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THE INFLUENCE OF DIFFERENT MESSAGE PACKAGING, ON THE PERFORMANCE OF FIELD WORKERS: A CASE STUDY OF FINLAY FLOWERS KERICHO

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore the influence of forms of communication on the performance of field workers in Finlay Flowers Kericho, focusing on the Communication process and quality management in flower production. The study was conducted at Finlay Flowers one of the leading producer of cut flowers in Kenya. A total of 145 respondents were selected from a population of 1,175 interacting groups comprising of middle level managers and field workers. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires and an interview schedule and collected data was analysed using Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Findings revealed that all forms of communications had influence on performance of field staff with demonstrations appearing to be more influential in this regard. This is attributed to the fact that demonstration is a consultative event where the management directly involves the employees and advice on the specifications or product requirements. In conclusion, main driver of performance as revealed by the findings of the study meaningful communication process; senior management communication style, supportive work environment and line management style. Based on the findings, the study recommends that in order to improve performance, demonstration as a form of communication should be encouraged, as workers need detailed information on how to conduct their duties especially when handling the produce, also the use of interactive methods as forms of passing messages will help in improving production efficiency.

Keywords: Performance of Field Workers, Forms of Communication, Message Packaging, Influence.

INTRODUCTION

Cut flower industry is amongst the fastest growing sectors of the Kenyan economy in the last two decades. This can be seen by its gradual growth evidenced by the entry of new firms, and expansion of the existing ones. In recent years, unit value of production increased dramatically with a shift toward production of high value flowers, predominantly roses (Mwase, 2015). Finlay's flowers, for instance has been one of the dominant cut flower producer in Kenya. It has extensions at Finlays' tea estates in the Western Highlands of Kenya, Naivasha and Mount Kenya (Finlays' 2015). The company commands more than a third of the cut flowers produced in Kenya (Zylberberg, 2013). A sophisticated consumer base characterizes the cut flowers market so that only high quality flowers are traded on the international market (Riisgaard, 2009).

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To maintain competitiveness in the markets, floriculture farms must produce consistently high quality flowers, and respond to the rapidly changing market demands. They have to be constantly innovative in production and ensure timely and accurate access to market information. This is essential in reduction of risk and helping the farms remain competitive in flowers production and marketing. Therefore, vertical integration of the supply chain from consumers to producers is useful in improving information flow and risk reduction (Kubwalo, 2006). Harvesting of cut flowers and foliage is highly labour intensive. Flowers are delicate and highly perishable, requiring careful management of growing conditions and post-harvest handling to ensure product quality for final consumers. It is important to note that effective and timely management of the supply chain from field to buyer determines the quality of the final product, and therefore high price at international markets. To achieve this, communication becomes the thread that holds the

various independent parts of the flower production and consumption. If communication were somehow removed from industry, it would collapse instantly (Tofaneli, 2012). This emphasizes the need for good communication in order to achieve coordinated results. Communication can be managed only by ensuring that the reasons for and the implication of communication are communicated to employee in the mode they can understand and produce what is expected. The communication process for quality of flowers starts with the consumer whose taste and desire is sent to the producer. The producer, like Finlay flowers uses its middle management, supervisors and field workers to ensure the product quality as demanded by the consumers. This chain of communication must remain responsive to the demands of the customer in order to produce consistently quality flowers. In Finlay's organization structure, those responsible for quality control include middle management, supervisors and field workers. On every occasion, a product quality fails to meet the standards set by the consumers, there is risk of undesirable consequences. For instance, when substandard flowers reach the market, it affects the sales for a period and may be costly to convince the consumers in future that change has been made. It is however not clear when the communication processes fail and how the workers in the chain perceive the influence of the communication process on the performance of field workers who are at the end of the production line in ascertaining quality to meet customer demands. Good communication between producer and consumer is therefore required to achieve co-ordinated results. To enhance competitiveness, most cut flower producing companies such as Finlay Flowers have put in place communication systems that are used to ensure quality. Such systems have however, not been conclusively and systematically investigated and documented to ascertain its influence on the performance of field workers in the organizations. This study sought to investigate and document the influence of different forms of communication in order to understand their influence on the performances of field workers in one of the major cut flower producers in Kenya- Finlay Flowers.

The main objective of this study was to determine the influence of different message packaging on expected levels of performance of field workers in commodity production in Finlay Flowers. The research questions

under consideration were: what is the level of influence of different message packaging on expected levels of performance of field workers in commodity production in Finlays Flowers? What relationship exists between the various forms of message packaging on the performance of field workers at Finlays? It was hypothesized that there is no significant influence of the various forms of messages packaging on the performance of field workers in Finlay Flowers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication in Kenya's Floriculture industry: Whitaker & Kolavalli, (2004) pointed out that, Kenya's Flowers sector has grown dramatically while the rest of the economy including the agricultural sector has stagnated, especially in the past decade. From small beginnings half a century ago, the floricultural sector in Kenya has grown to dominate Kenya's horticultural exports. The value of floriculture exports grew by more than 300% between 1995 and 2002 (Whitaker & Kolavalli, 2004). In recent years unit value of production increased dramatically with a shift toward production of higher value Flowers which are predominantly roses. It has been noted that the market is increasingly focusing on the quality of flowers reaching the consumer. Due to competition, only top-quality flowers are traded internationally because of the increasing quality-consciousness of the customers. Competition is such that anything less than the highest quality flowers can at best be sold to less-demanding domestic customers. (Whitaker & Kolavalli, 2004; Opondo, 2001). It is out of this reason that reputation becomes so important and why growers who have consistently delivered high quality produce fetch higher prices than little known or irregular suppliers do. Supply linkages help to increase producer's competitiveness, strengthen their access to up-to-date market and technical information, as well reduce risks to both supplier and buyer. Producing reliably high quality and high value flowers requires significant capital investments, access to technical and marketing information and ability to control the supply chain (Opondo, 2001). To maintain competitiveness, Whitaker & Kolavalli, (2004) recommend that growers must produce consistently at the highest level of quality, respond rapidly to changing market demands, and be constantly innovative in production. Timely and accurate access to market information is also essential in order to reduce risk and remain competitive in flowers production and marketing. Increasingly, vertical

integration of the supply chain from producers to consumers is used to improve information flow and to reduce risks. Guirdham, (2011) defines communication as the process by which an idea is transferred from a source to a receiver with the intention of changing behaviour. Such behaviour may encompass a change in knowledge or attitude as well as in overt behaviour. Guirdham (2011) further revealed that insufficient communication is frequently the main cause of difficulties in organisations. Communication function is the means by which organized activities are unified. In essence, it is by means of communication that behavior is modified, change is effected, information is activated and made more productive and goals are achieved. This is a fundamental function of communication because group activity is impossible without communication as coordination and change cannot be effected.

Communication flow in an organization: In an effective organization, communication flows directions; downward, upward and crosswise. Traditionally downward communication was emphasized, but there is sample evidence that it is only with one direction of communication when problems will develop. Drucker (2012), is even more emphatic when he states that downward communication does not work. A communication process model by Koontz (2010) suggests primarily upward communication. The business environment also provides many occasions of oral communication. They range from the informal meetings of the company to the more formal conferences, committees and board meetings. There are in addition many written forms of communication. Information has to be made widely available to all the stakeholders, as they will need it more to build confidence in what they are doing or what is happening. Therefore as a manager, one's role will shift away from the traditional one of controlling everything to keeping the teams trained and flexible to accomplish changing goals. It is probably no surprise that managers frequently cite communication breakdowns as one of their frequent problems. In one study, 80% of managers cited communication as the cause of difficulties on their problems according to Koontz (2010). It should be noted, however that communication problems are often symptoms of more deeply rooted problems such as poor planning, poorly designed organizational structure and vague performance standards. Besides the problems mentioned above, additional barriers include: Sentence structure, platitudes, unnecessary jargon and failure to

clarify the implications of the message when communicating. Lack of clarity and precision, which may be costly, can be avoided through greater care in encoding the message. Quality control in organization is managed at every interface, at every level, within and across all functional areas. In Finlay Flowers employees are arranged in their roles according to their level of obligation in terms of responsibility in the hierarchy. Flow of information follows a pattern of command from Management levels to Field Workers and feedback expected at each level. Middle Management is responsible for communicating changes from customers and instructs supervisors on appropriate methods and procedures inform them of likely causes of errors or defects and preventative methods necessary. Supervisors oversee the arrangement of such methods and instructions in the quality system. Initiate or facilitate any steps necessary to improve methods, equipment, materials and conditions in work area .Field workers implement instructions in the quality system by producing physical result as per the change.

Communication patterns: For any group to function at even the most basic level it is necessary for the members to interact with each other to some degree. This inevitably takes a form of communication. There are different patterns of communication that can be identified within a group, namely the star, The Y, The Line and The Chain (figure,1)

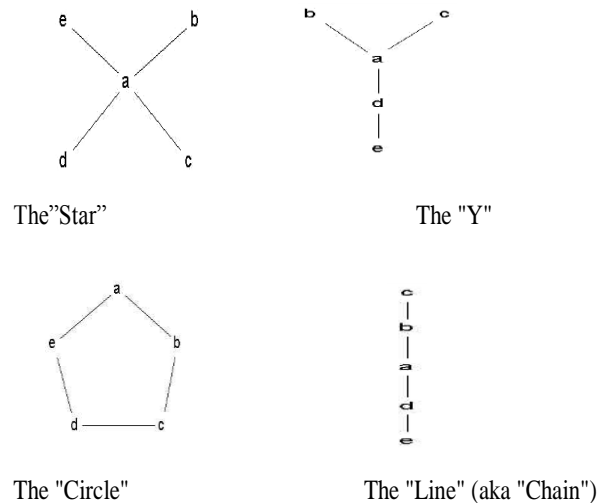


Figure 1. Communications patterns. Considering the above figure, communication linkages based on the work of a number of writers, including Nisonko (2010) and Levi (2010), each of these

communication networks has implications for a number of group features. For example, the style of leadership adopted and the ability of individuals to contribute to group decision-making. Consider the Circle and Y patterns of communication and the implications for both the flow of communication and group leadership. In both examples there exists a focal person through whom the essentially linear communication patterns pass. Either such a person might be a very strong and directive leader seeking to exert total control over the activities of a group or they might be a dominant individual within the group who in practice has taken control of the process.

Clearly, such patterns of communication have significant implications for the work of the group, the degree and quality of debate within the group and the ways in which any decisions would be taken. Compare these implications against the patterns of communication displayed in the chain, channel and circle patterns of communication none of which contains a dominant individual. In both examples, there are different issues and factors to be taken into account in reaching the decision, each with different possible consequences for the organization, group, production function and individuals. Greenberg & Baron (2008) suggest that where simple tasks are involved the wheel pattern of communication could produce an effective result. The central person could undertake the task alone with the necessary information provided by the peripheral members. They also suggest that the all channel pattern of communication would produce a poor result in such situations because the flow of information circulates all around the group with no single person collating it in terms of the decision necessary. Greenberg & Baron (2008) also revealed that for complex problems the outcome of both patterns of communication would be reversed. In complex decision situations it is necessary to have the flow of communication around the group to encourage 'richness' in analysis and debate as well as limiting the demands placed on the leader of the group to find a personal solution. The "Y" communication pattern is mostly used on quality communication in Finlay Flowers where (b) and (c) represent different customers communicating market requirement to the Middle Management (a) who will pass information to Supervisors (d) who will then relay the same information to Field workers (e) for implementation.

Factors determining the effectiveness of communication: Scott & Jaffe (2000) emphasize that to

be effective in preparing employees for change Middle Management have to communicate clearly, directly regularly and share basic goals. They have to be less of controllers and more of coordinators to manage effectively. Middle Management must also learn to delegate intelligently some of their control to the team. Employees need to prepare by telling them in good time not too far ahead as this creates anxiety.

Conceptual Framework: The conceptual framework explains a frame within which the study was organized. The forms of communication is a variable which affects the performance of field workers (negatively or positively). In this study the process of communication started with Middle Management who was the source of information from the consumer to Supervisor then to Field workers. The message was the stimulus that the source transmitted to the receiver; message could be packaged through specimens, pictures and demonstration. These elements formed part of Independent variable while performances of field workers were the dependent variable. Expected level of performance by the workers were based on quantity of flowers produced, number of rejects, and right Cut stage by bloom.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Present study adopted a descriptive research design. The design was suitable because respondent had equal opportunities of being selected, conditions were not altered and data were collected by asking all respondents in the sample similar questions through an interview schedule and questionnaire. Data was collected at one point in time and results obtained could be generalized on a bigger population. The objective of the descriptive research is to portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations. The survey was therefore a self-report study, which requires the collection of quantifiable information from samples (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Study Location: The study was carried out at Finlay Flowers farm, located in Kericho district; growing area is in the highlands and altitude of 2200 meters above sea level, alongside Finlay tea estates in the Western Highlands of Kenya. Finlays have developed a sustainable flowers growing business. In 2015, the farms had expanded to 104 hectares of flowers under greenhouses on four sites, including three diverse growing locations at Kericho & Londiani. The organization has continued to expand the Londiani farms, and it is expected that by the

year 2017, the total area under flower in all Finlays Firms will be over 150 hectares (Finlays, 2015).

Sample and Sampling procedures: A list of all the employees of the Finlay Flowers was obtained from the company human resource department. Proportionate random sampling procedure was used to arrive at the case groups to be studied in order to capture adequate representative sample (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The target population comprised of all 1,175 employees in production section of Finlay Flowers in the following categories: - Middle Management (45 in number) who are degree, diploma and certificate holders who demonstrated the desired output to the field workers. Field workers (1,130 in number), most of them were class eight and form four leavers whose responsibility were to Table 1. Population and sample size by category.

Category	Population	Actual sample	Percentage sample
Middle Management	45	45	100
Field workers	1,130	100	8.9
Totals	1,175	145	12.4

Data collection and procedures: A questionnaire was used to collect data from middle management and field workers. The instrument was developed and the items were based on the objectives of the study. A validated structured questionnaire was used because it was typically more efficient, economical, and practical and allowed the use of a large sample (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Inconsistent responses, missing or blank responses and repeated responses were also checked to ensure each instrument was valid. The questionnaire for Middle Management was delivered by hand to each individual for each one to respond to the questions and afterwards returned to the researcher. The field workers' interview appointments were made by the researcher through Human Resource Office. They were interviewed at their place of work during break time and information filled in on site. A Permit was sought from National Council of Science and Technology through a letter obtained from Graduate school. Permission was obtained from the company's Head Office to allow the research to be carried out.

Validity and Reliability: The validation of the instruments was ascertained by presenting the instruments to two experts from the Department of Agricultural Education and Extension of Egerton University. The two had wide experience in teaching and

ensure the product was produced as per the quality requirement. All production employees in the middle management were selected to form part of the sample because they are few in number hence total population were involved in the study.

Considering that Mertler & Charles (2011) recommended a minimum sample of 100 in a research survey, sample of 100 Field Workers were randomly selected. To select the sample, statistical table of random numbers was used for determining needed size of a randomly from the definite population of N cases. The error for sample proportion (d) was within plus or minus .05 of the population proportion P with a 95% level of confidence. From the two categories a total of 145 respondents were sampled for the study as shown in Table 1.

supervising graduate students. Pilot-testing was done using 30 employees of Lemotit farm which had similar characteristics as the study area. Use of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient reduces the time required to compute a reliability coefficient in other methods (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2001). Reliability refers to that quality of measurement which suggests that the same data would have been collected each time in repeated observation of the same phenomenon, (Babbie, 2004). It is the consistency of the instrument to yield the same result. This is measured by the application of the correlation coefficient known as reliability coefficient. Reliability and validity is measured using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, (α) which is a coefficient of internal consistency for Likert type scale, (Cronbach, 1951). As a result, alpha is most appropriately used when the items measure different substantive areas within a single construct. For field workers responses Cronbach's Alpha was .720, implying that the internal consistency was good. Therefore, the data collected was considered acceptable and reliable for drawing inference. Similarly, for management, the value of Cronbach's Alpha (.831) implies that the internal consistency criterion is good.

Data analysis: After the questionnaires were received from respondents and interviews were finalised; they were inspected for completeness and accuracy. The data

were summarized by coding and scoring in readiness for computer entry. All objectives were analyzed and presented using descriptive analysis techniques with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of influence of specimens on field workers performance as perceived by field workers showed that 34% and 38% of the respondents stated that to a small extent and large extent respectively, affects productivity. Similarly, management had the perception that specimens largely influence performance to a large extent (48.9%) being the highest frequency in the category. Furthermore, pictures as a form of message packaging are shown to influence the productivity as perceived by the field

workers; 52 %which is the highest frequency within the response, had the opinion that pictures influence performance to a large extent.

It was complemented by the results from the management of 46.7 % were of the opinion that pictures influence productivity by a large extent. For demonstrations as a form of message packaging, the results of the study showed that most of the field workers indicated that demonstrations by large extent 67 % influence the productivity. It concurs with the results from the management that majority 66.7 % of the respondents had the perception that demonstrations influence productivity. These results are summarized in the table 2 below.

Table 2. Influence of Forms of communication or Message Packaging on performance of field workers.

Level of influence	Small	Medium	Large
Specimens			
Performance of field workers as perceived by management.	33.3 %	17.8 %	48.9 %
Performance of field workers as perceived by field Workers.	34.0 %	28.0 %	38.0 %
Pictures			
Performance of field workers as perceived by management.	37.8 %	15.6 %	46.7 %
Performance of field workers as perceived by field Workers.	25.0 %	23.0 %	52.0 %
Demonstration			
Performance of field workers as perceived by management.	33.3 %	0.0 %	66.7 %
Performance of field workers as perceived by field Workers.	15.0 %	18.0 %	67.0 %

In summary, the extent of influence of demonstration on performance has the highest frequency compared to other forms or message packaging; pictures and specimen. This indicates that demonstration has more influence as a form of message packaging compared to the other forms. This shows that the three forms of message packaging influence performance. Regarding the hypothesis that there is no significant influence of the various messages packaging on the performance of field workers in Finlay Flowers, test of association was conducted. The relationship between frequency of specimen use and extent of influence of on performance as perceived by the field workers was found to be highly significant: Chi= 51.595; p=.000.

The results of the perception by the management supported the claim as the relationship between specimen use and extent of influence of on performance

as perceived by management was also highly significant: Chi= 68.494; p=.000. It is clear that there is highly significant relationship between pictures use and extent of influence of on performance as perceived by field workers: Chi= 52.445; p=.000.

The relationship between pictures use and extent of influence of on performance was also significant as perceived by the management: Chi= 36.547; p=.002. For the demonstration use and extent of influence of on performance, the results indicated highly significant relationship as perceived by field workers: Chi= 43.988; p=.000. The perception of the management about demonstration use and extent of influence of message packaging on performance complement response by field workers as there is evidence of significant relationship: Chi= 18.573; p=.029. The results are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Influence of the various messages packaging on the performance of field workers in Finlay Flowers.

Relationships	Field Workers		Management	
	Chi-Square value	P value (2-sided)	Chi-Square value	P value (2-sided)
Frequency of specimen use and extent of influence of on performance	51.595**	.000	68.494**	.000
Frequency of pictures use and extent of influence of on performance	52.445**	.000	36.547**	.002
Frequency of demonstration use and extent of influence of on performance	43.988**	.000	18.573**	.029

Notes: **relationship is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The Chi-Square tests invalidates the hypothesis that there is no significant influence of the various messages packaging on the performance of field workers in Finlay Flowers. All forms of communications were found to significantly influence performance. However, based on the frequencies it can be established that the relationship between demonstration use and extent of influence of on performance was strongest compared to the rest of the forms of communication. As such, use of demonstrations was more influential in affecting performance of the field workers.

The results of the different forms of communication concurs with (Canadian Centre for Communication, 2003), that individuals differ in their processing of information from different media; some learn better from and prefer visual media than audio and vice versa. Jones, Watson, Garner and Gallois (2004) demonstrate evidence from controlled classroom studies and suggest that providing a variety of reinforcing forms of communication caters to both learning styles and learning preferences. However, practical evidence from the field to reinforce the experimental classroom findings especially in commodity production system is rare. The results are indicative that demonstration provides a more effective form of communication compared to pictures and specimens. This is attributed to the fact that demonstration is a consultative event where the management directly shows the employees and advice on the specifications or product requirements.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the findings revealed that most of the respondents, both the management and field workers were in agreement that the various forms of message packaging influenced the way they performed their duties in the cut flower production system. It was notable that among the various forms of message packaging

considered, demonstration was perceived to have the highest frequency having larger extent of influence on performance. The hypothesis that there is no significant influence of the various messages packaging on the performance of field workers in Finlay Flowers was rejected based on the results of test of association. It was found out that all forms of message packaging significantly influenced the performance; in fact, the probability values were highly significant. This means that specimen, pictures, demonstration are efficient in the production chain for conveying information on the required quality for cut flowers.

In that view, the study recommends that in order to improve performance, demonstration, as a form of communication should be encouraged, as workers need detailed information on how to conduct their duties especially when handling the produce. Therefore, management and supervisors need to communicate using demonstration as a best practice. The study also recommends the use of interactive methods as forms of passing messages to help improve on production.

The use of demonstrations is more influential positively on performance of the field workers. In the paper, the implications for management policy include comprehensive communication process management policy, application of effective forms of communication and the use of advanced and technological means to relay information for the purpose of quality and sustainable results.

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- strength and synergies of pluralistic, multi-agency system in which the private sector, farmers organizations, cooperatives, NGOs, paraprofessionals, small agribusiness, self- help groups,