

Strategic Human Resource Practices that Influence Management of Transition in Government Departments in Kenya

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Abstract: *This study focused on strategic human resources practices that influence the success or failure of transition management and survival of government department in Kenya. The study considered transition in government departments as a strategic issues that cannot be left to fate if the if efficient and effective service delivery has to be realized in performance management. The study identified strategic planning, organization structure, and succession planning, as the independent variables that determine successful transition management in government departments. A descriptive survey and focus group methods in KSG and NCA respectively were used to collect and analyze data in Kenya School of Government Senior management class 221 which had 58 participants and a group of 23 employees of NCA have discussed transition management in organizations. Purposive sampling techniques were used for descriptive statistics and content analysis used to analyze data and to present the findings. The study found that a focus on strategic planning, responsive organization structures, and succession planning, were important determinants of the successful transition management in government departments from one generation or form of government to the next. These findings are relevant individual managers and the governmental policy makers in Kenya who are involved in any transition management either in their daily duties or when successive government assumes office after general elections. The study recommended the need examine the extent to moral values, integrity, professionalism and staff development impact a smooth transition process.*

Keywords: *Transition, Strategic planning, Organization Structure, Succession planning, Government departments*

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

According to Schultz et al., (2011) strategic management is a process carried out at the top of the organization, which provides guidance, direction and boundaries for management. It is the formal process used to determine the strategies for the organization (Thompson et al., 2012). Public sector organizations engage in strategic management as reflected in a variety of policy making and administrative activities (McKernian, 2006). Structural factors, employee skills, technology in use, leadership styles, strategies and employees are internal factors that influence change implementation in an organization (Pearce & Robinson, 2007). Strategic management enables managers to give direction and scope of the organization over the long-term thereby achieving advantages for the organization through its reconfiguration of resources within a changing environment (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). Human beings are essentially social creatures who throughout history have created structures that shape their interaction and relationships in any given environment. When employees learn new skills, meet performance targets and contribute to organization growth, they improve service quality to the organization (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008).

According to Lumpkin, Sterer and Wright (2011), these structures have various manifestations that are often times overlapping for example the state and the church, family, governments and business organization. A government department is one that belongs to the government management structure to offer services to the public which is essentially a human need that has to be satisfied through government intervention. A government department can also be described as an agency in which one or more members of staff have a significant interest and commitment towards serving the government. In developing economies like Kenya government departments play a significant role in economic growth and social development. The way they manage transition from one administration to another determines effectiveness of service delivery which in turn impacts on citizens living standards.

Strategic management is set of decisions and actions used to formulate and implement strategies that will provide a competitively superior fit between the organization and its environment so as to achieve organizational goals and objectives (Daft, 2005). Successful transition of management in government, like business planning, is a process, not an event that determines the future progress of an organization.

According to Mirara (2013), the probability of success will be enhanced if the civil servants follow time-tested steps for making sound decisions as stipulated in various government documents. First, there is need to take stock of the organization to determine its current strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities and threats. Next, considerable time is spent with all stakeholders developing a shared vision, objectives, and goals and aligning these with Kenya Vision 2030. There is also need to develop a workable plan for transition, and implement the plan. Finally, it is important to constantly monitor progress, and if necessary modify or improve on the plan to keep the business on track to achieving the Kenya Vision 2030 (ROK, 2007). Succession within government agencies mainly involves retaining or changing of leadership and/or running of a department by other staff and within or with stakeholders.

While the issue of government or non-government succession within a particular department is not necessarily an indicator of organization size, it is nevertheless within the area of which, government department should focus in transition debate going by the country's constitution (ROK, 2010). Empirical studies show that most successful governments have proper procedures and practice in succession management in order to survive beyond the several generations after the exit of the founders (Astrachan and Dean, 2009). Poor succession plans combined with avoidance of internal conflicts often leaves festering disagreements among public servants that might have arisen as early as during the struggle for independence and may be still influencing transitions in government departments. According to Sharma (2004), the importance of transition in government business to global economies is paramount and their impact in global economy is evident in every form of business analysis at a firm-level when conducting research in any country. Governments play a vital role in the venture- creation process and opportunities to exploit resources by providing or withholding funding and support mechanism to exploit resources.

The challenge, as Karl and Robert (1999) noted that, to gain acceptance of continuous transition management throughout the organization so that innovations will travel and be seen as relevant to a wider range of purposes at hand. It is as a result that Tim (2003) observes that in such firms where a manager struggled with strategic intent of their firm or organizations, one had a strong sense of wanting to develop the firm to a point where the firm could be self-managing and allow one to step back and let go of the daily operations.

Governments have long-term objectives of passing the departments on to the next generation as the country develops. However, in reality, only about 30% of government departments are able to successfully transfer to the next administration. Furthermore, only about 42% of the previous departments remained in the current administration in line with constitutional requirements. There is a gap on managing transition of government ministries and staff from the previous administration (GoK Ministry of Finance, 2012) and the scene is totally different with the new administration under the Kenya constitution 2010. It may also be simply because of inconsistency of goals and objectives from one administration to another or change in government policies as guided by the constitution.

In many other instances, however, it appears to be a lack of understanding of the underlying issues, a failure to communicate, and a lack of effective planning that result in the inability to successfully make the transition management effective. Planning involves communication, which is often difficult and strained in government departments and it involves openly discussing issues that often are not talked about such as finances and space. In addition, the previous office bearers are often reluctant to release control, and may be somewhat afraid of retirement or consequences of what might happen later on (they may view it as a loss of identity, or even a step closer to death). Finally, transition management often involves one or more officers running the office, while awaiting instructions on what to and whom to work through and within order to deliver service. A strategically well managed department is the one in which budgeting, performance management, human resource development, program management, and other management processes are guided by a strategic agenda that has been developed with a buy-in from key actors and communicated widely within the organization and among external constituencies (Chiuri, 2016).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Government departments in which strategic decisions and operational plans are made for the transfer and replacement of management are under the influence of the government of day. Government department is also an agency of business in which the property is completely available to government and decisions on how to deal with public assets is a strategic consideration. They hold a particularly significant position in mature world economies and are a sign of a healthy market economy.

However, according to Kinuthia Wamwangi (2013) some of the challenges facing these departments include, harmonization and realignment of constitutional institutions roles; dealing with outstanding debts and liabilities and lack of capacity in planning and budgeting under the devolved system of government(ICPAK,2013). Muthuiya (2004) established that organizations were challenged to implement change due to lack of effective planning. Obonyo and Onyango 2012 identified that most organizations cannot implement change due to systemic and individual challenges (Mwando & Muturi, 2016).

According to Hnatek (2012), a typical problem of organizations is paternalism. Where the organization is paternalistic, the organization founder concentrates power, permanently monitors other participating members and resists passing leading positions in the organization to the new administration. One of the main challenges of governance in Kenya in post constitutional promulgation has been the inability to appreciate the fundamental shift in organizational management that has taken place since the promulgation the Kenya constitution (Nyamwamu, 2010). Timbe and Sira (2013) study findings indicated that succession management process face challenges from various factors including political leadership transition management. These strategic HR practices on succession especially changes in leadership leads to distortions in the implementation of strategic human resource management plans when key management positions are filled with no due regard to established process and prior investments for succession purpose (Timbe & Sira, 2013)

Leach (2011) also notes that typically it is the founder who articulates the mission and goals of the organization which can also be the case with the change in government system. In government departments, trust, can however be taken too far if it becomes a substitute for professional management, there are overlapping interests between individuals as well as the old and new administration which affect service delivery to the public. According to Nyamwamu (2010) an example of such challenge is the provincial administration has already restructured the provincial administration but essentially retained a highly administrative and non-participatory governance system which deprives the nation the opportunity to reform the Kenyan State in a fundamental sense from an anti-people to a responsive government.

This is a clear indication that the formation of department structures in government will be a challenge based on the kind of government, leadership and the relationship that may develop in government. The inability to manage transition from one form to the other or one generation to another, may lead to termination of services or consequent weakening of the economic situation. This has been found to cause a negative impact on employment, a decrease in the gross domestic product (GDP) and also bring about changes to the social climate of the market (Hnatek, 2012).

Empirical studies indicate that succession-planning initiatives fall short of their intent (Corporate Leadership Council, 1998). "Bench strength," as it is commonly called, remains a stubborn problem in many if not most organizations. Research further indicates that companies which report the greatest gains from succession planning feature high ownership by the CEO and high degrees of engagement among the larger leadership team. Despite the contribution of government departments in creating employment opportunities while functioning as drivers of economic growth, many government departments collapse or do not transit from one administration to the next smoothly due to transitional challenges. This study is therefore examined the influence of planning and organizational structure in government departments in Kenya.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to examine strategic practices that influence management of transition in government departments in Kenya; a survey of Senior Management Class 221 in Kenya School of Government Lower Kabete and subsequent focus group discussion in NCA followed to support the

survey method in KSG. The specific objectives were; to assess the influence of strategic planning in management, organization structure and explore the importance of succession planning of transition in government departments.

4. REVIEWED LITERATURE

4.1. Organization and System Theories

Organization theory is a way of thinking about organizations and organizational learning theory emphasis on organization skilled in creating, acquiring and transforming knowledge.

This behaviour reflect the new knowledge and insights that organizations have acquired which is critical component for competitiveness in a dynamic environment (Wheelen& Hunger, 2012) Organizational theories have focused on organizations in the perspectives of production, administration, bureaucracy, motivation and systems that literate through communication for the organization to achieve its objectives. Classical and neo-classical theories elaborated the various formations of organization structure that would fit an organization from hierarchical structure in administration; bureaucracy and Human Relations theory developed on motivation of social relationship do support the family perspective of having one organization structure. Organizations are social entities that are goal-directed, are designed as deliberately structured and coordinated activity systems and are linked to the external environment. Organizations are made of people and their relationships with one another.

According to Tripon and Dodu (2010) Ludwig von Bertalanffy formulated the principles of the general theory of systems, in 1950. According to his definition, a system is “a total of elements that are interacting” an organized unitary whole composed of two or more interdependent parts, components, or subsystems and delineated by identifiable boundaries (Tripon & Dodu, 2010). The systems theory emphasizes that the overlap among the three sub-systems often creates conflict among actors because of different perspectives on organizational issues Poza (2009). A system is a set of interrelated parts that functions as a whole to achieve a common purpose. A system function by acquiring inputs from external environment transforms them in the same way and discharge output back to the same environment (Alawanch & kloub, 2013). Marion and Uhl-Bien (2001) advise leaders to foster interaction in such situations to enable system participants to work through conflicting constraints to develop collaborative solutions that meet individual and organizational needs. They argue that solutions that emerge through interaction among the players in systems (adaptive agents in complexity theory) are likely to be more innovative than ones developed by a command-and-control leader, who is constrained by his/her individual capabilities.

Further, the emergence of common understanding through such interaction leads to a degree of dynamic stability underneath the randomness (the edge of chaos) of such complex systems. Marion and Uhl-Bien (2001) also touch briefly on how complex systems evolve over time (phase space in complexity theory), another key principle of complexity theory, and advise leaders to be cognizant of changes taking place. Every organization has a system; any system needs information in order to survive, in order to perform successfully.

4.2. Strategic Planning

According to Wheelen and Hunger (2012), Strategic planning or long range planning is concerned with decisions with developing a corporation mission, vision, objectives, strategies and policies that guide organizational management. The strategic planning determines: what an organization’s wants to achieve, usually expressed as strategic objectives, and how to direct the organization and its resources towards achieving these objectives over the next several years, usually expressed as strategic action (Chiuri, 2016). Strategic planning usually requires that decisions to been taken about an organization’s vision and mission, target customer or client group, the kind of programmes to develop and offer, the resources needed to deliver successfully people, money, expertise, relationships, facilities, and a realistic assessment of how much resources will be available over time.

According to Bryson (1995) Strategic planning can help private business organizations anticipate and respond effectively to their dramatically changing environments. Strategic planning is 'examining the future, deciding what needs to be done and developing a plan of action'. Henri Fayol (1841-1925), the work of Fayol still endures today; including planning what he looked as prime responsibilities of management that involve strategic planning, organizing, command, co-ordination and control.

Strategic planning helps determine the direction and scope of an organization including transition over the long term, matching its resources to its changing environment and, in particular, its markets, customers and public, so as to meet stakeholder expectations. Therefore, managers in all organizations are continuously engaged in activities that are in line with strategic planning in order to actualize their missions focusing on the organization vision.

Johnson and Scholes (1993), strategic planning is the process by which managers evaluate the future prospects of the firm and decide on appropriate strategies to achieve long-term objectives including that of a nation which is a complex firm of social economic development.

According to Henry Mintzberg (2002), strategic planning approach involves 5Ps and each P stands for a different approach to strategy. He gave the meaning of the Ps as; Plan, Ploy, Pattern, Position and Perspective. As a plan, strategy needs to be developed in advance and with purpose. As a ploy, strategy is a means of outsmarting the competition. With strategy as a Pattern, we learn to appreciate that what was successful in the past can lead to success in the future. With position, strategy is about how the organization relates to its competitive environment, and what it can do to make its products unique in the marketplace. This perspective emphasizes the substantial influence that organizational culture and collective thinking can have on strategic decision making within an organization. Understanding and using each element helps in developing a robust, practical and achievable government owned departmental strategy and design of systems to ensure effective coordination of employees across departments. Government departments are expected to set up plans that will ensure successive processes of service delivery as well as promote a positive organizational culture that embraces diversity in human resource management.

According to Schmidt, Enock, and Laycock (2009), planning is, today an essential discipline, a vital, systematic and ongoing process that enables as far as is possible organizations and government agencies to plan the use and application of their resources, skills, knowledge and competences in order to achieve their organizational missions, goals and objectives in environments of ongoing, sometimes turbulent, change. It is especially in times of high levels of change that strategic planning places an organization in a more agile state, a state of 'preparedness', more attuned to market and other external conditions and therefore the better prepared to flex or even substantially change their strategic thrusts and operational plans at local as well as at higher corporate levels when fundamental, sometimes structural economic, political and social change occurs. The development of human resource in government is critical to ensure any progress in strategic planning to meet the demand of efficiency in service delivery.

4.3. Organizational Structure

The term organization structure refers to the formal configuration between individuals and groups regarding the allocation of tasks, responsibilities, and authority within the organization (Galbraith, 2009; Greenberg, 2011). Organization structure will determine the function the extent and scope of responsibilities in an organization. According to Smith (2011), as the organization grows, change in leadership needs of the organization require different skills to navigate through various phases of growth. Government organization structures tend to be complex and rigid, which makes them more difficult to manage transition into new structures Smith (2011). According to Mintzberg (2009), organizations can be differentiated along three basic dimensions one of them being the coordinating mechanism, that is, the major method the organization uses to coordinate its activities and the type of decentralization used, that is, the extent to which the organization involves subordinates in the decision-making process.

According to Lunenburg, (2012) that the strategy an organization adopts and the extent to which it practices that strategy result in five structural configurations: simple structure, machine bureaucracy, professional bureaucracy, divisionalized form, and adhocracy. The change of organization structure immediately initiates changes in the organization culture. New departments are born and subsequently new groups of people emerge to create a different entity. Within the new structure, organization members have to find new ways of communication and interaction with colleagues (Greenberg, 2011). According to Heidrich and Anetta, (2009), this leads to culture change the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization is affected by the surrounding environment and the dynamics of such environment as well as the degree of complexity of the organization structure (Alawanch & Kloub, 2013)

4.4. Succession Planning

According to Wilkerson (2007) Succession planning in the private sector has been more formalized than in the public sector, which has begun to look at it systematically only recently. Succession planning is the means by which an organization prepares for and replaces managers, executives and other key employees who leave their organization’s continued and future success.

It includes processes such as how the organization identifies and recruits successors, how it manages transitions from one executive to another and how it develops successors (Wilkerson, 2007). Succession planning is a process for identifying and developing internal people with the potential to fill key business leadership positions in the company. Succession planning increases the availability of experienced and capable employees that are prepared to assume these roles as they become available. Taken narrowly, "replacement planning" for key roles is the heart of succession planning.

According to Rothwell (2001) succession planning is a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement. Succession planning can also be defined as, a process which ensures the continued effective performance of an organization by establishing a process to develop and replace key staff over time King (2005). In this context succession planning encompasses not only top management but also a number of other factors. It can cover issues such as the procedures necessary for a successful transfer, legal and financial considerations, psychological factors, leadership development, and exit strategies (Ip & Jacobs, 2006). Succession planning can also involve identifying “high potential” employees and including them in special training and development for future management roles. The practice of succession planning is key to sustaining an organization’s initiatives and performance and to ensuring it meets its. One of the biggest challenges in the public sector is sustaining innovation and programs in the face of changing administrations, politics and priorities (Wilkerson, 2007)

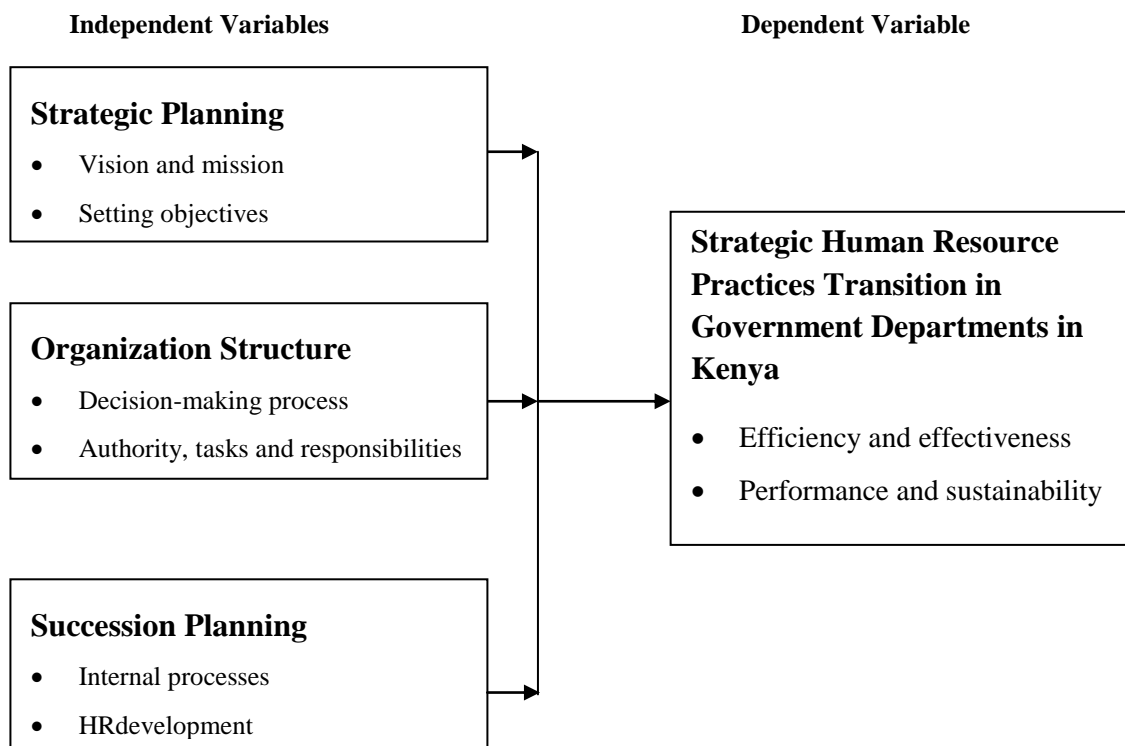


Figure1. Conceptual Framework

5. METHODOLOGY

The study population comprised of 58 senior government officers attending SMC 221 class in Kenya School of Management Sept-October, 2013 session and later in between June 2015 to December 2015a 23 member focused group discussion during internal training programmes in NCA. It was considered useful to take this approach in order to bring out the common challenges applicable to government departments in Kenya. It was a purposive sampling technique was used to collect data

from the participant in order to achieve objectives of the study. Data analysis method was used in view of the qualitative nature of much of the data collected from primary source, but a triangulation approach was adopted in the final analysis. Descriptive statistics used in form of diagrams, charts and tables were also used to summarize the findings.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

On strategic planning, results revealed that majority of the respondents (44%) agreed to high extent that strategic planning influences transition management in government departments. The study further inquired on the reasons why strategic planning does influence management of transitioning government departments. The respondents cited various resources such as organizational goals, objectives, mission and vision for future development. Most respondents (88%) agreed that strategic planning does influence management of transition in government departments. The discussion group also revealed that future of strategic planning and implementation of strategic plans will be important in deciding the future performance of government departments in service delivery to the public.

On organization structure in government departments, most respondents (51%) agreed to high extent that organization structure influence management of transition in government departments, and another 35% agreed to a moderate extent that organization structure influence management of transition in government departments. According to Chiuri, (2016) Strategic management practices do not occur when top executives micromanage operations to ensure fundamental strategies or policies are strongly endorsed as being critical for improving an organization's performance over the long run. The study revealed that 7% agreed to a low extent that organization structure influence transition management in government departments while 7% did not agree that organization structure influence management of transition in government departments. The focus group discussion also did agree that organization structure is key in transition management. The study shows that organization structure is important because it shows the process of communication, management levels, unity of command; capacity building, proper service delivery, smooth transition and job development.

Most respondents (45%) agreed to high extent that succession planning does influence management of transition in government departments. Another 37% were of the view that succession planning does influence management of transition to a moderate extent. This is in contrast to 9% who said succession planning affects management of transition to a low extent while another 9% said it does not influence. The respondents cited various reasons such as team building, frequent monitoring and evaluation and proper management as reasons that make it important to consider succession planning in organizations

7. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that strategic planning is an important management practice that highly influences management of transition in government departments. Strategic planning will create the vision, mission, goals and long-term objectives of government departments that assist in delivering service to the public in line with the Kenya Vision 2030 as a broader strategic plan. Organization structure influences management of transition because it outlines the various levels of management, communication channels and human resource necessary to run the department. The structure sets out the processes and systems that will be used to deliver services to the public. Therefore a good dynamic organizational structure will demonstrate the capacity and capabilities of departments to deal with management of transition. The study established succession planning is important because it does prepare public servants to acquire necessary knowledge, skills, and have competencies managing transitions in the department and avoid fear of filling managerial positions in government departments. Most of the respondents (82%) were in agreement that mentoring, coaching and training would promote effective management of transition in government departments.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study therefore recommends that government departments adopt a progressive strategic planning as a tool to aid in the management of transition. This will enable them to respond to the changing environment to make them competitive and deal with organization dynamics and capabilities that influence smooth management of transition in government departments. This study thus recommends that government departments embrace dynamic organization structures that are dynamic and flexible

that will aid in the management of transition in government departments. These structures should be flat or less formal with minimum bureaucratic processes that would affect smooth transition. The study recommends that government departments deliberately engage in succession planning to ensure they have a pool of competent and knowledgeable personnel that will guarantee continuity of services when transition takes place. Succession plans will be the key element that will facilitate smooth transition in government departments

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