

Effect of Socio – Cultural Factors on Employee Performance in the Public Service in Kenya

By

Joy Kasandi Kelemba
E-mail: kasandi2013@gmail.com

Abstract

Organizations face daunting task of addressing socio cultural factors which affect employee performance. It is important to regulate such factors without which they affect employee performance. Socio cultural factors are effectively addressed through change management and embracing transformational leadership. This paper aimed to examine the effect of socio cultural factors on employee performance in the public service in Kenya. The study adopted a cross sectional survey research design. The study population comprised of employees drawn from twenty ministries in Kenya. The study used a sample of 205 respondents. Both stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used in choosing the respondents that took part in the study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data. Content validity was used to validate the tool of data collection. The questionnaire was given to employees in non participating organization in the public service for validation. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's alpha whose score was 0.81. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze qualitative data. Quantitative responses based on Likert scale were coded in the computer using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Processed data were summarized in tables and then presented using simple frequencies and percentages. The study found out that there is a significant statistical association between social - cultural factors and employee performance in the public service in Kenya. The study concluded that employee performance in public service in Kenya is significantly affected by socio- cultural factors. The study recommended that there is need for development of strategies towards implementation of Best Fit Model unique to each organization. It was further suggested that organizations adopt new technologies as well as benchmarking on best practices as way of minimizing effect of socio- cultural factors on employee performance.

Key Words: Socio – cultural, Organizational performance, Employee performance, Public service.

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Introduction

Globalization, new technologies and innovation, economic and dynamic contexts have an impact on employee performance in organizations. Employee performance is affected by both internal and external environmental pressures and dynamics. Internally, employees are affected by insistence on high performance practices, employee involvement and participation. Of late, increased adoption of technology has led to demand for flexible work programmes. However, these approaches, especially flexibility, negatively affect investment in training, skills development and further education. Internal pressures are necessary as they lead to improved innovation capacity, quality and efficiency of services delivery and subsequently good returns on investment. Additionally, type of business, size of organization, age of organization, adoption of technology, type of staff and culture affect organizations internally as indicated by Armstrong (2009a; Armstrong, 2009b). Externally, organizations as well as society at large are affected by globalization and new technologies. The external environment consists of social, political, legal and economic developments and competition pressures (Armstrong, 2009a; Armstrong, 2009b; Armstrong & Baron, 2009).

Globalization is the process of international economic integration in worldwide market despite the changing nature of domestic and international trade a fact alluded to by Armstrong (2009a) and Palmer (2012). Globalization involves development of single international markets for high quality goods and services thus accelerating growth in the world trade based on rules set by supranational bodies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) of which Kenya is a member. In such an arrangement, the developing countries remain minnows under pressure of suppression since the rules favour the large economies or developed countries. Large global organizations have economic interests or activities which extend across international boundaries with the aim of profitability while goods or services from companies from developing countries face heavy taxation and levies in developed countries. Organizations with global coverage have to design mechanisms to manage cross – cultural human resources.

Global human resource management (HRM) involves managing all HRM activities throughout the world where an organization presence. It therefore calls for multinational organizations to manage challenges of efficiency and flexibility while managing risks in order to gain competitive advantage as outlined by Bartlett and Ghoshal (1991) in Armstrong (2009b). Globalized HRM uses new technologies to manage staff globally in more or less the same way. According to Armstrong (2009a), “Global competition in mature production and service sectors is increasing”. Successful globalization is achieved by removing legal and political barriers to trade which limit material and cultural exchange hence, hindering worldwide integration of markets and world cultures. In addition, globalization is enhanced through adaptation to specific local needs in each country and region. It also involves economic liberalization and advent of new technologies especially the internet, which all drive globalization.

According to Palmer (2012), liberalization of government economic policy, direct foreign investment and new technologies especially in the financial sector and information

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communication enhance globalization. He adds that globalization started long time ago through specialization and migration of people in ancient times and that trade should be made free for all without the developed world and big multinationals enjoying favours and monopoly. However, this challenge still persists!

According to Mackay in Palmer (2012), successful businesses create value for customers, employees, suppliers, stakeholders, investors and communities. Such businesses have a higher purpose than making money; they put emphasis on ethical leadership, create teams, prioritize core values, create a culture, care for the environment and educate stakeholders on healthy eating and lifestyles in addition to growth. All in all, human resource remains the key resource in any successful organization. However, Burnes (2004), stated that sustainability, workforce diversity and business ethics pose a challenge to globalization. Nelson Mandela in Palmer (2012), said “Money won’t create success; the freedom to make it will”. Economic freedom to produce, trade and consumer services such as human resource or goods is key to fight against poverty since it allows for prosperity, higher standards of living, longer life span, gender equity and subsequently, economic growth and social wellbeing (Burnes, 2004; Armstrong, 2009b; Palmer, 2012).

New technologies include information communication technology and innovation. Technology is the most situational variable that determines performance of an organization. Others situational variables include organization size and environmental uncertainty as explained in Burnes (2004). New technologies include internet which is extensively used by organizations in communication and doing business such as online shopping, recruitment and intranet. Technology is used to organize, manage and carry out tasks thus affecting human resource policies and practices which have to be dynamic as well. Personal computers, laptops, note books, kindles and iPads among other innovations have altered the way work is done. However, effect use of technology depends on skilled labour force. It involves extensive use of intranet, and e-learning among others, impact positively on improving performance of employees in an organization.

Kohli and Deb (2008), advocated for an efficient information system for collecting, analyzing and reporting data effectively thus, affecting right decision-making as opposed to a flawed data system. The manager therefore becomes a manipulator of information as opposed to a manager who is not ICT compliant who could easily become an obstruction to information flow. The public service commission constantly builds capacity of employees in line with changing trends in required skills (Burnes, 2004; Armstrong, 2009a; Kohli and Deb, 2008; Kelemba, 2013; Kelemba, 2017).

Economic and dynamic contexts affect employee performance and subsequently effective service delivery of an organization. Prudent utilization of resources such as finances, human, equipment and materials which are critical in enhancing employee performance determine realization of goals of an organization. Indeed, Palmer (2012), suggested that free markets embrace innovation, wealth creation and social change which bring prosperity to people. He also believes that capitalism encourages innovation evident in telecommunication and financial sectors which have tapped human energy and ingenuity riding on digital platforms thus adding value and quality to goods and services. In Africa, countries such as Mauritius and Botswana have experience economic freedom leading to economic and social prosperity for their communities by embraced good models of social and economic reforms. This was done in tandem with goals New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). The goals promote good governance through democracy, good political governance, economic management and governance, corporate governance and social economic development. Nigeria, Kenya, Gambia and Ghana were among the first countries to adopt

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NEPAD as outlined by Kelemba (2017). According to Kelemba (2017), organizations are dynamic since change is constantly taking place in small measures demanding for new behaviours and different skills towards attaining competitive advantage. The same views are shared by Palmer (2012).

International Standards Organizations (ISO) as well as benchmarking refers to attaining of internationally approved quality standards on goods or services rendered by an organization. It is on the basis of these standards that employee performance is measured. Quality standards emerged in 1987 with ISO 9000 which was closely followed by Indian Standards IS 1400 in 1988. Later in 1991, Taguch Methods emerged in Japan. Earlier on, successful implementation of Total Quality Control (TQC), Total Quality Management (TQM) and strategic planning had taken place by 1983 in the western world. Notably, quality systems such as Integrated Quality System (IQS) had been in use since 1979 (Kelemba, 2017).

Organizations implementing ISO certification usually state quality statements which comprise of: vision, the expectations of an organization; mission, stating type of organization, its customers, what the organization does and how it is done. In essence, the mission statement provides leadership and direction towards achievement of organizational goals. Kenya embarked benchmarking and ISO certification between 2004 and 2006 to enhance adopted Results Based Management approach which had been adopted as the driving force for realization of Vision 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2007; Republic of Kenya, 2009a; Republic of Kenya, 2009b; Republic of Kenya, 2010a).

As part of performance contracting and appraisal components of results based management, organizations of public service have quality policy statement which indicate prioritization of quality, fulfillment of customer needs, competitive excellence, continuous quality improvement and prudent utilization of human resource. The study by Saira (2016), revealed that performance appraisal, career planning, training and employee involvement directly impact on employee performance. It is worth noting that the entire public service of Kenya have adopted performance contracting and appraisal while some organizations are ISO certified (Republic of Kenya, 2010a).

Armstrong (2009b) describes benchmarking as comparison between what is happening in an organization with what is happening in similar organizations. The comparison could be done on the basis of quantified performance data or through exchange of information on good practices. Benchmarking guides identification of areas of gaps in performance hence, need for change or even innovation based on set standards. It is common practice in the public service in Kenya for organizations to benchmark on high performing organizations especially those which are ISO certified thus, enhancing employee performance (Naavagorozan and Arivalagar, 2009; Republic of Kenya, 2010a).

Methodology

A cross sectional survey research design was adopted in the study with the aim of enhancing use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in data collection as well as data analysis. The cross sectional survey design is useful in describing the characteristics of a sample drawn from a large population using a questionnaire. Information was sourced from experienced respondents who were quite familiar study subject. In so doing, the results obtained were statistically significant and easy to generalize in the entire public service in Kenya.

The study population comprised of 126,998 employees drawn from twenty ministries in Kenya based on reorganized government structure (Republic of Kenya, 2016b). The study used a sample of 205 respondents which were obtained by the use of Nassiuma (2010) finite

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sample size computation formula. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to choose the respondents who participated in the study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Content validity was used to validate the questionnaire. Apart from that, the questionnaire was given to specialists in the human resource management for validation. The recommendations made by the specialists were taken into consideration when revising the questionnaire. Reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's alpha whose score was 0.81. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze qualitative data. Quantitative responses based on Likert scale were coded in the computer using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Processed data were summarized in tables and then presented using simple bar graphs showing frequencies and percentages. The study took into account people's rights and ethical issues during the study. Confidentiality, anonymity, and acknowledgement of other people's input were strictly observed throughout the whole study.

Results

Demographic characteristics of respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents included gender, highest education level, working experience and capacity building. Apart from that, job designation, duties and responsibilities were also taken into account. The age factor was subsequently catered for by drawing respondents from management, technical and support staff cadres. Nearly two thirds (60%) of the respondents were male while the remaining 40% of them were female. This implies that the respondents were well represented by gender. The study also examined the highest education level of the study respondents whereby (32%) of respondents were holders of post graduate degree, a quarter (25%) graduate level of education, while 21% and 22 % were holders of diploma and certificate levels of education respectively. On the years of working experience in the Public service among the respondents, more than two thirds (74%) of the study participants had served in public service for more than 7 years while another 19% of them had less than 6 years of experience in the public service, thus, majority of them were capable of filling the questionnaire adequately. In any case, the researcher gave brief about the questionnaire to the respondents before the actual filling commenced (Kelemba, 2017).

With respect to designation, the respondents were appropriately designated. Nearly 12% directors, 44% technical officers and 44% support staff took part in the study thus, good representation of actual proportions of employees. About 50% of respondents indicated that they were trained in performance – related courses while 20% cited technical courses. Nearly 70% of respondents indicated that they carried out appropriate duties as per cadre while about 26% carried out duties above or below their cadre, an indication that some employees are not properly engaged.

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The respondents in the top management cadre were asked to comment on overall performance of their organization in relation to the rest of organizations operating under the umbrella of public service in Kenya. The results in table 1 showed that quality of goods, quality of work force, innovative capacity, cost reduction, market share and efficiency in service delivery were key for organizations rated in top 25% or middle 50% category ($\chi^2=13.0, P\leq 0.05$).

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Table 1: Percent Response on the Rating of Organizations

Performance Criteria	Top 25%	Middle 50%	Bottom 25%	Don't know	Chisq	P>Chisq
Quality of goods and services	40	44.44	6.67	4.44	25.56	0.001
Innovative capacity	26.67	48.89	13.33	4.44	21.62	0.001
Cost reduction	28.89	40	20	4.44	13.05	0.001
Market share	26.67	35.56	8.89	17.78	8.00	0.05
Return on investment	15.56	31.11	15.56	22.22	3.47	ns
Profitability	11.11	24.44	22.22	24.44	2.68	ns
Quality of work force	35.56	46.67	4.44	4.44	27.78	0.001
Efficiency in service delivery					20.91	0.001

The factors in table 1 had positive effect on employee performance and consequently, provided competitive advantage in respective sub sectors in the public service in Kenya. The results were found to be statistically significant for the above mentioned criteria since p value was < 0.05. However, return on investment and profitability were not significant ($\chi^2=3.47$, $P\leq 0.001$) and ($\chi^2=2.68$, $P\leq 0.001$), respectively. Nearly 14% of respondents were not aware of the ranking of their organizations although they belonged to management in their respective organizations thus, questionable teamwork.

With regard to emerging challenges in managing employee performance in the public service in Kenya, majority (62%) indicated that challenges exist while 20% said that there were no challenges. However, 11% of the respondents did not respond to the question. Majority (over 60%) of the respondents listed a variety of challenges. The challenges included: inadequate resources such as staff, tools, equipment and means of transport; lack of commitment and motivation due to –delayed promotion, poor remuneration and lack of rewards; budgetary constraints and delays in release of exchequer; lack of capacity of staff to implement programmes and projects; lack of proper strategy in implementing devolution; lack of proper organizational structure and supervision mechanisms as well as unclear job description and unrealistic targets.

Other challenges included: inadequate ICT infrastructure and skills; poor work environment; negative impact of nepotism and corruption on service delivery; ineffective communication and failure to involve employees in decision – making; lack of harmony in remuneration of employees at county and national governments and; failure to implement succession planning. Only 40% of respondents cited failure to inculcate change and lengthy government procedures as challenges impeding management of employee performance. Dessler and Varkkey (2009), recognize health and family issues as major challenges faced by employees. Other challenges cited were; legal, finances, care of children and elderly, buy - ins, downsizing, mergers and cost effective measures. According to Hunter and Kazt (2012), remuneration systems, job security, work organization and enterprise governance in the US automotive and banking industries provided diverse employment relations practices, many of which are not at all typical of liberalized market economies thus, affect employee performance.

Respondents were asked to suggest possible solutions to emerging challenges. All respondents (100%) indicated: mentorship programme; collaboration and networking on acquisition and utilization of resources between public service and private sector as well as

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developing clear organizational structure and supervision mechanisms. At least 55% of respondents cited: provision of adequate resources such as qualified staff, equipment, tools and means of transport to implement projects and programmes; capacity building of employees on performance contracting and appraisal plus self-driven appraisal to improve performance. Other solutions were: prompt promotion, higher remuneration and good rewards to higher achievers; effective communication and involvement of staff in decision making; adequate budgetary allocation and prompt release of exchequer.

All (100%) respondents cited the following strategies: improved work environment; clear job description and target setting; harmonization of salaries of employees in the public service; proper devolution mechanisms and separation of functions between national and county government as well as clear organizational structure and supervision mechanisms. Majority (over 60%) of respondents cited adequate resources such as qualified staff, equipment, tools and transport and capacity building including ICT skills. Other strategies included: prompt promotion of employees and higher remuneration; good rewards to higher achievers to enhance commitment; effective communication and involvement of employees in decision making; prompt promotion of employees and higher remuneration; effective communication and involvement of employees in decision making. These strategies cited across the public service are necessary in enhancing employee performance. In addition, better utilization of services provided at Huduma Centres and constant review of business models to ensure competitive advantage (Republic of Kenya, 2016a).

The hypothesis test

Hypothesis test on the relationship between socio cultural factors and employee performance

Ho: Socio cultural factors have no effect on employee performance

Ha: Socio cultural factors have effect on employee performance

Table 2 : Pearson Chi-Square test for the association between socio cultural factors and employee performance in the public service

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27.112 ^a	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	20.331	6	.210
Linear-by-Linear Association	.226	1	.131
N of Valid Cases	205		

Zero (0) cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.32. Results in table 2 show that there is a statistical significantly positive association between socio-cultural factors and employee performance in the public service in Kenya since the p-value is smaller than the level of significance (.05), $\chi^2 (6, N = 205) = 27.112, p < .001$. Thus, the study showed enough evidence to accept alternative hypothesis that, (socio-cultural factors have effect on employee performance) and to reject the null hypothesis (socio-cultural factors have no effect on employee performance).

Discussion

Both male and female respondents were appropriately represented in the study. In addition, the respondents were appropriately trained, qualified and experienced thus, capable of taking

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part in research. The results revealed that the study organizations were rated in top 25% or middle 50% category ($\chi^2=13.0$, $P\leq 0.05$), which confirmed that the organizations were implementing performance contracting and appraisal as expected. The results was found to be statistically significant in relation to rating of organizations since p value was < 0.05 . However, return on investment and profitability were not significant ($\chi^2=3.47$, $P\leq 0.001$) and ($\chi^2=2.68$, $P\leq 0.001$), respectively, an indication that the respondents couldn't easily tell impact of return on investment and profitability as their organizations were non –profit making. Interestingly, Malizu et al (2014) found out during their study that, socio –cultural factors had negative effect on performance of women in Small and Micro Enterprises in Tanzania.

Majority (62%) indicated that challenges exist while 20% said that there were no challenges. Some of the challenges cited were in tandem with those in problem statement of the study. Of concern are: weaknesses in accountability or corruption, monitoring and reporting of results which negatively impacted on employee performance in the public service. Poor revenue collection and accounting have negative impact on employee performance. All respondents (100%) indicated: mentorship programme; collaboration and networking on acquisition and utilization of resources between public service and private sector as well as developing clear organizational structure and supervision mechanisms as the key ways of addressing the challenges.

At least 55% of respondents cited the following solutions: provision of adequate resources such as qualified staff , equipment, tools and means of transport to implement projects and programmes; capacity building of employees on performance contracting and appraisal. Dessler and Varkkay (2009) advocates for adoption of employee assistance programmes in tackling challenges facing employees. Although the employee assistance programmes are not prominent in Kenya, it would be interesting if they were emphasized. Kemunto (2016), religion, commitment to work and cultural values had effect on employee performance while language didn't have any significant effect.

All (100%) respondents cited the following strategies: improved work environment; clear job description and target setting; harmonization of salaries of employees in the public service; proper devolution mechanisms and separation of functions between national and county government as well as clear organizational structure and supervision mechanisms. Harmonization of salaries still poses challenges (Republic of Kenya, 2011).The proposed strategies seem to point towards development of new policies on employee performance. These factors were also cited by Lubembe, (2012). At the same time, Horgan and Milhau (2006) in Armstrong (2010), established that high performance employee system improved not only employee job performance but also cooperation and discipline in Ireland. However, this was not the case in Netherlands, making the researchers to attribute the difference to societal context and negative system effect. The study by Ehambaranathan, Samie and Murugasu (2014), established that employee engagement and upgrade of competencies of work force enhanced employee performance hence, provided for competitive advantage necessary to counter effects of globalization.

The hypothesis test showed that there is a statistical significantly positive association between socio-cultural factors and employee performance in the public service in Kenya since the p-value is smaller than the level of significance (.05), χ^2 (6, N = 205) = 27.112, $p<.001$. Thus, the study showed enough evidence to accept alternative hypothesis that, (socio-cultural factors have effect on employee performance) and to reject the null hypothesis (socio-cultural factors have no effect on employee performance).

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Conclusion

Therefore, the study concluded that there was significant statistical association between employees' level of performance and socio-cultural factors among employees in the public service in Kenya. This shows that the employees' level of performance in public service in Kenya is significantly affected by socio-cultural factors. Both internal and external socio – cultural factors have significant effect on employee performance.

Recommendations

Based on conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

Policy recommendation: Review of policies on globalization, technologies and innovations.

Further research: Impact of globalization, information and communication technologies on employee performance.

Interventions

- i) Enhanced adoption of new technologies and innovation to enhance competitive advantage.
- ii) Benchmarking on best practices in both internal and external environment.

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