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Influence of Leave Policy on the Performance of Employees of Rwanda Cooperative Agency in Muhanga District

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Abstract: *This study examined the relationship between leave policy and employee performance at the Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA) in Muhanga District, Rwanda. Guided by Work Life Balance Theory and the Job Demands Resources Model, it adopted a cross-sectional descriptive correlational design within a mixed-methods approach. From a target population of 200 employees, a sample of 134 was determined using Yamane's formula. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed, and 131 usable questionnaires were returned, yielding a 97.8% response rate. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and simple linear regression, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Respondents generally rated leave policy favorably, with item means ranging from 3.55 to 3.97 on a five-point scale. Overall perceived employee performance was high ($M = 3.83$). Leave policy was strongly and positively associated with employee performance ($r = .712$, $p < .01$), and the regression model explained 50.7% of the variation in performance scores ($R^2 = .507$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. Qualitative findings linked adequate leave provisions to perceived improvements in motivation, concentration and effectiveness, while delayed approvals and limited awareness of entitlements hindered implementation. The study concluded that favorable leave-policy perceptions were associated with higher reported performance, although the cross-sectional design precluded causal conclusions. It recommends clearer communication of leave entitlements, timely and transparent approval procedures, and staffing arrangements that enable employees to take leave while maintaining service continuity.*

Keywords: *leave policy; work life balance; employee performance; public institutions; Rwanda*

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1. Introduction

Public institutions rely on the energy, judgement and commitment of their staff to deliver services, and organizations of every kind have therefore turned to work–life balance (WLB) practices as a way of protecting employee well-being while sustaining productivity (Chambel et al., 2023). Leave policy is one of the most basic of these practices. It sets out the days and conditions under which employees may be absent from duty without loss of pay or employment security, and typically covers annual, sick, parental, compassionate and study leave (Nyambura & Kipkebut, 2021; Wainaina et al., 2022).

Leave matters for performance in two ways. First, it allows employees to recover from the demands of work and to meet family and health obligations, which reduces fatigue and strain. Second, the way leave is written, communicated and administered signals whether an institution treats its staff fairly and supportively, which shapes trust and commitment. Both mechanisms are especially relevant in public institutions, where heavy workloads, fixed schedules and limited staffing can make time away from work difficult to obtain.

Evidence from Kenya and Rwanda generally links well-designed leave provisions to higher productivity, morale and service efficiency (Okoth & Muriithi, 2020; Nkunda & Habimana, 2021; Mugisha & Akimana, 2023; Mukamana, 2024). However, much of the wider WLB literature draws on private-sector settings such as banking and telecommunications (Kelley et al., 2021), and the studies that exist for Rwandan public bodies often address work–life balance broadly rather than examining leave policy itself in a single institution using both survey and interview evidence. This leaves managers and regulators with little agency-level evidence on whether leave arrangements are associated with performance and where their implementation falls short.

The Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA) is a public institution mandated to regulate and support cooperatives, and its Muhanga District office provides a suitable setting in which to examine these questions.

1.1 Research Objective

This study aimed to determine the influence of leave policy on the performance of employees of the RCA in Muhanga District.

1.2 Research Hypotheses

The study tested the following null hypotheses:

H_0: There is no significant influence of leave policy on the performance of employees of the RCA in Muhanga District.

H_a: There is a significant influence of leave policy on the performance of employees of the RCA in Muhanga District.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

Work life balance concerns individuals' ability to coordinate employment responsibilities with family, health and other personal commitments (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Leave policy supports this balance by specifying employees' eligibility for time away from work, approval procedures, duration and applicable remuneration or employment protections (Wainaina et al., 2022). Its provisions may include annual, medical, parental, compassionate and study leave, each addressing different needs for recovery, caregiving or professional development (Nyambura & Kipkebut, 2021; Mugisha & Akimana, 2023). In this study, leave policy was assessed through employees' perceptions of family-supportive provisions, contractual clarity, emotional well-being, study leave, extensions, paid parental leave and the stress-reducing role of annual leave.

The study was informed by the work life balance perspective and the Job Demands Resources (JD–R) model. The work life balance perspective emphasizes the importance of time, energy and organizational support in managing competing responsibilities (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Accessible leave may provide employees with opportunities to address personal obligations and recover from work demands. However, formal entitlements alone may offer limited support when employees lack information about their rights or encounter delays and inconsistent approval procedures. This perspective therefore directs attention to both leave provisions and their practical accessibility.

The JD–R model complements this explanation by distinguishing job demands, which require sustained effort and may generate strain, from job resources, which support motivation and help employees manage those demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Clearly communicated and administered leave can function as an organizational resource by enabling recovery and reducing conflict between work and personal responsibilities. Sonnentag (2003) linked recovery experiences with subsequent work engagement, providing a basis for expecting a positive relationship between effective leave arrangements and employee performance. Together, these perspectives suggest that accessible leave may support concentration, motivation and effectiveness. They guide interpretation of the study's findings, although the cross-sectional design cannot establish whether recovery or reduced strain explains the observed association.

2.3 Empirical evidence

Studies in East Africa report positive links between leave arrangements and employee outcomes. In Kenya, leave management and leave policy have been associated with employee productivity and staff efficiency in government institutions (Okoth & Muriithi, 2020; Nyambura & Kipkebut, 2021; Njoroge, 2023). Research in Rwanda points in the same direction: work–life balance and leave provisions have been linked with organizational performance, employee productivity and performance in public institutions and decentralised administrative units (Nkunda & Habimana, 2021; Mukamana & Musabyimana, 2022; Ndayisenga & Tuyisenge, 2023; Mugisha & Akimana, 2023; Mukamana, 2024). Related work highlights the emotional dimension, suggesting that leave supports psychological recovery and thereby performance (Uwizeyimana & Karekezi, 2024).

The literature also cautions that benefits depend on implementation. Public employers must balance individual preferences with operational requirements, and poorly managed leave can shift workload to remaining staff (OECD, 2023). Studies of public servants in Rwanda similarly stress that leave policies achieve their intended effects only when they are clearly communicated and consistently applied (Munyemana &

Habumugisha, 2023; Mukamana, 2024). These strands motivated the hypothesis tested here and the decision to complement survey data with interviews that could illuminate implementation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study used a cross-sectional, descriptive–correlational design within a convergent mixed-methods approach. The descriptive component documented employees' perceptions of leave policy and performance, while the correlational component examined the relationship between them. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same period and integrated at the interpretation stage.

3.2 Study setting, population and sample

The study was conducted at the Rwanda Cooperative Agency in Muhanga District, Southern Province, Rwanda. The target population comprised 200 employees across four management levels. Using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5% margin of error, $n = 200 / (1 + 200 \times 0.05^2) = 133.3$, rounded to a sample of 134. The sample was allocated across management levels (Table 1): board members and executives were selected purposively because of their small numbers and specific responsibilities, and senior, middle and lower managers were selected by simple random sampling from staff lists supplied by the RCA Human Resource Department. In addition, ten employees were interviewed to obtain qualitative insight.

Table 1. Population, sample and response rate by management level

Management level	Population	Sample	Returned	Response (%)	Sampling technique
Board and executive managers	10	7	7	100.0	Purposive
Senior managers	40	27	26	96.3	Simple random
Middle managers	50	34	33	97.1	Simple random
Lower managers	100	66	65	98.5	Simple random
Total	**200**	**134**	**131**	**97.8**	

3.3 Instruments

Primary data were collected with a structured, closed-ended questionnaire and an interview guide, supported by direct observation of how leave was administered at the RCA headquarters. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The leave-policy scale covered family-supportive leave, contractual clarity, emotional well-being, study leave, leave extensions, paid parental leave and stress reduction through annual leave (Table 3). Employee performance was measured with five items on perceived family support, organization and resumption of duties after leave, coordination of leave with duties, and the contribution of leave policy to staff well-being (Table 4). The interview guide contained open-ended questions on how leave arrangements affect work, well-being and productivity. The instruments were piloted with a small group of similar employees outside the study site, and ambiguous items were revised.

3.4 Validity and reliability

Content validity was established through review of the items against the study objective by academic supervisors and RCA human resource officers. Internal consistency was acceptable to high: Cronbach's alpha was 0.84 for the leave-policy scale, 0.83 for the performance scale and 0.82 for the overall instrument, all above the conventional 0.70 threshold (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.804 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 689.217$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis.

3.5 Data collection and analysis

Questionnaires were distributed with the cooperation of RCA management and followed up to maximize returns. Interviews were conducted in person using the interview guide. Quantitative data were edited, coded and analyzed in SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations) summarized responses; Pearson's correlation coefficient assessed the association between leave policy and performance; and a simple linear regression, $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon$, with employee performance (Y) regressed on leave policy (X), estimated the size of the relationship. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level. Interview and observation notes were analyzed thematically by coding recurrent ideas and grouping them into themes, which were then compared with the survey results.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response rate and respondent profile

Of the 134 questionnaires distributed, 131 were returned complete, a response rate of 97.8% (Table 1). Table 2 summarizes the respondents. Slightly more than half were men (55.7%), the largest age group was 31-40 years (41.2%), most held a university qualification (57.3%), and 59.5% were married. Because most respondents were in their prime working years and many carried family responsibilities, leave provisions were directly relevant to their circumstances.

Table 2. Profile of respondents

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	73	55.7
Female	58	44.3
Age group		
16–30 years	29	22.1
31–40 years	54	41.2
41–50 years	31	23.7
51–60 years	12	9.2
Above 60 years	5	3.8
Highest education		
No formal education	3	2.3
Primary	11	8.4
Secondary	42	32.1
University	75	57.3
Marital status		
Single	41	31.3
Married	78	59.5
Widower	6	4.6
Widow	6	4.6

4.2 Perceptions of leave policy

Respondents were broadly positive about leave arrangements at RCA (Table 3). All seven items had means above the scale midpoint, and the seven-item average was 3.84. The highest-rated item was that leave helps employees manage their emotional well-being (M = 3.97, SD = 0.86), followed by annual leave reducing stress and workload fatigue (M = 3.94), family-supportive leave (M = 3.92) and remunerated parental leave (M = 3.91). Agreement was lower, and responses more dispersed, for the clarity of leave provisions in contracts (M = 3.81, SD = 1.03) and study leave (M = 3.79, SD = 1.02). The lowest-rated item was that management grants leave extensions when necessary (M = 3.55, SD = 1.12), with only 58.0% agreeing or strongly agreeing and 17.1% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Table 3. Employees' perceptions of leave policy

Statement	Mean	SD	Agree + strongly agree (%)
Leave helps employees manage emotional well-being.	3.97	0.86	77.7
Annual leave reduces stress and workload fatigue.	3.94	0.90	75.7
Management offers leave opportunities that support family care.	3.92	0.91	75.0
Parental leave is remunerated.	3.91	0.95	73.7
Leave policies are clearly stipulated in employment contracts.	3.81	1.03	68.6
Study leave enhances capacity and skills.	3.79	1.02	69.5
Management grants leave extensions when necessary.	3.55	1.12	58.0

4.3 Level of employee performance

Perceived employee performance was high, with an aggregate mean of 3.83 across the five performance items (Table 4). The highest-rated item was that workers resume duties adequately after leave (M = 3.94, SD = 0.88; 75.5% agreement), and the lowest was that leave is allowed only when duties are coordinated (M = 3.70, SD = 1.05), which suggests some inconsistency in how leave is scheduled against workload.

Table 4. Perceived employee performance

Statement	Mean	SD	Agree + strongly agree (%)
Workers resume duties adequately after leave.	3.94	0.88	75.5
Leave policies support workers' well-being.	3.87	0.93	72.0
RCA supports staff to care for family members.	3.83	0.98	71.7
Workers feel organized after returning from leave.	3.81	0.95	69.3
Leave is allowed only when duties are coordinated.	3.70	1.05	64.9
Aggregate	**3.83**		

4.4 Relationship between leave policy and employee performance

Leave policy and employee performance were strongly and positively correlated ($r = 0.712$, $p < 0.01$). In the simple linear regression, leave policy explained 50.7% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = 0.507$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.503$; standard error of the estimate = 0.482). The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 167.57$, $p < 0.001$), and the coefficient for leave policy was positive and significant ($B = 0.661$, $SE = 0.051$, $t = 12.95$, $p < 0.001$; Table 5). Holding all else equal, each one-point increase in the leave-policy score was therefore associated with an increase of about 0.66 points in the performance score. On this basis the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative (H_a) accepted: leave policy has a statistically significant influence on employee performance at RCA.

Table 5. Correlation and simple regression of employee performance on leave policy

Statistic	Value
Pearson correlation (r)	0.712 ($p < 0.01$)
Coefficient of determination (R^2)	0.507
Adjusted R^2	0.503
Standard error of the estimate	0.482
Constant (intercept)	1.221 (SE = 0.214, t = 5.71, p < 0.001)
Leave policy (unstandardised B)	0.661 (SE = 0.051, t = 12.95, p < 0.001)
Model F	167.57 (p < 0.001)

As a supplementary check, when leave policy was entered together with flexible work arrangements and welfare policies in a multiple regression, the three predictors jointly explained 62.1% of the variance in performance ($R^2 = 0.621$), and leave policy retained a positive, significant coefficient ($B = 0.431$, $SE = 0.058$, $t = 7.43$, $p < 0.001$), the largest of the three predictors. This suggests that the association of leave policy with performance is not simply a reflection of other work–life balance practices.

4.5 Qualitative findings

Interviews and observation converged with the survey results and added detail on how leave operates in practice (Table 6). Participants consistently described leave as a period of rest and recovery that allowed them to return with renewed energy and concentration. Family-supportive leave, such as parental and compassionate leave, was said to help staff balance personal responsibilities with work commitments, and study leave was valued for developing skills. At the same time, participants identified two implementation problems: delays or difficulty in obtaining leave extensions, attributed to limited staffing or managerial discretion, and uneven understanding of entitlements even where these are written into contracts.

Table 6. Themes from interviews and observation

Theme	Summary of what participants reported
Rest and recovery	Leave reduces stress and fatigue and prevents burnout; staff return more focused, motivated and productive.
Family-supportive leave	Parental and compassionate leave help employees meet family responsibilities, improving concentration and commitment at work.
Study leave	Study leave builds skills and professional capacity that carry over into job performance.
Delays in extensions and approvals	Limited staffing and managerial discretion sometimes delay approval or extension of leave, creating workload pressure for the applicant and colleagues.
Uneven awareness of entitlements	Leave provisions appear in contracts, but not all staff fully understand their entitlements or the procedures for applying.

4.6 Discussion of Findings

This study set out to determine the influence of leave policy on the performance of employees of the RCA in Muhanga District. The results show a strong, positive and statistically significant association: employees who perceive leave arrangements as supportive, clear and fairly administered also rate performance-related outcomes more highly, and leave policy alone accounted for about half of the variance in perceived performance. The qualitative evidence points the same way and helps to explain why.

The findings are consistent with East African studies that link leave provisions to productivity, efficiency and morale in public institutions (Okoth & Muriithi, 2020; Nyambura & Kipkebut, 2021; Njoroge, 2023; Nkunda & Habimana, 2021; Mukamana, 2024). They are also consistent with the resource and recovery logic of the JD–R model. Respondents rated the stress-reducing and well-being functions of leave most highly, and interviewees described returning from leave with renewed focus. This is what would be expected if leave functions as a job resource that restores the energy consumed by work demands (Bakker & Demerouti,

2007; Sonnentag, 2003) and echoes the emphasis on emotional recovery in Rwandan research (Uwizeyimana & Karekezi, 2024).

Family support and parental leave also mattered. Because most respondents were married and in the mid-career age bands, leave provisions that recognize caring responsibilities address a real source of work–life conflict, and high agreement that parental leave is remunerated suggests that RCA complies with, and is seen to comply with, its obligations to employees. Study leave was viewed positively but with more variation, which may reflect unequal access across job categories, and suggests that this element of the policy could be applied more evenly.

The most instructive results concern implementation. The lowest-rated items were leave extensions (M = 3.55) and the coordination of leave with duties (M = 3.70), and the items on contractual clarity and study leave showed the widest dispersion. Interviewees attributed these weaknesses to limited staffing, discretionary decision-making and uneven awareness of entitlements. This supports the view that the presence of a leave policy is not sufficient; its effect depends on how clearly it is communicated and how consistently and promptly it is administered (Munyemana & Habumugisha, 2023; Mukamana, 2024). It also reflects the tension identified in public-sector research between individual needs and operational requirements, whereby leave that is granted without cover can burden colleagues (OECD, 2023).

For theory, the results add agency-level evidence from a Rwandan public institution to the resource-based view of work–life balance: leave functions as an organizational resource whose value is realized only when employees can actually access it. For practice, they indicate that the greatest gains are likely to come not from lengthening entitlements but from improving communication, approval procedures and workload cover. These interpretations should be read in light of the limitations below, in particular that the design shows association rather than causation.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study concluded that leave policy was positively and significantly associated with perceived employee performance at the Rwanda Cooperative Agency in Muhanga District. The regression model explained 50.7% of the variation in performance scores. Qualitative findings suggested that accessible leave supported stress reduction, emotional well-being and employees' return to duties, while approval delays and uneven awareness of entitlements hindered implementation. These findings highlight the importance of effective leave administration, although the cross-sectional design does not establish causation.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations are made:

1. RCA management should establish timely, consistent and transparent leave approval procedures, including clear criteria for extensions.
2. Human resource personnel should explain leave entitlements and application procedures during induction and reinforce this information through regular reminders.
3. Management should arrange workload coverage to enable leave utilization without overburdening colleagues and ensure equitable access to study leave across job categories.
4. Relevant public-service authorities should support consistent leave administration through clear guidelines and practical training for human resource managers.
5. Implementation should be monitored through approval, turnaround times, staff awareness, leave utilization and workload coverage.

5.3 Limitations and future research

Several limitations should be noted. First, the study covered a single agency in one district, so the findings may not generalize to other public institutions. Second, the design was cross-sectional, and the analysis, which did not include control variables such as age, gender, tenure or marital status, shows association rather than causation. Third, both leave policy and performance were measured through employees' self-reported perceptions from the same questionnaire, which raises the possibility of common-method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Fourth, the performance items concentrated on how staff resume work and are supported after leave and are therefore conceptually close to the leave-policy items; the correlation may accordingly overstate the link with task performance as assessed in appraisals. Future research should combine objective or supervisor-rated performance data with survey measures, including control variables, use longitudinal or multi-agency designs, and examine moderators such as leadership style and the role of digital HR systems in leave administration.

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