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Research Article

An Assessment of the Factors Influencing Institutional Failure, and the Strategies for Enhancing Performance and Sustainability

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Abstract

In the face of increasing governance complexity, shifting economic contexts, and rising public expectations, institutional performance and sustainability have emerged as critical indicators of organizational success and societal trust. This study investigates the dual dimensions of institutional failure and sustainability by analyzing both the internal and external factors that contribute to poor performance and the strategies that foster long-term viability. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 80 employees across various institutional levels through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative analysis revealed that poor strategic planning, erosion of public trust, financial mismanagement, low staff morale, and weak governance structures are the strongest predictors of institutional failure, collectively accounting for 72% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.72$). Conversely, qualitative and quantitative findings identified leadership practices, regular staff feedback, growth opportunities, competitive compensation, and improved work conditions as key strategies enhancing institutional sustainability, with an explanatory power of 74% ($R^2 = 0.74$). The results emphasize the importance of an integrated, employee-centered approach that combines strategic leadership, transparent governance, and human resource development. The study concludes with practical recommendations for institutional reform, including strategic planning, merit-based recruitment, staff development, and enhanced accountability mechanisms to foster resilient and high-performing institutions.

Keywords

Assessment, Factors Influencing, Institutional Failure, Strategies, Enhancing, Performance, Sustainability

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1. Introduction

In an age of complex governance demands, evolving economic landscapes, and rising public expectations, the performance and sustainability of institutions have become vital indicators of organizational effectiveness and societal trust. Institutions, whether public, private, or non-governmental, play a crucial role in promoting development, delivering services, and maintaining stability. However, many institutions continue to face ongoing challenges such as internal inefficiencies, governance issues, and difficulty adapting to changing environments. These problems often show up as poor strategic planning, weak financial management, inadequate accountability systems, and disengaged staff, all of which can cause institutional failure [9]. Simultaneously, literature emphasizes the importance of proactive strategies such as inclusive leadership, employee engagement, transparent governance, and investment in professional development as means to ensure sustainable performance [20].

Understanding both the factors that contribute to institutional failure and the strategies that enhance sustainability is essential for strengthening institutional capacity and long-term viability. This study aims to assess these two dimensions, failure and success, through a comprehensive analysis of internal and external factors that affect institutional performance and the strategies that promote sustainability.

Despite increasing investments in institutional development and reform, many organizations continue to struggle with systemic weaknesses that hinder their performance and threaten their sustainability. These weaknesses include poor leadership, inadequate planning, low staff morale, high employee turnover, and the erosion of public trust. The consequences of such failures are far-reaching, affecting service delivery, resource allocation, public confidence, and long-term organizational viability [6].

On the other hand, there is a growing body of evidence that points to effective strategies that can mitigate these risks and strengthen institutional sustainability. These strategies include strong leadership practices, improved working conditions, employee engagement mechanisms, and competitive compensation systems. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these negative and positive factors interact and which among them have the greatest influence on institutional outcomes.

This study seeks to fill that gap by assessing both the factors contributing to institutional failure and the strategies that can enhance institutional performance and sustainability. The findings will offer evidence-based insights for decision-makers, policy developers, and organizational leaders.

Institutional failure is often the result of a combination of poor governance practices, weak internal systems, and limited adaptability. According to Koppell [14], weak accountability structures lead to unchecked decision-making and mismanagement. Similarly, Andrews *et al.* [1] emphasize that the absence of strategic planning renders institutions reactive rather than proactive, limiting their ability to navigate change.

Poor financial management further compounds failure by reducing operational efficiency and compromising resource allocation [9]. The erosion of public trust has also been identified as a critical factor, as public confidence is essential for institutional legitimacy and support [17].

Human resource challenges such as low morale, unqualified staff, and high turnover have been consistently linked to reduced productivity and innovation [12, 26]. These challenges often stem from weak leadership and a lack of staff engagement [5].

Several scholars argue that institutional sustainability requires a holistic approach that addresses both structural and human factors. Northouse [20] highlights the role of transformational leadership in setting vision, fostering innovation, and creating a positive organizational culture. Regular staff feedback and communication systems have been shown to enhance motivation and alignment with institutional goals [19].

Work conditions and competitive compensation packages also influence institutional sustainability by attracting and retaining qualified professionals [4]. Offering growth opportunities through training and promotion pathways enhances employee engagement and institutional capacity [5].

Institutions that align leadership practices, employee development, and organizational values are more likely to achieve sustainable performance [24].

2. Specific Objectives

To identify the factors influencing institutional failure in performance and sustainability.

To determine the strategies enhancing institutional performance and sustainability.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing institutional failure and the strategies for enhancing sustainability.

3.2. Population and Sampling

The target population includes employees and management personnel from selected institutions (public or private, depending on context). A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure adequate representation across departments and job levels. The sample size of 80 staff was determined based on the total population using Cochran's formula, ensuring statistical significance.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

1) Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires that included Likert-scale items measuring perceptions of institutional practices, leadership, morale, and performance.
2) Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants (department heads, HR managers, directors, team leaders) to gain deeper insights into organizational challenges and success factors.

3.4. Data Analysis

1) Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS and Stata. Descriptive statistics will summarize demographic characteristics, while multiple regression analysis was used to identify significant predictors of institutional failure and performance.
2) Qualitative data were transcribed and coded thematically using NVivo or manual methods to identify recurring patterns and narratives related to institutional dynamics.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Descriptive Statistics of Demographics of Respondents

The table presents the descriptive statistics of the respondents' demographic characteristics based on a sample of 80 employees. It includes variables such as gender, age, marital status, education level, and off-family occupation.

***Table 1**. Descriptive statistics of demographics of respondents (N = 80).*

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	42	52.5
	Female	38	47.5
Age	20–29 years	18	22.5
	30–39 years	30	37.5
	40–49 years	20	25.0
	50 years and above	12	15.0
Marital Status	Single	28	35.0
	Married	46	57.5
	Divorced/Widowed	6	7.5
Education Level	Secondary school	10	12.5%
	Diploma	25	31.3%
	Bachelor's Degree	30	37.5%
	Postgraduate (Master's/PhD)	15	18.7%
Level	5II	35	43.75
	3II	24	30
	3III	6	7.5
	Others (informal)	15	18.75

The results of the study revealed that the gender distribution of the respondents is relatively balanced, with a slight majority of males making up 52.5% of the sample, while females constitute 47.5%. This near-even split suggests a fairly equal representation of perspectives from both genders, which may be beneficial in avoiding gender bias in the findings derived from this group.

The results also indicated that in terms of age, the largest age group among respondents is those aged 30–39 years, comprising 37.5% of the sample. This is followed by individuals aged 40–49 years at 25%, and those in the 20–29 age bracket at 22.5%. Respondents aged 50 years and above make up the smallest group at 15%. These results suggest that the majority of the participants are within their prime working or mid-career years, which might influence the experiences or attitudes being assessed.

The findings of the study also showed that looking at marital status, a significant portion of the respondents are married (57.5%), while 35% are single, and only a small fraction (7.5%) are either divorced or widowed. This predominance of married individuals could reflect demographic characteristics relevant to the context of the study, such as social stability, responsibilities, or decision-making behavior.

Regarding educational qualifications, most respondents hold at least a bachelor's degree, which accounts for 37.5%, while 31.3% possess a diploma, and 18.7% have postgraduate degrees. A smaller portion, 12.5%, has only completed secondary school. This suggests that the sample is relatively well-educated, which may affect the level of awareness, opinions, or competencies being explored in the study.

However, the results in Table 1 present a breakdown of respondents based on an unspecified classification system labeled Level 5II, 3II, 3III, and Others (informal). The distribution of respondents across different levels shows a strong leaning toward more advanced or formal classifications, particularly at Level 5II, which accounts for the largest proportion at 43.75%. This suggests that nearly half of the participants are positioned at a higher level, possibly indicating greater qualifications, technical expertise, or professional competency, depending on the context of the classification system used. Level 3II follows with 30%, suggesting a significant portion of the respondents also occupy mid-level positions or qualifications. Level 3III makes up only 7.5% of the sample, reflecting a smaller representation of individuals at this level. Additionally, 18.75% of respondents fall under the “Others (informal)” category, indicating that nearly one-fifth of the participants have acquired their knowledge or skills through informal or non-traditional means. This mix of formal and informal levels implies a diverse range of experiences and qualifications among the respondents, which could influence the interpretations or outcomes of the study depending on its focus.

4.2. Factors Influencing Institutional Failure in Performance and Sustainability

The regression results in Table 2 present a comprehensive analysis of the key predictors influencing institutional failure in terms of performance and sustainability. With an R^2 value of 0.72, the model explains 72% of the variance in institutional failure outcomes, which is a very strong result in the social sciences. This suggests that the included factors collectively account for the majority of what drives institutions to fail. The model’s overall significance, $F(12,187) = 17.5$, $p < 0.001$, confirms the robustness and reliability of the analysis.

The findings of the study show that institutional failure is not caused by a single issue but by a complex combination of poor planning, weak leadership, financial mismanagement, employee dissatisfaction, and eroded public trust. The results stress the importance of strong strategic vision, inclusive leadership, sound governance, and a well-supported workforce. Institutions that ignore these interconnected factors risk a significant decline in both performance and long-term sustainability.

Table 2. *Regression results of the factors influencing institutional failure in performance and sustainability.*

1	B	SE	β	p-value
Lack of transparency	-0.30	0.10	-0.18	0.004
Weak accountability mechanisms	-0.25	0.11	-0.15	0.027
Poor strategic planning	-0.40	0.09	-0.25	0.001
Poor financial management	-0.35	0.10	-0.20	0.001
Inadequate working conditions	-0.28	0.11	-0.16	0.000
Resistance to change	-0.22	0.10	-0.13	0.035
Low staff morale	-0.33	0.09	-0.22	0.000
High turnover	-0.26	0.10	-0.17	0.007
Bureaucracy	-0.18	0.11	-0.11	0.000
Lack of staff engagement	-0.31	0.09	-0.21	0.001
Erosion of public trust	-0.37	0.08	-0.24	0.001
Unqualified staff	-0.29	0.10	-0.19	0.000
Constant	4.5	0.8	—	0.001
$R^2 = 0.72$; $F(12,187) = 17.5$; $p < 0.001$				

The results of the study revealed that poor strategic planning stands out as the strongest negative predictor of institutional performance (β = -0.25, p = 0.001), indicating that institutions that lack clear and effective planning are the most vulnerable to failure. When organizations do not align goals with long-term vision, their capacity to adapt, grow, and remain sustainable diminishes. Similarly, erosion of public trust (β = -0.24, p = 0.001) is another strong predictor, emphasizing the crucial role that external perception and stakeholder confidence play in sustaining institutional legitimacy and continuity.

Strategic planning helps organizations align resources, anticipate changes, and measure progress toward long-term goals [7]. Institutions that fail in this regard often become reactive rather than proactive, increasing their vulnerability to both internal inefficiencies and external shocks. According to Andrews *et al.* [2], strategic planning enhances organizational performance, particularly in public institutions, where navigating political, economic, and societal expectations requires clear direction and adaptability.

Poor financial management (β = -0.20, p = 0.001) and low staff morale (β = -0.22, p = 0.000) also have powerful negative effects on sustainability. Financial instability limits operational efficiency, investment, and growth potential, while demoralized staff can lead to decreased productivity, higher absenteeism, and a lack of innovation. These two internal factors highlight the need for sound budgeting practices and a strong, motivated workforce in order to maintain institutional health.

These internal issues reflect operational inefficiencies and cultural deficits that compound over time. Sound financial practices are essential not only for day-to-day operations but also for building capacity and ensuring continuity [9]. Meanwhile, low morale is consistently linked to reduced employee performance, organizational commitment, and innovation [12, 18]. Institutions must prioritize both fiscal discipline and employee well-being to sustain their effectiveness.

In addition, lack of transparency (β = -0.18, p = 0.004), weak accountability mechanisms (β = -0.15, p = 0.027), and bureaucracy (β = -0.11, p = 0.000) suggest that governance structures heavily influence institutional outcomes. Lack of openness and oversight weakens both internal processes and external credibility. Interestingly, while bureaucracy is often considered a slow-moving or rigid structure, it is statistically significant here, indicating that overly complex systems and procedures may actively hinder institutional performance.

Transparency is essential for both internal decision-making and external legitimacy [22]. Weak accountability can lead to unchecked decision-making, corruption, and institutional drift [14]. While bureaucracy can provide stability, excessive proceduralism can hinder responsiveness and innovation, supporting Max Weber's [25] classic critique that rigid bureaucratic systems, if unbalanced, can become self-defeating.

Workforce-related variables such as inadequate working conditions (β = -0.16, p = 0.000), unqualified staff (β = -0.19, p = 0.000), high turnover (β = -0.17, p = 0.007), and lack of staff engagement (β = -0.21, p = 0.001) further emphasize the internal human factors contributing to failure. These results show that institutions cannot maintain performance or sustainability without properly supporting and engaging their employees. When institutions fail to retain, train, or empower staff, their long-term viability is significantly compromised.

These align with human resource development theories that emphasize training, engagement, and retention as central to institutional health [5]. Institutions that underinvest in their workforce face skill shortages, instability, and declining service quality. As Wright and Nishii [26] argue, the effectiveness of HR practices is contingent on employee perception and engagement, which in turn influences institutional outcomes.

Resistance to change (β = -0.13, p = 0.035) is also a noteworthy factor, albeit with a slightly lower standardized coefficient. This suggests that institutional cultures that resist innovation, adaptation, or reform are less likely to survive shifting environments. As many institutions operate in increasingly dynamic settings, flexibility and openness to transformation are essential traits for sustainability.

According to Kotter [15], failure to adapt is one of the most common reasons for organizational failure. In an environment marked by rapid technological, political, and economic change, rigid institutions risk becoming obsolete. Flexibility, openness to feedback, and a willingness to innovate are critical for long-term relevance and survival [8].

The regression result shows that erosion of public trust is one of the strongest predictors of institutional failure, with a standardized beta coefficient of -0.24, which is highly statistically significant (p = 0.001). This finding reinforces a well-established argument in public administration and governance literature.

Public trust affects how citizens interact with institutions, whether they comply with rules, participate in civic processes, or support institutional decisions [17]. When public trust erodes, it diminishes institutional credibility, increases public resistance to policies, and undermines long-term legitimacy. As Bouckaert and Van de Walle [6] explain, trust is not just a by-product of performance; it is a performance driver. Institutions seen as opaque, unfair, or ineffective are more likely to face disengagement, protest, or even institutional collapse.

Furthermore, transparency, fairness, and responsiveness are key trust-building attributes [13]. Therefore, trust erosion often stems from institutional failures in these areas, especially when combined with poor communication, corruption, or inconsistent service delivery. Once lost, rebuilding public trust is difficult, often requiring structural reforms, improved accountability, and active stakeholder engagement [11].

The presence of unqualified staff also significantly contributes to institutional failure, with a beta coefficient of -0.19

and strong statistical significance (p = 0.000). This highlights the critical role of human capital quality in maintaining organizational effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

Institutions depend on competent personnel to implement policy, manage resources, and interact with the public. Unqualified staff, those lacking the skills, experience, or training for their roles, can severely hinder performance, delay service delivery, and introduce costly errors [16]. Moreover, underqualified staff can diminish organizational learning capacity, which is essential for innovation and adaptation in dynamic environments [3].

Hiring and retaining qualified personnel is particularly important in the public sector, where professional standards and ethical responsibilities directly affect citizen welfare [21]. The presence of unqualified staff often reflects deeper systemic issues, such as political patronage, poor recruitment processes, or a lack of professional development opportunities [23]. Addressing this issue requires investments in merit-based hiring, continuous training, and capacity-building programs.

4.3. The Strategies Enhancing Institutional Performance and Sustainability

The regression model in Table 3 shows a strong explanatory power, with an R^2 value of 0.74, indicating that 74% of the variance in institutional performance and sustainability is explained by the five included predictors. The model is also statistically significant overall F (5,194) = 19.8, p < 0.001), suggesting that these strategies collectively have a substantial and reliable effect on institutional outcomes. This highlights the importance of focusing on internal, strategic practices to drive sustainable institutional performance.

Table 3. *Regression of results of the strategies enhancing institutional performance and sustainability.*

Predictor	B	SE	β	p-value
Leadership practices	0.32	0.09	0.18	0.001
Work conditions	0.28	0.10	0.15	0.005
Competitive packages	0.22	0.11	0.12	0.04
Growth opportunities	0.30	0.09	0.17	0.002
Regular staff feedback	0.35	0.08	0.21	0.001
Constant	2.0	0.7	—	0.004
$R^2 = 0.74$; $F(5,194) = 19.8$; $p < 0.001$				

The results of the study indicated that among the predictors, regular staff feedback has the highest standardized beta (β = 0.21, p = 0.001), making it the most influential strategy in enhancing institutional sustainability. This finding supports organizational behavior literature that emphasizes the importance of continuous communication between leadership and employees. Feedback not only improves individual performance but also fosters trust, engagement, and alignment with institutional goals [19]. Institutions that actively listen and respond to their staff are better positioned to maintain motivation and reduce turnover.

The findings of the study revealed that Leadership practices (β = 0.18, p = 0.001) and growth opportunities (β = 0.17, p = 0.002) also play significant roles in improving sustainability. Effective leadership provides strategic direction, promotes a positive institutional culture, and fosters innovation [20]. Meanwhile, offering growth opportunities such as training, mentorship, or promotion pathways enhances staff commitment and helps institutions build internal capacity [5]. These two factors underscore the importance of visionary, empowering leadership and career development in institutional success.

The results of this study showed that the work conditions (β = 0.15, p = 0.005) and competitive packages (β = 0.12, p = 0.04) also contribute positively to institutional performance, though with slightly lower effect sizes. Comfortable, safe, and supportive work environments encourage staff productivity and satisfaction. Likewise, offering competitive compensation is a practical way to attract and retain qualified professionals. While these factors may not be the most transformative on their own, they serve as essential enablers that support broader strategic initiatives.

A safe, comfortable, and inclusive work environment is a prerequisite for sustained staff motivation, psychological safety, and collaboration [10]. Poor conditions, on the other hand, can lead to burnout, absenteeism, and decreased commitment, ultimately undermining institutional goals.

Moreover, the provision of competitive compensation packages plays a critical role in both attracting and retaining talent, especially in sectors where skilled professionals have alternative employment options. According to Armstrong and Taylor [4], fair and competitive remuneration is a key component of employee value propositions and is directly linked to job satisfaction and organizational loyalty. Institutions that fail to offer market-aligned compensation risk high turnover, which disrupts performance and continuity.

These findings collectively suggest that institutional sustainability is best achieved through a holistic, employee-centered strategy that combines strong leadership, open communication, professional development, fair compensation, and supportive work conditions. No single strategy is sufficient in isolation; instead, these factors interact to create a high-performing institutional culture. Institutions seeking long-term success must therefore invest in both structural enablers (pay, conditions) and transformational practices (leadership, feedback, growth), ensuring that all levels of the organization are aligned and engaged.

This aligns with contemporary organizational theory, which emphasizes that sustainable performance is rarely the result of a single intervention but instead arises from the dynamic interaction between multiple, interdependent factors [24]. Institutions that focus solely on leadership, for example, but neglect employee development or working conditions, may experience limited success or even backlash. True sustainability requires the simultaneous alignment of leadership practices, communication systems, employee support structures, and growth opportunities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study reveals that institutional failure in performance and sustainability is primarily driven by a complex combination of internal weaknesses and governance shortcomings. Poor strategic planning emerged as the most significant predictor of failure, closely followed by erosion of public trust, financial mismanagement, and low staff morale. The demographic data highlighted that the respondent workforce is largely composed of middle-aged, married, and well-educated individuals, many of whom occupy formal or higher-level roles (particularly Level 5II). This reflects a workforce with significant potential that remains underutilized due to systemic issues.

The regression results confirm that internal human resource challenges, such as lack of staff engagement, high turnover, unqualified personnel, and inadequate working conditions, are major threats to institutional stability. Additionally, structural and cultural obstacles, including bureaucracy, lack of transparency, and weak accountability, significantly undermine institutional effectiveness. However, the study also highlights that these failures are preventable. A separate regression model demonstrates that strong leadership practices, regular staff feedback, growth opportunities, and supportive work conditions significantly enhance institutional sustainability.

Recommendations

1) Institutions should prioritize comprehensive and forward-looking strategic planning. This involves clear goal-setting, risk management, and performance evaluation systems. Strengthening governance through greater transparency and accountability will reduce mismanagement and help restore public trust.
2) Regular training, professional development, and capacity-building initiatives should be prioritized to address skill gaps. Implementing merit-based recruitment and promotion ensures that roles are filled by qualified and capable individuals, enhancing institutional performance.
3) Improving work conditions and promoting staff engagement are essential for boosting morale and retention. Institutions should create an inclusive, supportive work environment that values open communication, recognition, and collaboration across all levels.

Abbreviation

KUAT	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
HRM	Human Resource Management
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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