

Effect of Promotion Practices on Employee Engagement in Fairtrade Horticultural Firms in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to determine the effect of promotion practices on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. Theory that informed the study was Expectancy theory. This research adopted pragmatism research philosophy. A cross-sectional descriptive survey research design was adopted. The study targeted 17 fairtrade horticultural firms as unit of analysis and 5,600 employees as the unit of observation. The sample size was 373 respondents drawn from low level, middle level, and top-level management. The study relied mainly on primary data. The study adopted stratified and simple random sampling techniques. After the stratification of the respondents into strata, simple random sampling was adopted to pick up the respondents. The researcher used questionnaire as the research instrument. Descriptive and inferential analysis were computed using SPSS version 26. In order to analyze the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable the study used Multiple Regression analysis at 5% level of significance. The findings indicated that promotion practices have a positive and significant effect on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. The study concluded that promotion practices contribute significantly to the employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. The study recommended that Horticultural firm management should create opportunities for promotion practices of employees, offer training ground for career movement within the organization. Nomination for employees to undergo various staff career growth and development programs such as training should be conducted in a fair and transparent manner by the management.

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INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has gained significant attention among human resource practitioners as organizations recognize its importance for competitiveness and sustainability. Budriene and Diskiene (2020) highlight that an engaged workforce is crucial for an organization's smooth functioning and long-term survival. Lockwood (2016) asserts that fostering an environment conducive to engagement improves talent retention, customer loyalty, and overall company performance. ISO 9001–2015 underscores employee engagement as a principle that fosters motivation, active participation, and involvement in production processes, leading to increased efficiency (Stevenson, 2019). Organizations acknowledge that human resources determine

their success or failure (Khan, 2017). Giancola (2017) emphasizes the need for businesses to enhance employee engagement and motivation to boost performance.

Evenson (2016) describes employee engagement as encompassing high levels of commitment and involvement toward organizational goals. Harter, Schmidt, Killan, and Agrawal (2016) note that engagement positively influences performance, organizational effectiveness, employee satisfaction, productivity, and staff turnover reduction. Employee engagement is vital for business success, influencing employee retention, morale, and productivity (Clack, 2020). Taneja, Sewell, and Odom (2015) argue that engagement predicts performance more than commitment and satisfaction. Studies (West & Dawson, 2018) suggest that

engaged employees contribute significantly to organizational success. Gifford and Young (2021) assert that engagement enhances employee well-being, performance, and innovation. Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019) reviewed engagement literature and identified gaps, including a lack of research on demographic and personality differences. Satata (2021) found that engagement directly influences work performance. Tripathy and Vidyapeeth (2019) describe engagement as a complex concept requiring customized strategies for different organizations.

Promotion practices are an integral aspect of Human Resource Management (HRM) and play a critical role in shaping employee attitudes, including their engagement. At a conceptual level, promotion practices can be understood through the lens of several theoretical frameworks that highlight their impact on employee engagement. One key framework is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which emphasizes the fulfillment of psychological needs, including esteem and self-actualization, through recognition and career advancement. Employees who perceive promotions as fair and based on merit are more likely to engage positively with the organization (Satata, 2021). The Social Exchange Theory also underscores the reciprocity between employees and organizations. When employees perceive that their organization is investing in their career development through promotion opportunities, they tend to reciprocate with increased engagement, commitment, and enhanced performance. When promotions were seen as fair and based on objective criteria, employees were more likely to trust the organization and invest in their roles, leading to enhanced performance and engagement (Clack, 2020).

The 2019 Employee Engagement Report revealed that 43% of workers would leave their companies for a 10% salary increase, and weak corporate cultures contribute to disengagement. Gallup (2022) found that only 32% of U.S. employees and 23% of the global workforce felt engaged. Low engagement costs businesses approximately \$7.8 trillion annually. Gardiner (2023) identified key engagement drivers, including transparent policies, corporate social responsibility, fair treatment, compensation, career development, leadership, and performance appraisals. Purcell et al. (2018) noted that successful companies prioritize engagement through clear vision, integrated values, and strategic HR practices. Mansor et al. (2023) established a strong relationship between engagement and organizational performance. Hasana et al. (2021) emphasized that high engagement levels are challenging to achieve and require flexible human resource management.

Maleka et al. (2019) examined engagement, commitment, and job satisfaction in Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Their study revealed that South African employees exhibited higher engagement than their counterparts, with macroeconomic factors influencing differences. Oosthuizen et al. (2021) analyzed burnout and self-perceived

employability in the South African public sector. Their findings indicated a negative correlation between burnout and engagement. Govender and Bussin (2020) studied performance management and engagement in South Africa, revealing communication gaps across organizational levels. Ngobeni et al. (2022) explored how psychological contracts influence engagement in South African banks. Their research highlighted the need for organizations to adapt talent attraction and retention strategies to evolving employee expectations. Moletsane, Tefera, and Migiro (2019) investigated engagement and productivity in the South African sugar industry, noting that leadership style, communication, and work environment significantly affect engagement. Saks (2015) proposed that effective work organization, inclusive culture, and performance evaluation enhance engagement. South African studies underscore the importance of career development, support, and organizational climate in engagement.

Studies in Kenya highlight the need for fair promotion practices to foster engagement. Mutuku (2018) found that organizations with transparent promotion systems reported higher engagement levels. Ochieng (2021) observed that horticultural firms with structured career progression paths experienced lower turnover rates and higher productivity. Kuria et al. (2017) examined the role of incentives in Kenyan firms and concluded that financial and non-financial rewards significantly impact engagement. Companies that recognize employees' contributions and provide growth opportunities retain talent more effectively.

In Kenya, horticultural firms play a significant role in economic development and employment. The horticulture industry is Kenya's third fastest-growing agricultural sub-sector, contributing significantly to foreign exchange earnings. It primarily exports fruits, vegetables, and cut flowers, with agriculture comprising 65% of Kenya's total exports and 18% of national employment (Mwangi et al., 2015; Dolan, 2016). The cut-flower industry, active since the 1980s, has grown into a global player, positioning Kenya as the fifth-largest flower exporter, particularly to the Netherlands, Germany, and the UK (Lanari et al., 2016; Opondo, 2019). However, concerns about employee engagement persist due to inadequate incentive structures, poor working conditions, and limited career growth opportunities. Many horticultural firms struggle with high staff turnover and low productivity, which can be linked to disengagement. According to the Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE, 2020), a significant proportion of Kenyan workers are disengaged due to unclear promotion policies, lack of professional development, and unfair compensation. Employers must adopt strategies to enhance engagement, including competitive rewards, transparent promotion criteria, and employee involvement in decision-making.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Employee engagement has been widely recognized as a crucial determinant of organizational performance, as disengaged employees can lead to significant losses for firms. Despite the importance of engagement, many organizations struggle to maintain high levels of employee engagement. Various studies have explored engagement from different perspectives, yielding mixed results. For instance, Ajilon (2018) noted that over 80% of full-time workers are actively seeking or open to new job opportunities, indicating a significant engagement challenge. Okoroji and Emmanuel (2024) observed that while incentive systems are often touted as tools to enhance engagement and productivity, many organizations continue to experience declining profitability, suggesting that engagement may not be effectively addressed through rewards alone.

In the realm of employee engagement research, a range of approaches have been used. Studies by Gardiner (2023) and Mansoor et al. (2023) emphasize employee involvement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and focus group research as important aspects of engagement, while others like Govender and Bussin (2020) have highlighted a significant gap in engagement despite the use of qualitative methods. Ngobeni et al. (2022) confirmed that employees' expectations of engagement are shifting due to the evolving nature of work. Additionally, Oosthuizen et al. (2021) found that self-perceived employability influences engagement, and others such as Sartono & Ardhani (2015) have focused on intrinsic motivation as an engagement driver.

While these studies address various dimensions of employee engagement, there is a gap in understanding how specific promotion practices influence engagement. Sari and Ranihusna (2019) and Moletsane et al. (2019) suggested that engagement cannot be linked conclusively to organizational outcomes without considering how work environment factors, such as promotion practices, affect engagement. Moreover, despite the growing body of literature on reward systems, only a few studies have directly linked promotion practices with employee engagement. In the Kenyan context, studies such as those by Mudachi (2023) and Tuyia and Juma (2019) have explored engagement's relationship with performance but have not focused specifically on how promotion practices influence engagement in organizations like the Fairtrade horticultural firms.

This study sought to fill these gaps by examining the role of promotion practices on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya, where employee engagement has been reported to be weak. Promotion practices, as part of extrinsic rewards, have the potential to significantly influence employee engagement. However, the current literature often overlooks this factor in the context of agricultural and Fairtrade firms. Furthermore, existing research has typically concentrated on individual reward programs without considering the broader impact of work environment factors,

such as promotion practices, that might moderate the relationship between extrinsic rewards and engagement. Therefore, this study aims to better understand how promotion practices within the Fairtrade horticultural sector can influence employee engagement and, by extension, firm performance.

Objective of the Study

- To determine the effect of promotion practices on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya.

Research Hypothesis

The study tested the following null hypothesis:

H₀ There is no significant influence of promotion practices on employee engagement in the horticultural sector in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Social exchange as formulated by Blau (1964) is based on the prism that an employee's perceived organizational support creates a sense of indebtedness and an obligation within an individual to repay the organization. Positive beneficial acts to an employee by the organization create a high exchange relationship that serves to develop an aversive sense of indebtedness to the organization which can only be reduced by reciprocation (Setton et al., 2016). Social exchange reciprocity occurs at all levels of the organization and also with immediate supervisors (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Reciprocity to the organization is noted in-role behaviors, citizenship behavior and organization commitment (Shore & Wayne, 2015). Social exchange leads to the trust of the employee towards the organization that it will fulfill its exchange obligations. Commitment to the organization through the social exchange can be either affective commitment or continuance commitment. Setton et al. (2016) describes the leader-member exchange to be a cordial relationship between the employee and the supervisor arising out of the perception the supervisor represents the organization to which the employee is indebted. Leader-member exchange is more associated with role behavior with employees developing personal obligation to undertake extra duties, put in more time, and minimize conflicts with the supervisors. The social exchange theory (SET) is a theory that is famously related to employee engagement. The social exchange theory (SET) indicated that a person is responsible for how they interact with other parties and create an environment of interdependence. The expectations, trust and mutual commitments are used to determine the efforts that both parties will make to ensure that a certain goal is achieved. The first party will require the other party to play some roles which they need to have mutual agreements and mutual roles. This theory explained the promotion practice variables in the study.

Conceptual Framework

The hypothesized relationship between independent variable and dependent variable is summarized in figure 1.

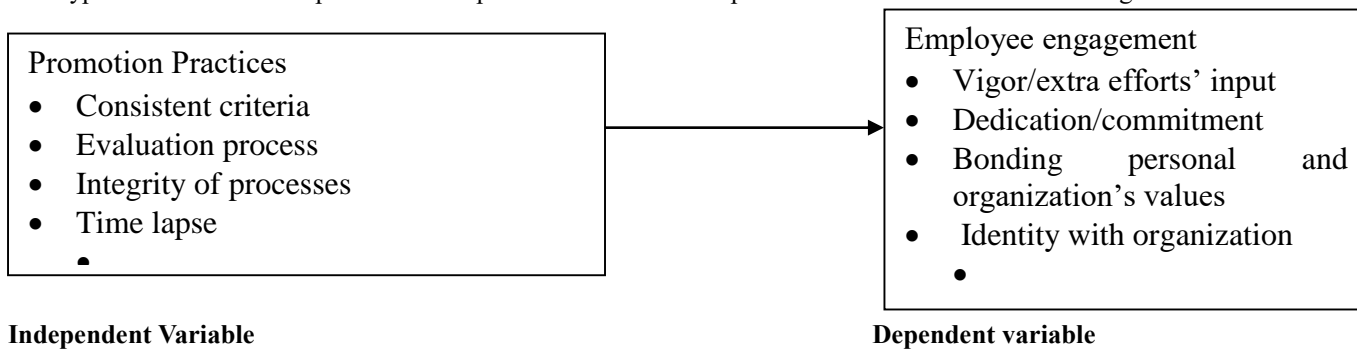


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

The corpus of current studies shows different points of view on how promotional strategies affect employee engagement, therefore exposing both consistency and inconsistency. Studies like those by Ashraf and Mohammad (2015) and Yasmeen et al. (2015) show that while promotions have a modest impact on employee engagement, other incentives such as cash rewards and intrinsic motivation have a more major influence. Though they nevertheless help to increase employee engagement, Ashraf and Mohammad (2015) propose that promotions rank lower than awards in impacting employee performance. This is consistent with Yasmeen et al. (2015), who discovered a modest correlation between performance and compensation but a more significant one between promotion and organizational results.

By contrast, Phelan and Zhiang (2017) take a contingency view, stressing that organizational structure, work environment, and knowledge transferability define the efficacy of promotion strategies. This complex perspective implies that rather than being applied everywhere, promotional programs have to be customized to certain organizational situations. Likewise, Abdul et al. (2016) discovered that employee performance and engagement in the Makassar Government Region were much impacted by promotional strategies, thereby supporting the theory that sectoral and regional variations impact results. Research like Akhtar et al. (2016) and Ong and Teh (2015) emphasize the part reward-based promotions play, hence further muddying the argument. While Ong and Teh (2015) show a good link between intrinsic incentives and financial performance but a negative association with extrinsic rewards, Akhtar et al. (2016) contend that performance-based promotions increase organizational revenue. This distinction implies that while promotions increase participation, their efficacy depends on their structure that of financial or non-financial incentives.

Furthermore, adding sectoral disparities are the results of Adeyemi (2015) and Dar et al. (2018), which show significant variations between public and private sector workers over merit-based promotion incentives. Dar et al. (2018) discovered that organizational performance was favorably

connected with merit-based selection and promotion in Islamic banks, therefore highlighting the need of fairness in promotion procedures in maintaining employee engagement. 2014 Kenyan research by Ssekakubo et al. points to a particular contextual gap. Their study on Nairobi County police personnel shows that employee performance is much influenced by promoting scale, especially in occupations involving organized public services. Unlike previous studies, this one, nevertheless, emphasizes the influence of hierarchical development rather than the more general motivating elements connected to promotion.

One important discrepancy this research reveals is the absence of a consistent paradigm combining intrinsic and extrinsic incentives into promotion strategies. Although some research highlights financial incentives (Akhtar et al., 2016; Yasmeen et al., 2015) others underscore the importance of merit-based and structural factors (Phelan & Zhiang, 2017; Dar et al., 2018). Furthermore, underdeveloped are the effects of industry-specific variances and organizational culture. Future studies should look at how many forms of promotion systems interact with other motivating factors to maximize employee engagement across several industries and geographic settings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a pragmatist philosophy, grounded on a rational and logical approach to problem-solving that focuses on particular circumstances rather than abstract ideas and theories. This study used a cross-sectional survey research approach. This was established on the premise that the research encompasses many horticulture enterprises in Nakuru County. Furthermore, cross-sectional studies are conducted at a particular moment or during a brief timeframe (Sileyew, 2019).

The research population included all categories of workers (21,030 individuals) from the horticulture enterprises in Kenya registered with Fairtrade Africa (17 Fairtrade horticultural firms). The sample frame comprises 5,600 individuals, including low-level, middle-level, and top-level management personnel associated with the registered

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Fairtrade horticulture enterprises. The target population of 5,600 is substantial, necessitating sampling. To compute the sample size scientifically, A representative sample size was determined with 95% confidence and specified risk levels, using Yamane's (1967) method. Consequently, 373 respondents constituted the minimum acceptable number of replies to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. A sample size of around 373 respondents served as the unit of observation. A stratified selection strategy was used to pick 5% of the population from the designated research sample size. Following the segmentation of respondents into categories (low level, middle level, and top management), basic random sampling procedures were used to choose the participants.

The research mostly used primary data. The researcher used a questionnaire as the study tool. A self-administered structured questionnaire was distributed to each responder and subsequently collected. The questionnaire had both open-ended and closed-ended questions, separated into two sections addressing demographic characteristics and research variables. Of the 373 distributed questionnaires, 315 were completed and returned to the researcher, resulting in an 84.4% response rate.

The study instrument underwent pilot testing before to its deployment for data collection, using a select group of respondents employed at Desire Flora horticulture enterprise in Kajiado County. The study's participation constituted 10% of the sample size, namely 37 responses. The completed surveys were subjected to reliability and validity assessments. The instrument's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's

Alpha (α). The Cronbach alpha varied from 0.823 for promotion practices to 0.930 for employee engagement. The questionnaire had a consistency score over 0.7, indicating a high degree of internal consistency among its items. The content validity was established by verifying that each item was suitable for a certain variable construct via the computation of the content validity index. The construct validity was maintained by limiting the items to the conceptualization of the variables and ensuring that the indicator of a specific variable remains within the same construct. All components were preserved according to the general guideline for acceptable factor loading of 40% (Promotion practices factor loading was 75.7% and employee engagement was 84.2%).

The data was analyzed quantitatively using SPSS 26. Data processing was conducted by editing, coding, and categorization. Linear regression analysis was used to examine the quantitative data using SPSS Software version 26. The analyzed data was presented as tables, charts, and graphs to facilitate comparison and inference. The study used regression analysis at a 5% significance level to assess the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Descriptive Statistics of Variables in the Study

To determine the level of employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya, the respondents were asked to state their level of agreement with the following seven statements. The results are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.0: Employee Engagement

5- Strongly agree; 4-Agree; 3-Neutral; 2- disagree; 1- strongly disagree, S.D-Standard Deviation, N-Sample Size

Employee engagement	5	4	3	2	1	Mean	S.D
1. There is a feeling of vigor in accomplishing job tasks.	45.1%	21.3%	6.7%	16.5%	10.5%	3.74	1.435
2. There is enthusiasm about looking for opportunities to improve the organization's performance	34.9%	32.7%	4.8%	17.5%	10.2%	3.65	1.375
3. There is a strong connection between personal values and organization values	36.5%	27.9%	9.8%	13.3%	12.4%	3.63	1.407
4. There is strong identification with the organization's success and failures	36.2%	30.8%	5.4%	17.5%	10.2%	3.65	1.384
5. There is pride associated with working for the organization	26%	33.3%	20.6%	13%	7%	3.58	1.203
6. Employees keep up to date with any development within their job area/field	31.4%	28.3%	19%	15.2%	6%	3.64	1.237
7. Employees always volunteer to do extra work outside their job tasks to contribute to the organization's success	39.4%	27%	9.5%	15.9%	8.3%	3.73	1.342
Average level of Employee Engagement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Grand Mean	Std. Dev.		
	315	1.14	5.00	3.66	1.21		

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As shown in table 1, the study findings suggested that most respondents agreed on various aspects of employee engagement, though with notable variations. A majority (mean = 3.74, SD = 1.435) reported feeling strong and vigorous in accomplishing job tasks. Similarly, respondents expressed enthusiasm for improving organizational performance (mean = 3.65, SD = 1.375) and perceived a strong connection between personal and organizational values (mean = 3.63, SD = 1.407). Additionally, respondents identified with the organization's successes and failures (mean = 3.65, SD = 1.384) and took pride in working for the organization (mean = 3.58, SD = 1.203). Employees also demonstrated commitment by staying updated on job-related developments (mean = 3.64, SD = 1.237) and voluntarily taking on extra work to support the organization's success (mean = 3.73, SD = 1.342).

Overall, these findings indicate strong employee engagement, though variations in responses suggest differing experiences among employees within the organization. Apparently, the average level of employee engagement (Grand mean) according to the sampled respondents was at 3.66 with a standard deviation of 1.21. This implies that majority of the

respondents agreed with most of the statements that were used to measure employee engagement. However, significant standard deviation shows they were some variations implying that this rate of engagement is not uniform amongst the sampled firms. The report by Setiawan and Negoro (2023) asserts that in order for workers to implement a business plan, they must have the required skills and credentials. With respect to this, however, it is imperative that organizations make good use of their people's skills in the effort to increase employee engagement. Engaged workers are those that want to help the company grow by providing the finest service or excellent work (Andrić, Priyashantha & De Alwis, 2023). Further, Ningsih, Wijaya, Muntahari and Damayanti (2023) analysis on the measures of employee engagement reiterated that an engaged employee; believes in the organization, works actively to make things better, treats others with respect, and helps colleagues to perform more effectively, can be relied upon, and goes beyond the requirements of the job, sees the bigger picture even at personal cost, identifies with the organization, keeps up-to-date with developments in his/her field; and last but not least, looks for, and is given, opportunities to improve organizational performance.

Table 2.0: Promotion Practices

5- Strongly agree; 4-Agree; 3-Neutral; 2- disagree;1- strongly disagree, S.D-Standard Deviation, N-Sample Size

Statements on Promotion practices	5	4	3	2	1	Mean	S.D
1. There exist a Performance/merit-based promotion	23.8%	34%	23.2%	14%	5.1%	3.57	1.144
2. There is a clear Employee promotion evaluation criterion	31.4%	32.7%	10.2%	13.3%	12.4%	3.57	1.374
3. There is an employee promotion policy to attract and retain high performing employees	30.2%	32.1%	14%	18.1%	5.7%	3.63	1.244
4. There is a Transparent promotion process	32.1%	32.7%	10.2%	19.4%	5.7%	3.66	1.265
5. Diversity and inclusivity in employee promotion matters is considered	20.6%	40%	14%	21%	4.4%	3.51	1.163
6. Time taken to be promoted to the next job grade/scale is reasonable	29.8%	38.7%	4.1%	22.5%	4.8%	3.66	1.250
Average level of PromotionN practices	315	Minimum	Maximum	Grand Mean		Std. Dev.	
		1.00	5.00	3.55		1.18	

As shown in table 2.0, the study findings indicated that most respondents agreed on the existence of various promotion practices, though with significant variations. Performance or merit-based promotions received overall agreement (mean = 3.57, SD = 1.144), as did clear promotion evaluation criteria (mean = 3.57, SD = 1.374). Similarly, respondents acknowledged the presence of an employee promotion policy to attract and retain high-performing employees (mean = 3.63, SD = 1.244) and a transparent promotion process (mean = 3.66, SD = 1.265). Diversity and inclusivity in promotions

were also recognized (mean = 3.51, SD = 1.163), alongside reasonable promotion timelines (mean = 3.66, SD = 1.250). The overall average for promotion practices was 3.55, with a standard deviation of 1.18, indicating general agreement but significant variation across organizations.

The average level of promotion practices ((Grand mean) according to the sampled respondents was at 3.55 with a standard deviation of 1.18. This implies that majority of the respondents agreed with most of the statements that were used to measure promotion practices. However, significant

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standard deviation shows there were some variations implying that the promotion practices is not uniform amongst all the sampled firms. This agrees to what was shown by research, done by Lamba and Choudhary (33), promotion tends to increase commitment. Wan, Sulaiman, and Omar (2012) argue that employees that perceived promotion decisions as fair are more likely to be committed to the organization, experience career satisfaction, perform better and subsequently have a lower intention to leave the organization. However, Gathungu, Iravo and Namusonge (2015) showed that with promotion, employees’ commitment reduces. The current study agrees with Phelan and Zhiang (2011) studied on promotion practices and organizational performance in Netherlands.

Linear Regression between Promotion practices and Employee Engagement

The hypothesis of the study sought to establish the influence of promotion practices on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. The model (Promotion

practices) was able to explain 36.6% of the variation in the Employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya as indicated by the R Square = 0.366 as shown in the model summary of Table 3. The ANOVA test results as indicated in Table 4.24 were $F(1, 313) = 180.856, P = 0.000 < 0.05$; an indication that the Simple Linear Regression model was a good fit to our dataset. The regression Coefficient results showed that $B = 0.776, t = 13.448, p = 0.000 < 0.05$; hence promotion practices had a statistically significant influence on the employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. Promotion practices had a positive standardized beta coefficient = 0.776 as shown in the coefficients results of Table 3; this indicates that an improvement in the promotion practices by a unit was likely to result to an improvement in the Employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya by 0.776 units. To predict the Employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya when given the level of Promotion practices, the study suggests the use of the following model.

Employee engagement = $.813 + 0.776$ Promotion practices.

Table 3: Linear Regression analysis between Promotion practices and Employee Engagement

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.605 ^a	.366	.364	.78932		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Promotion practices						
b. Dependent Variable: Employee engagement						
ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	112.679	1	112.679	180.856	.000 ^b
	Residual	195.009	313	.623		
	Total	307.689	314			
a. Dependent Variable: Employee engagement						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Promotion practices						
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		β	Std. Error	Beta	T	
1	(Constant)	.813	.238		3.418	.001
	Promotion practices	.776	.058	.605	13.448	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Employee engagement						

DISCUSSIONS

Respondents agreed that time is taken to be promoted to the next job grade/scale as well as there are employee promotion evaluation criteria. In this regard, the respondents also agreed that employee promotion policy to attract and retain high performing employees. The inferential results revealed that there is direct relationship between promotion practices and employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. This implies that increase in promotion practices would results to increase in the employee engagement in

Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. The coefficient of determination through the R square indicated that up to 36.6% of change in employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya is significantly accounted for by promotion practices ($R^2 = 0.366, P = 0.000$). This implies that promotion practices is a significant predictor of employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. Abdul, Sarpan, and Ramlan (2016) examined the relationship between promotional practices and employee performance. The results indicate that Makassar Regional Government

promotes jobs within the appropriate fields and skill sets. When examined partly, it appears that the advancement of dominating positions impacts Employee engagement and therefore personnel performance. Yasmeen, Farooq and Asghar (2015) found that there exists moderate to strong relationship between staff promotion and organization performance. Aktar, Sachu and Ali (2014) found that each factor within both extrinsic and intrinsic reward through promotions was a highly significant factor which affects employees' performance which translated to employee engagement.

Linear regression indicated that when other variables are controlled, a unit increase of promotion practices will result to significant increase in employee engagement by 0.146 units ($\beta_1=0.146$, $P=0.016$). Adeyemi (2015) studied on the influence of incentives based on staff promotion schemes on employee's job performance. found that there are significant differences and similarities between employees in the private and public sector organizations with the influence of merit-based staff promotion schemes as the most effective incentive capable of raising employee engagement. Ssekakubo, Lwanga and Ndiwalana, (2014) studied on the impact of staff promotion aspects of motivation on Employee engagement in the public security sector in Nairobi County, Kenya. The research showed that promoting scale changes had a significant impact on performance of the ordinary police officers. Phelan and Zhiang (2017) studied on promotion practices and Employee engagement in Netherlands. This study has implications for understanding employee promotion practices from the contingency perspective. However, Ashraf and Mohammad (2015) showed promotion rankings show that promotion has a small effect on employee engagement, which indicates that though promotion is near the bottom of the list, it affects employee engagement, indicating that promotions can increase employee engagement.

These findings are in congruent with other studies which revealed job promotion had positive influence on employee performance. According to the study by Saharuddin and Sulaiman (2016) on the effect of promotion and compensation toward working productivity through job satisfaction and working motivation of employees in the Department of Water and Mineral Resources Energy North Aceh District promotion implementation, had several challenges and obstacles. This issue is confirmed through interviews with staff at the department saying that the implementation of a promotion for civil servants (PNS) is still hampered by the limitation of existing resources. Interview results show that some employees were promoted to a position that is inappropriate to their competence. On the other hand, the fact shows that employees' development and capacity building within the department got less attention. The problem on the employees' development scheme affects the quality of their work. It was recommended that the

employee needs to be developed or nurtured on an on-going basis so that they can consistently contribute in accordance with the professional level expected as well as more reliable behaviour.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The study underscores the significant influence of promotion practices on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya. Employees who perceive promotion practices as transparent, fair, and merit-based tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement. While most employees acknowledge the presence of effective promotion policies, there is notable variation in how these practices are implemented across organizations. This variation impacts the overall employee experience, with some employees feeling that the promotion process lacks consistency and fairness. Therefore, a well-structured and uniform approach to promotions is crucial to ensure that all employees feel equally valued and motivated. By rejecting the null hypothesis, the study concluded that there is significant influence of promotion practices on employee engagement in Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya.

This study contributes to Human Resource Management (HRM) by reinforcing the importance of promotion practices as a fundamental driver of employee engagement. It provides practical insights for HR managers in Fairtrade horticultural firms and similar sectors, offering a framework for improving promotion policies to foster greater employee motivation, loyalty, and performance. By focusing on the fairness, transparency, and inclusivity of promotion practices, HR departments can create an environment where employees are not only more engaged but are also more likely to remain committed to the organization long-term. This approach will ultimately lead to improved organizational outcomes, including enhanced productivity, reduced turnover, and better overall performance.

It is recommended that Fairtrade horticultural firms in Kenya standardize their promotion practices to ensure consistency and fairness across all departments. A uniform approach will help eliminate disparities in promotion decisions, thereby enhancing employee trust and engagement. Clear, merit-based promotion criteria should be established, and these should be communicated transparently to all employees to create a sense of fairness. In addition, firms should prioritize inclusivity in their promotion policies, ensuring that diverse groups are considered for advancement opportunities. This will foster an environment where all employees feel valued and motivated to contribute to the organization's success. Regular reviews of promotion practices are also essential to ensure they remain relevant and responsive to changing employee needs and industry dynamics. By adapting promotion policies to meet these evolving demands, firms can

ensure continued employee engagement and long-term retention.

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