

STRATEGIC ISSUES AND PERFORMANCE OF EMPLOYEES IN URBAN COUNCIL: FOCUS NYAMARAMBE TOWN COUNCIL GUCHA SOUTH DISTRICT, KISII COUNTY - KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to assess the strategic issues affecting the performance of urban employees of Nyamarambe Town Council (NTC). The Urban Councils have a critical role to play in the socio-economic development of Kenya. They are responsible for the implementation of policies and programmes, which aim at improving the well being of local residents. The specific objectives thus, were, to determine and assess the strategic issues affecting employees' performance at Nyamarambe Town Council of Gucha South District, Kisii County in Kenya. To achieve the objectives, qualitative and quantitative approaches were used whereby the survey design was used. Data was collected using questionnaires which were analyzed using descriptive statistics (tables, percentages, frequency distribution and weighted mean) to assess the impact of various variables on performance. The findings of the study showed that training, motivation, are the key strategic issues that affect employees at NTC, where majority of the employees were not satisfied with the performance of the council and the strategic issues identified were found to have a significant influence on the performance of the council. Consequently, the study recommended, that NTC should introduce access scheme of service, introduce other motivational elements other than salary and rewards.

KEY WORDS: Strategic issues, employee performance, urban council

INTRODUCTION

Performance is defined as the outcome of work because it provides the strongest linkage to the strategic goals of the organization, customer satisfaction, and economic contributions Bernadin et al, (1995). The drive for reform in the public sector worldwide has focused attention on the measurements of performance in public sector organizations. This is particularly true in local government. Local government has traditionally been concerned with the delivery of services.

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Local government performance measurements pay much less attention to the determinants or means of achieving long term, sustained organizational improvement in internal business

processes, innovation and learning. Whilst these issues are recognized as important, there are few measurement processes in place to manage performance in these areas, Ayao, (2007).

2 Public servants are expected to strive for high performance (for positive results of their activities with regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness) and to achieve the performance targets set by their superiors. Appropriate concepts and tools of strategic management can realize such a performance orientation of the workforce.

Local authority means anybody or persons empowered to spend money derived from the proceeds of a local tax (Michael, 1995). The Kenya Local Government (KLG) derives its legitimacy and power from an Act of Parliament (cap 265). Local authorities depend on legislative framework to identify specific legal power for all its actions, finances and contractual relationship.

Local authorities play a significant role in their respective areas of jurisdiction. Each category of local authorities performs different roles. Among their services include linking the people with central government through their elected leaders, constructing houses for the people especially in cities, municipalities, urban and town council. In addition they mobilize local resources and energies in carrying out projects within their areas, collection and disposal of garbage, further they facilitate education by constructing and maintaining nursery and primary schools. For these services to be felt there must be efficient and effective employee performance.

Melua, (2003) argues that the existence of efficient and competent local authority employees is an essential prerequisite for local democracy in general. He further adds that public servant's efficiency can be measured by the quality of services they provide. The best assessment could be got from the people they serve. Hence, the protection of local interests and the welfare of local residents mostly depend on the services they provide.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Urban Councils have been recognized all along as a means of enabling towns and cities to provide services to their people. However, they are usually characterized by poor performance and this has been a major concern of various stakeholders such as the urban dwellers.

A Ministerial Annual Report, (2009) page 8 on local authority performance indicated that NTC was highly ineffective and inefficient, for example in rate collection. The strategic issues affecting performance have not been fully addressed. Thus, the main focus of this study was based on the assessment of the strategic issues affecting performance of Urban Council employees in Nyamarambe Town Council, Gucha South District, Kisii County Kenya.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objective of this study was to assess the strategic issues affecting the performance of Nyamarambe Town Council employees.

The specific objectives were to:

- i) Determine the strategic issues affecting performance of employees at Nyamarambe Town Council Gucha South District, Kisii County Kenya.
- ii) Evaluate the performance indicators on the operations of Nyamarambe Town Council Gucha South District, Kisii County.
- iii) Assess on how the strategic issues affect performance of employees in Gucha South District, Kisii County.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A survey design was used because data was collected from all the employees of the study area (Nyamarambe Town Council, Gucha South District, Kenya.). The study population consisted of all Nyamarambe Town Council employees (such as 3 Management officers, 4 Finance Officers, 6 Office Clerks, 3

Councilors, 9 General Office Workers, 4 Drivers and 11 Tax Collectors) who were 40 in total. On collecting primary data, the research used structured questionnaire which was self administered. Data collected was coded, edited, processed and analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequency distributions, percentages, means, mode, and median.

The study was carried in Nyamarambe Town Council found in Gucha South District, Kisii county Kenya. It is perched on the highly productive Kisii highlands, about 400 kilometers West of Nairobi. It covers an area of 105.1 square kilometers with a population of 1,300. To achieve the research objectives, data was collected from all the employees of Nyamarambe Town Council, because it was rated last by the [Ministerial Annual report 2009 page 8 in rate collection].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

There are many theories that have been presented by various psychologists and social scientist about the phenomenon of motivation one of the theories present by Vroom, (1964) describes the outcome of effort, performance, reward and satisfaction. It suggests that an increase in effort leads to growing performance and then appropriate rewards with satisfaction help keep the relationship.

Another important theory, one given by Herzberg's views of motivation suggests that motivators lead to individual contentment and the level of job performance is chiefly influenced by this factor.

Maslow also discussed in detail the phenomena of motivation. Maslow, (1954) has argued a hierarchy of human requirements. The hierarchical needs are set from the bottom to the top. The bottom is physical desires, next is safety and security needs, third is social and community needs, forth is self respect and fifth is self-actualization. Maslow's theory suggests that an individual's motivation needs aim at the next level once the lower level needs have been accomplished. However in the modern day life, an individual prefers these needs at the same time.

Empirical review

Performance has quite different meanings. From a process view, performance means the transformation of inputs into outputs for achieving certain outcomes. With regard to its content performance informs about the relationship between minimal and effective cost (economy) between effective cost and achieved outcome (effectiveness). Thus performance is equivalent to the famous 3 E⁶ (Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness) of a certain activity or program Richard (2002). Kane, (1996) argues that performance is something that the performer leaves behind and that exists as part of the purpose. Bernadin et al, (1995) is concerned that performance should be defined as outcomes of work because they provide the strongest linkage to the strategic goals of the organizations, customer satisfaction and economic contribution.

Armstrong, (2003) argues that effective performance measures should be related to results and the results must be within the job holder's control, should be objective and observable and data must be available for measurement. He further argues that performance agreements and plans are working documents subjected to new demands, new situations and provision therefore need to be made for updating objectives and work and personal development from time to time.

UNCHS, (2001) case study of East Africa on financing cities for sustainable development noted that politics remain a factor contributing to low performance by local authorities. Employees whose regime will be voted out are often replaced or reshuffled in disregard of their training to take care of political interests. Wamuyu, (1999) in his study on the training needs of the personnel working in the media and how they can be met, asserted that training is as old as mankind and the ways and means of training have changed and continue changing with the times.

McClelland, (2002) carried a study on training needs assessment for the united way of Dan county Wisconsin. She suggested that training will make staff to work smarter if not harder for productivity and effectiveness will increase. She further recommended that training was a priority for both directors and staff.

Rebecca, (2002) on training evaluation in the technical training department at a Company suggested that many factors are causing an increase in the need for training. Technology is progressing rapidly and a skilled workforce enables business to compete in global market. Melua, (2002) Report on training needs analysis, submitted to working group on national training strategy, and indicated that local authorities demand new skills and experiences. He stressed on the importance of training activities to help in organizational matters.

1 Motivation has to do with a set of independent/ dependent variables relationship that explain the direction amplitude and persistence of an individual's behaviour, holding constant the effects of aptitude, skills and understanding of the task and the constraints operating in the environment. Amstrong M, (2003). Motivation can have an effort on the yield or output of businesses and concerns both quality and quantity.

Management in town councils in Kenya is complex not only because of the wide range of services and activities undertaken but also because of the interaction with central government, changing society and environment, local communities interests and influence of political party organization.

Ameringern, (1995) points out that the wide interaction the local authorities have rendered them inefficiency leading to poor performance of their crucial services. Malombe, (2003) report argues that management of local authorities is greatly undermined by the very Act of parliament that establishes it. The tight control of the local authorities from the central government takes away the envisioned autonomy and makes them dependent on orders from above.

Mbithi, (1990) associated low productivity in the civil service to among other factors, the non-application of effective management styles. These include lack of effective delegation, lack of effective performance appraisal, and lack of clearly defined objectives and targets. This inefficiency in management leads to morale erosion among employees. A management which fails to set specific objectives and a target to be achieved fails to communicate their expectations to workers. It has therefore business of blaming the employees when organizational goals are not realized for the service delivery expected is not clear to those expected to perform.

Attitude is another vital strategic issue that determines the performance of any organization. Tumbo, (1991) in his study on the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards Mathematics in some primary teachers' colleges found out that attitudes are the pre-disposition of the individual to evaluate some symbol or object or aspect of his world in favourable or unfavourable manner. He asserts that attitudes formed early in life persist through life. Attitudes affect the response in a certain way towards a phenomenon.

Omollo, (2000), assessed the role of the public and the municipal council in the disposal of residential solid waste in Mombasa-Kenya. The findings indicate that local authorities in Kenya are unable to provide adequate solid waste management services to the residents. He argues that very little attention has been given on the perception or attitude of the residents toward solid waste management in Kenya. The outcries of the poor solid wastes service provided by Mombasa municipal council continue to pervade the media.

Nyamunga, (1999) suggest that in any organization deployment or redeployment should be for the purpose of placing an employee in an appropriate position to utilize his skills, knowledge and aptitudes for the accomplishment of the organization's objectives as well as giving the employee job satisfaction. The rationale behind any deployment should be to place employees in the relevant and suitable position for optimum productivity. It benefits both the employee and organization. He further argues that good deployment yield better fruits with a good and clear scheme of work for employees. A scheme of work clearly defines career progression structures, which in turn facilitate the attraction and retention of quality staff. It also eliminates anomalies in appointment, qualification, progression in the career and thus provides equal opportunities for advancing to all based on merit.

Armstrong, (2003) argues that deployment entails matching people's abilities and competences to positions within the organizational structure so as to make the best use of the strategic management. He further asserts that deployment is an aspect of strategic management, whose aim is to create an organizational culture suitable for enhancing competitive advantage.

The Local Government has long been recognized as a means of enabling villages, towns and countries to provide certain services to their areas. In the larger towns and cities around the

world a local authority council is responsible for the provision of education, health, fire and sewerage Heley et al. (1992). In Kenya this has remained so of local authorities to the Central Government Malombe, (2003).

A United Nation Commission on Human settlement UNCHS, (2001) report on financing municipal services in East Africa noted that the pressure of the state greatly differ from one country to another, between strong states and weak states. Even in countries where the state is still strong as in France and United Kingdom (UK), it no longer has the political and economic resources needed to carry out the traditional functions and societal governance of its own. The report further observed that in Kenya, local authorities are failing to offer basic services to many of the citizens living within their areas of jurisdiction. It attributed this to poor management and resource base, lack of reliable funding, political interference and corruption, high staff turnover and significant inherent and inflexible bureaucracies.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate

A total of 40 questionnaires were administered to 40 employees of NTC. Out of these, 34 were successfully completed and returned to the researchers giving a response rate of 85%. The analysis of the finding was based on the returned and completed questionnaires. The distribution of respondents shows that 58.8% of them were permanently employed, while 26.5% were temporarily employed and 14.7% casual. The frequency of permanent employment was higher as compared to casual as well as temporary employment. On the level of education the result reveals that, 11.8% had attained primary level, 32.4% attained secondary level, 35.3% attained college diploma, 17.6% attained university degree and 2.9% attained college certificate. The majority of the responses had attained college diploma followed by those that had attained secondary level. College Diploma education showed a higher frequency compared to college Certificate. The result findings also show that the majority of the respondents (88.2) had worked in the council for more than two years.

Descriptive statistics on the strategic issues

The respondent's opinions were solicited on various strategic issues such as training, motivation, management style, attitude and deployment. The findings reveal that 73.5% of the respondents

have not undergone training while 26.5% had gone. On enquiring the type of training the employees had undergone, it was revealed that formal training was most preferred to informal training.

On enquiring about the tools used at work place, 11(38.2%) said that tools used were appropriate while 21(61.8%) observed as inappropriate. This reveals that there were inappropriate tools used at work. When the respondents were asked to rate the provision of services in the NTC, 41.2% rated the provision of services in the council as satisfactory, while 47.1% rated the provision as less satisfactory and 11.8% insufficient. The provision of services in NTC was less satisfactory. On the same issue, respondents were solicited to give their opinion if urban councils in Kenya are characterized by poor service delivery. 44.1% agreed to the view while 55.9 disagreed.

3 The respondents were asked to give their opinion on the type of management style which is used by the council. Of the responses received 58.8% said that management style at NTC is participatory whereas 23.5% said it is non-participatory. Only 17.6% of the employees' revealed that participatory type was used at NTC. The management style used by the council is majorly dictatorial. When the respondents were asked to if they were satisfied with the management style used, only 11(32.4%) were satisfied while the remaining 23(67.6%) were not satisfied.

The respondents were asked to give their opinions if they feel motivated to go to work every day. The results found out that majority 19(55.9%) do not feel motivated while 15(44.1%) feel motivated. When they were enquired if they receive their salaries and wages in time, 27(79.4%) felt they do not receive salaries/wages in time while 7(20.6%) felt that they received it in time. The respondents were also asked of other benefits received from the employer. The findings reveal that 15(44.1%) received none while 11(32.4%) and 8(23.5%) received recognition and bonuses respectively.

The respondents were solicited to give their opinions on the level of satisfaction with some strategic activities as handled by the NTC. The findings have been revealed on the table 1 below.

Table 1: Level of satisfaction with the given strategic activities as handled by NTC

Strategic activity	Poor 1	Satisfactory 2	Good 3	Excellent 4	Weighted Average
Promotion	20(58.8%)	12(35.3%)	1(2.9%)	1(2.9%)	1.500
Recognition of those who excel	18(52.9%)	11(32.4%)	5(14.7%)	0(0.0%)	1.618
Retirement	17(48.6%)	14(40.0%)	3(8.6%)	0(0.0%)	1.588
Selection	16(45.7%)	11(31.4%)	6(17.1%)	1(2.9%)	1.765
Induction / orientation	13(37.1%)	16(45.7%)	5(14.3%)	1(2.9%)	1.882
Compensation	26(74.3%)	7(20.0%)	2(5.7%)	0(0.0%)	1.353
Staff safety and health	18(51.4%)	7(20.0%)	9(25.7%)	0(0.0%)	1.735
Career path	19(55.9%)	12(35.3%)	3(8.8%)	0(0.0%)	1.529

Most of the respondents showed that the level of satisfaction of the above strategic activities as handled by NTC is either poor or satisfactory (see table 1 above).

The respondents were asked to rate the key issue that may influence performance. The responses revealed the following results as depicted on table 2 below.

Table 2: showing key issues influencing performance

Strategic issue	Less effective 1	Moderately effective 2	effective 3	Most effective 4	Weighted averages
Training	1(2.9%)	2(5.88%)	14(41.2%)	17(50.0%)	3.676
Motivation	0	3(8.8%)	11(32.4%)	20(58.8%)	3.500
Management styles	2(5.9%)	5(23.5%)	11(29.4%)	16(41.2%)	3.206
Attitude	0	0	12(35.3%)	22(64.7%)	3.647

Nearly 100% of the respondents agreed that attitude to work influence performance. These responses show that employee's attitude to work play a great role to the performance of an organization. These findings agree with Tumbo's, (1991) and Arasa's, (1995) that attitude influences the response in certain way towards a phenomenon.

The level of training influences the performance of employees in an organization. This is evident by the response rate of about 91.2% of NTC employees who said that training influence the performance to be most effective. These findings agree with McClelland (2002), who found out that training make staff work harder thus increasing productivity and effectiveness.

About 91.2% of NTC employees opined that motivation is a key issue influencing the performance in an organization. Also management style play a great role in uplifting the performance as 79.4% of the NTC observed. This concurred with Chowdhury, (1974), who espoused that management style was important factor that influenced yields very much.

Table 3: showing Level of agreement with the recommendations on improving council performance

	Strongly disagree 1	disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5	Weighted Averages
Training of employees	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	9(26.7%)	25(73.3%)	4.735
Improve motivation	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	13(38.2%)	21(61.8%)	4.618
Change management style	0(0%)	5(14.7%)	3(8.8%)	8(23.5%)	18(52.9%)	4.147
Deploy workers properly	0(0%)	3(8.8%)	1(2.9%)	20(58.8%)	10(29.4%)	4.088
Change attitude to work	0(0%)	0(0%)	9(26.7%)	4(11.8%)	21(61.8%)	4.353

Table 3 above shows that all the respondents 34(100%) are in agreement with the use of training as a way to improving the performance of the council. This is in line with the finding that majority of the employees in NTC have not received any training which as established earlier by the study does affect the council performance. All the respondents are also in agreement with the use of motivation to improve performance. This is in line with the finding that most employees do not receive any motivational elements other than salary.

Attitude to work has been found to be having a great effect of the performance of NTC. Table 3 above shows that 73.6% of the respondents are in agreement that attitude change can be used as a strategy to improve performance

26(76.4%) of the respondents are in agreement to change of management style as a strategy to improving performance whereas 5(14.7%) are in disagreement. This is an indicator that the management styles being employed by the council's management inhibits performance hence need for change.

On proper deployment of workers, 30(88.3%) of the respondents are in agreement that proper deployment of workers will help improve performance, 3(8.8%) are in disagreement. This supports the finding that workers are poorly deployed hence a mismatch between skills and work task.

CONCLUSIONS

This study intended to investigate on the strategic issues affecting performance at NTC. The findings of the study revealed that NTC is sensitive to all the issues investigated. Attitude to work was found to be the most important issue affecting performance at NTC. Employees have low attitude to their work due to low pay and inappropriate working tools. This reduces the number of hours worked and hence productivity declines. The study found out that most employees of NTC are not trained. This explains much on the quality of service offered at NTC. The council does not sponsor employees even for short-term seminars or workshops. Those who manage to sponsor themselves for any training intended leave to other organizations which offer better services.

It was also found out that other than salary, NTC does not provide other motivational elements. Most employees do not feel motivated to come to work. Equally, it was found out that there are insufficient working tools at NTC and poor induction of new employees. This contributes to low productivity levels for the employees. Workers were not satisfied with the management style in the council which eventually leads to poor performance of employees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be a clear scheme of service for staff to ensure that the council has the right caliber of officers and well trained support staff. These should be coupled with training programmes for the employees who are sponsored by the council thus attracting more employees and changing their attitude towards work. They should also be deployed according to their training to inspire them to work for better results.

A part from salary, there is no other motivational elements that drive employees to work in NTC. Clear systems of promotion on merit, recognition of those who excel in their work, retirement benefit schemes and annual increments should be put in place to motivate the employees. In the lengthy process, NTC should strive to make the council more transparent, more accessible and more accountable. All employees should have access to council information about planning, policy processes and assessments to allow them to participate fully in council and society. In other words, a bottom-up process that actively involves a wide range of employees must form a basis of action. This will entail participatory management system that will trigger employees into action.

Since there is on-going reforms in many sectors, serious thought should be given to minimum qualification for the councilors, whereby at least they should attain ordinary level of education while those seeking to head the council to be University or Diploma graduates. The Ministry of Local Government should review transfer guidelines to avoid too much movement of officers and long stay officers within a council which will eventually help the council to redeem its image.

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