

THE ROLE THAT EMPLOYEE RELATIONS PLAY IN ENHANCING INNOVATION DEVELOPMENT AT PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OF KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to establish the role that human relations play in enhancing innovation development at public universities in Kenya. The specific objectives were: To establish the effect of employees relations practices on innovation development at the public universities in Kenya, to find out if all levels of employees in the university are involved in the determination of rewards, to investigate if the CBA agreements in the university encourage innovation development, and to find out if employee relations take care of all stakeholders in the industry so as to enhance innovation. The study adopted a survey design and questionnaires were used to collect data. The data collected was analyzed using Excel package and the results presented in tables.

Key Words: *remuneration policy, employee relations, innovation development, collective bargaining agreements, industrial relations, human resource management, employee morale, stakeholders*

Introduction

Armstrong, (2006), sees employee relations as consisting of all the areas of human resource management that that involve relationships with employees either directly or through collective agreements where trade unions are recognized. He further explains that these relationships deal with the agreement of terms and conditions of employment Armstrong. This therefore means, the maintenance of employee-employer relations that contribute to satisfactory productivity motivate employees and ensure healthy employee morale. It is hence the interrelationships both formal

and informal between managers and those whom they manage. It has a wider scope than industrial relations since industrial relations is confined to the regulation of the relationship principally by means of collective bargaining, (Cole, 2008). Collective bargaining is a process whereby procedures are jointly agreed, wages and conditions of employments are settled by negotiations between employers or associations of employers and workers organizations (Acas, 1992)

Employee relations therefore is a broad term used to refer to the general management of and planning of human resources activities that are related to developing, maintaining and improving employee relationships that deals with the agreements of terms and conditions employment. Employee relations is a continuous relationship between a group of employees represented by a union or association and an employer. This relationship includes the initial recognition of the rights and responsibilities of union and management. This is proposed by Nzube, (2007). The negotiation of a written contract concerning wages of work, other conditions of employment, the administration and interpretation of the contract over its period of coverage. Robbin and Coulter, (2005), allude that there is a growing recognition of the need of particular efforts in dealing with attitudes of employees and it is not enough that one is able to work but that one must also be willing to work. When the needs of human beings meet the needs of the organization, conflict often occurs. There must therefore be a reasonable merger of a person and the organization if effective action is to result. The goal of human relation or employment is an integration leading to productive and creative collaboration towards mutual objective.

Research and experience indicates that there is a healthy overlapping of interest in such programs as work flexibility, job enlargement and enrichment, simultaneous work group, job evaluation, and valuable compensation plans. The greater the overlap of this interest, the more productivity would coincide with employee satisfaction, this is a Armstrong, (2006) puts it.

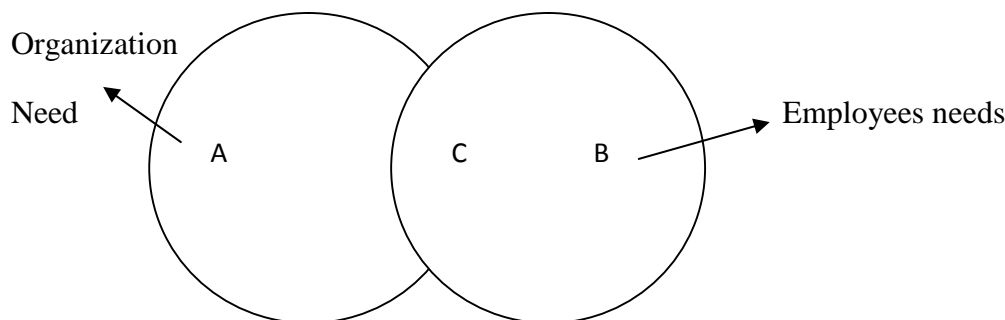


Fig 1: Intersection of Employer and Employees Needs

The organization will require certain things of employees that the employees themselves would prefer to avoid e.g. the assignment of narrow and competitive tasks, meeting of high standard output, acceptance of managerial decisions. For this reason, an organization must put in place a

disciplinary action program, (Desler, 2011). There are also certain things that employees desire which the organization is reluctant to provide e.g. increased wages, safe working conditions, time off with pay, insured pension, pay offs. These issues may arise from outside pressure e.g. from the government, labor unions, managers, code of ethics, this therefore implies that employee relation has a wider scope than industrial relation. It is concerned with all aspects of interrelationship between the management and the employees while industrial relations is confined with the regulations of relationship between managers and principally by means of effective bargaining, (Robbin & Coulter, 2005).

Employee relations policies express the philosophy of the organization on the acceptable relationships between the management and employees and their unions and how they should be handled. The overall aim of these policies should be to develop and maintain a positive, productive, cooperative and trusting climate of employer relations. The policies should provide guidelines for action on employee related issues and can help to ensure that these issues are dealt with consistently, (Nzuve, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

One of achieving enterprise development agenda is innovation through capacities of the universities. According to Lester, (2005), these institutions are a primary source of the most valuable assets in knowledge economy and this is regarded as an engine of innovation. Universities are widely cited as a critical institutional actors in national innovation systems, (Nelson, 1993).

In Kenya, the economic, social and political pillars in Kenya Vision 2030 are anchored on, among other things, science, technology and innovation, (Bailey, Cloete & Pillay, 2012). This is an indication of developing countries continued recognition of innovation in economic development. However, while the significance of universities through their innovation capacities is increasingly become a central tenet in various developments, the situation in Kenya is far from being realized. Various empirical studies, (Nyagoti-Chacha, 2004, Larsen & Salter, 2006, Dahlander & Gann, 2010), show that universities are deficient in terms of research and development. This echoes the findings by Oketch, (2004), that universities have capacity to carry research and development but on the practical side, this has not been happening. This translates to marginal performance of universities in achieving their bottom line objectives since the performance of any universities will be measured by the amount of research programs undertaken.

General Objective

To investigate the role that employee relations play in innovation development at public universities in Kenya.

Specific Objectives

1. To establish the effect of employees relations practices on innovation development at the public universities in Kenya
2. To find out if all levels of employees in the university are involved in the determination of rewards
3. To investigate if the CBA agreements in the university encourage innovation development
4. To find out if employee relations take care of all stakeholders in the industry so as to enhance innovation.

Theoretical Framework

Ackers and Wilkinson, (2003), bring out the importance of human resource Employee employer relations is the maintenance of employee-employer relations that contribute to satisfactory productivity, motivate employees and ensure healthy employee morale, (Amstrong, 2006). Employee relations refer to the interrelationships both formal and informal between managers and those whom they manage.

Empirical Review

The open innovation paradigm is not a simple outsourcing of R&D activity, but rather it is an integration of internal and external competences. According to Chesbrough, (2003), a firm's relationship with external actors may take place during three different innovation phases: the fuzzy front-end (i.e. to access new knowledge), development (i.e. to buy or sell solutions) and commercialization (i.e. to buy and sell end products or components). Thus, open innovation implies cooperative research and development rather than simple R&D outsourcing, and in order to take advantage of this new paradigm, organizations must also develop their internal knowledge to increase absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal,1990). Mowery and Rosenberg, (1989), underlined the notion that cooperative research programs alone are insufficient without the development of sufficient expertise within organizations to utilize the results of the external research.

Employee relations have a wider scope than industrial relations since industrial relations is confined to the regulation of the relationship principally by means of collective bargaining, (Cole, 2008). Collective bargaining is a process whereby procedures are jointly agreed, wages and conditions of employments are settled by negotiations between employers or associations of employers and workers organizations (Acas, 1992), management and the role they play in developing the firms objectives.

Research Methodology

The study adopted survey research design. This design was appropriate as it includes elements and goes ahead to identify and explore the causes lying behind the effects and the nature and the relationships between the variables. In addition, a few samples can be examined from each of the chosen public universities and moreover, it described the characteristics of a large

population. A research design is a detailed plan for how the research will be conducted, (Borg, Meredith and Gall, 2003). Another author, Gall, (2003), adds that a research design serves as a framework for the collection and analysis of data. Nachmias and Nachimias, (2008), also explains that a research design involves a systematic collection of information from a sample of respondents for the purpose of either, understanding or predicting some aspects of the behavior of the population of interest. The design therefore attempts to investigate the causes of a particular phenomena, as well as describing them. The target population was university lecturers in the seven public universities. The study employed a survey design because the population of interest was drawn from the different public universities. Use of questionnaires was recommended especially because the point of interest was the respondents behavior, opinions, view, perceptions and feelings, (Sekaran, 2003; Kothari, 2004). The questionnaires were dropped to the respondents and picked later at an agreed date. The data was collected and analyzed using Excel package and the results presented in tables. The researcher pre-tested the research instrument using 15 respondents. The purpose of the pilot testing was to validate the constructs in the questionnaire and to supplement the literature review. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to check the internal consistency and evaluate the reliability of the measures. An alpha of 0.84 was obtained and therefore acceptable, (Cronbach, 1951. As a result, the questionnaire was amended and the literature review enriched, (Cooper & Schindler, 1998).

Results Discussion and Findings

The study intended to establish if employees are involved in the determination of rewards in the university and below are the results. Findings show that 47.2% were neutral, 36.1% agreed, 12.6% disagreed, 2.2% strongly disagreed and 1.9% strongly agreed. The results point out that the employees in the university are either not aware or indifferent if involved in the determination of rewards.

The researcher wished to find out if CBA agreements are designed in a way which encourages innovation plans. Below are the results. 59.5 % of the respondents were neutral, 34.2% agreed, 3.0% strongly agreed, 3.0% disagreed and 0.4% strongly disagreed. The results indicate that the respondents were non committal or unaware as to whether the CBA encourage innovation plans.

The researcher wanted to find out if the employees' relations in the universities take care of all the stakeholders in the industry. Results show that 53.5% of the respondents were neutral, 36.8% agreed, 7.1% disagreed, and 0.0% strongly disagreed. The results therefore suggest that the majority of the respondents were non-committal or did not have information in regard to this question.

The respondents were asked if the universities encourage employee participation in decision making. The bar graph above shows that 52.0% had a neutral opinion, 34.2% agreed, 9.3% disagreed, 2.6% strongly agreed while 1.9% strongly disagreed. This could imply that the respondents were either not aware or wished to remain non committal on this issue.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The objective of the study was to establish the role that employee relations play towards innovation development in public universities. From the study, the researcher was able to deduce that the universities support innovation development by involving employees in reward determination, encouraging the participation of all stakeholders in decision making as well as supporting CBA agreements that encourage innovation development.

In conclusion, the researcher inferred that though this is happening, there should be commitment by both parties. Both short term and long term measures must be embraced. Right policies and strategies must be developed and communicated to the human capital. Innovation development and financial planning must be put as a priority.

The researcher recommended that the issue of innovation development must be key. There should be conscious and deliberate policies by the universities as well as creating an enabling environment for innovation to thrive. Friendly policies should be formulated in order to encourage equity and fairness for all innovators.

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