

Influence of Human Resource Management Practices on Employee Retention in Research Institutes in Kenya

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Abstract: Employee retention has become an increasingly significant concern for just about every organization as new economy companies lure talent and as technical skills are in increasingly in short supply. Research institutes in Kenya are putting in place measures which can create a work environment that engages employees in the long term however they have to contend with the dynamic and competitive external environment in which they operate. This study sought to examine the influence of human resource management practices specifically employee selection and training and development with management style as a moderating variable on employee retention in research institutes in Kenya. The study adopted both descriptive and correlational research designs. The target population included 1413 research scientists, technical staff and professional support drawn from 5 public research institutes in Kenya formed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act (repealed), 2013. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 303 employees (22%). Data was collected using self-administered questionnaires and data was analyzed by use of descriptive and inferential statistics using Predictive Analytics Software (PASW) version 23 formerly statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Research findings were presented using percentages, regression model summary and beta coefficient tables. The study found that training and development had a significant positive influence on employee retention whereas employee selection had a significant negative influence on employee retention in research institutes in Kenya at 0.05 level of significance. The research also found that the moderating effect of management style was insignificant on the relationship between the selected human resource management practices and employee retention at 0.05 level of significance. The study recommends the need to improve these human resource management practices through effective communication and consistency in implementation of their policies and procedures, active participation of relevant actors and provision of prompt feedback as regards to these human resource management practices.

Keywords: Human resource management, Employee selection, Training and development, Management style and employee retention.

I. INTRODUCTION

Employee retention of the most talented and desirable employees is one of the key challenges facing organizations today. Kenya like other developing countries has high demand for talent which has been triggered by the turbulent nature of business environment. The contemporary rapidly changing business environment characterized by growing competition, scarce highly skilled labour and changing consumer preferences and tastes is undoubtedly a big challenge for most organizations. Sullivan (2009) observed that employee retention has never been important until recent years owing to the costs of employee turnover which are skyrocketing and seriously impacting on organizations' bottom-line.

According to Narang (2013), employee retention refers to the various policies and practices which let the employee stick to an organization for longer period. Selesho and Naile (2014) argue that once an organization has captured skilled employees, the return on investment requires closing the back door to prevent them from walking out. For organizations to retain this most valuable asset; it is therefore important that they adopt a set of best human resource management practices that make the best use of employees so as to retain them in the organizations. This is because employees are an

important source of competitive advantage for firms (Barney, 2001& Pfeffer, 2006). Furthermore, employee retention is important for firm performance and if an organization is not able to retain its employees, it will not be able to capitalize on human assets it has developed over time to meet its strategic objectives. According to Blake (2009), retention policy should focus on retaining the high performers and talented employees or losing the losers and keeping the keepers.

Minbaeva (2005) defined human resource management practices as a set of practices used by organizations to manage human resources through facilitating the development of competencies that are firm specific, produce complex social relation and generate organization knowledge to sustain competitive advantage. Organizations ought to come up with retention policies, strategies and practices which will ensure that highly skilled employees stay longer to ensure success of the firm. This study has selected two human resource management practices namely: employee selection and training, and development. According to Beardwell, Holden and Clayton (2004), the importance of ensuring the selection of the right people to join the workforce has become increasingly apparent as the emphasis on people as the prime source of competitive advantage has grown. Training and development is an important human resource management practice because it helps in enhancing the employees' skills, knowledge and abilities necessary in accomplishment of organization's objectives

Kenya has five (5) public research institutes formed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, CAP 250 (repealed) namely: Kenya Agricultural & Livestock Research organization (KALRO), Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI), Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) and Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI). According to the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), science and technology provide the essential means for facilitating economic, social and cultural transformations at national and global levels. The Government of Kenya therefore through the scientific research institutes aspire to generate a mass of critical and skilled manpower as well as develop innovations in order to deliver Vision 2030.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Human resource is the most valuable resource in every organization and it undoubtedly contributes immensely to the organization's success world over. When placed strategically, human resources can provide innovative solutions and ensure that organization achieves competitive advantage but as a result of globalization, competition, economic growth, accelerating product and technology changes and shortage of skilled labour, many organizations are finding it difficult to retain valued employees (Yamamoto, 2011). For many organizations therefore strategic staffing has become an important practice because the ability to retain talented employees can be crucial for organization's future survival (Whitener, 2001). This is particularly important for public research institutes in Kenya who face stiff competition from international research institutes such as International Council for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and institutions of higher learning such as the universities for talented employees. It is therefore vital for organizations to institute appropriate measures to retain their key employees such as implementing effective human resource management practices which can help organizations to retain their valued employees.

III. OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study was to examine the influence of human resource management practices on employee retention in research institutes in Kenya.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- i. To examine the influence of employee selection on employee retention in research institutes in Kenya.
- ii. To establish the influence of training and development on employee retention in research institutes in Kenya.
- iii. To establish the moderating effect of management style on the relationship between human resource management practices and employee retention in research institutes in Kenya.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study are expected to be of benefit to various stakeholders. First and foremost, the findings will help the Government of Kenya to understand the challenges research institutes face when generating a mass of critical and skilled manpower through employee retention required in developing innovations in order to secure Vision 2030. Secondly, the research results will help the policy makers and management in organizations particularly research

institutes to gain a better understanding of the key role played by human resource management practices in attracting, motivating and retaining talented and competent employees. Last but not the least, the research findings of this study will be of benefit to researchers and academicians by contributing to the body of knowledge in the academic community and to stimulate further research in the field of human resource management practices in other sectors of the economy.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

In this study, the selected human resource management practices that were examined were adapted from the Michigan model which provides four (4) generic human resource management practices namely: selection, training and development, performance management and compensation. This study focused on two (2) human resource management practices namely: employee selection, and training and development as the independent variables, whereas management style is the moderating variable and employee retention is the dependent variable. Management style was selected as the moderating variable because the human resource management depends mainly on line managers in the implementation of human resource activities and the manner in which they treat employees may have a bearing on employees' willingness to stay with the organization. This study therefore sought to find out practices related to employee selection and training and development that influence retention of core employees specifically research scientists, technical staff and professional support employees of research institutes in Kenya.

The conceptual framework for this study shows interaction between independent variables (employee selection and training and development), moderating variable (management style) and dependent variable (employee retention) in Figure 1.

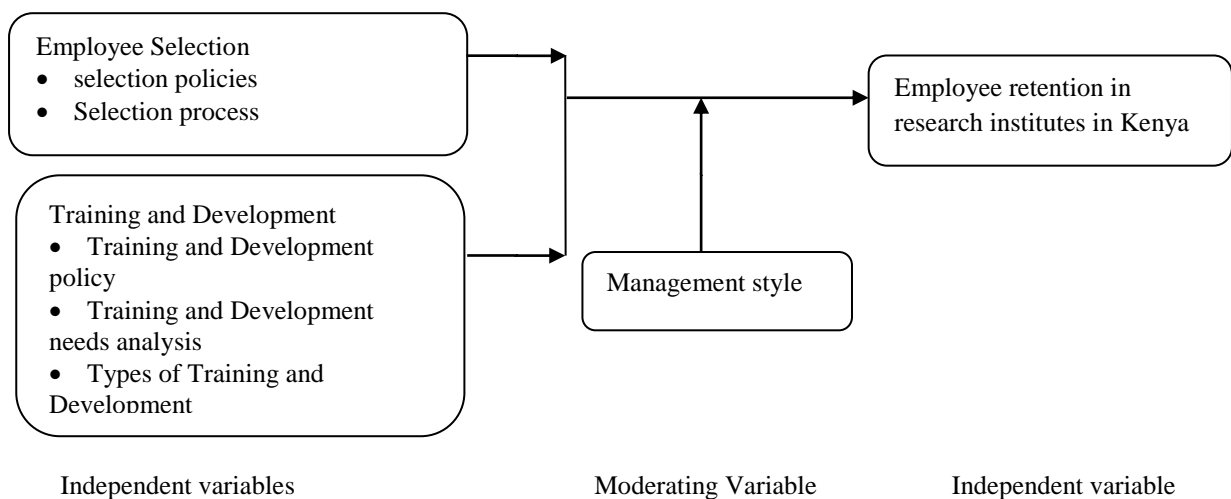


Fig 1: Conceptual framework

EMPLOYEE SELECTION:

Several researchers have defined employee selection as matching people with right qualifications based on their knowledge, skill or ability but not on their personal characteristics of the applicant. For, example Dessler (2011), explains selection as choosing an individual that has necessary qualifications to fill an existing or new job opportunity. According to Gupta (2006), selection is a process of choosing the most suitable persons out of all the applicants. Therefore, selection is a process by which an organization chooses from a list of applicants the persons who meet best the selection criteria for that position that has been advertised. It is more concerned more with predicting which candidates will make the most appropriate contribution to the organization- now and in the future (Hackett *et al*, 2001).

Candidates can be selected using different selection methods to assess their suitability for certain role. Such methods include: individual interviews, interviewing panels, selection boards and assessment centres. Cho *et al*. (2005) pre-employment tests as a key component of selective hiring and found that when employed, these tests can select employees that stay with a company longer. The success of this process requires that the recruitment strategies employed attract a large pool of applicants which will improve the organization's opportunities in selecting the right people for the advertised jobs. According to Lee *et al*. (2015), person-organization fit or selection of the most appropriate employee for

the organization plays an important role as an indicator of employee retention. Ulrich (1997) suggests that employee attachment to an organization is high where there is a shared mind set between employees and management which results in shared decision making processes used to reach organizational goals. This therefore implies that a mutually reinforcing relationship between organizations, employee, mediated by human practices, which influence the shared mind set by shaping the behaviour of the employee and thereby contributing to customer satisfaction and organizational effectiveness.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT:

Training and development refer to a systematic development of knowledge, skills and abilities required by employees to perform adequately a given task or job (El Sagheir, 2014). Training tends to be more narrowly focused and oriented toward short-term performance concerns whereas development tends to be oriented more towards broadening an individual's skills for future responsibilities (Snell & Bohlander, 2007). Development refers to a longer process of learning, acquiring skills or knowledge that may include a number of elements such as training, coaching, formal and informal interventions, education or planned experience.

In today's competitive environment driven by the knowledge economy, certain attributes and competencies of personnel are an integral component of organization's competitiveness. According to Jarventaus (2007) such a dynamic business environment requires organizations that invest heavily on training of their employees as this helps to positively respond to new challenges. Research has shown that when managers provide opportunities for training and support regarding career development, they help create employee development and drive employee engagement (Mone & London, 2009). Furthermore, according to Charan *et al.*, (2010) a strong employee development program prepares employees for full performance at all levels and is often an incentive for staying with an organization because people tend to stay where they can learn and grow.

MANAGEMENT STYLE:

According to Armstrong (2009), management style is the way managers treat members of their teams. The manner in which managers of a company manage and control their employees depends largely on their attitude and leadership over the employees, their perception of corporate identity and image that reflect in the organizational culture (Olmedo-Cifuentes & Martinez, 2014). It is for this reason that management style includes values and patterns of behaviour in which the management of a company is based on in order to influence the behaviour of the rest of the organization.

Lee and Chuang (2009) posit that a good manager not only inspires subordinates potential to enhancing efficiency but also meets their requirements in the process of achieving organizational goals. Managerial style is therefore one of the factors that play a significant role in enhancing or retarding the interest and commitment of the individuals in an organization. For example, according to Fry (2003), managerial style can be used as a leading strategy for offering inspiring motive and to enhance staffs potential for growth and development. Poor managerial style to a large extent can have a tremendous effect on staff resulting to workers leaving an organization (Essien, Adekunle & Oke-Bello, 2013).

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive and correlational research design which is was found to be appropriate in assessing the relationships among variables since the population of interest was drawn from different research institutes. The target population included middle and senior management employees working in Nairobi and Kisumu counties and their environs of research institutes formed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, CAP 250 (repealed). Stratified random sampling technique was used to draw a sample from all the employees who were in the scientific, technical and professional support categories of staff. A sample of 303 employees was randomly selected which represented 22% of the target population. The researcher used self-administered questionnaires to collect primary data while secondary data was gathered from available literature. The questionnaire was pre-tested in one of the research institutes that was an outlier. Quantitative data was analysed using Predictive Analytics Software (PASW) version 23 formerly Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and presented using percentages, correlational tables and regression tables.

VII. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study yielded a response rate of 77.89% which was found to be very good and representative, and was therefore used to draw plausible conclusions from the study.

CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS:

The relationship between the employee selection, training and development and employee retention in this study was determined using the Pearson correlation coefficient(*r*) which is a measure of association between two or more variables. The results indicate that the employee selection Pearson Correlation coefficient, $r = 0.406$ at $p < .01$ meaning that there's a significant moderate positive relationship between employee selection and employee retention and for training and development, $r = 0.550$ at $p < .01$ which implies that there's a significant strong positive relationship between training and development and employee retention. The correlation coefficients of 0.406 and 0.550 are above the recommended 0.3 meaning therefore that a relationship does exist (Gall *et al*, 2007; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003) between employee selection, training and development and employee retention. The correlation analysis results are presented in TABLE I.

TABLE I: PEARSON CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS FOR EMPLOYEE SELECTION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION

		Employee selection practices	Training and development practices	Employee retention
Employee selection practices	Pearson Correlation	1	.477**	.406**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	236	236	236
Training and development practices	Pearson Correlation	.477**	1	.550**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	236	236	236
Employee retention	Pearson Correlation	.406**	.550**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	236	236	236

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

REGRESSION ANALYSIS:

Regression analysis was conducted to determine whether employee selection and training and development were significant determinants of employee retention in research institutes in Kenya. The results in TABLE II indicate an *r* of .687 and a goodness of fit, r^2 of 0.473 at $p < .05$ significance level, which shows that combination of employee selection and training and development explains 47.3% of variation in employee retention.

The study sought to establish the moderating effect of management style on the relationship between a combination of employee selection, training and development, and employee retention. When management style was included in the analysis, the change in r^2 is .1%, and which is the percentage increase in the variation explained by addition of the interaction term (moderating variable). The increase is insignificant at $p = 0.627 > \alpha = 0.05$ at 5% degree of significance, hence management style does not moderate the relationship between employee selection, training and development and employee retention.

TABLE II: MODEL SUMMARY FOR REGRESSION

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.687 ^a	.473	.463	.463	.473	51.744	4	231	.000
2	.688 ^b	.473	.462	.464	.001	.236	1	230	.627

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee selection practices, Training and development practices
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Employee selection practices, Training and development practices, Management style practices
- c. Dependent Variable: Employee retention

Multiple regression was conducted on the relationship between the above human resource management practices and employee retention in research institutes in Kenya and the results are presented in Table III.

Table III: Results of Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	2.733	.195		13.989	.000	2.348	3.118
	Employee selection practices	-.174	.110	-.223	-1.584	.115	-.391	.043
	Training and development practices	.102	.122	.120	.842	.401	-.137	.342
2	(Constant)	2.494	.530		4.704	.000	1.449	3.538
	Management Employee selection practices	-.134	.138	-.171	-.973	.332	-.406	.138
	Selection	.055	.043	.427	1.257	.210	-.031	.140
	Training and development practices	.130	.134	.152	.967	.335	-.135	.394
	Training	.024	.041	.177	.581	.562	-.057	.104
	Management style practices	.079	.161	.108	.486	.627	-.240	.397

a. Dependent Variable: Employee retention

Using the values obtained in Table 4.5 the fitted model; $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_1X_1Z + \beta_2X_2Z + e$ becomes:

$$Y = 2.494 - 0.134X_1 + 0.13X_2 + (-0.134)(0.055)Z + (0.13)(0.024)Z + e;$$

$$Y = 2.494 - 0.134X_1 + 0.13X_2 - 0.0071Z + 0.0031Z + e$$

Where;

Y = Employee retention

β_0 = Constant

X_1 = Employee Selection

X_2 = Training and Development

β_j = the coefficient for X_j (j= 1,2,3,4,5)

Z = Management style

e = error term

X_jZ = the interaction term for management style with each of the independent variables (X_1 and X_2)

Results in Table III indicate that a unit change in employee selection will lead to reduction in employee retention of 0.134 whereas a unit change in training and development will lead to an increase of 0.130 in employee retention. With the inclusion of the moderator, a unit change in employee selection leads to an increase in employee retention by 0.055 whereas a unit change in training and development leads to an increase of 0.024 in employee retention. These results imply that employee selection has a significant negative influence on employee retention, training and development has a significant positive influence on employee retention in research institutes in Kenya. Management style is insignificant and does not moderate the relationship between the selected human resource management practices and employee retention in research institutes in Kenya.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS:

EMPLOYEE SELECTION:

The study established that employee selection has a significant negative influence on employee retention in research institutes in Kenya. From the study, 75% of the respondents confirmed to have been interviewed for the positions that they held which implies that research institutes carry out interviews before employment in order to get the competent employees on board and also comply with the requirements of the Kenyan constitution, 2010. The study established that

most of the appointments done in research institutes are based on merit which is key in building the confidence of not only the new employee but also the existing staff who are likely to work with the new employee. Majority of respondents at 71.1% indicated that research institutes do have clear policies and procedures for employee selection which is a key guide to institutions in enabling them conduct employee selection in a fair and standard manner. The study established that research institutes do undertake short listing of applicants for jobs transparently though involvement of user departments and other relevant actors. The study established that majority (50.9%) of the respondents agreed that their departments are indeed involved in the selection process. Participation is key in the employee selection process since it enhances transparency, fairness and objectivity. These results are consistent with those of a study by Mitchell and Mickel (2001) who found that employees should be involved in crucial decision making since they are also major stakeholders. The study results also indicate that 59.5% of the respondents revealed that research institutes use a combination of selection methods during the selection process of candidates. According to Beardwell *et al* (2004), the use of sophisticated techniques to ensure selection of the right people is frequently included in the bundles of best human resource practice.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT:

From the study, 55.5% of respondents indicated that research institutes have clear policy on training and development. These findings indicate that though research institutes do have policies on training and development, their employees may not be very much aware of the same. According to Ali, Shwerani and Ali (2015), training and development activities, although very important in enhancing the employees' competencies, it increases the employees' intentions to leave the organization if the organization has a weak system to retain its employees. 65.7% of respondents indicated that research institutes undertake training needs assessment periodically. Training needs assessment is key in determining the critical skills, knowledge and abilities required by the institution in meeting its strategic objectives and boosting performance of both employees and the organization. From the study, 47.2% respondents revealed that employees are accorded the opportunity to discuss their training and development requirements with their supervisors. The study established that majority of employees do not get the opportunity to discuss their training needs. Involvement of employees in the training needs assessment process is important in order to arrive at relevant training and development programmes which are likely to benefit both the employee and the organization.

The study results showed that 31.7% of respondents indicated that the nomination practices of staff for training and development in their organizations was fair. These results indicate that the nomination process for training and development in research institutes is biased which is likely to demotivate and demoralize employees. From the study, 43.9% respondents also indicated that they were satisfied with the quality and quantity of training provided for their current jobs which is a clear indication that satisfaction levels were low. The research institutes therefore ought to improve in the kind of trainings and quality of trainings that they are providing their employees so as to enable their employees get adequate trainings necessary for the execution of their duties. Training programs build a more committed and productive workforce and leads to less employee turnover (Kaufman & Hotchkiss, 2006).

MANAGEMENT STYLE:

From the study, 36.1% respondents indicated that management is committed to good people management. These findings indicate that research institutes in Kenya are committed to building effective employer – employee relationships. These results are consistent with findings of study by Dupre and Day (2007) who observed that employees' perception of management concern for both employees and customers has a significant influence on turnover intention. The majority of respondents representing 54.1% revealed that the management had created an open and comfortable work environment. From the study 42.1% of the respondents indicated that the management motivates and supports value systems. The manager's role in motivating is to recognize employees' for who they are and help them find their own way to making the best use of their strengths and abilities. The study results also indicate that 64.3% of respondents revealed that the management in research institutes encourages teamwork among employees. Research institutes exist to deliver on respective mandates aimed at generating respective improved technologies which depends on a wide range of expertise drawn from various disciplines in the organization, its therefore imperative that the various specialists work together as a team if they have to be successful and deliver results

VIII. CONCLUSION

Employee selection is important o organizations in ensuring that the right people join their workforce. The study found that research institutes in Kenya undertake competitive interviews, involve relevant offices in the selection process and make appointments of successful candidates on merit which are important selection factors in enhancing employee

retention. Training and development helps in enhancing the employees' skills, knowledge and abilities necessary in accomplishment of organization's objectives. The findings show that research institutes have clear policies and procedures on training and development and they have demonstrated commitments to training through provision of budget.

The study found a significant positive influence of training and development on employee retention whereas employee selection had a significant negative influence on employee retention. In addition; the moderating effect of management style on the relationship between the human resource management practices and employee retention was found to be insignificant. The study therefore established that research institutes in Kenya do undertake effective human resource management practices especially as regards to employee selection, training, and development aimed at retaining the best core employees.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizations should ensure that their employees come first, if they take good care of their employees through the various human resource management practices then employees are motivated to remain longer with the organization thus enhancing employee retention. The following recommendations were derived from the study findings and conclusions which if implemented will go a long way in improving human resource management practices and ultimately employee retention in research institutes in Kenya. The study recommends that research institutes in Kenya should ensure effective communication and consistent implementation of human resource management policies and procedures on employee selection, training and development. This will ensure that employees are fully aware of their employer expectations of them and will also ensure unit of direction for the organization thus ensuring effective and efficient service delivery.

The study recommends active participation by the various relevant actors across the respective human resource management practices. Research institutes in Kenya should ensure for instance in employee selection; short listing and interview panels should involve user department and relevant technical resource persons since participation enhances transparency, fairness and objectivity of the process. Training and development activities should be managed by a training committee to ensure fairness in nomination for trainings and judicious utilization of training funds.

Furthermore, the study recommends that research institutes in Kenya should endeavour to provide prompt feedback on employee selection process to interviewed candidates and employees on outcome of their training needs requests. This will prevent unnecessary anxiety for the job applicants and will guide employees on the way forward in terms of their training needs and performance status. For training needs employees who are unsuccessful for sponsorship are likely to pursue alternative means in order to bridge their training gaps such as self-development.

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