

# Goal Setting in Appraisals and Employee Productivity

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**Abstract:** Goal setting within performance appraisals is an important component of employee performance management. Drawing from Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 2019), this study investigated the influence of goal setting during appraisals on employee productivity in Kenya. A descriptive research design was employed, targeting 385 respondents drawn from academic and administrative staff in public universities within the Nairobi metropolitan area, including the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Moi University (satellite campus), and Egerton University (satellite campus). Data were collected using structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis revealed that goal setting had a positive and statistically significant effect on employee productivity, where specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals were linked to increased motivation and improved work outcomes (Mutuku & Njoroge, 2022). The findings underscore the importance of integrating goal setting into performance appraisal systems to enhance employee productivity (Nyaga, 2023).

## I. Introduction

Employee productivity is central to organizational success, and performance appraisal systems remain one of the tools for measuring and improving it. In Kenya, many public universities have adopted appraisals, but challenges persist due to weak frameworks that lack clear and structured goal setting (Omondi, 2020). In Nairobi's public universities, employee performance has been inconsistent, with appraisals often perceived as routine exercises rather than tools for motivation and productivity improvement (Kinyanjui, 2020). This study focuses on goal setting within appraisals, examining how setting clear performance objectives influences employee productivity.

## II. Literature Review

Goal setting has been widely associated with increased employee performance. Locke and Latham (2019) argue that specific and challenging goals result in higher levels of effort and performance compared to vague goals. Empirical studies in Kenya and other African contexts demonstrate that goal setting in appraisals increases accountability, role clarity, and motivation (Mutuku & Njoroge, 2022). Employees who participate in setting goals perceive appraisals as fairer and are more committed to achieving desired outcomes. However, poorly structured goals contribute to role ambiguity and low performance (Nyaga, 2023). Thus, the integration of SMART goals into appraisal systems is critical for enhancing productivity.

## III. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990; 2019), which posits that individuals perform better when they are given clear, specific, and challenging goals. Goal setting influences performance by focusing attention, mobilizing effort, and encouraging persistence. In the context of appraisals, when goals are clearly defined and agreed upon, employees are more likely to be motivated to achieve them, leading to higher productivity (Taylor & Green, 2020).

## IV. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population was approximately 10,000 employees (academic and administrative) working in selected public universities within Nairobi County, namely the University of Nairobi,

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Kenyatta University, Moi University (satellite campus), and Egerton University (satellite campus). Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation from different staff categories, resulting in a sample size of 385 respondents. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, which included items on goal-setting practices and employee productivity. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were used to analyze the data, while regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of goal setting on productivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

### V. Analysis and Results

The descriptive analysis showed that most respondents agreed that goal setting within appraisals enhanced their productivity. Respondents reported that setting clear goals improved focus and accountability in their roles.

Table 1

#### Descriptive Statistics on Goal Setting and Productivity

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Clear goals improve focus on tasks	4.23	0.81
Goal setting enhances accountability	4.11	0.77
SMART goals improve overall productivity	4.19	0.84
Participation in goal setting increases motivation	4.25	0.79

The results in Table 1 indicate that respondents strongly agreed that goal setting has a positive impact on productivity, with all mean values above 4.0.

Table 2

#### Regression Analysis of Goal Setting on Employee Productivity

Variable	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Std. Error	p-value
Constant	2.15	0.52	0.001
Goal Setting	0.412	0.08	0.000

R-squared ( $R^2$ ) = 0.365

Adjusted  $R^2$  = 0.359

The regression results show that goal setting had a positive and significant effect on employee productivity ( $\beta = 0.412$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), explaining 36.5% of the variance in productivity levels.

### VI. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that goal setting is a critical determinant of employee productivity. Consistent with Locke and Latham (2019), the study shows that employees with clearly defined goals work more efficiently and are motivated to achieve higher results. These findings also align with Mutuku and Njoroge (2022), who found that goal setting in appraisals enhances accountability and performance in public sector organizations. The study emphasizes that for Kenyan universities and similar contexts, integrating SMART goals in appraisals can lead to improved employee outcomes (Nyaga, 2023).

### VII. Recommendations

1. Public universities should institutionalize SMART goal setting in appraisal systems.
2. Supervisors should engage employees in participatory goal setting to enhance commitment and ownership.
3. Regular training should be provided for managers to improve their skills in setting and evaluating performance goals.
4. Policy frameworks should reinforce goal setting as a mandatory component of performance appraisal systems.

### VIII. Conclusion

The study concludes that goal setting within performance appraisals significantly enhances employee productivity. By grounding appraisal systems in Goal-Setting Theory, organizations can foster motivation, role clarity, and accountability. Strengthening goal-setting practices is therefore essential for improving employee productivity and organizational effectiveness in Kenya's public universities (Kuvaas, 2021).

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