

## **Adoption of Best Human Resource Management Practices Among Private Secondary Schools in Kisumu County, Kenya**

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**ABSTRACT:-** Thirst for quality education has seen many parents in the country turn to admit their children in private secondary schools, largely because of inadequate funding by the state therefore compromising quality in public schools. The study objective was to establish the extent to which private secondary schools in Kisumu County have adopted best human resource management practices. A cross sectional descriptive survey design was used and primary data was collected using semi structured questionnaires pretested for validity and reliability. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings of the study revealed that private secondary schools in Kisumu County have adopted different best human resource management practices at varying degrees. The study further recommends that such practices be enhanced and strengthened to help improve staff performance.

**Keywords:** Human Resource Management Practices, Secondary Schools, Staff Performance.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1. Background of the Study**

To understand the critical importance of people in any organization requires one to recognize that the human element and the organization are synonymous. A well-managed organization usually views an average worker as the root source of quality and productivity (Banjoko, 2005). The approach that a firm uses to manage its human resources is increasingly recognized as particularly important to the execution of its business strategy (Torrington, 2005). Boxall and Steenveld (1999) argue that there is a positive relationship between firm performance and labor management and it is evident that the quality of human resource management practices is critical in the performance of a firm. There are human resource management practices and approaches which will invariably help an organization in achieving competitive advantage in service delivery over others. These practices generally rotate around how to get the best performance out of people employed in organization; how to recruit, reward and keep top performers and how to improve employee performance. However there are differences of opinion on the question of details on how each practice creates competitive advantage. Huselid (1995) and Mac Duffie (1995) have elaborated on human resource best practices and strongly suggest that the same basic bundles of human resource practices tend to enhance business in all organizations irrespective of particular product market strategy.

#### **1.1.1 Human Resource Management Best Practices**

Best practice is a quality statement of performing an activity or business process that has generally been accepted as successful. To qualify as best practice, the technique must have proven record in significantly lowering costs, increasing revenue, improving quality or performance, shortening time requirements, enhancing safety or delivering some highly positive outcome (Strickland, Arthur and Gamble, 2007). According to Beardwell and Claydon (2003) the concept of best practices or high commitment human resource management was identified initially in the early United States models of human resource management, many of which mooted the idea that the adoption of certain best human resource practices would result in enhanced organizational performance manifested in improved employee attitudes and behaviors, lower levels of absenteeism and turn over and therefore higher productivity, enhanced quality and efficiency in service provision.

Best practices in human resource management include selection and recruitment strictly on merit, by giving equal opportunity to all qualified people without discrimination; proper matching of the individual capabilities and interests with the demands and rewards given by the organization against the job; regular training and development activities that are aimed at not only improving employee performance at work, but also boosting self-confidence of the individual employee; use of flexible work arrangements to enable employees to mix work and family responsibilities without hurting any side; making performance appraisal to be part of the organizations culture and linking it to organizational objectives and good labor relationships that include diversity management (Torrington, 2005).

Boxall and Purcel (2003) argue that no list of best practices is likely to have universal application because of principles, which if applied, can bring about more effective but different people management. However, there seems to be a growing tendency around the broad human resource management territory that there is plausible list of practices that include selection, training, communication, job design and reward system. There are also practices on the margins such as family friendly and equal opportunity practices as well as some that cannot apply across all sectors such as profit related pay and employee share ownership schemes (Guest, 2001).

### **1.1.2 Private Secondary Schools in Kisumu County**

Private secondary schools are owned and managed by individuals or groups as business entities. They complement the public schools in providing elementary education to Kenyans. Since they are business entities, it is important that the human resource they have be of proper quality. The workforce should consistently form part of the school culture through controlled, efficient and effective personnel management (Eshiwani, 1993). Increased demand by for quality education and the limited resources available from the government to sufficiently fund the public education sector has made it necessary for the private sector to get involved in the provision of education in the county. These private schools have also emerged as major employers of various types of professionals including teachers, accounting clerks, drivers and other support staffs.

### **1.2 Research Problem**

Recruitment and selection procedures in private secondary schools in Kisumu County, rely mainly on references, unsolicited applications and advertisement while ignoring the fancied sources such as job centers, direct links with colleges, use of private agencies and e- recruitment. The emerging issues in education pose challenges to schools on what type of skills that their staff require to remain relevant and competitive (Carroll, 2003). Adoption of best practices in human resource management may therefore create a conducive environment making it easier for the schools to attract a motivated work force and offer quality services to their clients. Just like in the corporate world, private secondary schools in Kisumu County conduct, regular on the job training and development for their employees, have made performance management and appraisal part of their culture and try to empower their employees through establishing adequate communication channels between management and workers in order to keep them informed about decisions which affect their work and interest. Relevant studies on best human resource management practices, for instance, Njenga (2007) focused on the relationship between human resource management practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and performance in secondary schools in Dagoretti division of Nairobi; Omoro (2008) and Nguku (2008) studied strategic human resource management practices and firm performance in the banking and hotel industries respectively. Baraza (2008) dwelt on adoption of best practices in human resource management among hotels in Kenya. Whereas the findings of these studies are valid, there is a knowledge gap on the extent of adoption of best human resource management practices among private secondary schools in Kisumu County.

### **1.3 Research Objective**

To establish the extent to which private secondary schools in Kisumu County have adopted best human resource management practices.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

A significant body of research has suggested specific HRM Practices which are expected to promote inimitable attributes in human resources that can help an organization to obtain a competitive advantage and enhance its performance (Guest, 1999). All the practices that lead to superior performance have been termed as 'best HRM practices' (Marchinton & Grugulis, 2000) and 'high performance work systems or practices' (Delery & Doty, 1996). All these terms highlight the increased improvement in employee decision making and the improvement in employee motivation and commitment. The study therefore, adopted the following theories;

#### **2.1.1 Resource-Based Theory**

Porter's (2001) observes that the resource-based theory has been an important step in human resource management, since it has provided a new point of view to explain a firm's success. According to the focus on resources, a firm's success is due to joint resources and capabilities which an enterprise owns and makes it different from its competitors. Among such resources and capabilities are the human resources and the crucial attributes of knowledge, skill, know-how and talent. These resources and capabilities may constitute a source of competitive advantage. From this point of view, the HRM practices in an organization are geared towards strengthening those significant capabilities and knowledge. Wright and McMahan (2001) observe that if resources are strategic for the firm, it implies that they are scarce, valuable, specific or difficult to transfer.

### **2.1.2 Human Capital Theory**

Recent challenges such as globalization, a knowledge based economy and technological evolution have promoted many countries and organizations to seek new ways to maintain competitive advantage (Armstrong, 2006). In response, the prevailing sense is that the success of an organization depends largely on the people with higher levels of individual competence. Therefore, people are valuable assets and can be recognized within a framework of human capital. This is the reason why organizations invest a lot on their employees through training and development programs and appropriate reward systems. Broadly, the concept of human capital is semantically the mixture of human and capital. In the economic perspective, the capital refers to factors of production used to create goods or services that are not themselves significantly consumed in the production process (Armstrong, 2006).

### **2.1.3 Universalistic Theory**

In recent times, human resource management has assumed new prominence because of continuing concerns about global competition, the internalization of technology and the productivity of labour through effective HRM practices (Bratton & Gold, 2006). Managers and academicians argue that traditional approaches to managing workers are inappropriate and can no longer deliver the services. Harnessing workers' full potential and producing the attitudes and behavior is considered indispensable for the competitive edge that requires three aspects of managerial control to change i.e. organizational design, culture and effective HRM practices (Storey & Sisson, 1999). Moreover, researchers have also found that bundles or systems of HRM practices have more influence on performance than individual practices working in isolation (Husselid & Barnes, 2002). An underlying theme is that firms should create a high degree of internal consistency or fit among their best HRM practices. The logic connecting these universal HRM practices (i.e. recruitment, training, reward management, job rotation and staff welfare) and firm performance is intuitively appealing and supported by theoretical arguments from a number of disciplines.

### **2.1.4 Michigan's Model**

Michigan's Model emphasizes the necessity of tight fit between business strategy, organizational structure and HRM which are also influenced by economic, political and cultural forces. This model underlines the deployment of HRM practices in order to achieve business objectives. Accordingly, the model recognizes the various styles in managing people in organizations. The model emphasizes the application of HRM practices aimed at motivating employees in organizations, such as the provision of welfare programs, reasonable employee benefits as well as equipping them with relevant skills through effective training and development programs.

## **2.2 Best Human Resource Management Practices**

The literature adopts the Boxall and Purcell's (2003) bundles of best practices in human resource management which include recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management and communication and motivation. Torrington (2005) concluded in his research that although human resource management practices matter for performance in general, little is known, in particular about how and which combinations of human resource management practices matter; for example, they are employed in different types of firms, support different knowledge strategies. Evidence suggests that when several human resource practices are used simultaneously and in a particular system configuration, productivity increases beyond what individual human resource practice can achieve in isolation.

Scharinger (2002) comments on the links between human resource practices and market value creation, and concluded that application of key human resource management practices was associated with an overall increase of 47% in market value. In a study of diversity management practices applied by commercial banks in Kenya, Oluoch (2006), suggest that there is no single way of treating employees as each one will have their own personal needs, values and beliefs and the notion that best practices while helpful in theoretical setting will not provide all answers in reality. Mutuku (2003) found that majority of the management have an understanding of the diversity in the work place and are aware about its benefits. Such diversity includes the area of the team work, productivity motivation, creativity and staff turns over.

### **2.2.1 Recruitment and Selection**

Recruitment and selection is essentially concerned with identifying, assessing and engaging new employees or promoting existing ones. The focus is on matching the capabilities and interests of prospective candidates with the demands and rewards given by the organization against the job. Kilonzi (2008) noted that in the manufacturing sector, different companies use different recruitment and selection methods; however advertisement of vacancies and promotion from within are the most preferred, while consultancies and employment agencies are least preferred. She further asserted that in selecting employees for vacant positions in

the sector, academic qualifications and competence emerged as the most used; individual flexibility is least considered as a method of selecting employees for vacant positions. Barret (2000) notes that best practices in recruitment requires that the human side of the business should always be addressed; this means meeting the needs of potential new employees who are choosing to work for the organization, cultures that align with their personal professional growth; usually the relationship between the employee and the organization is made by contract in which the employee commits him/herself to use his knowledge, learning and skills for the benefits of the company. In return the organization provides a reasonable compensation.

### **2.2.2 Training and Development**

Training and development are activities that are used to maintain and promote the competencies and talents of employees in relation to the developments inside and outside the organization. Hatch and Dyer (2004) noted that firms without superior foresight into the productivity of human resources may be able to earn competitive advantage by building the firm specific human capital of its employees through training. Njenga (2007) in his study argues that employee development directly impacts on the organizational ability to satisfy customers, resolve problems and crises, and adopt changing market conditions. Paying for an employee's continuing professional education for example can help organization gain expertise in new technologies and opportunities or markets, which can save resources in the long run. In addition, most employees find learning new skills and taking on new challenges extremely rewarding. Becker (1964) poses that a firm's internal and external training may contribute to corporate prosperity of workers through on the job training and seminars.

### **2.2.3 Clear Job Design**

Job design ensures flexibility of work force skills, commitment and motivation, including steps to clarify that employees have the responsibility and full autonomy to use their knowledge and skills. There should also be skill variety at the work place which is the extent to which job incumbents can complete a whole and identifiable task using various skills, activities and ability. A good job design is one that can help employees balance their work and non-work lives by allowing workers to adopt more flexible work schedules; for example, flextime, permanent part time work, and job sharing and compressed weeks. These programs enable employees to address their work and family concerns and reduce potential stress and conflict between the various life roles. Such programs can be applied in areas such as working time, number of workers, the place of work and even type of workers. It's also important to note that different organizations have different objectives when it comes to deciding which flexible work systems should be used (Bernadine, 2007). However, Beardwell and Claydon (2003) argues that despite the advantages of flexible work arrangements, workers may be unwilling to take advantage of work life balance initiatives because they are worried that it will generate hostile response from colleagues who are not able to do the same or even have damage to career prospects.

### **2.2.4 Performance Management**

Organizations have long acknowledged the values of performance appraisal in both administration decisions and in motivating employees. Scherer and Segal (2006) poses that some of the best practices of performance appraisal are ensuring that an organization makes performance appraisal to be part of the culture, link performance appraisal to organizational objectives, invest in training and education, design the system for the unique needs of the organization; use performance appraisal to build relationships between supervisors and employees; use flexible, customized appraisal forms and finally separates the compensation from performance. Ouko (2008) recommended that 360 degrees of performance appraisal should be used by organizations because it creates a mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and the employees. It should fit in the strategic mission of the organization and be used as a means not as an end in itself. Performance measurement enables the worker to get feedback from the job itself, which is the extent to which carrying out the work activities result in incumbent receiving clear and direct knowledge about how they are performing.

### **2.2.5 Communication and Motivation**

Every organization should strive to include good labor relations and ensure industrial peace by avoiding labor unrest such as strikes, work stoppages, boycotts, picketing and lock outs. The best practice is to keep a communication line that everybody in the process is fully informed frequently and comprehensively to enhance teamwork. Private sector though not vulnerable is culpable to labor interruption (Armstrong, 2008). According to Limo (2008) most managers do not prioritize quality employee relationship as an aspect of quality management practices. Employee relations include the use of reward system practices in a manner that supports employee involvement. This is even more important given the scholarly nature of academic institutions. Adoption of systems that reward collective performance and thus encourage teams and individuals to be involved in the business units of which they are part and perceived to contribute positively to overall organizational performance and this is best practice in employee relationship. Good labor relations also includes

diversity management initiatives which include practices and policies that the organization adopts voluntarily for the purpose of ensuring that all members of diverse work force feel they are treated fairly (Jackson, Randall and Steven, 2009).

### **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive survey design. This was an appropriate design for the study because it enabled the examination of the entire population of the existing phenomena by asking questions without making inference or casual statement. It was also appropriate because it enabled the researcher to secure factual and detailed information from the respondents on the various aspects of the phenomena that existed namely extent of adoption of best human resource management practices.

The population of study consisted of the twenty private secondary schools in Kisumu County. Primary data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire which was divided in two sections; section one contained demographic information of the respondent while section two focused on best human resource management practices in the school. The deputy head teachers of the schools were the target respondents because they are in charge of staff operations and thus better placed to answer respective research questions. The data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics to measure the extent of adoption of the best human resource management practices.

### **IV. FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Recruitment and Selection**

The study sought to find out whether recruitment and selection practices have been adopted in the schools and the extent to which these have been applied. From the findings 64.3% of the respondents agreed that recruitment and selection methods used are fair enough while 35.7% of the respondents disagreed. Further, proof of best practice in recruitment and selection is the finding that 71.42% of the respondents agreed that the vacancies are advertised through local dailies and other accessible media. In addition, 85.7% of the respondents agreed that education and professional qualification is considered in recruitment. This is in agreement with Dessler (2002) observation that recruitment and selection should march organizations mission, vision and person qualification to avoid attracting wrong persons. A further 71% of respondents disagreed that workers are allowed to have a feel of negative aspects of their job before placement. This implies that the schools largely ignore realistic job preview as a selection device.

#### **4.2 Staff Training and Development**

The study aimed at establishing the extent to which training and development activities have been implemented in the schools. From the findings 85% agreed that they have undergone training. This means way over half of the respondents have trained and therefore these schools emphasize training as part of staff development. According to Armstrong (2008) training has a fairly impressive record of influencing organizational effectiveness, scoring high than appraisal and feedback. Further, 85% of the respondents who had trained acknowledge that training has helped to impart professional ethics and skills and has improved cognitive ability of staff making learners to excel. This is in line with Njenga (2007) observation that employee development directly impacts on the organizational ability to satisfy customers, resolve problems and crises and adopt changing market conditions. However, 64% of the respondents would like training to be regular in order to improve service delivery. The results further showed that 71.4% of the respondents agreed that the most common form of training is on job training for staff development. Moreover, 50% of respondents agreed that they attend seminars and workshops to build their capacity. This is an important tool in developing employees since it helps in passing values, work activities and job design from incumbents to new workers. The study also established that no school supports development of workers through scholarship and sponsorship while 35.7% agreed that those who want to further their studies are given study leave to develop their careers.

#### **4.3 Job Design**

The study purposed to find out the extent to which job design as best human resource management practice has been adopted in the respective secondary schools i.e. whether there is flexible work scheduling, part time work activities and whether shifts are arranged in agreement with employees. The study established that 50% of the respondents agreed that employees are involved in arrangement of work schedules and 50% of the respondents also agreed that they find work activities in their school very interesting. This may be an indicator that the job design adopted by the schools is satisfactory. However on the other hand, 52% think that they have been denied leisure time while 28.5% of the respondents complain about work activities implying there is some discontent. Equally, 42.8% of the respondents agreed that they have adequate time for personal activities. This is in agreement with Bernadine (2007) assertion that such programs enable employees to address their work and family concerns and reduce potential stress and conflict between the various life roles. An overwhelming 92.8%

strongly disagreed that workers can work in their school and elsewhere. This implies that the management of these schools do not tolerate part time work activities. The findings also revealed that 64% of respondents agreed that there is job rotation and sharing in their departments. This may be an indication of management policy or employee congruence and commitment in their work.

#### **4.4 Performance Management**

The study aimed at establishing the extent to which performance management activities have been adopted. From the findings, 50% of the respondents acknowledged that their bosses help them in setting performance targets and a further 64% agreed that both subordinates and supervisors are clear about what is expected of subordinate's performance. This is a clear indication that performance of workers is tracked with a view to improving and is in agreement with Scherer and Segal (2006) observation that some of the best practices of performance appraisal are ensuring that an organization makes performance appraisal to be part of its culture and use performance appraisal to build relationships between supervisors and employees. An overwhelming 78.5% agreed that management by objectives is widely used as performance appraisal tool. This they acknowledged took the form of inspecting work plans, records and schemes. On completion of tasks and assignment within the target time, 57% of the respondents disagreed with this statement. This could have been as a result of work overload and extraneous activities teachers engage in in the course of the academic term. On ability of workers to work without supervision and cope with pressure of work 32% agreed and 57% disagreed. This could have been attributable to pressure by management to perform necessitating the close supervision. It is worth pointing out that 92% of the respondents strongly agreed that their supervisors and coworkers helped them know how well they have performed implying that the schools have embraced 360 degrees performance appraisal. This confirm the findings of Ouko (2008) that it is good to use 360 degrees performance appraisal because it creates a mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and the employees.

#### **4.5 Motivation and Communication**

The study further sought to find out the extent to which communication and motivation as human resource management best practices have been adopted in secondary schools across Kisumu County. The findings indicate that 50% of the respondents agreed that they are treated as important and responsible workers by fellow employees. On the chances of improvement of career 57.1% of the respondents disagreed that they have equal opportunities to improve on their careers. On the statement about staff meetings being held regularly, 95% of the respondents agree and suggest that they are given equal chances to give their opinion during the meetings. Moreover, 50% of the respondents agreed that there is adequate payment structure, fair remuneration and satisfactory working condition. Further results indicate that 64% of the respondents agreed that there is fair attitude of supervisors towards workers' rights, addressing their grievances and in assignment of duties and tasks. This makes the subordinates to be satisfied with their leaders and their work, as they perceive their leaders as being fair and in turn perform to superior's expectations (Kelly & Gennard, 2000).

### **V. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, private secondary schools in Kisumu County have adopted best practices in human resource management at varying degrees. The most popular selection methods are advertisement and unsolicited applications and there is a lot of emphasis on education and professional qualifications. On training, seminars and workshops are the popular practices. However, employees need to be allowed to form and join trade unions since majority of them believe the unions are important while none belong to any trade union. There are varied degrees of adoption of various best practices in human resource management among private secondary schools in Kisumu County and the findings will help each school to reassess their individual practices and strengthen their human resources as observed by Pfeffer (1995) and Boxall and Purcell (2003) who have elaborated on human resource best practice strongly suggest that the same basic bundles of human resource practices tend to enhance business in all organization irrespective of particular product market strategy.

### **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

To improve performance of staff in private secondary schools in Kisumu County, the study recommends there is need to fully embrace best practices in human resource management. This should start from planning with focus on the customer needs and the selection and recruitment based on education and professional qualifications. Training and development should also be regular and consistent in view of the ever increasing need to provide quality education. On the other hand performance management, especially management by objectives should be enhanced in response to the market needs. To curb employee turnover, the study recommends that remuneration and compensation should be improved to be consistent with the work activities and increasing cost of living.

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