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## Talent Management Strategies and Service Delivery in County Governments in Kenya

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A proactive human resource management (HRM) system in public sector organizations is critical for effective public service delivery. However, sub-national(county) governments (SNGs) in Kenya faced significant challenges in acquiring and retaining talented staff because of a labour supply and demand mismatch. Based on the challenge, the study evaluated the nature of the talent management strategies and their influence on service delivery in sub-national governments in Kenya. The study utilized the descriptive design and critically examined the HRM structures 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 chosen based on their functional human resource management roles in the counties. The research instrument was validated through a panel review and piloted in three counties. The qualitative reports support the establishment and strengthening of county HR structure and systems, building staff capacity through training, and adopting talent management policies and practices to reduce staff turnover. This process would optimize staff competencies in sustaining service provisions at the county level. The correlation analysis indicated that service delivery positively correlated with talent management strategies ( $r = 0.6731$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) at 0.05 significance levels, while the regression analysis revealed that talent management strategies explain about 45.30 % variance in service delivery with an effect size ( $\beta_1 = 0.6210$  ( $t = 10.6$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Based on the findings, the study concluded that talent management strategies are crucial to improving service delivery in Kenya's sub-national(county) governments. The study recommends proactive planning and adequately structuring the county's workforce based on knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics. The study suggests that county governance structures should integrate and concretize the HRM initiatives geared towards talent management.

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**INTRODUCTION**

In a globalized world, a flexible and person-centred human resource management (HRM) system in the public sector is critical for the effective delivery of public service (Kim *et al.*, 2022; Azmi, 2010). However, managing HR-related issues is usually based on the manager's experiences, intuition, and gut feelings (Cho *et al.*, 2023). Traditional values and bureaucratic processes pose challenges in the smooth management of human resources in organizations in public sector organizations (Akuoko, 2009), as this poses a significant challenge to the public officials who have to make compromises regarding interdepartmental collaboration and poor policy communication, all of which increased workplace stress (Kim *et al.*, 2022).

Public sector organizations face significant challenges from several fronts, including financial constraints, downsizing, supply and demand gaps in talented staff, increasing demands for emergency and disaster management, rising expectations of public service quality, and increasingly fragmented public service delivery (Kim *et al.*, 2022). Further, HR-related expenditures for public service comprise significant costs as often as high as 70% or 80% of the total operating budget (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015). The sub-national governments also face a significant human capital crisis due to retirements, retention and becoming an employer of choice. This crisis revolves around demographic trends, talent acquisition and development (Jacobson & Sowa, 2016).

Public sector organizations should recognize the importance of human judgment and moral imagination in HR decision-making (Cho *et al.*,

2023). In particular, transforming the public service requires new skills, behavioural changes and change management (ElSherbiny, 2020). Developing and retaining talent and motivating staff relate to the strategic issue of workforce planning, which has the right mix of people and skills ready when needed (Jacobson & Sowa, 2016). In most cases, HR practices are adopted not because they were identified as best practices or industry trends but rather in response to the local government's situation (Jacobson & Sowa, 2016).

In such situations, governments adopt various HRM practices and business continuity strategies to not only avert the public health crisis itself but also improve various HR-related issues such as work overload and burnout (Kim *et al.*, 2022). If the HRM function is considered to hold a transactional function only, the process of transforming and reforming public services will fail (ElSherbiny, 2020). The traditional HRM approach to public service focuses on the person-job fit aspects where individuals are matched with the right jobs for task accomplishment. The approach focused on creating a set of knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviours (KSABs) needed for particular positions rather than exploring individuals' specific competencies and capitalizing on them (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015).

The public sector organizations in sub-Saharan Africa are considered the largest employers. Thus, its recruitment and talent management policies are expected to ensure fair representation of all ethnic groupings, races, minorities and marginalized groups (Okeke-Uzodike & Subban, 2015). On a global scale, talent management is a significant challenge facing organizations due to the dynamic business environment (Meyers *et al.*, 2013). The global integration trend demonstrates the

standardization of HRM practices in recruiting, developing, and managing organizational talent. Hence, organizations need to adapt to best practices in talent management and local labour markets and requirements (Almohtaseb *et al.*, 2020).

Talent management is a human resource management strategy that integrates several human resource practices of attracting, retaining, developing, and retaining individuals with the requisite skills and qualifications to improve workforce engagement and performance (Nkala *et al.*, 2021). Talent management is beneficial to organizations because it helps attract and retain talented employees (Almohtaseb *et al.*, 2020). Talent management is more about managing employees' ability, competency, and power within an organizational setting. It is often viewed as a pillar for transforming health service delivery, especially in public sector settings (Nkala *et al.*, 2021).

Human resource management in public sector organizations is critical for economic development; therefore, recruitment and selection processes play a vital role in terms of competitiveness, performance, and success (Okeke-Uzodike & Subban, 2015). Competitive recruitment enables an organization to acquire the best job candidates and confer certain advantages to the organization (Amegashie-viglo, 2014), while shoddy recruitment strategies often result in several challenges such as underperformance, higher foregone financial cost, turnover, absenteeism, low morale, among other issues (Okeke-Uzodike & Subban, 2015).

Service delivery is critical in the relationship between citizens and the government since the performance of any government is measured by its service delivery to the citizens (Abe & Oluwaleye, 2014). Hunting *et al.* (2014) argued that service delivery is the range of services delivered by local governments to meet the needs and wants of their communities. In Kenya, A 2022 World Bank report indicated that five essential sectors, namely health, education, agriculture, water and sanitation, and urban development, accounted for

most of the devolved services in Kenya. The report further indicated that service delivery in the devolved governments in Kenya varies because devolution initiatives have enabled the establishment of the institutional framework to support service delivery (Muwonge *et al.*, 2022).

However, there are ambiguities in the financing and service provision. In addition, service delivery is impeded by the failure of the national government to transfer the devolved functions (Muwonge *et al.*, 2022). The report indicated that the quality of devolved services is different, with some sectors, like health, showing positive trends while others, like the provision of urban infrastructure, still indicate negative trends. In terms of overall service, there are significant differences in the service quality between counties, with citizens in poor and rural counties having access to fewer and lower quality services than citizens in urban and wealthier counties (Muwonge *et al.*, 2022).

### **Problem Statement**

Many sub-national governments experience HRM and workforce-related challenges from prevailing HRM structures (Jacobson & Sowa, 2016). Further constraints arise from the government's strategic goals and priorities, such as sustainable budgeting and service delivery, among other objectives (Ghosh *et al.*, 2016). Talent management in public sector organizations is challenging because of the demand and supply of labour and the diversity of the governance structure (Connell & Walton-Roberts, 2016). On the other hand, public service employees navigate bureaucratic protocols with high levels of uncertainty within a time-bound or disruptive environment (Borry & Henderson, 2020). Therefore, existing HRM practices must be aligned with organizational goals and objectives to build employee skills and capabilities to perform their tasks exceptionally well (Collins, 2021).

Massive efforts to impact service delivery through changes to specific HR practices are all too often not effectively utilized or valued when

compensation is not tied to them (Jacobson & Sowa, 2016). Extant empirical studies linking talent management to performance in developed countries have explored how talent can be deployed in various organizational settings in Europe, but there is little anecdotal evidence in Sub-Saharan Africa on how talent management can influence service delivery (Nkala *et al.*, 2021). Due to contextual and conceptual gaps in the talent management strategies in SNGs in Kenya, the study evaluated the influence of talent management strategies on service delivery in sub-national governments in Kenya.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

Human capital is the most valuable resource that guarantees organizational survival and achieves sustainable competitive advantage (Alkalha *et al.*, 2012). Human capital can be distinguished into general and specific (Becker & Huselid, 2016). Whereas, general human capital comprises the broad skill that can be applied to performing routine tasks. It thus may not only be helpful with the current or potential employer, but specific human capital is a unique skill that enhances employee productivity in the current job (Morris *et al.*, 2017).

The HRM draws a lot from the assumptions of the Based View (RBV), which considers human resources to be critical and strategic to the organization and that employee skills, attitudes, and behaviours provide the foundation for performance; thus, HRM systems are instrumental in the development of human resources, which in turn forms the strategic capability (El-Ghalayini, 2014). The theory proposes that HR investments complement human capital stocks through strategic human resource management processes such as talent management (Boon *et al.*, 2018).

HR practices are those processes associated with identification of key positions, development of diverse talent pool and delivery of employee commitment (Al Ariss, Cascio, and Paauwe, 2014). Talent management strategies borrows its structures from the human capital architecture. The theoretical background of human capital posit that value resides in the unique set of knowledge,

skills, capabilities, commitment, and competencies possessed by an organization's talent. Thus, talented employees are both a strategic asset and a versatile resource that has the potential to create value (Sparrow & Makram, 2015).

The HR bundle of practices reflects the importance of individual talent and the creation of internal talent markets and recognizes the need for a dedicated set of advanced and sophisticated practises (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Therefore, organization have to align the HR architecture towards its critical strategic outcomes in order for the talent practices to contribute towards strategic value creation or amplify the efficiency of the strategic positioning by optimizing the individual existing talents (Sparrow & Makram, 2015).

At the organizational level, value is created when organizations exploit its internal resources and capabilities to implement strategies that enable them to respond to market opportunities by creating economic value and enhancing an organization's performance (Sparrow *et al.*, 2014). The potential for human resource to confer competitive advantages to an organization occurs through the managerial effectiveness of human resources in both productive and operational functions (Boon *et al.*, 2018). This potential is also contingent upon its staff's cumulative knowledge, competencies, and skills required to implement organizational strategy (Jibrin-Bida *et al.*, 2017). Further, human resource management influences and aligns employees' behaviours towards optimal service delivery (Wilton, 2019).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical studies on talent management have been varied in several contexts. The study examined several studies in Sub-Saharan Africa (Nkala *et al.*, 2021; Tshukudu, 2021; Aleck, 2019), the Middle East (Almohtaseb *et al.*, 2020; Kaleem, 2019) and Kenya (Rapando & Nzulwa, 2018; Onuko & Onyango, 2020). Other studies have elaborated the recruitment strategies (Okeke-Uzodike & Subban, 2015; Jonah *et al.*,



2019; Amegashie-viglo, 2014) and developmental strategies (Tshukudu, 2021).

Nkala et al. (2021) evaluated the effectiveness of talent management practices in public health organizations in Zimbabwe. The study measured the existing talent management practices, including recruitment, compensation, rewarding, and workforce succession management, and randomly sampled employees. The findings indicate that talent management processes are rarely applied, impacting human resource practices. In Tanzania, Aleck (2019) assessed the effect of staff retention on service delivery at the Fisheries Research Institute using a case study. Based on the regression analysis, the study observed indicated that staff retention strategies impact the service through development programs.

Almohtaseb et al. (2020) examined the influence of talent management practices on the performance of public health organizations in Jordan using a questionnaire. Based on the SEM analysis, the findings indicated that talent management has a significant positive impact on organizational performance and its impact is accentuated by the presence of a performance management system. Kaleem (2019) evaluated the influence of talent management on employee performance in public sector organizations in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) using a questionnaire. The findings indicated that talent management practices directly impact employee motivation, creativity, satisfaction, and competency.

In Kenya, Rapando and Nzulwa (2018) assessed the influence of talent management strategies on service delivery in the Personnel Service Management directorate. The study employed a questionnaire that utilized correlation analysis and observed a significant correlation between talent management and service delivery in the civil service. Onuko and Onyango (2020) assessed the influence of talent management practices on the service delivery of healthcare professionals in Nairobi City County. Based on correlation analysis, the findings indicated that talent

attraction positively correlated with service delivery of doctors, while employee retention was not linked with service delivery.

Okeke-Uzodike and Subban (2015) evaluated the recruitment policies on workforce efficiencies in federal ministries in Nigeria using mixed-method approaches. The findings indicated that ethnicity still precedes merit and significantly impacts service delivery within government institutions. Furthermore, the recruitment processes are influenced by the social structure and political patronage. Jonah et al. (2019) examined the influence of recruitment strategies on the performance of county Governments in Kenya using three counties: Kitui, Machakos, and Makueni Counties. The findings varied with recruitment strategies influencing performance in Machakos and Makueni County but not in Kitui County.

Amegashie-viglo (2014) examined the recruitment and selection practices in one public sector organization in Ghana using questionnaires and interviews. Based on descriptive analysis, the findings showed that the recruitment practices were primarily based on merit, with a few isolated cases being recruited through political interference, family connections and other affiliations. Tshukudu (2021) examined the effectiveness of development strategies on Botswana's public sector performance. The findings indicated that human resource development (HRD) practices can substantially impact organizational performance. Based on the foregoing reviews, the study hypothesized that *H<sub>0</sub>: Talent management strategies have no significant influence on service delivery in sub-national Governments in Kenya.*

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive design with a target population of 140 respondents comprising 47 county secretaries, 47 HRM directors, and 46 municipality managers. The respondents were chosen based on functional HRM responsibilities at various levels using a census sample of 140 respondents (47 county secretaries, 47 HRM directors, and 46 municipality managers from

headquartered - 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. Data was prepared in several steps, including verification and checks before data was

coded and entered into a statistical software program, Statistical Package for Social Science version 20. 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
Recruitment and selection	6	0.715
Talent management	6	0.849
Talent retention	6	0.892

## DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data was generated thematically from the unstructured data, while quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics with a statistical package (Statistical Package for Social Science Version 23). Since the regression analysis uses a single index, geometric mean was used to reduce the items of the variable into a single numerical index. Diagnostic tests were carried out, and the results indicated that all the assumptions were met; thus, the regression analysis was employed during the hypothesis testing.

## RESULTS

### Qualitative Analysis

The study participants recommended the following talent strategies: establishing and strengthening county HR structure systems and building staff capacity through training, formulating workplace policies and practices that reduce employee turnover and enhance staff retention, such as proper upward mobility and good service schemes for every cadre. Other suggestions include establishing knowledge management systems for the transfer of knowledge and skills inventory for succession plans, motivating staff through promotion by the relevant schemes of service, rewarding productivity and recognition of outstanding staffers, promoting financial independence for different departments, e.g., every county director to have their budgetary allocations and the

commitment to establish political goodwill for the public services.

The excerpts from the interviews are shown in the subsequent paragraphs. From Garissa County, Informant 1 avowed that:

*"...The recruitment and selection processes are not strictly followed since the governor has tendencies to reward their cronies, thereby disregarding the laid-down rules and regulations."*

In Isiolo County, informants also signalled the political pressure and other emerging issues that influence public services. In addition, Isiolo County upholds public service recruitment principles and Article 10 of the Constitution in effect 25% of the marginalized and 5% of PWD.

In Meru County, Informant 1 affirmed that:

*"...The CPSB does the recruitment process and follows the required process, including advertising, long-lasting, shortlisting, interviews and selection. The county public service board that vacant positions are advertised."*

Informant 2 highlighted the influence of political leadership, which overrides the best practices, while Informant 3 affirmed that all vacancies are advertised and recruitment panels are made up of HR professionals. The municipality lays down minimum requirements before the recruitment process begins. Thus, without minimum

qualifications, one cannot be hired. From Kilifi County, Informant 1 affirmed that:

*"...All county departments through the authorized officers report vacancies to the county public service board accompanied by the intent and budgetary allocation. Immediately, upon confirmation, the public service board advertises the vacancies and the process is followed till the end."*

In Tana River County, Informant 2 affirmed that:

*"...As a county government governed by existing retention strategies, it's impossible to have additional retention strategies outside the SRC guidelines. Otherwise, the county independently uses good HR practices and democratic leadership style and effective communication to retain staff."*

In Kiambu County, Informant 2 said that:

*"...The Departments have to declare the vacancies that are within the establishment and request the CPSB to recruit staff based on*

*the provided Job indents which are in line with the Schemes of Service".*

In Marsabit and Embu Counties, respondents affirmed that public service values are embraced in addition to competitive staff recruitment. The County Public Service Board (CPSB) observes the public service regulations in the recruitment and selection process. Furthermore, Mandera and Murang'a Counties affirmed the county recruits from diverse backgrounds considering the relevant laws. It has been noted as one of the most cohesive counties in Kenya in terms of recruiting qualified individuals from different ethnic groups. The county adheres to the due processes during the recruitment period.

### Descriptive Statistics

The study utilized the typical five-point Likert Scale, which rated the level of affirmation/disaffirmation with the items of a variable that best represented their view/opinion on an ascending scale starting with Strongly Disagree (SD); Disagree (D); Neutral (N); Agree (A), and Strong agree (SA).

**Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Analysis**

Variable	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Service delivery	12	3.4268	1.0216
Recruitment practises	6	3.3290	1.0923
Talent development practises	6	3.3101	1.1346
Talent retention practises	6	3.2869	1.0789

The study measured service delivery at the sub-national governments using public expectations, implementation strategies, service delivery capacities, and service performance assessment. The respondents largely affirmed that the service delivery was satisfactory based on the public's needs and expectations, but its implementation is lagging behind best practice since the statistic ( $M = 3.4268$ ,  $SD = 1.0216$ ) borders on neutrality as opposed to affirmation. Talent management strategies centred on recruitment structures ( $M = 3.3290$ ,  $SD = 1.0923$ ), talent development ( $M = 3.3101$ ,  $SD = 1.1346$ ) and talent retention ( $M = 3.2869$ ,  $SD = 1.0789$ ). The recruitment practises centred on structured recruitment processes from needs gap analysis to the acquisition, and the

county structures are sufficient in labour acquisition but proactive approaches to recruitment. The aspects of talent development focused on employee competencies and less on employee development. Regarding talent retention, the county governments performed well on employee commitment and career progression and underperformed in compensation and skill transfer.

### Hypothesis Testing

Linear regression was carried out to determine the influence of the resourcing strategies on service delivery in the sub-national governments in Kenya, as shown in *Table 3* below.

**Table 3: Regression Analysis Results**

Variable	r	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Stn $\beta$	t
Talent management strategies	0.6731	0.4530	113.01*	0.6210	10.6*

\*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 shows that human processes explain 45.30 % of service delivery with an effect size of 0.6210. The results show that talent management strategies have a statistically significant effect on service delivery in sub-national governments in Kenya.

Based on this result, the study rejected the null hypothesis that *talent management strategies have no significant influence on service delivery in sub-national Governments in Kenya* and concluded that the resourcing strategies have a significant influence on service delivery in the county governments in Kenya.

## DISCUSSION

The basis for explaining the hypothesis is drawn from the empirical studies on employee sourcing and talent management. The finding from the study agrees with empirical studies linking organizational effectiveness to employee sourcing (Argue, 2015; Oaya *et al.*, 2017; Rapando & Nzulwa, 2018; Jonah *et al.*, 2019), talent management (Kaleem, 2019; Onuko & Onyango, 2020) and talent retention (Aleck, 2019). The recruitment and selection procedures directly affect service delivery through the effective staffing process, which helps the organization obtain skilled and experienced individuals (Gamage, 2014).

Recruitment provides the organization with a pool of potentially qualified job candidates, creating a pool of suitably qualified candidates (Ekwoaba *et al.*, 2015). Recruitment procedures influence the quality and type of skills the organization requires (Gamage, 2014). The recruitment and selection process is the most effective way of improving organizational development (Yadav & Singh, 2021). It shapes employee behaviour and attitude

by selecting the most appropriate candidate whose skills and experience match job specifications (Ekwoaba *et al.*, 2015). An efficient recruitment and selection process enables organizations to reduce costs like turnover costs, forgone sales and underproductive (Yadav & Singh, 2021).

The effect of talent management on service delivery occurs in the following ways: either employees potentially create value for the organization or a subset of employees create disproportionate value (Cappelli & Keller, 2014). Talent management improves the effective performance of employees and productivity in the organization (Al Aina & Atan, 2020). Talent management processes attract, motivate, and retain productive employees in the public sector (Mehale *et al.*, 2021). Talent management helps improve employees in terms of motivation, performance, and competencies. Through this focus, employees can focus on organizational activities and processes, thus improving organizational effectiveness (Al Ariss *et al.*, 2014). Talent retention allows employees to proactively revitalize their job roles and tasks in ways that make these jobs more desirable to an employee (Cappelli & Keller, 2014).

Talent management also ensures the accomplishment of organizational goals efficiently and effectively, with consequent productivity increases and a significant competitive advantage (Mohammed *et al.*, 2019). Talent management provides essential knowledge and strategies for change, recognizes the most talented employees, and promotes HR development strategies associated with the organizational mission and vision, resulting in prosperity and sustainability (Al Aina & Atan, 2020).

Theoretically, talents are seen as unique strategic resources central to achieving sustained competitive advantage, and organizations use



talent to capture, leverage and protect these resources (Sparrow & Makram, 2015). Organizations perceive talent as an important resource that supports a sustainable competitive advantage and outstanding performance (Al Aina & Atan, 2020).

The influence of these processes on organizational outcomes is explained by the path-dependent effects of human resources (Penrose, 1959). Usually, managerial development requires time to develop, and as such, the path-dependency with which the managerial development takes ensures that the human capital at the organization will likely increase differences between the organizations and thus makes organizations more likely to benefit from their prior investments in human capital (Crook *et al.*, 2011).

## CONCLUSION

The study findings demonstrate that talent management holds the potential to influence service delivery in sub-national governments in Kenya, as highlighted by its positive effect on service delivery through the impact of recruitment, talent development and retention strategies. This suggests that talent management strategies are critically important in aiding the sub-national governments to improve service delivery. Talent management also assists in identifying and retaining talented employees who can enhance service delivery and thus promote economic growth and development in the sub-national governments.

## Recommendation

Based on the influence of talent management strategies on service delivery, sub-national governments should integrate and concretize the HRM initiatives geared towards talent management. This will enable the county governments to acquire and retain a competitive workforce that would drive the devolution initiatives through the counties' economic development.

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