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Strategic Human Resource Planning and Service Delivery in County Governments in Kenya

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Strategic human resource management in public sector organizations enables governance arrangements that promote efficient service delivery. However, service delivery in county governments in Kenya gets stymied by both human resource and funding constraints. Due to contextual gaps in the strategic human resource management practises in county governments in Kenya, the study evaluated the role played by strategic human resource planning on service delivery in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive design and systematically examined the HRM practises by sampling 140 respondents (47 county secretaries, 47 county directors of HRM and 46 municipality managers from municipalities based at the county headquarters of 46 counties) through interviews and questionnaires. The respondents were selected based on their operational and functional human resource management roles in various units in the 47 counties. The research instrument was validated through a review by a panel of supervisors and a pilot testing exercise. The qualitative reports indicated that the county governments can attract qualified and competent persons with critical skill sets to match the various job descriptions and optimally sustain service provisions at the county level. The correlation analysis indicated that service delivery positively correlated with strategic HR planning practises ($r = 0.6510$, $p < 0.05$) at 0.05 significance levels, while the regression analysis indicated that strategic HR planning practises explains about 41.61 % variance in service delivery with an effect size ($\beta_1 = 0.6451$ ($t = 8.97$, $p < 0.05$)). Based on the findings, the study concludes that strategic human resource planning practises hold a positive and significant potential impact on service delivery in county governments in Kenya. The study recommends proactive planning and proper structuring of the county workforce based on knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the managers of public sector organizations have recognized the role that Human Resource Management (HRM) plays in shaping the strategic direction of government and public agencies (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015). The modern approach in HRM, the strategic HRM views HR as assets in which public sector organizations should invest. The first step in this modern approach is to conceive personnel and human capital as organizational assets (Jacobson, Sowa & Lambright, 2014). Therefore, government departments and other public agencies should move away from the administrative focus and take a more operational and strategic role in deploying human resources throughout the public service (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015).

There is a growing recognition that strategic HRM practices positively impact service delivery in public sector organizations as this allows government and public sector agencies to leverage their human capital to deliver services efficiently and effectively (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015). Strategic HRM enables an organization to manage change, facilitate improvements in service delivery, and provide leadership and managerial skills for a sustained transformation of the public service (ElSherbiny, 2020). Furthermore, strategic human resource management (SHRM) helps align employee skills with the organisation's goals (Eneh & Awara, 2016) and links human resource management functions to organisational growth through the human resource processes (Sinha & Mishra, 2014).

Human resource management (HRM) approaches take a strategic and coherent approach when it

values the organization's most valuable assets, people (Akuoko, 2009). Fundamentally, SHCM involves integrating HRM with the overall strategic direction of an organization to align the HR needs with strategic goals to ensure sufficiency in human capital to deliver a high level of performance (Jacobson, Sowa & Lambright, 2014). The modernization of the existing workforce requires a robust workforce planning process that integrates future workforce needs so that capabilities are developed earlier. Typically, workforce planning involves identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to develop appropriate interventions to mitigate future risks (Ghosh et al., 2016).

Effective HRM approaches in the public sector and government agencies are essential for robust workforce planning against dynamic environmental conditions (Ghosh et al., 2016). The implementation of workforce planning models in public sector organizations often includes gap analysis, supply/demand analysis and solution analysis (Johnson et al., 2022). These steps align the organizational workforce with its strategic direction and ensure that talented individuals are attracted, developed, and retained, (Cho, Choi & Choi, 2023). Workforce planning in different public sector organization vary from country to country, including centralized and decentralized or hybrid approaches, mandatory and elective processes, one-time and ongoing or institutionalized efforts, and dynamic and static approaches (Cho et al., 2023).

The sub-national governments represent a vibrant area that can be used to examine the capacity of public sector organizations to leverage HR in their functions. Human resources in SNGs vary in terms of the level of resources devoted to HRM

and their overall staffing structure (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015). The functional requirements associated with SHCM are going to vary across government jurisdictions, based on the needs and existing capacity of the government (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015).

Devolution in Kenya is a two-tier national and county government with integrated urban areas (towns and municipalities) drawing their legal mandate from the county government structure (Rutto, Minja & Kosimbei, 2022). The county governments are tasked with agricultural development, county planning, health services, trade development, pollution control, local transport, road infrastructure, animal control and welfare, county public works and services, village polytechnics, pre-primary education, craft centres, firefighting services, disaster management, and promotion of governance among others to the local levels (Rutto et al., 2022).

Staffing shortages impact service delivery in the sub-national county governments in Kenya due to high absenteeism rates, low staff motivation and staff misallocation. In the agricultural sector, the number of technical staff has declined as well as extension services offered. In urban environments, technical urban staff such as planners, surveyors, land economists and engineers are in short supply in some counties (Muwonge *et al.*, 2022). At the individual county levels, the challenges impeding service delivery include; underperformance (GoK, 2014), poor working conditions (Hussein, 2018), corruption, larceny, and dishonesty (Odour, 2013), staff absenteeism, harassment, extortion, other informal payments and governance issues among others (Miranda, 2017).

Devolution in Kenya has not led to a major redistribution of services but has significantly expanded the levels and access to services in health, early childhood education and water. Healthcare infrastructural facilities have been expanded with a significant increase in immunization rates countrywide; while the agricultural extension services have declined,

notable improvements in the provision and access to input subsidies have been realised (Muwonge *et al.*, 2022). The county governments have enlarged the wage bill consuming 41.7 % of the total expenditure (Kilelo, Beru & Nassiuma, 2015) which is against the provisions of Regulation 25 (1) (b) of the Public Finance which provides for a maximum of 35% budgetary allocation for personnel emoluments (GoK, 2020).

Problem Statement

In parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, many sub-national governments face resource constraints relating to financial as well as human resource capabilities (Jacobson & Sowa, 2016). Due to financial constraints, sub-national governments are not able to offer competitive compensation packages to attract and retain qualified and competent personnel (Ghosh et al., 2016) and this has a consequent effect on service delivery (Gul, Maidanwal & Khaliqi, 2020). Within the local context, service delivery in the county governments in Kenya is wanting and unsatisfactory as indicated by several authors (See Nduta et al., 2017; Onchari et al., 2014 among others). Further, there are ambiguities in financing and service provision. In addition, service delivery is impeded by the failure in the transfer of the devolved functions by the national government (Muwonge *et al.*, 2022). The influence of strategic human resource management practices has been widely researched but there are few empirical studies on how human resource planning influences service delivery in public sector organizations (Gul et al., 2020). Information on workforce planning efforts in public sector organizations in developing countries is still scarce because of the nature and kind of approaches that can be adopted utilize (Cho et al., 2023). Due to contextual and conceptual gaps in the strategic human resource management practises in county governments in Kenya, the study evaluated the effect of strategic human resource planning on service delivery in sub-national governments in Kenya.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The human capital theory was first postulated by Becker (1962) who posits that investment in human capital in the form of on-the-job training tends to raise future employee productivity when compared to school training. The human capital theory emphasises employee knowledge, competencies and attributes which are incorporated into employees' ability to generate economic value at an individual and organisational level (Mihm-Herold, 2010). Human capital is a unit-level resource that is linked to the organisational ability to generate economic value from the people (Ployhart & Hale, 2014). The economic utility of human capital is underpinned by an individual's attributes, interests and traits which are simply referred to as knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) (Boon *et al.*, 2018) and thus, an individual's education and training plays a critical role for human resource in an organisation (Crook *et al.*, 2011).

Human capital is heterogeneously distributed inside the firm and in turn, contextual factors such as causal ambiguity, social complexity and specificity within an organisation can impede the flow of and duplication of stock in the human capital (Boon *et al.*, 2018). Thus, a system of HR practices involves a socially complex process that is causally ambiguous and that makes them inimitable to the competitors. In this manner, HR systems create and sustain valuable human capital with the potential to increase organisational effectiveness in the marketplace (Boon *et al.*, 2018).

The human capital theory asserts that outlays on human resources in terms of training and development may be costly, but an organisation should consider it as an investment rather than a sunk cost since it increases employee skills, and knowledge for the performance of organisational tasks (Schultz, 1961). The human capital theory views human capital in unique and specific terms, such as the possession of a particular technical skill with a limited industrial application and therefore the rate of return on human capital is

dependent on individual output (Kuzminov, Sorokin & Froumin, 2019). Although human capital can be substituted, it is not transferable like other factors of production such as capital, land, or labour. Thus, employees require investment in the form of training to enhance their access to knowledge and skills as they are viewed as capital which enhances successful strategy implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a different context, the human resource management practices in public sector organizations take varied perspectives. For instance, Rosiadi, Setiawan and Moko (2018) examined the public sector organizations in Malaysia based on a competency framework. The qualitative study used in-depth interviews and the findings indicated that competency human resource management practices are found in the recruitment and selection process, career management and competency development. The Australian Public Service (APS) uses HR analytics to forecast workforce demand and supply and create a long-term workforce planning strategy (Cho, Choi & Choi, 2023). This has allowed the APS to shift the focus from operational processing to a capacity-building approach through workforce planning strategies (Cho, Choi & Choi, 2023). The oil and gas industry in Mexico has also implemented a workforce planning program to identify skills gaps among public sector employees.

Jacobson and Sowa (2015) examined the municipal governments in North Carolina and Colorado on how these sub-national governments are implementing strategic human capital management (SHCM) practices. The results indicated that there is a progressive move towards SHCM practices but with significant variations in different contexts. Some SNGs have attached greater importance to SHCM practices in decision-making and the perceived importance of the HR function. Awofeso (2010) examined the impact of workforce planning on healthcare delivery in remote regions in Nigeria. The study observed that the deteriorating health conditions

and limited effective delivery of clinical services in the public health management systems are attributable to the inadequate training of appropriate cadres of health staff, and burnout of overworked and underpaid rural-based clinicians.

Tiwari and Pareek (2012) evaluated the service gaps at public health hospitals in India based on workforce availability. The findings indicated that workforce planning was skewed in that there was a high degree of dissatisfaction among the clinicians in terms of compensation and promotion. There were service gap differences in healthcare services with primary healthcare centres lacking essential equipment. Madichie and Nyakang'o (2016) explored the demographic challenges faced by the public sector organizations in Kenya. The findings indicated that many public sector organizations face ageing workforce challenges due to a lack of workforce planning within the HRM structures. Ubah and Ibrahim (2021) examined the influence of strategic human resource planning on the performance of public sector organizations in Nigeria. The findings observed a strong correlation between workforce planning and performance of the public sector organizations.

In the private sector setting, Khawaldah (2020) examined the influence of HRM practices on service delivery in the Jordanian banking industry. The study observed that workforce planning has a statistically significant effect on the quality of services provided to customers. In Nigeria, Dialoke and Duru (2017) evaluated the effects of workforce planning on the performance of selected media houses in Imo State, Nigeria. The findings indicated that workforce planning is significantly associated with organisational performance. In the US, Groves (2019) examined the impact of succession management practices on the performance of US hospitals. The findings indicated that succession management practices

are strongly associated with multiple hospital performance metrics. Rotich and Kiiru (2021) examined the effect of succession planning on employee performance in the Ministry of ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs in Nairobi City County. The findings indicate that succession planning has a strong, positive, and significant effect on employee performance. Based on the preceding reviews, the study hypothesized that:

H₀: Strategic human resource planning does not significantly influence service delivery in county governments in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

Conceptualized, the study operationalized strategic human resource planning into three interrelated components; workforce planning, labour forecasting and succession planning (Ayandibu & Kaseeram, 2020). service delivery at the sub-national government levels as measured by the exploration of needs, the development of policies, plans and strategies, the prioritisation of service delivery and the assessment of service performance (Humphreys, 1998)

The study adopted descriptive research with a target population of 163 respondents comprising 47 county secretaries, 47 HRM directors and 69 municipality managers. The choice of respondents was based on their operational and functional HRM responsibilities at various levels. A sample of 140 respondents (47 county secretaries, 47 HRM directors and 46 municipality managers from headquarters-based municipalities in 46 counties (Nairobi City County does not have a municipality manager). The study mainly used a semi-structured questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The instrument was validated by a school faculty and then submitted for a reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7) indicating its reliability as shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis for the Study

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Service delivery	12	0.858
Strategic Human resource planning	18	0.887

Data was prepared in several steps that included data serialisation, data verification and checks before data was coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Science version 20.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed qualitatively (thematic and narrative analysis) and quantitatively (descriptive and inferential statistics) with the aid of a Statistical package (Statistical Package for Social Science Version 20). First, the study used the geometric mean to reduce the items of the variable into a single numerical index used for further analysis. The study then employed Pearson Correlation analysis and linear regression model to establish the nature of the relationship between the study variables. The linear regression model took the following format; $\text{service delivery} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{strategic human resource planning}) + \varepsilon$.

The study carried out the diagnostic tests and the results indicated that all the assumptions were met thus, the regression analysis was employed during the hypothesis testing.

RESULTS

The output of the qualitative analysis was grouped into several themes that include; an increase in human resource capacities and other organisational capabilities such as teamwork and other accrued benefits which tend to improve employee and organisational outcomes. Most of the counties affirmed that strategic human resource planning improved the efficiencies in HR planning systems. This is done with consultation with the public service board, annual departmental reviews of the organogram, and review of strategic plans. The excerpts from the interviews are as follows:

In Isiolo County, Informant 1 affirmed that

"...HR planning impacts positively on service delivery in that well-trained HR will be able to match the workplace demands and as a result, meet public expectations. HR planning helps in managing capacity building, succession planning and the hiring of the appropriate staff".

From Kirinyaga County, Informant 1 avowed that "...HR planning helps in the ensuring continuity of workflows, teamwork and introduces new capacities to the staff and thus improve on service delivery." From Kilifi County, Informant 1 inferred that HR planning strategy plays a paramount role in recruitment because it is through such initiatives that the county can hire skilled and quality HR and hence improve and enhance service delivery.

In Murang'a County, Informant 3 affirmed that "...HR planning places employees with the right skills in the appropriate tasks, and helps in the development of individual staffers through skills acquisition." Informant 2 highlighted that the HR policies would facilitate the effective functioning of HR planning strategies and quipped that "...Human resource planning is the backbone to the organisational growth and development." The informants from Bomet County inferred that HR planning assists the county in improving staff productivity and employing the staff with requisite skills while observing that HR planning enables the county to evaluate the current and future requirements of human resources and examine the skill capacity gaps within the staff.

In Meru County, Informant 1 avowed that "...Correct recruitment process and placement results in efficient and effective service delivery." Informant 3 observed that

"...Having correct personnel and continuous training both in service and attendance ensures that the incoming personnel acquires the needed competencies for the completion of the task at hand. The county government invites consultants from time to time to review the structures as well as involve the public service board."

In Kiambu County, informants avowed that the County government restructures its organogram to be aligned to the five-year CIDP which informs the strategic plans and the annual work plans and therefore matches the current needs of the Kiambu County citizens.

"...Human resource planning ensures that the county has optimum number of staff with the requisite skills to enable the achievement of organisational objectives."

From Embu County, informants affirmed that a lack of HRP leads to over-hiring or under-hiring which leads to either high wage bills or poor performance. Respondent 3 avowed that *"...Labour skills and technology keep on changing hence the need to review organisation structure to match the labour demands with organisational needs."* Informant 3 asserted that *"...Effective HR planning helps in unlocking the potential of the county workforce and identifying the gaps in HR."* In Marsabit County, Informant 2 affirmed that HR planning strategy helps in enhancing an enduring managerial and leadership continuum in the public service and bridging service delivery gaps. If embraced, HR planning would keep management of staffing levels with key requisite knowledge, skills, and experience. It also helps in succession management so that offices are manned continuously.

From Mandera County, Informant 2 averred that

"... Proper planning in terms of recruitment of the required set of employees is the foundation stone upon which an organisation is set to take off. However, if this planning is

not properly done such an institution is doomed to fail. Human Resource planning, therefore, is an initial stage in which an institution is properly aligned hence impact on service delivery."

The output from the quantitative analysis is presented in Table 2 and as indicated, the respondents largely agreed that the service delivery was good ($M = 3.4268$, $SD = 1.0216$) but lagging in its implementation since the responses border on neutrality as opposed to affirmation. Strategic human resource planning was measured by workforce planning ($M = 3.2116$, $SD = 1.1628$), labour force forecasting ($M = 3.3725$, $SD = 1.1286$) and succession planning ($M = 3.3174$, $SD = 1.1309$). In terms of workforce planning, the county HR policy falls short in detailing the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities but the recruitment systems support the organizational objectives. The aspects of labour forecasting fall short of bridging skillset gaps but the market holds a sufficient pool of qualified individuals. Age distribution is insufficient to meet the ideal staffing requirements and HR information systems are underutilized in the management of human capital. On the aspect of succession planning, most staff attend leadership training programmes but there are few mentoring opportunities for junior staff.

Table 2: Summary of descriptive analysis

Variable	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Service delivery	12	3.4268	1.0216
Workforce planning	6	3.2116	1.1628
Labour forecasting	6	3.3725	1.1286
Succession planning	6	3.3174	1.1309

The study tested the H_0 : Strategic human resource planning does not significantly influence service delivery in county governments in Kenya using

linear regression analysis to determine the influence of the human resource processes on firm performance shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Results

Variable	r	R ²	F	Stn β	t
Strategic human resource planning	0.6450	0.4161	80.54*	0.6451	8.97*

*Significance at 0.05

The results shown in Table 3 indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in explaining the variations in

service delivery in the sub-national governments in Kenya. The model indicated that strategic HR planning practices explain about 41.61% of

service delivery with an effect size of 0.6451. The results show that strategic human resource planning has a statistically significant effect on service delivery in county governments in Kenya. This result indicates that a positive unit – change in the strategic planning components (through positive and proactive improvements in workforce planning, labour forecasting and succession planning) leads to a 0.6451 unit – change in service delivery (a more positive outlook in the way public service is delivered).

Based on this result, the study rejected the null hypothesis that *Strategic human resource planning has no significant influence on service delivery in county governments in Kenya* and concluded that the human resource planning strategy has a significant influence on service delivery in county governments in Kenya.

DISCUSSION

The study reported a positive and statistically significant effect of strategic human resource planning on service delivery in county governments in Kenya. The basis for explaining the positive effect is drawn from empirical and theoretical literature which links strategic human resource planning to service delivery. First, the findings from the study are in agreement with empirical studies linking organizational effectiveness to human resource planning (Sunday & Paul, 2015; Dialoke & Duru, 2017; Aslam *et al.*, 2013) and succession planning (Groves, 2019, Najam & Siddiqui, 2020) and labour force forecasting (Al-Qudah, Obeidat & Shrouf, 2020; Seyyedjavadin & Zadeh, 2019). The impact of a human resource planning strategy tends to optimise the utilization of the potential of the organisational HR capital and support and meet the business as well as strategic goals (Chakraborty & Biswas, 2019).

Second, the effect of workforce planning includes the intensification of the talent pool of promotable employees thus ensuring that there is a continuation of qualified individuals to fill the key positions (Jacobson, 2010). Effective workforce planning helps prioritise the current and future workforce needs (Al-Frijawy *et al.*, 2019) as well

as integrating employee development activities to provide a continuous supply of motivated, experienced staff who are ready to fill key positions when required (Jacobson, 2010). Human resource planning strategy tends to improve human capacity for task execution and these linkages have an ensuing effect on workforce planning and organisational effectiveness (Al-Qudah *et al.*, 2020). In particular, HR planning programs, namely, staffing plans and succession plans, yield better results in addressing organisational strategic objectives (Chakraborty & Biswas, 2019).

Workforce planning aids an organisation's workforce in investing in employee training, career, and productivity (Jacobson, 2010). Workforce and succession planning allow organisations to adapt to a dynamic environment, and build HR capabilities to support strategic initiatives and business strategy (Jacobson, 2010). However, HR planning is only effective within the organisational context and applies in light of the specific objectives (Seyyedjavadin & Zadeh, 2019).

Third, the study was underpinned by the human capital theory. Theoretically, human capital is largely the knowledge, skills, attitudes, aptitudes, and other acquired traits that contribute to value creation through service provision (Goode, 1959). Human resource planning in an organisation deals with human capital and requires not only strategic objectives but also the adoption and implementation of HR programmes such as staffing and training (Aslam *et al.*, 2013). Workforce planning systematically evaluates the composition of an organisational workforce to determine the current and future demands of the organisation (Jacobson, 2010).

The human capital theory also links investments in HR planning with the firm's capacity for the planned development and deployment of competencies for the achievement of organisational objectives (Døving & Nordhaug, 2010). Strategic HRP tends to improve employee satisfaction, organisational reputation, as well as cost efficiencies and increase organisational

productivity, (Al-Qudah et al., 2020) and helps allocate HR to the organisation's activities, cost control, and provide support for other HR plans and strategies (Al-Frijawy, Militaru & Tonoiu, 2019). HR planning strategies ensure that employees are managed based on a planned framework aligned with a specific organisational objective that derives organisational benefits (Chakraborty & Biswas, 2019).

The effectiveness of service delivery is contingent on the effective deployment and use of HR capital (Addicott et al., 2015). Human resource planning is a driver for achieving competitive advantage through the effective utilization of human capital (Jacobson, 2010). HR planning ensures that staff management is within a structured framework, thus enabling employee performance to become a source of sustained competitive advantage (Chakraborty & Biswas, 2019). Workforce planning leverages HR practices and increases opportunities for current and future workers (Jacobson, 2010). Human resource management practices can effectively align organisational, group and individual factors (Buller & McEvoy, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that strategic human resource planning holds the potential to improve service delivery in the county governments in Kenya. The positive effect is drawn from the impact of the proactive implementation of strategic human resource planning components that include workforce planning, labour forecasting and succession planning and this has a positive change in the way public services are rendered or delivered and thus higher public satisfaction and competitive workforce.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends proactive planning and proper structuring of the county workforce based on knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics. Through such initiatives, the county governments would boast of a balanced

and competitive workforce to improve on its public service provision and delivery.

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