



Human Resource Management Practices in Public Secondary Schools in Kiambu East District

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ABSTRACT

The practices of managing people have undergone tremendous changes. Previously, the duties of human resources management normally centered on staffing activities such as hiring and firing, keeping personnel records and organizing other personnel activities. However, today public and private organizations can no longer afford to look at people as a commodity to be exploited to exhaustion and then discarded. The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which human resource management practices are utilized in public secondary schools with a case study of Kiambu East District. The study used a descriptive research design, the target population consisted of the senior and middle level heads and other teaching staff of all the 19 public secondary schools in Kiambu East District. 40 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling method. Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires and was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings suggested that public schools in Kiambu East have to a reasonable extent utilized HRM practices such as training, vigorous selection process, compensation, and supervisory support. It also revealed that performance appraisal and employee participation in decision making have been practiced to a very little extent. The concluding section recommends that managers carefully re-evaluate the extent to which innovative HR practices could be implemented within their departments. This is so because some of these practices may be inappropriate to public secondary schools sector organizations due to organizational structure.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Today's organisations operating environment is characterised by constant change. The accelerated pace of advances in technology, increase in competition, widespread and growing unemployment create serious adjustment problems. Diminishing resource supplies have also affected the way business is conducted; education institutions have not been spared and schools have to adapt more prudent management systems. This complex and unstable environment is a way of life, which will continue way into the future. Organizations are open systems, studies carried out before liberalization indicates that the reform process has led to stiff competition in key sectors of the economy (Owiye 1999, and Murage 2001).

Armstrong (2002) asserts that all organisations exist to achieve a purpose and they must ensure that they have resources required to do so and they use them effectively. An organisation has to align its human resource function with its overall strategic goals and objectives. Organisation culture, people and processes rather than capital or technology can form the base of sustained competitive advantage of a firm (Miner 1995). It is important that a firm adopts strategic HR practices that make best use of its employees. People have been reported to hold the key to more productive and efficient organizations. The way in which they are managed at work has major effects upon product quality, customer service, and organizational flexibility and costs (Harrison, 2000). Cole (1997) referred to the collective activities undertaken by all those who manage people in the organization as human resource management (HRM). He highlighted the consequences of not caring for the employees as unsatisfied customers and stressed unhappy work force and emphasized the need to balance the respective needs of customers and those of employees. Harrison (2000) asserted that when employees are well managed through HRM, they would take care of customer needs.

1.1.1 Human Resource Management Practices

In an attempt to define HRM, Armstrong (2001) emphasized that it is people working in an organization who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives. The human resource is a living and active input that operates the other factors of production. It is people who create organizations and make them survive and prosper. Hence, their special management cannot be neglected as other components of the organization are likely to suffer. Without people, organizations could not function. Yet people also need the organizations so that they can maintain their living standards, by working in

these organizations. Jackson (2009) explained that, employees work in exchange for compensation. Hence there is a symbiotic relationship between organizations and employees who work in them. Human resources management practices describe the way in which managers set about achieving results through people. It is how managers behave as team leaders and how they exercise authority. Managers can be autocratic or democratic, tough or soft, demanding or easy going, directive or laissez-faire, distant or accessible, destructive or supporting, task orientive or people oriented, rigid or flexible, considerate or unfeeling, friendly or cold, keyed-up or relaxed. How people behave will depend partly on their natural inclination, partly on the example given to them by their manager, and partly on the norms, values and climate of the organization. Human resources management is a strategic and coherent approach to the management of organisations' most valued asset. Defined by Storey (1995): Human resource management is a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to obtain competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and skilled workforce, using an array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques. It is clear that human resources management is an important part of today's business management. Barasa J.M (2004) asserts that all organizations, schools being no exception cannot do without human and material resources. These resources complement each other in organization development and must be managed.

Pfeffer (1998) suggested a number of human resource management practices, termed as best practices, which he believed could improve organizational performance. These are namely; selective hiring, extensive training, employment security, diffusion of information, team working, reduction of status differences, performance related and incentive pay. Guest (2002) argues that a relationship exists between the use of appropriate HRM practices and positive employee attitudes among them job satisfaction and commitment. He further claims that these practices equip employees and enable them to function autonomously and responsibly.

1.1.2 Public Secondary schools in Kiambu East

The district has nineteen public secondary schools. Each is headed by the school principal who is responsible for the overall running of the school and for the maintenance of the tone and all round standards. He will have such a keen interest in the welfare of both his teachers and students. He is responsible for all planning, organizing, controlling, staffing, innovation, coordination, motivation and actualization of education goals and objectives of the institution It is therefore important

that the school head be able to establish cordial relations with the staff, students, the community and other organizations.

Public secondary schools are administered by boards of governors appointed by the Minister for Education. The Teachers Service Commission Act allows the TSC to delegate its powers relating to hiring, control and discipline of teachers to the boards of governors. The public education system in Kenya is structured along the lines of Weber's concept of hierarchy. There is for instance a District Education Officer who is answerable to the Provincial Director of Education who in turn is accountable to the Director of Education. At the helm of the Ministry of Education are the Permanent Secretary and the Minister for Education. In public secondary schools, there is the school principal and immediately under him is the deputy principal. Answerable to the deputy principal are departmental heads who are in charge of subject teachers. In a school setting, there are various departments such as the Science, Mathematics, Languages, Humanities and Technical subjects departments. In these departments, teachers are assigned tasks to perform according to their specialization; this is to maximize productivity and efficiency. The ministry of education has the overall responsibility to manage all aspects of education and training with the assistance of semi autonomous government agencies. At the school level, the board of governors is responsible for the management of human and other resources so as to facilitate operations, structure development and provision of teaching and learning materials.

Management of people in the school context involves the skillful control and guidance of students, teachers and other stakeholders in order to achieve the schools desired outcomes. The principal plays an important role in this respect. The School Management Guide, 2008 asserts that the nature and quality of leadership and management that the principal provides will determine the effectiveness of the school. Secondary schools do not have clearly defined customers like in the business world. Their customers include students, communities, religious organizations and other government institutions, development partners and the private sector. In today's secondary schools, the school principal is the most immediate human resource manager and is accountable to the Board of governors who are the TSC's agent.

Strategic human resource management improves firm's performance (Beer et al, 1985). This approach emphasizes the importance of congruence between human resource activities and organizational objectives. Recent research has focused on the links between HRM and performance (Guest 2003; 2004; Purcell 2002; 2004), and much of the growing body of international literature in the field is built upon the premise that human resource management is linked closely to the emergent strategies. To provide efficient education and training services, the capacities and skills of staff in the various offices and organizations involved should be commensurate with the tasks they perform (MOEST 2005). Currently, in majority of cases there are gaps between competencies and the responsibilities of those mandated to undertake provision and management of education in Kenya. The Kenya Education staff institute (KESI) is charged with the responsibility of training and in servicing education managers to enable them manage education services and institutions effectively.

Objective of the Study

To determine the extent to which HRM practices have been adopted by public school managers in Kiambu East.

Literature shows that to get work done, organizations need to attract people to apply for jobs and retain those who do their jobs well. After applicants have applied for a job offer, the process of selection occurs. Employers would want to select employees who will be able and willing to learn new tasks and continually adapt to changing conditions. As job requirements change, existing employees must be able to develop new competencies, become proficient in new jobs and even change their occupations. Training and development practices enable employees to develop themselves and remain employable (Jackson, S.E 2009).

Performance must also be measured and employees must receive usable feedback so that they can correct performance deficiencies. In addition, employees work in exchange for compensation, monetary or otherwise. Employers on the other hand offer incentives and other forms of rewards to motivate employees to perform to their best. They must further provide a healthy and safe workplace and also give an ear

to their employees' grievances. Human resources management encompasses a wide area and it can be said that good human resources management practices add value to a job and increase the job satisfaction.

Notwithstanding the technological advances and new systems now available in the workplace, the most important factor in production is human. The other factors are only useful when they are operated by competent well motivated employees. Human resources management practices and systems have been linked to organizational competitiveness, increased productivity, higher quality of work life and greater profitability (Cascio, 1992, Schuler and Jackson 1996). In a global economy, competitiveness means the ability to take the most advantageous position in a constantly changing market environment (Pfeffer, 1994). In order for this link to be accomplished, the role of human resources management must become strategic instead of operational, aligning the human resources function with the strategic needs of the organization (Pickles et al; 1999). Brewster (1995) reports that the integration of human resources management with business strategy is rare even among the large organizations. Also, Down et al (1997) claim that many management teams have had difficulty transforming human resource management into a strategic function, leaving the human resources department in most companies focused on administrative and clerical tasks. As a result, they ignore the long term perspective of HR planning and set their sights too low, ending up with HRM strategies that are too functional, too operational, too narrow and too generic (Walker, 1999). In the end, such strategies fail to energize their managers in making necessary changes to achieve competitiveness through people and often fade away or are replaced before they achieve any real impact. HRM strategies need to be integral to organizational strategies; they need to pay attention to multiple levels for strategy implementation, including organization, development, recruiting and staffing, rewards, performance and employee relations; they should provide for innovative ways to differentiate organizations in competitive markets and they must establish an achievable implementation plan (Walker, 1999). The new strategic role for the HRM function entails two major aspects. First, the function should provide enough input into the organisation's strategy about whether it has the necessary capabilities to implement it. Second, it has the responsibility to ensure that the HRM programs and practices are in place to effectively execute the strategy. The key functions of HRM differ from one organization to the other and from one country to another, but includes mainly the employment process, management of movement of employees in the organizations, employees motivations, reward management, performance management, personnel administration, training and development, exit management and employee welfare. Over the last 20 years there has been a growing interest in people management practices. In part this reflects the accumulating evidence that workers hold the key to enhanced organisational performance. Thus many of today's organisations are re-evaluating their HR practices in an attempt to tap workers' discretionary efforts and improve organisational performance (Park et al 2003). In many instances, the growing interest has been accompanied by a change in the nature and title of the personnel function, with former personnel managers now referred to as human resource managers, and workers considered as 'valued employees' deserving respect and dignity from senior managers. Where such changes have occurred it is not uncommon to find human resource managers occupying strategic roles within organisations, alerting directors and other senior persons of the implications of change from a human capital perspective.

Many contemporary organisations use a range of HR practices that have become known as 'high performance', 'innovative' or 'high commitment' practices. In many instances the practices themselves are not new but the rationale for using them has changed; managers are now endeavouring to develop a committed and qualified workforce in a climate of trust and comradeship. This approach contrasts from the orthodox view in which employees were used dispassionately as any other capital resource. Furthermore, evidence suggests that when HR practices are used in conjunction with each other, the impact on performance will be greater than when used in isolation. In other words, organisations attempting to introduce individual HR practices will observe minimal change in performance, whereas those organisations introducing a range of practices (generally referred to as 'bundles') will experience a more dramatic change in performance.

Exactly what are the innovative practices? There are mixed views regarding the number and nature of such practices, but it is generally accepted that eight practices form the core. These are thought to rep-

resent those used by private sector managers who have successfully achieved competitive advantage through the workforce. However, it is unlikely that any one organisation will utilise all these practices or even perform them equally well. Therefore, the list should be regarded, in the first instance at least, as a standard by which managers may monitor the level and extent of HR activity within their organisations (Murage, 2005).

A preliminary study on Non Governmental Organisations in 2002 by William Gould identified the following inter-related human resource management practices: employment security, rigorous selection process, incentive pay, effective communication systems or participation schemes, team working, personal training and skill development programmes, symbolic egalitarianism and internal promotion. As highlighted earlier, it will be difficult to successfully implement one practice in isolation. For instance, a rigorous selection process should ensure suitable candidates enter the organisation. Thereafter, the organisation's personal training and development programme may then enhance the skills of these workers. As these capable individuals develop they are likely to qualify for more senior posts within the organisation, thus reinforcing policies of internal promotion. While the exact content and nature of these practices will vary between organisations, the underlying rationale for their adoption will be similar. Therefore, the following section will outline why and in what way these practices should be used. Today, it is unlikely that organisations can guarantee life-long employment to workers. Even in countries such as Japan where, until recently, such employment was the accepted norm, organisations have had to re-evaluate their position due to dramatic down turns in the world economy. However, while organisations may not be able to guarantee total employment security, the ways in which re-structuring or downsizing programmes are managed will signal to staff the extent to which managers value them. If workers are given the impression that they are dispensable, not valued or their jobs are insecure, it is highly probable that they will become de-motivated. This may result in them feeling reluctant to exert themselves on behalf of the organisation. If it is simply not possible for managers to guarantee extended periods of employment, they may need to consider ways to counteract feelings of insecurity felt by workers. In the education sector, employment security has been quite guaranteed. Kenya teachers have continued to enjoy job security except for the case where a teacher is transferred unwillingly to a less attractive station. Such a teacher would feel not highly valued and even insecure. It is however the duty of the school head to create a conducive atmosphere in the school to make everybody feel that their contributions are valued (MOE & HRD, 2008). When an organisation adopts a strategy of achieving superior performance through the workforce, it will need the right people in the first place. In doing so organisations have used imaginative selection techniques. For example, Kenya airways includes customers on the selection panel

when recruiting new candidates. The organisation reasons that as customers have extensive dealings with front-line workers, they should be well qualified to identify suitable employees. Furthermore, it is also argued that rigorous selection processes not only provides the 'right sort of people', but have positive psychological effects, as newly recruited employees having gone through a rigorous selection process, are more likely to feel part of an 'elite' organisation. It is the duty of the T.S.C to ensure that all public schools are staffed with qualified teachers. Some commentators argue that organisations function better when employees are encouraged to work together as teams rather than on their own: Group forces are important not only in influencing the behaviour of individual work groups with regards to productivity, waste, absence and the like; they also affect the behaviour of entire organizations. It is argued that team working has a positive impact on performance due to social interaction, peer pressure and work norms. In other words, assuming the group norms are favourable, group members will endeavour to maintain high working standards. Team working is also thought to provide workers with a forum through which they can learn 'through the grapevine'. These factors may lead to greater comradeship, peer support and team performance. Team effort, enhances school management and contributes towards employees' personal growth and development (Barasa J.M, 2004). The study used a descriptive research to investigate the extent of utilization of HRM practices in public schools in Kiambu East district The researcher adopted the stratified sampling technique.

Findings

The research established several key findings. First the study established that employees are provided with sufficient opportunities for training and development. There is a clear status difference between management and staff ,team working is strongly encouraged in the schools studied. A rigorous selection process is used to select new recruits. Employees feel their jobs are secure within the organization. When new management positions come up the organisations normally fill them with people from outside the organisation. The respondents indicated that promotions within the organisation were not frequent and the top management normally did external recruitment. The organization does not relate pay with performance in any way. Most of the employees are on permanent terms. Management does not fully involve employees when making decisions that affect them. The middle level management and the top management are the ones that are involved in decision making within the organization. However the future direction of the organisation is clearly communicated to everyone in the organisation. The study findings suggest that public secondary schools in Kiambu east have utilised innovative HRM practices such as training, recruitment/selection, compensation, though it has not utilised others like employee participation in decision making and performance appraisals.

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