

Determinants of Strategic Human Resource Management Practice Adoption in the National Government in Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract: This study sought to establish the determinants of strategic human resource management practice adoption in the government ministries in Kiambu County, Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to determine the effect of workforce diversity, top management support, culture and organization structure on adoption of strategic human resource management practices in the government ministries in Kiambu County. The study used a descriptive research design. The target population of the study consisted of all the staff drawn from various ministries of the government working in Kiambu County. The study used stratified and simple random sampling techniques to obtain a sample size. A questionnaire was used for data collection. In analysing the data, the study used descriptive statistics using SPSS V. 20 and inferential statistics. The study concluded that workforce diversity, top management support, culture and organization structure through their distinct features played a critical role in the adoption of SHRM practices in the government ministries. The study recommends that the national government should institute a policy that embraces workforce diversity in its recruitment processes. The study further recommends that the national government should ensure that each ministry has a functional HRM department that is adequately funded and staffed for it to effectively deliver on assigned responsibility and the senior management in the ministries should enhance their support to Human Resource functions in their respective ministries. In addition, the study also recommends that the HRM function should be recognized in the ministerial structures as a key function within the respective ministries.

Keywords: Strategic Human Resource Management Practice, National Government.

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) is crucial in all organizations particularly public organizations, where it facilitates those who work in the public service in adapting to the changing role of the government. Comprehensive Human Resource (HR) strategies are necessary in exploiting new opportunities and ensuring that all public service functions are carried out to the highest professional standards (Bratton & Gold, 2012). Today, there is immense need for human skills and knowledge in the public service in areas of policy development, management of organizations, service delivery and in tackling economic crises of global magnitude (Storey, 2010). Public service leaders around the world are looking for new approaches to inspire integrity, accountability and motivation in public service in order to achieve coherence and coordination between government policies and various interests (Tompkins, 2003).

Truss (2008) asserts that improved HRM helps facilitate the acquisition, training and retention of esteemed employees and this serves to improve organizational cost-effectiveness and also serves to create a performance-driven culture via the adoption of a more strategic HR function.

Locally, an exploratory survey of HRM practices carried out by the Ministry of State for Public Service in Kenya found out that the day to day work of HRM practitioners in the public service revolves around activities like; computation of leave days; confirmation of appointment; preparation of the payroll, deployment of staff, attending meetings, verification of personnel data; pension matters, statutory deductions and arranging for staff training among others (Akong'o, 2010). According to Kiiru (2015), there is need for HRM to stop acting as administrative agents or clerk of works and to play a

more direct role in the running of the organization. Sang (2015) argued that the future of HR function depends on its ability to acquire, assimilate, transform and exploit new knowledge in other areas to allow it to connect with strategic business drivers. Waiganjo *et al.* (2012) opined that the more strategic the approach to human resource management (HRM), the greater the contribution of HRM to organizational performance.

1.1 Statement of the problem:

In today’s intensely competitive and global marketplace, maintaining competitive advantage puts a heavy premium on organizations to have a highly committed and competent workforce (Holbeche, 2009). As strategic partners, human resources managers should be able to identify the human resources practices that make the strategy happen. The primary role of the strategic human resource managers is to translate business strategies into human resources priorities (Wang, 2002). To be effective in service delivery, government agencies require a competent and motivated workforce. This requires the government to have the ability to respond with sound and well thought out HR policies as and when the need arises (Ulrich & Lake, 2011).

Previous research suggests that firms can gain sustainable competitive advantage through strategically managing their human resources, a function exercised as, strategic human resource management (SHRM) (Barney, 2002; Wright *et al.*, 2004; Guest, 2011). However it remains unclear about the factors that influence a firm’s adoption of SHRM so as to achieve enhanced organizational performance (Omondi *et al.*, 2011).

1.2 General objective:

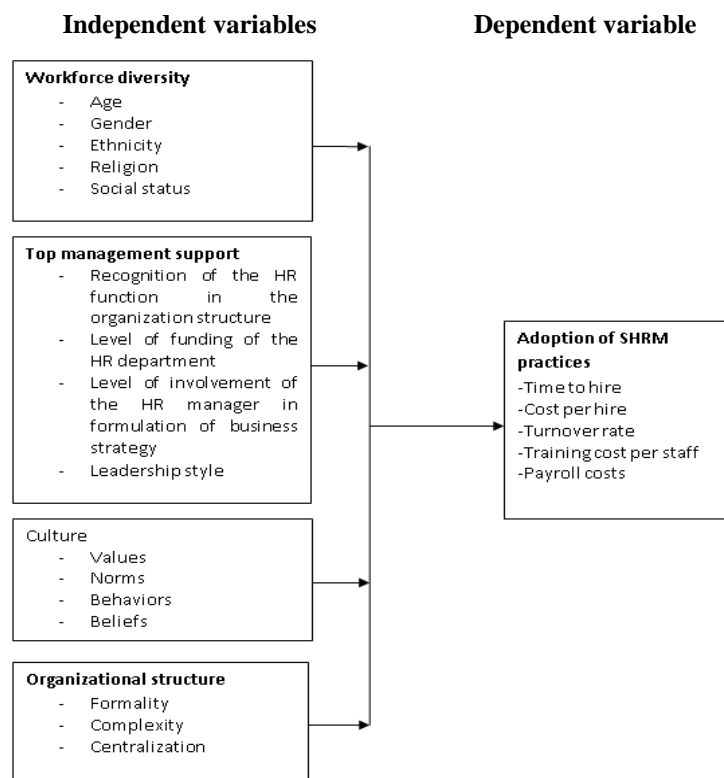
To establish the determinants of strategic human resource management practice adoption in the National Government in Kiambu County, Kenya.

1.3 Specific Objectives:

The study was guided by the following specific objectives;

- i. To determine the effect of workforce diversity on adoption of strategic human resource management practices.
- ii. To establish the effect of top management support on adoption of strategic human resource management practices.
- iii. To determine the effect of culture on adoption of strategic human resource management practices.
- iv. To find out the effect of organization structure on adoption of strategic human resource management practices.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



2.1 Workforce diversity and adoption of SHRM practices:

Workforce diversity acknowledges the reality that people differ in many ways, visible or invisible, mainly age, gender, marital status, social status, disability, sexual orientation, religion, personality, ethnicity and culture (Barak, 2013). However, the predominant diversity issues in each country are different. While gender inequality is the oldest and most common diversity issue worldwide, religion and ethnicity are also key aspects of workforce diversity in most organizations (Canas & Sondak, 2013). A diverse workforce comprises a multitude of beliefs, understandings, values, ways of viewing the world, and unique information (Jackson, Schuler & Werner, 2011).

A diverse workforce is a reflection of a changing world and marketplace. Diverse work teams bring high value to organizations. Respecting individual differences will benefit the workplace by creating a competitive edge and increasing work productivity. Diversity management benefits associates by creating a fair and safe environment where everyone has access to opportunities and challenges (Shen *et al.*, 2009). Management tools in a diverse workforce should be used to educate everyone about diversity and its issues, including laws and regulations. Most workplaces are made up of diverse cultures, so organizations need to learn how to adapt to be successful (Okoro & Washington, 2012).

2.2 Top management support and adoption of SHRM practices:

Wei (2006) argued that top management support for the organization's HR policy directed clearly to or emphasizing the compatibility among a variety of HR practices facilitates a fine tuning process within the SHRM system. He further notes that if certain functions are considered less important than others, according to the top management's assessment, less resource/budget will probably be allocated to these functions, making them poorly operated or less effective, relative to other institutional functions. Thus he asserted that the investment of the firm by the top management in its human resource is a key factor influencing adoption of SHRM practices (Wei, 2006).

The critical management task is to align the organization's formal structure and the HR system so that they drive the strategic objectives of the organization (Fombrun, 2010). Where HRM is imposed "top-down as a scientific exercise," then the result is likely to be a cynical workforce (Foot & Hook, 2008). At its most effective HRM must take account of skills development and allow scope for bottom-up input and interaction with everyday work. This coincides with the widely recognized need to involve and empower line management in the SHRM process (Guest, 2011).

2.3 Culture and adoption of SHRM practices:

Culture has an important impact on approaches to managing people and therefore cultural differences call for differences in management practice (Holden, 2002). Different authors argue that of all the management practices, strategic human resource management practices seem to be the most vulnerable to cultural differences, which may have important implications for their design and appropriateness (Stone, 2013; Smith *et al.*, 2002; Jain, 2005). The divergent perspective in international HRM proposes that cultural differences cause differences in individual perceptions and preferences which shape organizational behaviour including work motivation, communications, conflicts, work-orientation, definition of goals, performance appraisal and rewarding, decision making and management style (Edgar, 2013).

According to Smith *et al.* (2002), culture is a collective social phenomenon. For instance, management communicates organizational work culture through practices of recruitment, staff appraisals, remuneration and flexible work arrangements. All these practices are aspects of social interactions. Organizational culture can, therefore, be created, rather than just inherited by employees. Once in existence, it subtly influences perception, thought, action, and feeling of the employees in ways that are consistent with their cultural reality. It guides the selection, interpretation, and communication of information in ways that are meaningful to the employees. Rowley (2013) observed that to understand organizational culture, one must understand the basic assumptions of the employees, namely, their national cultural values and beliefs. Culture is not a characteristic of individuals; it encompasses a number of people who were conditioned by the same education and life experience.

2.4 Organization structure and adoption of SHRM practices:

Organization structure is the key element in improving the efficiency of all organizations (Wei, 2006). In fact, economic growth and industrial advancement of societies are due to proper management techniques and having a proper and desirable structure in the communities (Ulrich & Lake, 2011). Appropriate organizational structure, efficient procedures, safe instruments and equipment and a balanced work environment are essentials that should be considered by managers if the organization is to attract competent and qualified manpower. Inappropriate organizational structure prevents organizations from achieving their goals or misleads them. The purpose of the organizational structure is to clarify the

duties and tasks that are to be carried out and define formal coordination mechanisms and patterns for effective interaction within the organization (Cummings & Worley, 2014).

According to Wong-Humborstad and Perry (2011), organizational structures that allow efficient information sharing are important for the sake of making employees maximize on their job performance. For example, the clearer an employee is about the basic goals and mission of the organization, the easier it is to direct job activities in that direction. Research on the importance of communication shows positive relationships between effective communication and improvement of the service quality (Ulrich & Lake, 2011). This can only be achieved if an organization has proper communication structures in place (Tiwari & Saxena, 2012).

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive research design. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), descriptive research design is a method which enables the researcher to summarize and organize data in an effective and meaningful way. The design was appropriate for this study as it helped to describe the state of affairs as they existed without manipulation of variables (Kothari, 2004).

The target population of this study consisted of all the staff of the different ministries of the National Government in Kiambu County. The study sample size was therefore 263 respondents.

The study used a questionnaire as its data collection instrument. The reason for choosing the questionnaire as the data collection instrument was primarily due to its practicability, applicability to the research problem and the size of the population. It was also cost effective (Denscombe, 2014).

Data collected was edited, coded and classified into different components to facilitate a better and efficient analysis. The data collected was analyzed through descriptive statistics using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 20.0) and presented through means and standard deviation. Tables and graphs were used to present the study findings as appropriate.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Inferential statistics:

The four study hypotheses were tested by use of the above Chi-Square (X^2) model at 0.05 significance level (or at 95% confidence interval). According to Kothari (2004) an independent variable has significant effect if the calculated chi-square value is greater than the critical value as indicated in the table, from which the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4.1 Chi square test for the independent variables and adoption of SHRM practices

Independent variable	Hypothesis	Chi-sq. p value	Sig. Value	Result	Decision
Workforce diversity	H ₀₁	0.027	0.05	0.027<0.05	H ₀₁ : rejected
Top management support	H ₀₂	0.018	0.05	0.018<0.05	H ₀₂ : rejected
Culture	H ₀₃	0.032	0.05	0.032<0.05	H ₀₃ : rejected
Organization structure	H ₀₄	0.041	0.05	0.041<0.05	H ₀₄ : rejected

From the study findings on Table 4.1 above, at 95% confidence level, all the Null (H₀₁;, H₀₂;, H₀₃ and H₀₄) hypotheses yielded Pearson's P-value < 0.05, hence, all the Null hypothesis (H₀₁;, H₀₂;, H₀₃ and H₀₄) for the four independent variables were rejected. Consequently, their alternate hypotheses (H₁₁;, H₁₂;, H₁₃ and H₁₄) that workforce diversity, top management support, culture and organizational structure had significant influence on the adoption of SHRM practices in government ministries, were accepted.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that adoption of strategic human resource management practices in government ministries was influenced by workforce diversity as it allowed a mix of diverse ethnic, religious, gender and work experience contributions from organization members in generating superior solutions to organizational problems.

The study also concluded that top management support played a critical role in the adoption of SHRM practices in organizations through availing the required financial resources for the effective operation of the HR function, participating in development of organization SHRM practices, aligning the HRM policies to overall organizational strategy, ensuring effective execution of the HRM policies, encouraging discourse on HRM issues and offering support for the various HR activities in the organization.

Culture affected the adoption of the SHRM practices through creating a collective identity for members based on shared values and beliefs, providing a means of socializing new members into the organization's norms, ensuring existence of social order through clarity of how the members should behave and fostering unity, trust and tolerance among organizational members.

Organisational structure influenced the adoption of SHRM practice through providing a balanced work environment that is essential for the organization to attract competent workforce, providing clear channels of communication, creating platforms that allow participatory decision making, ensuring effective coordination of organization activities, ensuring proper delegation of authority and power and providing clarity of duties and tasks to be done.

The national government should institute a policy that embraces workforce diversity in its recruitment processes. As part of the policy, the government should ensure that there is no any form discrimination in recruitment of staff in the various government ministries.

The national government should ensure that each ministry has a functional HRM department that is adequately funded and staffed for it to effectively deliver on assigned responsibility. The senior management in the ministries should enhance their support to Human Resource functions in their respective ministries. This will boost the morale of the Human Resource Management Department and improve its efficiency.

Since organizational culture was found to play an important role in the success of SHRM practices in the government ministries, the study recommends that it needs to be harnessed and emphasized by the top management in each of the respective ministries.

The study also recommends that the HRM function should be recognized in the ministerial structures as a key function within the respective ministries.

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