

CONTRIBUTION OF TRADE UNIONS TO EMPLOYEE TRAINING, CAREER ADVANCEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION: THE CASE OF THE UASU AT EGERTON UNIVERSITY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Employee training, career advancement and employment satisfaction are important to build capacity for effective and quality service delivery in an organization. In Kenya, the Universities' Academic Staff Union (UASU) was formed to, among other objects, ensure better welfare and terms of service for its members, provision of a favourable working environment, and protection of its members from harassment and firing by their employers. The Union experiences challenges in the process of its operations, including enhancing training and career advancement of its members and, consequently, employment satisfaction. Through a cross-sectional survey, this study evaluated the contribution of the UASU to training and career advancement, and its effects on employee satisfaction at Egerton University in Kenya. Results indicate that the activities of the UASU impacted equally on the training of its members, University's investment in human capital, academic qualification, advocacy on investment in human capital, academic rank and frequency of employee training. Generally, the UASU significantly influenced employee training and career advancement and, consequently, employee satisfaction. It is, therefore, necessary to engage the UASU in the activities of the University. Besides, the UASU should continue to impress on the University's management the need to enhance training and investment in human capital in order to boost effective and quality service delivery in the University.

Key Words: Trade Unions, Training, Career Advancement, UASU, Kenya

Introduction

Employee training, career advancement and employment satisfaction are important to build capacity for effective and quality service delivery in an organization. Training equips employees with adequate knowledge and skills necessary for improving their efficiency and effectiveness in their jobs (Republic of Kenya, 2010). Career advancement is a process where employees strategically explore, plan and create their future at work by designing a personal learning plan to achieve their potential and fulfil the organization's through learning, seeking opportunities,

taking risks, and finding ways to contribute to the organization in a productive and motivated fashion (Republic of Kenya, 2010). Trade unions have been reported to influence employee training, career advancement and employment satisfaction (e.g., Duncan & Stafford, 1980; Lynch 1992; Harley et al., 1995; Lynch & Black, 1998).

In Kenya, the Universities' Academic Staff Union (UASU) was formed in 1993 as a trade union for academic staff in all the public universities in the country, with a Chapter in every university (UASU Constitution, 1993). This Union was formed to address the issue of declining academic standards, owing to poor terms and conditions of service for the academic staff. The objects of the UASU include ensuring better welfare and terms of service for its members, provision of a favourable working environment, and protection of its members from harassment and firing by their employers (UASU Constitution, 2006). One of the tasks of the UASU is to enable training and career advancement of its members (Lagat, 2012). This will contribute to capacity building for the universities as well as individual growth and employment satisfaction for its members.

According to Freeman & Medoff (1984), unions could have a positive impact on training and career advancement through their influence on channels of communication and management, employee turnover and policies. Unions provide a "voice" for individual grievances and interests that would often be unavailable for individual employees. Booth et al. (2003) observed that for unionized employees, the post-training wage was 21% higher than the pre-training wage, but the corresponding increase for non-unionism was only 4%. However, the contribution of trade unions to training, career advancement and employment satisfaction among employees in Kenyan universities has not been clearly understood. The current study, therefore, assessed the contribution of the UASU to these aspects at Egerton University Chapter in Kenya.

Research Methodology

A cross-sectional survey was undertaken at Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya, in which primary data was collected from 82 respondents from a sample frame of 435 general members of the UASU using sets of pre-tested structured and unstructured questionnaires. Simple random sampling was used to secure a representative group using the formula of Israel (1992) as shown in the equation below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where; n is the optimum sample size, N the number of registered UASU members and e the probability of error (i.e., the desired precision, e.g., 0.1 for 90% confidence level).

Secondary data was obtained from records and documents (e.g., collective bargaining agreements, the UASU Constitutions, publications and reports) at the Union's Offices. Both

quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The respondents provided information regarding training and career advancement, and their influence on employment satisfaction. General statistics were used to analyze the data, and non-parametric analyses using Friedman ranking test done to test whether there were significant differences on the impact of the activities of the UASU on various aspects of training, career advancement and employment satisfaction. Besides, correlation analyses were done to establish the effect of training and career advancement on employment satisfaction. The results were then presented in tabular summaries.

Research Results

The general characteristics of the members of the UASU, Egerton University Chapter, can be found in Lagat et al. (2014). Table 1 presents the contribution of the UASU to employee training and career advancement. Majority of the respondents possessed masters (42%) and doctorate (54%) degrees. First degree and higher national diploma holders were few. On academic rank, lecturers and senior lecturers were 40% and 38%, respectively. Associate Professors and Professors were, correspondingly, 3% and 1%.

The perception of the respondents on the frequency of employee training at the University as a consequence of the activities of the UASU was moderately high. Respectively, 16% and 64% of the respondents agreed that employee training had highly and moderately improved. Correspondingly, 17% and 1%, perceived it as low and very low. On the extent to which the activities of the UASU contributed to the University's investment in human capital, respectively, 4% and 28% of the respondents believed that there was no contribution or it was small. Correspondingly, 48% and 13% believed that the contribution was moderate and large.

Table 1: Contribution of the activities of the UASU to employee training and career advancement at Egerton University

| Variable | Level | Frequency | % |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Academic qualification | Higher National Diploma | 1 | 1 |
| | First degree | 1 | 1 |
| | Masters | 34 | 42 |
| | Postgraduate Diploma | 2 | 2 |
| | Doctorate | 44 | 54 |
| | Total | 82 | 100 |
| Academic rank | Principal/ Chief Technologist | 9 | 11 |
| | Assistant Lecturer/ Tutorial | 6 | 7 |
| | Fellow | | |
| | Lecturer | 33 | 40 |
| | Senior Lecturer | 31 | 38 |
| | Associate Professor | 2 | 3 |
| | Professor | 1 | 1 |
| | Total | 82 | 100 |

Table 1: Continued

| Variable | Level | Frequency | % |
|--|----------------|-----------|-----|
| Frequency of employee training | High | 13 | 16 |
| | Moderate | 52 | 64 |
| | Low | 14 | 17 |
| | very low | 1 | 1 |
| | Not sure | 2 | 2 |
| | Total | 82 | 100 |
| Extent to which the activities of the UASU contributed to the University's investment in human capital | None | 3 | 4 |
| | Small | 23 | 28 |
| | Moderate | 39 | 48 |
| | Large extent | 11 | 13 |
| | Very large | 4 | 5 |
| | Not negotiated | 1 | 1 |
| | No response | 1 | 1 |
| | Total | 82 | 100 |

Table 2: Means, modes and standard deviations for aspects of employee training and career advancement as contributed by the activities of the UASU at Egerton University (n=82)

| Parameter | Academic qualification | Academic rank | Frequency of employee training | Relevance of employee training | University's investment in human capital | Advocating and ensuring investment in human capital |
|-----------|------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Median | 4.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 |
| Mode | 4.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 |
| SD | 1.02 | 1.18 | 0.77 | 1.61 | 1.04 | 0.96 |
| Minimum | 1.00 | 1.00 | 2.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Maximum | 5.00 | 7.00 | 6.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 5.00 |

SD = standard deviation

The Friedman mean ranks for the variables explaining employee training and career advancement had a mean response of between 3.21 and 3.80 (Table 3), confirming that the activities of the UASU moderately improved employee training and career development. The activities of the UASU had a similar (Friedman test: $\chi^2 = 5.59$, $df = 3$, $P < 0.35$) impact on all aspects of employee training and career advancement, i.e., the training of its members, University's investment in human capital, academic qualification, academic rank, advocacy on investment in human capital and frequency of employee training.

Table 3: Mean ranks for the aspects explaining employee training and career advancement as contributed by the activities of the UASU at Egerton University (n=82)

| Aspect | Mean |
|--|------|
| Relevance of employee training and the realization of the University's mandate | 3.47 |
| Extent to which the activities of the UASU contributed to the University's investment in human capital | 3.21 |
| Advocating and ensuring investment in human capital | 3.65 |
| Academic qualification | 3.45 |
| Academic rank | 3.80 |
| Frequency of employee training | 3.43 |

Correlation analyses findings relating to the effect of employee training and career advancement indicated that relevance of employee training to the realization of the University's mandate ($r = -0.295$, $P < 0.01$) negatively and significantly affected effective mix of wages and personnel policies. The extent to which the activities of the UASU contributed to the University's investment in human capital ($r = 0.266$, $P < 0.05$), and advocating and ensuring investment in human capital ($r = 0.496$, $P < 0.01$) positively and significantly affected effective mix of wages and personnel policies.

Relevance of employee training to the realization of the University's mandate ($r = -0.256$, $P < 0.05$) and frequency of employee training ($r = -0.226$, $P < 0.05$) negatively and significantly affected morale, motivation and cooperation towards productivity. However, the extent to which overall activities of the UASU contributed to the University's investment in human capital ($r = 0.328$, $P < 0.01$) and their effort in advocating and ensuring investment in human capital ($r = 0.488$, $P < 0.01$) positively and significantly affected morale, motivation and cooperation towards productivity. Relevance of employee training to the realization of the University's mandate ($r = -0.237$, $P < 0.05$) and frequency of employee training ($r = -0.226$, $P < 0.05$) negatively and significantly affected organizational layout/working practices. The extent to which the activities of the UASU contributed to the University's investment in human capital ($r = 0.298$, $P < 0.01$), and advocating and ensuring investment in human capital ($r = 0.576$, $P < 0.01$) positively and significantly affected organizational layout/working practices. The efforts of the UASU in advocating and ensuring investment in human capital positively and significantly affected employment/ contract terms and conditions of service ($r = 0.451$, $P < 0.01$) and employee commitment to achieving organizational goals ($r = 0.485$, $P < 0.01$).

Discussion

The current study evaluated the contribution of the UASU to training, career advancement and employment satisfaction among its members at Egerton University. The findings indicated that the activities of the UASU generally contributed positively to these aspects in the University. The observations concur with those of Lynch (1992) and Harley et al. (1995) who reported unionization to be significantly and positively correlated with employee training and career

advancement. However, this was contrary to the observations of Duncan & Stafford (1980) who found a significant and negative correlation between union and employee training, and Lynch & Black (1998) who found no significant relationship between union and employee training.

The members of the UASU who had masters and doctorate degrees were the majority, and corresponded to the majority of the members who were lecturers and senior lecturers in rank. Studies have shown that academic qualification normally tied with academic ranking. The level of knowledge an individual employee has can be appraised in terms of academic qualifications, which signify the level of success that has been attained via the academic study of a discipline (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Brown et al., 2007). Other studies have also indicated that the probability of receiving on-the job training and the amount of work-related training received were higher for unionized workers than non-unionized ones (e.g., Lynch 1992; Harley et al., 1995). Usually, a union plays the role of ensuring that the planned training programmes were implemented (Harley et al., 1995).

Motivation is key to performance improvement, and the ability to perform depends on education, experience and training (Tachibanaki & Noda, 2000). The level of performance of employees relied not only on their actual skills but also on the level of motivation each person exhibits (Burney & Matherly, 2007). In the current study, the extent to which the activities of the UASU contributed to the University's investment in human capital positively and significantly affected employee morale, motivation and cooperation towards productivity. It has been reported that the presence of a union might influence investment in human capital in the workplace beyond the extra traditional effect on investment in physical capital or research and development (e.g., Lynch 1992; Harley et al., 1995). Aryee & Tan (1992) reported that employees who were committed to their profession attended more trainings and were committed to their careers to keep abreast with new developments in their profession.

In the present study, the efforts of the UASU in advocating and ensuring investment in human capital positively and significantly affected employment/ contract terms and conditions of service and employee commitment to achieving organizational goals. The contribution of the UASU to the University's investment in human capital was largely moderate to large. Majority of the respondents confirmed that the activities of the UASU impacted positively on training and career advancement of its members. The findings concur with those of Green et al. (1999) who found a positive impact of the presence of a union on training investments. Generally, improvement in employment/ contract terms and conditions attracted more qualified personnel (Lagat, 2012).

The current study confirmed that training and career advancement were important in contributing to employment satisfaction. Generally, well-trained employees were adequately mentored and coached because they were armed with the competencies that assisted them cope with day-to-day challenges of work, managing interpersonal relations and improving their interpersonal

effectiveness (Republic of Kenya, 2010). It is, therefore, essential that organizations appreciate the contributions of trade unions towards employment satisfaction and, consequently, enhanced employee performance.

Conclusions and Recommendations

From the findings in this study, it was evident that the activities of the UASU impacted equally on the training of its members, University's investment in human capital, academic qualification, academic rank, advocacy on investment in human capital and frequency of employee training. Overall, employee training and career advancement and, consequently, employee satisfaction in the University had improved due to the activities of the UASU. It is, therefore, necessary to engage the UASU in the activities of the University. Besides, the UASU should continue to impress on the University's management the need to enhance training and investment in human capital in order to boost effective and quality service delivery in the University.

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