

## **Job factors related to employees' persistence in work-related activities in Kigali Institute of Education**

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### **Abstract**

*Rwanda has established a "Vision 2020" framework for its development goals, and considers its population as its fundamental resource for achieving it. However, the country is still suffering from a serious lack of competent personnel. One behavior of incompetent personnel is lack of persistence in work-related activities which might be related to job factors. The purpose of the present study was to explore this relationship in Kigali Institute of Education (KIE). A correlation research design was used and the null hypothesis was tested on a sample of 151 respondents from a population of 318 employees in KIE. One of the major findings was that there is a significant relationship between employees' persistence and job factors (supervisory support and coaching, task design and organizational culture). KIE leaders should use this opportunity to increase their efforts with regard to employees' persistence while at the same time increasing the related stated job factors.*

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**Key words:** Persistence, supervisory support and coaching, task design and organizational culture

### **Introduction**

All organizations need the support of employees in their efforts to work towards good performance and productivity. This is emphasized by Vanhala and Ahteela (2011), who stress that without the support of employees, organizations are likely to experience lower productivity and poor performance. In view of this, the Government of Rwanda in its vision 2020, considers its population as the principal asset and relies on it for future development. Vision 2020 is a framework established by the Government of Rwanda for its development. The vision presents priorities and provides Rwandans with a guiding tool for the future (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning [MFEP], 2000). Success in the implementation of the Rwandan vision 2020 will depend primarily on the efforts and sacrifices of Rwandans (Kaberuka, 2000). In other words, the country needs persistent employees to achieve its vision 2020. However, the country still has the challenge of lack of competent personnel (MFEP, 2000). One behavior of incompetent personnel is lack of persistence in work-related activities. Persistence is explained by Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004) as the sustained effort that employees manifest in their work-related activities.

The problem of lack of persistence in work-related activities by some employees might be related to job factors, hence the need for organizations to conduct research on employees' persistence in work related activities and related job factors. Unfortunately, few studies have focused on this relationship especially in Rwandan organizations. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between employees' persistence and job factors (supervisory support and coaching, task design and organizational culture) in Kigali Institute of Education (KIE), one of the public higher learning institutions mandated to train teachers at all levels in Rwanda.

## Research questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the perception of the respondents on persistence?
2. What is the perception of the respondents on job factors (supervisory support and coaching, task design and organizational culture)?
3. Is there a significant relationship between persistence and job factors (supervisory support and coaching, task design and organizational culture) for KIE employees?

## Null hypothesis

To seek for an answer to the last question, the following null hypothesis was tested: *There is no significant relationship between persistence and job factors (supervisory support and coaching, task design and organizational culture) for KIE employees.*

## Literature review

### ***Supervisory support and coaching in relation to employees' persistence***

In most organizations, it is observed that all employees do not have the same abilities, knowledge and skills needed to perform specific tasks (Ivancevich, 2004). It is obvious that employees who do not have required abilities, knowledge and skills to perform their tasks would not be motivated to persist in their work related activities. This is supported by Bordin, Bartram and Casimir (2006), who point out that people who are persuaded verbally that they have the ability to perform their tasks are likely to mobilize greater sustained effort than if they dwelt on personal deficiency when given challenging tasks.

That is the reason why supervisory support and coaching is crucial to employees' work performance. According to Wickramasingher and Jayaweera (2010), supervisory support positively relates to an individual's performance or effectiveness which might be the result of sustained effort of employees. According to these authors, supervisory support may take the form of career enhancing functions such as providing challenging assignments, visibility, as well as psychosocial functions such as counseling, acceptance, and friendship.

Concerning supervisory coaching, Bearwell, Holden, and Claydon (2004) explain that the term coaching is used when the supervisor needs to improve the performance of an employee who is already competent. Coaching is the responsibility of all managers in developing employees as indicated by Rue and Byars (2005). For Certo (2006), coaching is given by supervisors after employees have received training to help them maintain and use the skills they have acquired. Certo (2006) maintains that the word "coaching" originated from sports, where a coach constantly observes team members in action and helps each member accordingly. From this context the author defines coaching as guidance and instruction about how to do a job in order to reach performance goals. In other words, a

supervisor should act as a coach, which means that he has the responsibility of regularly observing, teaching, encouraging and helping employees to develop. This is likely to enhance sustained effort by employees in work related activities.

### ***Task design and persistence***

The nature of the task to be accomplished is crucial for employees' persistence in work-related activities. Zaniboni, Fraccaroli, Truxillo, Bertolino, and Bauer (2011) observed that persistence might increase or decrease depending on whether a person is goal oriented or promotion oriented. The authors distinguish two forms of goal orientation: *learning goal orientation* and *performance goal orientation*. *Learning goal oriented* individuals prefer goals that involve gaining new task competence, seeking challenges, and persisting when confronted with failure. In contrast, *performance goal oriented* individuals are interested in goals that demonstrate task competence and receiving favorable judgment from others; thus, they tend to avoid challenges and decrease their effort and persistence following failure. In the same context of employee's persistence, Trevelyan (2011) as well as Thorbjornsen and Supphellen (2011) highlight the idea of promotion *orientation* which refers to a preference for tasks and situations in which growth, advancement and development are possible. Managers or leaders of organizations should be aware and consider the above mentioned relationship in order to see good results from staff members.

### ***Organizational culture and employees' persistence***

Organizational culture is also an important variable related to employees' persistence. Ivancevich (2004) explains this as a system of shared meaning held by employees that distinguishes organizations from each other. The author indicates that an organization's culture is shown by its way of doing business, the manner in which it treats customers and employees, the extent of autonomy or freedom that exists in the departments or offices, and the degree of loyalty expressed by employees about the organization. Organizational culture represents the perceptions held by the organization's employees. Ivancevich (2004) goes further by explaining that the organizational culture can predict employee's behavior such as persistence, productivity, expectations and provides performance standards among employees. For example, organizational culture can provide clear guidelines on attendance, punctuality, concern about quality, and customer service.

According to Jones and George (2006), when people belong to the same organization, they often tend to behave in a similar way. The authors distinguish "strong" from "weak" organizational culture. When organizational members share an intense commitment of cultural values, beliefs and routines and use them to achieve their goals, then a strong organizational culture exists. However, when organizational members are not strongly committed to a shared system of values, beliefs, and routines, organizational culture is weak. The stronger the culture of an organization, the more it influences the way its members behave. Jones and George (2006) also emphasize the importance of managers in the development and maintenance of organizational culture. All members of an

organization contribute to the development and maintenance of organizational culture, but Ribeiro-Soriano and Urbano (2010) indicate that leaders are among the strongest influencers of employees in an organization. This means that when leaders are persistent in their work related activities, all employees are likely to behave in the same way.

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

This study used a correlational research design to determine whether dependent variables are related to independent variables (Bordens & Abbott, 2002). The independent variables in this study were Job factors, namely supervisory support and coaching, the task to be accomplished and organizational culture while the dependent variable was employees' persistence.

### **Study population**

The target population of this study was composed of 318 employees from Kigali Institute of Education. The population was made of two main groups of participants consisting of 186 academic staff members and 132 administrative staff members. The study considered academic staff members who are permanent employees.

### **Sampling technique**

The study used *purposive sampling* technique to identify key informants. The researchers considered permanent teaching and non-teaching staff because they are the most important members that the institution invests in for its development; therefore the institution needs to retain them and expects quality service delivery from them. The sample size of this study was 177 KIE employees. The sample was computed using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where  $n$  = sample size

$$n = \frac{318}{1 + 318 \times (0.05)^2}$$

$N$  = population size = 318 employees

$e$  = margin of error = 0.05

**$n = 177$**

### **Research instrument**

This study used a questionnaire to obtain different perceptions of respondents on job factors and employees' persistence. The questionnaire was constructed by the researchers using a four- point of the scale design. The four points of the scale were as follows: 1 = Disagree, 2 = Tend to Disagree, 3 = Tend to Agree, 4 = Agree.

### ***Validity of the instrument***

The questionnaire was submitted to experts before the researchers were allowed to use it for data collection. The feedback received was thoroughly followed by the researchers and sufficient to enhance the validity of the questionnaire.

### ***Data-gathering***

The researchers requested for official authorization to collect data from Kigali Institute of Education administration. The process of collecting data started on November 1, 2010. Oral clarification was provided to the respondents on how to fill the questionnaire, where necessary. The questionnaires were left to individual respondents. The researchers managed to collect 151 filled questionnaires (85%) out of 177, among which 70 were from academic staff, 73 from administrative staff and 8 from members of staff who did not indicate which group they belonged to.

### ***Data analysis***

The following main statistical procedures were used by the researchers to analyze the collected data from respondents:

1. Reliability test of the questionnaire: a pilot study was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of at least 0.6 was considered in order to use the questionnaire.
2. Descriptive statistics were used to obtain the frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations.
3. The relationships between variables were tested using *Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r)*. The level of significance was set at 0.05.

### ***Findings and discussion***

The major findings of this study and the associated implications are summarized in the present section. The findings are related to the perception of the respondents on persistence and job factors as well as the relationship between employees' persistence and job factors (supervisory support and coaching, task design, organizational culture).

#### ***Perception of the respondents on persistence and job factors***

The means and standard deviations of the responses of all staff members who participated in this study on the closed-ended questions rated on a four-point scale were calculated to determine employees' perception on persistence and job factors.

**Table 1: Descriptive (Persistence)**

In this Institution, I	Mean	Std. Deviation
Work hard to achieve specific institutional objectives	3.7933	.52196
Have exemplary hard working supervisors	3.1837	.97236
Give up when the task to be accomplished is challenging	1.7500	1.06764
Am encouraged to work hard	3.0612	1.05483
Encourage others to work hard	3.4286	.80239
<b>Mean score for persistence</b>	<b>3.3473</b>	<b>.54538</b>

Note: Categories of means: 1.00 – 1.49 (Disagree); 1.50 -2.49 (Tend to Disagree); 2.50 – 3.49; (Tend to Agree); 3.50 – 4.00 (Agree).

#### **Perception of the respondents on persistence**

Table 1 describes respondents' perceptions on statements related to persistence. The table shows that generally, respondents "tended to agree" (M = 3.3473) that there is persistence in working toward institutional objectives. This means that they did not fully agree that there was sustainability of their activities. Findings showed for example, that sometimes some employees gave up when the task to be accomplished is challenging, which should not happen when employees are persistent. Such category of staff members who give up when the task to be accomplished is challenging could be among employees called by Zaniboni et al. (2011) as *performance goal-oriented individuals*. These are the people who tend to avoid challenges and decrease their effort and persistence following failure.

#### **Perception of the respondents on supervisory support and coaching**

The mean score for supervisory support and coaching as indicated in table 2 below is 2.9111 which is equivalent to "tend to agree". This finding means that employees benefit from supervisory support and coaching. This is good that employees recognize what is done by the institution with regard to supervisory support and coaching however, it is not enough since employees did not fully agree with the existence of supervisory support and coaching. It means that employees would wish that this support and coaching be strengthened for them to sustain on work-related activities.

**Table 2: Descriptive (Supervisory Support and Coaching)**

<b>In this Institution I</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Am trained in order to perform my tasks well	2.7987	1.17393
Perform well my tasks because I have been trained by the Institution	2.1156	1.12577
Am happy with the support my supervisors give me	2.9396	1.02158
Increase my sense of competency because of my supervisors' support	2.7095	1.07066
Am competent	3.6824	.60651
See supervisors as competent in their supervisory responsibilities	3.1892	.89861
<b>Mean score for supervisory support</b>	<b>2.9111</b>	<b>.65558</b>

Note. Categories of means: 1.00 – 1.49 (Disagree); 1.50 -2.49 (Tend to Disagree); 2.50 – 3.49; (Tend to Agree); 3.50 – 4.00 (Agree).

Orpen (1997) as well as Dawley, Andrews and Bucklew (2010) talk about mentoring as a process whereby managers assist and support employees on an individual basis, to help them in their efforts to work successfully towards institutional objectives. Orpen (1997) pointed out that mentoring process has positive effects to both organizations and individuals as far as motivation, commitment and better performance of employees are concerned. Dawley, Andrews and Bucklew (2010) defined mentors as generally more experienced employees who develop, guide, and counsel newer or younger employees as they work toward achieving their career goals.

### **Perception of the respondents on task design**

The task to be accomplished was also a job- related factor that this study looked at in relation to employees' persistence. Table 3 indicates that respondents "tend to agree" that the tasks to be accomplished can enable employees to make sustained efforts in their work. This means that some tasks are favorable to employees' persistence but some others are not. One item that needs more attention than others in this matter is to sometimes give to employees *the tasks that permit them to have exposure with other institutions*. Learning good practices and experience from other institutions would be beneficial not only for the employee but also for the institution. This could be easy when the institution is in partnership with other institutions.

**Table 3: Descriptive (Task Design)**

<b>In this Institution I</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Am expected to use ICT to perform my tasks well	3.6600	.65364
Am delegated the power and authority to make relevant and meaningful decisions	2.9795	3.49674
Am given tasks that are within my area of specialization	3.4178	.84492
Work in physically pleasant and safe working conditions	2.7770	.98161
Am given tasks that permit me to have exposure with other institutions	2.4122	1.11226
<b>Mean score for task</b>	<b>3.0520</b>	<b>.89227</b>

Note. Categories of means: 1.00 – 1.49 (Disagree); 1.50 -2.49 (Tend to Disagree); 2.50 – 3.49; (Tend to Agree); 3.50 – 4.00 (Agree).

Lee (2011) talks of synergistic benefits because when institutions are in partnership, all the institutions will benefit from the combined complimentary resources and expertise that could be shared. Here, the “win-win” potential is applied (Covey, 2004). For this particular matter, the institution could be recommended to exploit the existing partnerships with other institutions by sharing human resources and others. The institution could also create other partnerships where possible. It is also important to discuss the items that rated high among others. The first one is related to the *use of ICT to perform the tasks well*. This item was rated high (M= 3.666) in comparison with other items, which is a good practice to be appreciated. The world in general and institutions in particular are progressively becoming ICT oriented. According to Antonioli, Mazzanti and Pini (2011), ICT not only helps in improving information sharing but it also helps in providing workers with greater degrees of autonomy. It is good that the institution demonstrated to have understood this benefit of ICT.

The institute should take effort to make this good practice sustainable and make some improvements where necessary. The other item which was also rated high was that, *employees are given tasks that are within their area of specialization*. Generally, organizations recruit employees on the basis of their qualifications and specialization. Accordingly, the posts and tasks to be accomplished should be associated to each staff member’s area of specialization. This was confirmed in KIE with this study where respondents’ answer rated 3.4178 interpreted as “tend to agree” which is close to 3.50 meaning “agree”. This means that staff members are given tasks which are within their area of specialization, however there might be some exceptional cases since all respondents did not agree that all tasks were within each member of staff’s area of specialization. There are some staff members who demonstrate other skills beyond their area of specialization. There would be no need to assign such a member of staff other tasks when the institution’ leaders find that he/she has the required skills. What matters in this case is to recognize the work accomplished by the staff member.

### ***Perception of the respondents on organizational culture***

This study was also interested in rating respondents’ perceptions on “organizational culture” as a job factor related to employees persistence as described in table 4. Findings summarized in table 4 indicate a mean score of 3.1984 (tend to agree) for employees’ perceptions of “organizational culture” in relation to their persistence in relation to work-related activities. This means that there were some aspects of the organizational culture which are favorable for employees’ persistence although others need to be improved. Some items were rated high in comparison to others. The first one was related to employees’ loyalty to the institution (M= 3.5959). Turkyilmaz, Akman, Ozkan and Pastuszak (2011) explained that loyalty is characterized by the strong wish by employees to continue membership in an organization. This plays a positive role in retention of members in the organization.

The other item that rated second was that *employees behave according to the institution’s way of doing things* (M= 3.4621). When one is loyal to the institution, one behaves accordingly. This is an opportunity that the institution should exploit. Although some efforts should be made in general for KIE to have a fully attractive



organizational culture, the findings revealed that much effort should be put on providing to employees an opportunity to express their concerns about quality and customer service. Table 4 shows that this item rated (M = 2.7000). It is possible that employees do not have forums where they are free to express their opinions. Having regular departmental meetings might be one way of solving this problem. It is also important to mention that leaders have an important responsibility in this matter. As observed by Ribeiro-Soriano and Urbano (2010), leaders are among the strongest influencers of employees in an organization. Leaders or line managers are recommended to play a good role model for example in terms of quality and timely service delivery, interpersonal relationship, implementation of policies and regulations. This idea is supported by Thorbjornsen and Supphellen (2011), when they say that the manager is a role model for his or her subordinates.

**Table 4:** *Descriptive (Organizational Culture)*

<b>In this Institution I</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Am loyal to the institution	3.5959	78414
Behave according to the institution's way of doing things	3.4621	72668
Am given performance standards by the institution way of doing things	3.0408	87490
Am happy with guidelines on attendance and punctuality	3.2819	96619
Am given opportunity to express my concern about quality and customer service	2.7000	1.13959
See the institution's leaders as good role models	3.1267	.86929
<b>Mean score for organizational culture</b>	<b>3.1984</b>	<b>56207</b>

*Note.* Categories of means: 1.00 – 1.49 (*Disagree*); 1.50 -2.49 (*Tend to Disagree*); 2.50 – 3.49; (*Tend to Agree*); 3.50 – 4.00 (*Agree*).

#### **Relationship between employees' persistence and job factors (supervisory support and coaching, task design, organizational culture)**

If *persistence* is considered in relation to *supervisory support and coaching*, it was found that the correlation coefficient between *persistence* and *supervisory support and coaching* is 0.539 with a p-value of 0.000 which is less than the significance level of 0.05. This means that there is a significant moderate correlation between *persistence* and *supervisory support and coaching* in a positive direction. Increasing supervisory support and coaching would likely increase persistence, likewise decreasing supervisory support and coaching would decrease persistence. The importance of *supervisory support and coaching* is to reinforce the employee's ability to perform his/her work. This is supported by Trevelyan (2011) who emphasizes that when the employee will have confidence in his or her ability, he or she will work hard toward institutional goals. In view of this, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between *persistence* and *supervisory support and coaching* was rejected.

About the relationship between *persistence* and *task design* as indicated in table 5, the correlation coefficient between *persistence* and *task design* is 0.348 with a p-value of 0.000 which is less than the significance level of 0.05. This shows that there is a significant moderate correlation between *persistence* and *task design* in a positive direction. This means that persistence and task design vary together in a positive direction.

**Table 5:** *Correlation coefficients*

		<b>Supervisory support and coaching</b>	<b>Task design</b>	<b>Organizational Culture</b>
<b>PERSISTENCE</b>	Pearson Correlation	.539**	.348**	.427**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Note:** correlation coefficients between .00 and less than .30 are considered weak, those between .30 and less than .80 are moderate and coefficients between .80 and above are considered strong.

This relationship is explained by Trevelyan (2011) that different tasks will result in different effort allocation decisions because the characteristics of tasks vary, and consequently perceptions of likely task completion. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between *persistence* and *task design* was rejected.

*Persistence* was finally considered in relation to *organizational culture*. The Findings revealed that the correlation coefficient between *persistence* and *organizational culture* is 0.427 with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. Thus, there is a significant moderate correlation between *persistence* and *organizational culture* in a positive direction. Persistence can be considered as a characteristic of the organizational culture. It is one quality or value that each employee is expected to have. Employees should be hard working (or persistent) in order to achieve organizational objectives. Organizational leaders have an important role to play in shaping the organizational culture. This is in accordance with what Ribeiro-Soriano and Urbano (2010) presented that leaders are among the strongest influencers of employees in an organization. This means that when the leaders are hardworking, other employees are also likely to work hard. Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between *persistence* and *organizational support* was rejected. In short, improving employees' supervisory support and coaching, task design and organizational culture would increase employees' persistence.

## Conclusions

From the above findings, the following conclusions were drawn. Each of them is related to the research questions of this study:

1. While KIE employees appreciate what is done so far by the institution in terms of sustaining their efforts to work toward institutional objectives, the findings showed that KIE employees would like more effort to be deployed by the institution's leadership to support them.
2. Similarly, employees recognize the institution's effort in making job factors (supervisory support and coaching, task design and organizational culture) favorable for their persistence in work-related activities. However, they would be happy if the efforts are reinforced.

3. The institution's improvement of job factors namely, supervisory support and coaching, task design and organizational culture would increase employees' persistence in work related activities.

Thus, the present study prompts the following suggestions for consideration by KIE leadership:

- a. Employees, especially new ones, need to be developed, guided, and counseled by their supervisors who are more experienced, to make sustained efforts in their work related activities. A supervisor should also act as a coach, which means that he or she has the responsibility of regularly observing, teaching, encouraging and helping employees develop.
- b. The importance of improving organizational culture is observed in this study. Culture provides basic values and beliefs that stimulate and serve as guidance for (and persistence of) behavior. The best way of improving organizational behavior is to have leaders or line managers who play a good role model for subordinates in terms of observing the institutional core values (such as equity, tolerance, respect, quality, competence, accountability, etc), beliefs as well as regulations and policies.
- c. In relation to the task to be accomplished, the institution's leaders should ensure that the task facilitates employees' growth, advancement and development. This explains the idea of promotion orientation (Thorbjornsen & Supphellen, 2011). In the same context, the institution's leaders should sometimes give to employees tasks that permit them to have exposure with other institutions.

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