

Effect of Workforce Diversity on Employee Work Performance: A Study of the County Government of Mombasa

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Abstract: Workforce diversity is a multi-faceted phenomenon that will continue to evolve as the world becomes a global marketplace. No doubt many believe workforce diversity is fundamental for employee performance. This study sought to find out the effect of workforce diversity on employee work performance, using the County Government of Mombasa. In the context of this study the term workforce diversity was defined as the similarities and differences among employees in terms of ethnic background, gender and education. These similarities and differences formed the independent variables of this study. Literature review was done and an attempt was made to link the various published studies with this study with a view to discovering how each variable impacted on employee work performance at the CGM. The study described the target population which comprised of employees of the CGM working in the County Assembly. Judgmental sampling technique was used to get respondents within the County Assembly. The researcher targeted 30 out of 59 employees of the County Assembly of the CGM. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires and was descriptively analyzed. Data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed statistically by using the Software Package for Social Science (SPSS). It was then summarized using tables. The summarized responses were used to examine the effect of each variable on employee work performance. Correlation Coefficient analysis showed a significant level of association between performance and the tested variables of diversity. Interviews and observations were also used to gather information to aid the study. It became clear from the data analysis that workforce diversity is a well-accepted phenomenon at the CGM and that there was no discrimination detected resulting from ethnic, gender or educational background. The workforce was harmonious but without expectations of high or low performance based on an employee's demographic background. An employee's ethnic, gender and educational background did not have any contributory effect on performance. The objectives of the study were fulfilled with negative results for all the tested variables. It became evident that workforce diversity does not influence employee work performance at the County Government of Mombasa. This study could be a guideline for future studies. While diversity is an acceptable phenomenon, its variables of ethnicity, gender and educational background do not portray significant effect on performance, positively nor negatively. It is therefore important for the County to realize the need to capitalize on these demographic categories in order to stay ahead of other Counties. In order to fully understand the scenario at the CGM, further studies need to be conducted in order to unearth the challenges of employee work performance with a view to discovering what needs to be done to enable the County increase efficiency and make better, its service delivery to the residents.

Keywords: Workplace Diversity, Ethnicity, Gender, Education and Work Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background of Study:

For organizations to attract a broader talent pool of employees, it needs to embrace an organizational culture of workforce diversity. This will lead to an enhanced corporate reputation and strengthened cultural values. According to Childs (2005), workforce diversity is a global workplace and marketplace phenomenon. Therefore any business that intends to be successful must have a borderless view and an underlying commitment to ensuring that workforce diversity is part of its day-to-day business conduct.

Workforce diversity includes, but are not limited to: age, ethnicity, ancestry, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, educational background, geographic location, income, marital status, military experience, religious beliefs, parental status, and work experience Srivastava, (2012).

Organizations hire employees from diverse countries, cultures, values and styles. While employees expect returns from the organization, their effective performance is significant for its success. It is therefore important to consider the effect of diversity on employee output. Workforce diversity could present tremendous challenges as well as opportunities to the organization in terms of effective management. The following are some of the challenges that diversity could present to an organization; individual versus group fairness, resistance to change, resentment, group cohesiveness and interpersonal conflict, segmented communication networks, backlash and competition for opportunities Madiha, (2003). It is therefore important to understand the impact of diversity on organizational outcomes, such as organizational performance, employee satisfaction, and turnover (Sungjoo, 2010).

As an organization, County Government of Mombasa (CGM) draws its workforce from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, it faces pertinent issues such as demographic changes, increasing number of women joining its workforce, organizational restructuring, and the implementation of the equal opportunity legislation, which requires organizations to review their management practices and develop new and creative approaches to people management. All these issues play out on the employee and can affect his or her work performance.

Problem Statement:

Workforce Diversity trends were first identified in the mid-1980s and they were proclaimed as an opportunity for organizations to become more creative, to reach previously untapped markets and talents, and in general to achieve and maintain a competitive advantage Roberson (2007).

Erasmus (2007) contended that, diversity management and workforce diversity are a forced integration that creates conflict and uncertainty in the workforce as leadership is not skilled in the discipline of diversity management and its principles. As such, human resource managers are in most cases not well equipped to effectively practice diversity management, or identify what factors contribute to effective diversity management and the tasks that can deal with diversity related issues in the workplace. Research suggests that left unmanaged, workforce diversity is more likely to damage morale, increase turnover and cause significant communication problems and conflict in the organization, Roberson et al. (2007).

The County Government of Mombasa has a workforce drawn from almost all the 42 ethnic groups of Kenya, working under unique social and environmental circumstances that provided a rare study on workforce diversity. This study focused on the relationship among ethnicity, gender and educational background, towards employee performance at the County Government of Mombasa.

Significance of the Study:

Based on the problem stated above, it was evident that there has never been an attempt to study CGM's diverse workforce which provides a rare socio-environmental atmosphere. It was therefore, envisaged that the results of this study would go a long way to enlighten scholars and lay readers on the effects of workforce diversity on employee work performance specifically at the County Government of Mombasa. The parties that are to benefit immensely from this study include, the Human Resource Manager at the County Government of Mombasa, who could use the findings of this study to review the policies on employment and management of the workforce. Also to benefit were the top management at the County Government of Mombasa could use the findings of this study in policy formulation and review on hire of employees and the work process. Other County Governments in Kenya, as well as other organizations, both private and public, that required employee services for their sustainability, would benefit from this study. Finally, future researchers and scholars, in this field of study, would benefit too from the findings of this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretically, the workplace diversity literature espouses three different theoretical frameworks for the examination of the possible effects of workplace diversity (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998).

According to Turner (1987), the first theory is social categorization theory, which describes employees based on attributes like ethnicity, gender or age. Turner argues that this results in stereotyping. The second theory is similarity or attraction

theory based on non-salient attributes like values and education, which increase interpersonal attraction and attachment (Berscheid & Walster, 1978). The third theory is information and decision-making theory, which examines the impact of distribution of information and expertise on work-teams (Wittenbaum & Stasser, 1996).

According to Michaéla et al. (2003), these theories lead to different and sometimes contradictory hypotheses regarding the effects of diversity on group process and performance. They argued that social categorization and similarity theories lead to a prediction of negative effects, such as reduction in within-group communication, decreased satisfaction and commitment, and increased labor turnover.

According to Williams et al. (1998), the third theory on information and decision-making perspective leads to positive effects of diversity since more diverse work-teams are expected to process information differently and members may bring together differing viewpoints. This in turn can lead to more creativity and increased performance.

Several research findings by eminent scholars suggest that several factors could be responsible for the conflicts provoked by workforce diversity. Tsui, Egan & O' Reilly (1992), proposed that identifying employees with distinct groups such as ethnic background may disrupt group dynamics. Shaw (1993) agreed with Egan and O'Reilly (1992), following their research on self-categorization theory which showed that ethnic identification evoked more disliking, distrust and competition than when categorization arises from within the organization. This study was based on the first theory which considers attributes like ethnicity, gender or age, Turner (1987).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design for this particular study was descriptive in nature. The study involved eliciting of opinion of some employees of different cadres at CGM. The study focused on investigating and examining factors of workforce diversity towards employees' performance in an organization. A questionnaire was used as a tool to examine those factors of diversity in relation to work performance. The researcher examined a sample that was representative of the whole population so as to obtain a more in-depth and rich description. The descriptive design was adopted because it has the advantage of using questionnaires, observations and interviews without necessarily having to change the environment of the study (Yin 1984).

4. DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

From the responses to the various items and the correlations of the tested variables, it became clear that diversity is a well embraced phenomenon at the CGM. It could be deduced from the findings that all employees of the CGM were fully involved but it appeared diversity does not influence the attitude of worker with respect to performance.

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary:

In considering ethnicity, Dahlin (2005) argued that ethnicity is negative since it can create conflict and cliques due to social categorization but that is not the case at the CGM. Over 85% of the respondents felt that ethnic differences in work groups never encouraged conflict. However, even though there was harmony, ethnicity did not seem to have any significant contributory effect, negatively or positively on work performance.

In analyzing gender effect, Kundu (2003) stated that hiring women helps an organization tap a niche in the market. However, it was evident that being a man or woman did not encourage or discouraged one on performance. From the analysis it became clear that gender diversity was well encouraged. A performance criterion for success at work was equally expected to be higher for female as well as for male employees.

Discussing about education, Tracy (2011) argued that educational background is important to employees and that they cannot perform well without adequate education but that is contrary at the CGM. It became evident from the results that educational background did not have significant effect on work performance at the CGM.

With regard to work performance, the researcher observed that there was motivation of workers at the CGM and that there was full cooperation amongst workers of different ethnic backgrounds. It was also apparent that different gender groups worked well and that there was appreciation of one's performance by members of the opposite gender. 62.97% of respondents disagreed that employees with higher educational qualification performed better.

Conclusions:

From the findings, workforce diversity has no significant effect towards employee work performance at the CGM. There is no discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, gender and educational background. Normally discrimination either directly or indirectly curtails the potential of available talents or underutilizes the employees. The CGM has a diverse workforce with a satisfying work environment which is highly socialized.

Several researches suggest that whether or not diversity has positive or negative effect, depends on different aspects of the organization's strategies, culture and HRM practices. This indicates that diversity may be beneficial under certain conditions and may fail to have any impact in others, Pugh (2008). The following factors are known to affect the effectiveness of workforce diversity: size of organization, age of organization, type of organization and diversity of community surrounding an organization.

Recommendations:

This study could serve as a guide for future researches at the CGM. The focus of this research was on workforce diversity. The results indicated that employee performance is not significantly affected when the diversity variables of ethnicity, gender and educational background are considered. Diversity is a well-accepted phenomenon at the CGM. It is therefore important for the County to realize the need to capitalize on these demographic categories in order to stay ahead of other Counties. Smith (2010) argued that good workforce diversity practices are believed to enhance employee and organizational performance. However, at the CGM there seems to be no link between workforce diversity and performance. To fully understand the scenario at the CGM, further studies need to be conducted in order to unearth the challenges of employee work performance, with a view to discovering what needs to be done to enable the County increase efficiency and make better its service delivery to the people.

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