Examining the middle cadre employee capacity building and its effect on organizational performance in Machakos County government Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the effects of middle cadre employee capacity building in Machakos County Government. The objectives of the study were as follows: To examine the effects of frequency of capacity building activities for middle cadre employees on organizational performance in Machakos County Government; to examine the effects of middle cadre employee training on organizational performance in Machakos County Government and to establish the challenges encountered in middle cadre employee capacity building on organizational performance in Machakos County Government. The study utilized a descriptive survey design which targeted the permanent and pensionable employees of the Machakos County Government Service Board. Using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formulae, a total of 1,962 employees formed the target population out of which 320 was the sample size. Findings of the study demonstrate that capacity building is a norm that is practiced by the County government of Machakos.

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Introduction

According to Potter (2004), Capacity building refers to that process that is pursued by organizations in order to not only retain employee skills, but also to enable them have the requisite knowledge, facilities and resources which make them to perform their work competently. This process is normally aimed at enabling the understanding of the challenges that make people fail to attain their optimum whether they work with the public or even private sector. Martha (2016) avers that put in practice, capacity building focuses on a wide array of employee skills that are needed in order to perform a particular task in an organization.

According to Bernadin (2002), employee performance refers to the outcome of job specifications given to employees within a specified period. When an employee is considered to have performed, it is because the person has managed to produce what the specified job opportunities were allocated to him/her within a specified period of time. From this angle, the performance of someone who is employed is only considered when the person implements the task allocated to him. From a managerial perspective, employee performance normally encapsulates taking stock yearly or quarterly and this enables the employers to take stock of their employees. Tzafir (2005) views it as a very important component of enhancing human capital.

Gullop (2019) avers that what make one organization have a competitive advantage over others is the people and their quality. The prerequisite for performance of employees is the possession of requisite skills and knowledge of the people employed there. For this to be attained fully there is need for constant training and exposure of the employees by the organization. This is made possible by the provision of adequate training and capacity building programme by the organization. Therefore, there is a nexus between capacity building and employee productivity if looked at from a comparative organizational perspective' those which tend to demonstrate

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improved performance in both their output and the quality of their employees are those that tend to put more emphasis on capacity building activities.

Globally, since the advent of Human Resources approach to development, capacity building has been an acceptable norm in not only the private entities, but also in public organizations. According to Waheed (2016), the success of newly industrialized states such as Taiwan, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore can be largely attributed to capacity building of the workers in public institutions. He further avers that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) require that countries of the world to formulate policies that strengthen the capacity of the public institutions as a panacea of stimulating economic development. Therefore, capacity building of public institutions is a central element of ensuring good governance. This is because if these public entities aspire to achieve in the same way private entities do, the bottom-line priority ought to be the employees since they are the focal points towards attaining this.

According to Wassem (2019), Yamoah (2013), Muathe & Nzulwa (2014), capacity building has a positive and significant impact on employee performance. In contrast, managerial support has an insignificant impact on employees' performance. However, the impact of capacity building and managerial support on employee performance is positive and significantly moderated by employee retention. Studies by Waheed (2016), Cohen (2018) and Chematani (2016) reveal that public organizations which focus on building the capacity of their employees end up performing effectively. A study by Mueni (2016) revealed that compensation, working conditions, work load distribution and work life balance affected employees working life at Machakos County government. However, the research did not establish how capacity building affected the performance of the employees. Since the establishment of the Human Resource Department; that aims at ensuring that the employees deliver their services properly; capacity building has been one of the measures that it has put in place is capacity building on its employees. Therefore, this study sought to find out how capacity building affects the performance of employees in the government of Machakos.

In a study by Chematani (2016) on organizational performance in civil organizations in Kenya, it was revealed that organizational performance is significantly influenced by organizational capacity factors; the organizations that focus on the achievement of their goals through capacity investment perform better than their counterparts that do not. The research concluded that the capacity building is one of the best approaches for measuring the output of organizational performance since organizations can easily relate achievement of organizational goals to progress. Studies by Kadian (2010), Wanyama (2010) and Mutsotso (2014) reveal that employees who are exposed to capacity building usually manifest a high level of productivity; in fact, Gallup (2019) states that highly satisfied groups of employees often exhibit above average levels of loyalty, productivity and longevity at the workplace. This enhances productivity and thus service delivery.

Machakos County is one of those counties that have established a well grounded human resource practices. These practices came into effect when the county assembly passed the Machakos County Administrative Structures bill (Machakos County Gazzete, 2015). This has seen the streamlining of human resource issues through a wide array of measures; one of them is capacity building. It is against this background that the research seeks to establish how capacity building helps in organizational development. It is against this background that this research investigated how capacity building affects service delivery particularly with regards to Machakos County employees.

Based on the research problem this study sought to address the following objectives to examine the effects of frequency of capacity building activities for middle cadre employees on organizational performance in Machakos County Government. This paper aims at examining the effects of middle cadre employee training needs on organizational performance in Machakos County Government and lastly establishing the effects of middle cadre employee capacity logistic on organizational performance in Machakos County Government.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

This study utilized three main theories in advancing its argument on capacity building in organizations, particularly Machakos County Government. These theories include: Performance and Human Capital Development theory, Dynamic capabilities and capacity building theory and knowledge-based theory.

Performance and Human Capital Development Theory

The Performance and Human Capital Development Theory, as Caine (2005) connotes, perceives individuals and organizations as entities that are enjoined together in one journey. The theory holds that the context, knowledge, identity, fixed factors and personal factors usually comprise the process of performance. It is argued that when there are high levels of absence incapacity, poverty sets in. The same is replicated at the institutional level where when there is deprivation of capabilities within institutions, they will not be able to operate effectively.

According to Light (2002) many people have not understood capacity building properly. This is because there is a lack of a universal definition or approach that can guide this approach. There are many elements that entail capacity building which make it hard to give it a single definition. It all depends on the context and circumstance one is defining it from. Whereas those who are funding such

activities may want to look at it from the perspective of engagements, builders, on the other hand, may want to look at it in terms of adding skills in the employees and the organization in order to enhance its development.

On the other hand, there are some people who tend to view it as a wide array of activities rather than a single concept. According to them, the sum total of capacity building is actually the ability of an organization to be able to accomplish its mission effectively. This definition, however sidelines the 'ho' and chooses to concentrate on the what. Capacity building ought to be viewed from a person's perspective and not just output perspective alone. As Connolly & Lukas define it, it is a wide range of capabilities, knowledge and resources that non-profits need in order to be effective."(2002:p17). In reviewing definitions, there are also those that encompass notions of capacity that extend beyond organizations. Capacity can also be built at the individual and community level, and therefore definitions need to include these concepts. It is evident that there is a lack of agreement within the field of capacity building as to what exactly it is. This lack of shared understanding around capacity building elements and features can be enhanced through a greater focus of where capacity building efforts are directed—individuals, organizations, geographical or interest communities.

The Dynamic Capabilities and Capacities Theory

The Dynamic Capabilities and Capacities Theory was postulated by David Teece, Gary Pisano and Amy Shuen (1997). According to the scholars, an organization's basic competencies should be used to create short-term competitive positions that can be developed into longer-term competitive advantage. The theory places emphasis on processes, resources and capabilities within a business or company. According to Boesen (2004), some of the main pillars of capacity development encompass learning by doing approaches. Capacity development thus affects organizations and individuals through skills and knowledge attained; this happens when the strategies for capacity building are put in place. Furthermore, the theory posits that individual learning has a direct contribution to organizational learning in form of processes, policies, information management and reward systems which are based on the overall objectives of the organization (Boesen, 2004). The dynamics capabilities approach guides the human resource management; competition in both external and internal environments. The foundation of this theory was laid down by Selznick (1980); it postulates that a look at firms and organizations reveals that those organizations that manage to stay aloof do exhibit some unique traits. According to the approach, an organizational success is founded on its processes, resources as well as capabilities. Key among them is the issue of innovation.

Knowledge based theory

The Knowledge Based Theory was initially promoted by Penrose (1959) and later expanded by Wernerfelt (1984), Barney (1991) and Conner 1991. This theory is premised on the belief that the accumulation and enhancement of knowledge and capability is a key responsibility of any manager. Boydel (1997) avers that the respective capability levels guides an organization's efficiently in turning its inputs into sustainable and high value outcomes. From this perspective, therefore, organizations organically mutate and develop into learning forums or entities. In other words, these organizations keep on learning and take note of their success as they transform themselves. The person's commitment to the process of learning in the institution is what constitutes mastery of knowledge and those organizations that have a competitive advantage usually learn more quickly as opposed to those which do not. In such case, organizations usually have memories that they do preserve and transmit in form of norms, values and certain behaviors.

Empirical Review

According to Weil and Woodall (2005), some of the techniques that organizations use in training and development are usually intended towards enhancing organizational competitive advantage. According to the scholars, there is not only a significant relationship between training and development, but also with employee performance. According to Bunch (2007), the goal of training programs is usually to either improve performance of the present job of the individual, train new skills for either new job or new position in the future or the general growth for both the employee and organization. From this perspective therefore, organizations do so by identifying the needs for training and development, selecting methods and programs needed for these needs, planning how to implement and finally evaluating the outcome results (McCourt & Eldridge, 2003).

Barlet (2001) if a firm aspires to grow, priority ought to be given to its employees. This is because they carry the responsibility of actualizing the firm's goals and their treatment is very crucial in attaining the organizational goals. In fact, money that has been invested in training and equipping the employees of an organization is money well spent. This idea is supported by Woodlock (2006) when he asserts that it is because of the primacy of human resources that the aspect has received a lot of attention by organizations and elevated to a department that is so crucial for the functioning of any organization. In fact Houser (2006) alludes that human resource is so important that it is treated as a form of intellectual property and it actually gives the organization a competitive advantage over others and it ensures that the organization engages in an endless endeavor to improve the competencies of those working in it. As alluded to earlier, when employees are equipped with the requisite skills, they are able to translate them into better performance. These findings tally with those of Asfaw (2015) that there was a significant nexus between employee training and organizational performance in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa.

As earlier stated, capacity building is a very important element of an organizational success or failure. On one hand, it is carried out diligently and meticulously, it can propel the organization to success. However, on the other hand, if not applied or if applied haphazardly, then it can lead to the plummeting of an organization. Torrington (2005) connotes that if there is a perception among

employees that the organization is not keen on capacity building; then there may be a high turnover rate and at the same time, many of them will become demotivated. In addition, the employees will come to the realization that they are on their own; this will make them to want to pursue further education without the assistance of the organization with the aim of positioning themselves for future prospects. This can have a negative disadvantage to the organization because the best and most ambitious individuals in an organization will be turned away by the organization's approach of not motivating them through capacity building. Therefore, any organization has a mandate of ensuring that they put in place appropriate mechanisms that ensure that they address capacity building of its employees.

Research and Methodology

This study was conducted in Machakos County and specifically on those employees working under the Machakos County Government. This study utilized a Descriptive Case Study Design. It combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The case study focused on the middle cadre employees of the Machakos County Government. The study targeted those Permanent and Pensionable middle cadre employees who are working under the County Public Service Board in Machakos County. As per the Public Service Board, the total number of employees in the county is 1,962. (Machakos County PSB, 2019). Out of these, 200 of them are subordinates; the remaining 1,762 are middle cadre and above cadre employees.

The sample size was arrived at by employing Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formulae for calculating a sample size. According to the formulae, for a population of 1,762, a sample size of 317 is appropriate. Therefore, based on this formula, 317 respondents were targeted from the following departments of the county government on the middle level of management that is the Finance, Agriculture, Water and Energy, Health Services, Education and Youth Affairs, Lands, Public Works, Public Service Management, Trade and Information Communication. From each of the 10 departments, 31 employees were targeted using Purposive Sampling in which each of the department were targeted for an interview. The remaining 7 were Heads of Departments in the sections.

The study utilized the questionnaire as the primary tool of data collection. The questionnaire was composed from the objectives of the study. It captured demographic details of the respondents. At the same time, it contained both open ended and closed ended questions. Whereas the closed ended questions were aimed at capturing specific information, the open ended questions gave the respondents liberty to express their views on specific issues. The data collected was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. It was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. The questionnaires had both closed questions and open ended questions. The study utilized both quantitative as well as qualitative analysis. This is because the data collected was both and as such, both methods were appropriate. The quantitative data, being in the form of responses derived from the closed ended questions in the questionnaire, was analyzed using the SPSS software.

Research analysis and Discussions

Demographic Data of the Respondents

Gender

The gender of the respondents was established in order to ascertain the distribution. The findings are presented in the figure below:

Figure 1: Sales distribution based gender demographics

From the Figure above, it is apparent that a majority of the respondents, 60%, were male while the remaining 40% were female. This was a reflection of the gender demographics of the middle cadre employees working at the Machakos County Government.

Department attached to

The study also sought to establish the department that the respondents were working in. There were up to ten departments that the respondents were chosen from equitably. The findings are presented in the figure below:

Figure 2: Department attached

The respondents were sampled based on the departments which they work in. Because of the fact that some departments are larger than others, they manifested larger percentages as reflected in their numbers than others. This means the distribution was equitable. The department of public service had the highest percentage, 25% followed by Health services at 15%. Water, energy, agriculture, education and youth as well as lands had 10% each while public works, trade and information had 5% each. This was viewed as a representation of the actual picture of employees in the departments.

Length of Service

Here, the researcher sought to establish the time that the respondents had worked in the organization in order to ascertain their work experience. Work experience was treated as an important parameter because the longer one works in an organization, the better versed the person is. To this end, the respondents were asked to indicate how long they had worked at the County Government of Machakos as middle cadre employees. Given that the counties were established in 2013, the longest was expected to have served for a maximum of 7 years. The findings are presented in the figure below:

Figure 3: Length of service

From the figure above, the majority of the respondents, 70% indicated to have served for above four years at the county while another 20% had served for a period of between two and four years. The remaining 10% indicated to have served for a period of between 0 to 2 years. This was an indication that the respondents had the requisite experience in terms of working at the county that would enable them to respond appropriately to the questions asked.

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Figure 4: How capacity building has been attended

From the Figure above, 70% of the respondents attested having attended capacity building severally since their first employment; the remaining 30% answered in the negative. Asked to state how many times they have attended it; those who answered in the positive stated that they have attended it more than once a year. The respondents were further probed about the nature of the capacity building initiative that they attended; they responded that it was mainly residential and it took up to one week, with some stating that it took three days. The capacity building initiatives, according to them, were organized by Human Resource department and in most cases, they are usually taken to a resort away from Machakos. It was established that the facilitation was done by experts in Human

Resource, a majority of who are usually outsources from other counties as well as from the private sector. They are usually well informed and instigative. Asked whether it was beneficial, those who stated that they attended them answered affirmatively. Some of the areas that were covered included: workplace dynamics, team spirit, organizational change as well as financial management.

The respondents were asked to indicate why they thought that the facilitations should be organized frequently. The responses were varied; 70% of the respondents stated that it would encourage the workers to be motivated because it demonstrated that the employer minds about their welfare; another 20% alluded that facilitation are mediums that enhance their career growth because promotion is based on attendance of such forums. The remaining 10% of the respondents averred that such facilitations were important because they enable them to be exposed to recent trends at the workplace and know how to respond to these trends. Furthermore, the respondents also explained that capacity building occasions were fulfilling and were treated as ends in themselves since have intrinsic value of enabling them to bond outside the workplace and get to know each other more deeply than at the workplace.

The question was aimed at gauging the respondent's appreciation of capacity building. From the responses, 50% were of the feeling that the management ought to organize capacity building after every six months. At the same time, 30% of the respondents preferred it to be held after every 3 months while a paltry 20% were of the view that it should be held after every month. This was a clear indication that the respondents appreciate the role played by capacity building and that explains why they recommended that it should be done. The respondents were asked to indicate the reason why they thought that the capacity building forums be done frequently; they stated that these forums enabled and ensured that they learn the best practices and recent trends that emerge at the workplace as well as compare best practices with other similar environments.

The effects of middle cadre employee training on organizational performance

The study also sought to establish how employee training affects organizational performance. The respondents were asked questions and their responses are presented below:

Figure 5: Employee training is part of staff training and promotion

From the Figure above, it is apparent that employee training occupies a very central component towards staff appraisal and promotion as reflected in the 92% of the respondents who answered in the affirmative to the questions as to whether employee training is part of staff training and promotion. Those who dissented to the question were only 8%. The respondents were further asked to state what they thought could be done in order to integrate capacity building and training for all employees; the responses were varied. Whereas some explained that it should be integrated in the HR manual as compulsory so that every employee is facilitated to attend as an impetus to enhance upward mobility, others stated that employee training should be done very frequently for all employees regardless of the cadre that they belong to.

Training needs that need to be filled through capacity building

Figure 6: Training needs should be addressed through capacity building

A majority of the respondents, 88%, did indicate that there exists training needs which ought to be filled through capacity building. However, 12% answered in the negative. Asked further to explain their answer, those who answered in the positive explained that needs such as recent trends, IMS (Information Management Systems), ICT as well as trends in service delivery are always changing constantly and as such, training ought to be done in order to ensure that middle cadre employees are well versed with the

changes that come with the relativity of the workplace. Furthermore, 25% of the respondents added that gaps such as poor working relationships can be best treated through training of the employees, especially teaching them the importance of public relations at the workplace. Other gaps that were noted which can be addressed through training include: how to operate during the challenging COVID-19 environment as well as the psychological needs of employees.

The respondents were further asked to indicate the particular attempts made towards ensuring that the management addresses employee training needs. Another 30% indicated that things such as partial facilitation of employees to attend training sessions, encouraging them by giving them off during training as well as giving them the certificates of training in order to encourage them to attend as well as show proof of attending. This has made some of the employees especially those who do not get exposed to training and capacity building to feel neglected and isolated. This, in effect, has led to lowering of their working morale and consequently general low organizational performance.

Whether capacity building prioritized by the management

Capacity building initiatives are usually planned for at the management level before being rolled out to the employees. Since the management deals with many things in an organization, it is usually up to them to decide whether capacity building is a priority. To this end therefore, the respondents were asked to indicate whether the management takes capacity building as a priority. The responses are presented in the figure below:

Figure 7: Management take capacity building as a priority

On whether the management takes capacity building as a priority, half of the respondents, 50%, answered in the affirmative while another 50% answered in the negative. They gave varied responses when asked to explain. Those who answered in the positive said that the fact that the management has organized on several occasions is enough proof that it takes capacity building as a priority. The other half who answered in the negative explained that middle cadre employees are not given as much attention in comparison with higher cadres and as such, they thought that the management does not give them priority.

The respondents were also asked to indicate whether employees take capacity building seriously; many of them affirmed that indeed employees take their seriously owing to the fact that they are viewed as pathways of career progression and all employees aspire to undergo upward mobility at the workplace. However, to the extent that the capacity building takes time to be conducted and given that the middle cadre employees are not prioritized as their higher cadre counterparts and as such it makes them not to take them seriously.

The effects of the challenges facing middle cadre employee capacity building and their effects on organizational performance in Machakos County Government

Figure 8: CB initiatives helpful in improving performance

From the Figure above, a majority of the respondents, 96% were of the view that the capacity building initiatives were indeed helpful in improving their performance. A paltry 4% answered in the negative. Asked to substantiate their response, those who answered in the affirmative indicated that the capacity building session enabled them to grasp many things which, when translated into practice, enabled them to improve their performance. They particularly singled out the exposure that usually comes along with the training as well as information regarding recent trends at the workplace and ICT (Information Communication and Technology) developments as they relate to the work place.

However, those who dissented explained that because of the uncoordinated nature of the frequency of capacity building initiatives, the ultimate intention of improving performance is not usually attained. At the same time, they decried the fact that capacity building was not given precedence to the middle cadre as compared to the higher cadre employees. However, this was attributed to several shortcomings; key among them being shortage of funds to run frequent capacity building sessions. The allocation given to the public service of Machakos county government does not enable the department to frequently hold such sessions because of other priorities. The other challenge bordered sensitization; employees were not fully sensitized on the importance of these capacity buildings on their productivity; as such, they tend to look at them merely as formalities that need to be fulfilled for their own sake. Lastly, the attitudes that middle cadre employees have towards the capacity building initiatives have an effect on their performance. The employees view them as conduits by the management to make money on the pretext of training. This is challenging to the effect that it creates in employees wrong perceptions that they are being used by the management to make money and enrich themselves at their expense.

Conclusions

It has been acknowledged that regarding the frequency of capacity building in Machakos county government that this is a phenomenon that exists and it does have an effect on the employees working there. The effects range from exposing the employees to the dynamics of the workplace to motivating them to be better at their work place. These have ensured that they increase their output and as a result, there has been improved organizational performance. Secondly, regarding training needs, it was also discovered that the training did address the needs of the employees in terms of having the ware withal to perform their tasks. However, these initiatives are not done as frequent as they ought to be. From the responses that were received from the respondents, it was apparent that they would have wanted them to be organized more frequently. At the same time, it has been established that if frequently organized, then the capacity building initiatives will have far reaching consequences on the employees of Machakos county government. Regarding the challenges that face the county government, it was established that indeed there were several challenges that face the county government in promoting capacity building. The challenge therefore, lies in addressing the shortcomings that prevent the county government from organizing more frequent capacity building initiatives. If these challenges of financial allocation to the Human Resource department are overcome, as well as working on the attitude change among the employees on the capacity building initiatives, then there would be improvements in terms of organizational performance by the workers of Machakos County government.

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