The role of HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT on transformation of public service reform initiatives in Kenya

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Public service reforms are global phenomenon as evidenced by the structural, organizational and managerial change that took place in public service. Despite close to two decades of public service reforms in Kenya, the results to an extent have been a failure (GOK, 1993, 2009, 2010; Kiragu and Mutahaba, 2006). In public sector efficiency enhancers' measurements, Kenya's performance is dismal. This study sought to find out to what extent the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) affects transformation of public service reform initiatives in Kenya. Using an exploratory survey design, the study targeted 276 respondents in the civil service deployed in Nairobi. A total of 178 responded to the study which translated to 64 percent response rate. The sample was picked through stratified random and simple random sampling and Data was collected using a questionnaire with both Likert type and open questions. SPSS was used to analyze the data quantitatively and qualitatively. The study found that the respondents were clearly aware that Human Resource Management (HRM) is increasingly becoming strategic in public service organization's reforms. They further observed that the strategic role of HRM lies more in demonstrating its value and worth through the efficacy with which they manage relations with multiple stakeholders groups in the organization. Further, respondents anticipated human resource professionals to deliver value by adopting a more proactive role. Nevertheless for the Human Resource (HR) function to become more strategic, far more is needed than the HR Directors deciding that the department becomes strategic. Rather, the role the HR function takes on will be the result of a continuous process of negotiation with other groups within the organization and will be achieved through a process of “negotiated evolution” which involves credibility, agenda management, continuous delivery and other influencing techniques. The study recommends that the role of Human Resource Management should be to adopt proactive strategies in its practices and processes which would ensure innovation and creativity in public service reforms leading to informed and evidence-based decisions in the reforms initiatives.

Key words: Managerial change, public service reforms, strategy, human resource management, pro-activity, evidence-based decisions.

INTRODUCTION

Public service reforms is a global phenomenon as evidenced by the structural, organizational and managerial change that took place in Organizations for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries in the late 1970s (Hood, 1995). The concept of New Public Management (NPM) approach borrowed heavily from private sector management style and spread throughout the world in 1980s (Ridley, 1995; Hood, 1991;
Further impetus for public service reforms was occasioned by the advent of globalization in the area of production of goods, transport, communication and financial transactions (World Bank, 1997). Vabo (2009) argues that to have a competitive advantage in a globalized world therefore, the public service was considered as an important factor for efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. Thus, reforming the public service became a prerequisite on how efficient service was to be delivered (World Bank, 1997).

Government’s response to globalization was the streamlining of the public services through privatization, contracting-out or restructuring former public services linked with entrepreneurial activities. These measures were meant to cut costs in public administration and strengthen the private sector and civil society. The new role of the state was envisaged to be establishing favorable conditions for the private sector and non-governmental players. The state was deemed to concentrate on what was regarded as its core functions consisting, among others, policy making, international relations, defense, public security, justice and social security (ILO, 1998).

African governments generally regarded its public service as the pivot that was to promote socio-economic development. Fiszbein (2000) attributes the push towards African public service reforms to lessons learnt by the African countries from the international experiences. Kenya’s reform can be segmented into two generations; the “quantitative first generation” and the “qualitative second-generation” programs. The first-generation reforms were implemented between the 1980’s and early 1990’s. In 1993, the Government formally initiated the Civil Service Reform Program (CSRP) (GOK, 1993). The CSRP was envisaged for implementation in three phases. The first phase (1993-1998) focused on cost containment, the second phase (1998-2001) focused on performance improvement and the last phase (2002-2009) focused on refinement, consolidation and sustenance of reform gains.

Objective of the study
The main objective of the study was to determine if the role of human resource management affects transformation of public service reform initiatives in Kenya as depicted in figure 1.
Figure 2: Gender distribution

Table 1: Role of human resource strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy aspect</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequencies</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Percentages</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

METHODOLOGY
The study adopted an exploratory approach using descriptive survey design to obtain information from a sample of policy makers, senior managers and support staff in the civil service of Kenya. The categorization into three levels is based on tasks, responsibilities, and roles carried out (GOK, 2006). The study population was derived from two of the five sub-sectors of the public sector. These were the Civil Service and State Corporations. (GOK, 2008) The sampling frame for this study was from the population and was selected on the basis of the ranking scored on performance evaluation by the Government. Random sampling was done to obtain all cadres of staff at the three levels of policy makers, senior managers and support staff. The study targeted 276 cadres picked randomly from this list. A simple majority (51.7%) of the respondents were female while the rest (48.3%) were male as reflected in figure 2. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire that included open ended and Likert scale questions and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively using SPSS.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
The data collected was analyzed to determine the role of human resource management on transformation of public service initiatives in Kenya. This section describes and discusses the findings.

Human resource management strategy
According to the findings, a simple majority (45.5%) agreed that human resource management strategy affects role of human resources and 25% were neutral. On the other hand, 16.1% strongly agreed, 7.4% disagreed, while only 6% strongly disagreed that human resource strategy affects the role of human resource management as reflected in table 1.

This agrees with the findings of Akinnusi (2011), Bird (2011) and Huselid (1995) that human resource management (HRM), today, plays a strategic partnership role in public sector management. Human Resource function should provide the organizational development strategies supporting the business needs of transforming public services. Investments in human resources are a potential source of competitive advantage, with increase in overall HRM effectiveness leading to increase in the performance of the institutions concerned. Armstrong (2000) views HRM as a strategic and coherent approach to the management of people who contribute to the achievement of organizations’ objectives, while Guest (1989), Legge (2005) posit that the main defining characteristic of HRM is considered to be its strategic focus (Holbeche, 2001). The term “Strategic” highlights the need for the determination of long-term goals of an organization. In order to emphasize this focus even more, often the adjective “strategic” is added to HRM, referring to HRM as a strategic function which does not only build organizations’ performance, but also is forward looking and creates competitive advantage.

Manpower planning
A simple majority (30.7%) were neutral, as to whether manpower planning affected transformation of the public
sector reforms, while 28% agreed, 12.9% strongly agreed, 14.9% disagreed and 13.5% strongly disagreed as indicated in figure 3. The result does not support O’Riordan (2012) findings that workforce planning affords organizations the possibility of better managing workforce reductions and coming to a more strategic and evidence based approach to staffing. The findings also does not corroborate literature by Ashour (2004) and Sinclair (2004), on Human Resource Planning in public service reforms which indicates that the existence of a sound plan and the associated HR structure and policies provide the objective basis for making various HRM decisions.

The absence of HR planning may result in inflating and distorting public sector employment. Consequently, public sector organizations may experience defused responsibilities, red tape, crowded offices, low compensation (when government resources and revenues are limited) – often leading to corruption. The phenomena of “ghost” or fictitious employees, the same employees receiving multiple salaries from various government organizations and employees not showing up for work or executing tangible assignments result in waste and corruption in the HR area.

The existence and execution of a sound HR plan and associated databases are likely to curb these malpractices. Lacking a policy on the merit principle makes staffing practices vulnerable to political, administrative and personal favoritism and nepotism that lower professionalism and efficiency. Having an imbalanced employment composition, due to a lack of policy on diversity, results in denying the public sector the talent existing in all social groups. It also lowers integrity and fairness.

**Recruitment**

A significant (45%) number of respondents agreed on the importance of recruitment and its influence in public sector reforms while 21.8% strongly agreed, 18.8% were neutral and a paltry 6.9% disagreed while 7.5% strongly disagreed that recruitment affects public sector service reforms as reflected in figure 4.

The findings are in line with Harris (2003), Legee (2005), Millward, Bryson and Forth (2000) who noted that recruitment policy can determine the quality of staff which in the long run plays a big role in reforms of any kind for an organization. Recruitment should be entrenched in the strategic plans of organizations. Without proper recruitment, the activity plans go to waste and are expensive to reformulate (Charlesworth, 2000; Tyson, 1995).

**Performance management**

A simple majority (40.1%) of respondents agreed that performance management contributes to public sector transformation, while 23.4% were neutral, 18.3% strongly agreed, 9.9% disagreed and a trifling 8.3% strongly disagreed that performance management contributes to public sector transformation reforms as reflected in figure 5.

Thiel and Leeuw (2002), Christensen and Laegrid (2004), corroborates these findings stating the need for performance management through measuring output, outcomes, and evaluation as an important element on improving government’s performance. NPM reforms introduced Management by Objectives and Results (MBOR), in the development and use of performance
management. Armstrong (2000) has advocated for clear guidelines on performance management in order to make it a goal and not a tool to be used against employees.

**Training**
A simple majority (41.9%) of respondents agreed that training was a factor in public sector transformation reforms, while 22.5% strongly agreed, 20% remained neutral, 8.2% disagreed and a few (7.4%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that public sector transformation was affected by training as reflected in figure 6. This view is supported by Healy (2001) on the importance of the role of training within public service organizations and corroborated by Saint Lucia civil service, (2013) which observes that a critical aspect of any Public Sector Reform Programme is the focus on human resource development and utilization. Training should be well planned in the calendar of organizations to carry out any meaningful reforms (Armstrong, 2000, Bendell, 2005).

**Manpower Development**
Most (30%) of the respondents agreed that employee development affects public service transformation, 32% were neutral and 14.7% strongly agreed while 11.2% disagreed while 12.1% strongly disagreed that
Manpower development helps staff face complex changes effectively while preserving trained skills in both operational and strategic thinking. Manpower development should be carried out on a needs based analysis in order to save and preserve the developed skills first within the organization that has budgeted to develop the human capital (Scholz, 2007).

Staff relations
A simple majority (35.1%) of respondents agreed that staff relations affects public sector reforms while 24% remained neutral, 13.9% strongly agreed, 14% disagreed and 13% strongly disagreed (Figure 8). The findings are corroborated by studies carried out to investigate the role of staff relations in public sector reforms by Beaumont (1993), Pittard (2007), Gennard, (2005) and Schein (1980) who noted that good employee relations is a requisite for a successful public service reforms.

Statistical tests of significance for study variables
The relationship between the independent variables were tested and compared with the dependent variable. Positive linear relationship between human resource management and transformation of public service reforms initiatives was established as shown in figure 9. A correlation coefficient of 0.751 at 0.01 significant level implies a strong positive relationship between human resource management and transformation of public service reforms in Kenya.

Statistical tests of significance for study variables
Role of human resource management and transformation of public service reform initiatives
As shown in figure 10, there is a positive linear
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Figure 8: Staff relations

Figure 9: Scatter plot of human resource management

Table 2: Correlations between human resource management and transformation of public service reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Transformation of public service reform initiatives</th>
<th>Role of human resource management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformation of public service reform initiatives</td>
<td>Pearson correlation 1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Role of human resource management</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

relationship between the role of human resource management and transformation of public service reform initiatives (table 2).

Regression analysis
Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for regression coefficients indicate a high value of the F statistic (228.077) whose significance is .000 which is less than p = 0.05. This implies that there is a significant relationship between the role of human resource management and transformation of public service reform initiatives (table 3).

Test on beta coefficients
The test on the beta coefficients as shown in table 4 on the role of human resource management of 5.788 is significantly greater than zero since the significance of...
The strategic role of HRM lies more in demonstrating their value and worth through the efficacy with which they manage relations with multiple stakeholders groups in the organization. The rise of managerialism in contemporary public organizations anticipates human resource professionals to deliver value by adopting a more proactive role. The study further reveals that the knowledge of the nature, role and meaning of a strategic HRM department within public sector reforms responding to the ‘modernization’ agenda is significant.

The strategic role of the HR function is contingent on a variety of factors internal and external to the organizational setting, in addition to the will of the HRM department members to change their role. Given the existence of such shaping factors and the contested ownership of the HRM agenda, which will strongly influence the extent to which the HRM function can successfully evolve toward a strategic position, a more evolutionary approach, sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of the local context, is clearly required.

**Abbreviations**
- OECD: Organizations for economic cooperation and development
- NPM: New public management
- CSRP: Civil service reform program
- HRM: Human resource management
- HR: Human resource
- MBOR: Management by objectives and results

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