The Future of Talent Acquisition in Kenya: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract: **Talent acquisition has become a strategic alignment to bring congruence between people and purpose. Talent acquisition is arguably the most dynamic and most complex area of talent management and is the area of human capital management most critical to the business strategy. The outlook towards talent acquisition is changing and what was once called a 'workforce' evolved into 'human capital' and is now known as 'talent'. Talent acquisition has therefore made recruitment today a strategic and competent driven business function. This paper uses a descriptive approach through an analysis of secondary data and attempts to articulate the prospects and challenges that are likely to confront organization's talent acquisition today and in the future.**

Keywords: **Talent, Talent acquisition, Talent management.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective talent acquisition is based on the premise that organizations need to get the right people on the bus and in the right seats to succeed and that good coaching, training, mentoring, etc., is not likely to make up for bad selection." "Hire Hard….Manage easy!"[14]. Talent fuels every facet of business. A company can have the right technology, the right infrastructure, the right products and services—yet still fall short of expectations without the right people. Attracting, recruiting, hiring, and engaging the right talent for the right job is what makes enterprises grow [14]. For better understanding of talent acquisition, this paper undertakes to define some of the related terms as follows:

1.1. Talent refers to those individuals who can make a difference to organizational performance either through their immediate contribution or in the longer term by demonstrating the highest levels of potential [24].

1.2. Talent management is the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of individuals with high potential who are of particular value to an organization [24].

1.3. Talent acquisition is a strategic approach to identifying, attracting, and on boarding top talent to efficiently and effectively meet dynamic business needs. It is the process of attracting, finding, and selecting highly talented individuals (those who align with the business strategy, possess required competencies, and who will integrate smoothly and productively into the organization and its culture) to meet current and future employment needs. Talent acquisition encompasses more than recruitment and selection alone. It therefore includes elements of employment branding, outreach, networking, and relationship building with potential candidate communities [24].

Talent acquisition has become a strategic alignment to bring congruence between people and purpose. The scarcity of and demand for talent have reframed the organizations' search to find talented people by adding 'talent attraction' and 'employer brand value' as prerequisite for successful talent acquisition. Globally, talent is considered as a valuable asset to the organization and has become a critical resource for an organization to attain competitive advantage. There are many large organizations suffering from chronic shortage of talented employees, and therefore, in recent years organizations have been extremely putting priority on managing talent for global competition and allowing competitive advantage to survive [21, 30]. Organizations today have also realized the significance of having the right people in the right place.

Talent is the key ingredient to any organization, and hiring, engaging and retaining the right talent can be effectively managed by having a proper talent acquisition strategy in place. The quality of people and culture you nurture in your organization directly affects the output of the organization. Therefore, nowadays the organization must have the ability to attract and retain talent fostering the right employee because it is one of the key issues for human resource managers and their organization across the globe [30, 8].

2. FUTURE PROSPECTS OF TALENT ACQUISITION

Per Aberdeen's Talent Acquisition 2014: Reverse the Regressive Curse, 60% of companies had a reactionary recruitment approach, wherein they only sourced and hired when there were open job requisitions, instead of actively looking for new talent all the time. This is counterproductive since today's candidates typically research the organization regularly over a long period of time before they even decide to apply for a job. Reactionary recruitment is no longer good enough for bringing in the most sought-after talent. Today's workforce has changed dramatically. If firms do not create and execute a talent acquisition strategy, or if their talent acquisition efforts do not keep pace with competitors, firms will not only lose qualified candidates, but also will jeopardize organizational growth and performance [22]. Human resources and talent acquisition are constantly evolving and with new trends and new tools continuously being introduced, it is nearly impossible for these spaces to stay settled for very long. The following tools can be used to enhance the talent acquisition of an organization:

2.1. Technology:

Technology has brought an overhaul into the whole exercise of talent acquisition. New applicant tracking systems (ATS), recruitment marketing platforms, and other advantageous tools are not only making it easier to find talent, but to foster a culture of networking with passive candidates that can translate to new hires down the road.

Technology has also enhanced the use of e-recruitment. E-recruitment is the use of internet enabled technologies to attract and select candidates for a live vacancy existing in an organization [10] and helps companies in implementing the Best practices of recruitment and hiring the best talent available in the market [28]. E-Recruitment allows for better targeting of candidates than advertising in general newspapers, resulting in a greater availability of qualified applicants [15].Websites provides a medium through which company can present highly detailed job and organizational information to attract relevant job seekers who are a good fit for the organization. In a study of perceived effectiveness of e-recruitment in talent acquisition in Kenya's public service, the findings showed that e-recruitment enabled ministries to communicate vacancies to the applicants and receive prompt response from suitable applicants as well as improve talent pool of ministries [16]. This shows the importance of technology in talent acquisition.

Another form of technology according to Morgan, (2015), is platform business models e.g OLX which are sprouting up across all sectors of the economy. The platform economy is real and growing rapidly and it is developing in the human capital management sector and beginning to impact talent acquisition models, practices, and roles. While many of these human capital platform businesses cover multiple skill and talent categories, others are quite category focused. Moreover, not all "human capability platform" businesses are pure "online marketplace" models that enable open buying and selling—some are more complex intermediaries which provide value-added services of verification, assessment, classification and compliance management, etc. Others appear to require complementary sourcing and recruiting businesses to function effectively. The expansion of platform models will significantly alter talent acquisition in future. For example, away from the time-consuming, inefficient searching for talent and the acquisition of it as a specific person who will be secured and hired "into a job" to the managing pools and links to talent and skills, assessing business requirements and needs for talent and skills, and configuring optimal work arrangements that meet the specific requirements of both business and talent across a range of different forms of engagement beyond "jobs" as we know them today. Platforms will also provide the networked capabilities and workflow tools to connect talent and those who have a need for it in smoother, faster, more efficient ways (as well as the right services are applied along the way—background checks, classification tests, on boarding, etc.) [19].

Social media networks also create a powerful talent acquisition tool [9]. Throughout the coming decade, social networks will continue to be the best way to form relationships with both passive and active candidates. Instead of the one-time static relationships candidates might have expected from recruiters, social networks will allow recruiters to have long term dynamic relationships with an extensive talent pipeline. With passive candidates making up more that 70% of the workforce, leveraging these relationships through social networks is more important than ever. Forward thinking

organizations are now leveraging social media outlets to strengthen and promote their employee referral programs – programs often cited as the most cost effective source of qualified talent. Long viewed as the most effective way to attract and identify top hires, social media programs that leverage employee referrals decrease turnover, reduce cost per hire and improve new hire time-to-productivity. More and more organizations are discovering the remarkable value proposition social media holds. With talent management solutions integrating with social networks, it is easier than ever to launch, measure and capture data from candidates and employees through social networks [9].

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) will also become a key component in strategic recruiting [11]. Search engine optimized talent hubs will gain popularity, allowing candidates to filter jobs by class, location and company. Organic search engine optimization is now viewed as one of the most cost effective and under- utilized ways to generate applicant traffic to a company's listed job openings. In order for candidates to find job openings within an organization, the job descriptions must be optimized to rank well with search engine results [11]. Search engine optimization (SEO) is defined as the process of developing and structuring Web content to be easily discovered by search engines and therefore by people. SEO has long been part of an organization's strategy to drive traffic to their individual corporate website. The concept is simple, the higher your website or job description appears on the list of search results for a given set of terms, the more web traffic your website and job description can expect to receive. Quality content that is search engine optimized will get picked up for a wider range of relevant searches, resulting in a higher number of quality candidates and essentially a more effective recruiting campaign. With SEO, content is king. When preparing job postings, job descriptions should be extremely detailed focusing on keywords and phrases that are likely to relate to candidates [11].

2.2. Use of talent communities:

Top performing firms proactively build talent pipelines using talent communities [5]. Talent communities are one of the fastest-growing areas of talent acquisition. A talent community is a segmented audience of targeted talent that can meet the current and future hiring needs and maps to an organization's workforce plan. These can be for example Law Society of Kenya (LSK), Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Kenya (ICPAK), Kenya Institute of Management (KIM), Kenya Society of Immunology (KSI), Kenya Institute of Supplies Management (KISM), Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK), Institute of Human Resource Management (IHRM) among other recognized bodies in Kenya dealing with different professionals. For most organizations, a talent community is simply a database of active and passive candidates who receive email alerts about job opportunities. Most employers in Kenya now require candidates to be accredited members of their specific professional bodies before they can be hired by any particular organization.What distinguishes the best firms from the average firms is their ability to engage candidates through these communities and create a strong employer brand in the process. Relationships are built with a talent community primarily through content. Although firms have a vested interest in marketing jobs to the target audience, profession or affinity focused content is more effective. In other words, it is better for an organization to be seen as sharing an affinity for the community as opposed to just giving the community a job feed. Firms that are successful in building talent communities serve their target talent audiences and are great citizens of their community. The talent community is continually engaged, nurtured, informed, listened to, and cultivated. This results in those organizations being top of mind when the timing is right for a community member to consider a job change [5].

2.3. Using talent acquisition as a strategy:

The world of talent acquisition is complex and the most successful firms view talent acquisition as a strategic endeavor, not simply an activity in filling open positions. The number one strategy pertaining to talent acquisition revolves around candidate relationship management. Much like an organization has a strategy around nurturing relationships with its prospective and current customers, the firms that are able to find and hire the best quality candidates most quickly are doing the same with their prospective employees. For these top-performing organizations, talent acquisition is a continuous process no matter what the immediate hiring needs are [6]**.** Organizations that take a holistic approach to talent and focus on every element are better able to address skill shortages and meet company growth objectives. Managers therefore will be required to look at talent acquisition from a strategic point of view for their organizations to succeed. Strategic talent acquisition integrates the entire pre-hire stages of the employee lifecycle—from creating the job requisition to on-boarding a new hire in a way that engages candidates and drives business outcomes. As the talent management industry continues to mature, the trend towards a holistic approach is more pronounced than ever. Holistic talent management encourages organizations to maximize their talent pool by aligning it with short and long term business objectives [19]. While encouraging an organizational culture of engagement and innovation, a holistic talent management approach requires organizations to view talent acquisition, development, retention and employee management in a radically new way- as a single entity rather than distinct parts.

2.4. Use of Talent departments:

The main focus of the talent acquisition discipline/activity/process will also shift from the acquisition of talent to the configuration of the optimal arrangements through which talent will be provided by people and consumed by businesses. The concept of talent as something that is supplied by people (and must be managed as such) will be as important as ever; however, a new concept of "talent-as-a-service" (and managing different talent services arrangements) will become equally important [23]. This means that organizations may have to create what may be referred to as talent departments to manage the talent services.

2.5. Career mobility:

As regional economies and labour markets improve, finding talent will become an increasing challenge. By giving current employees the opportunity and the mechanisms to reach for new positions it will help ensure an effective workforce now and into the future. According to a recent study, strong internal mobility programmes are critical to an organisation's attraction and retention efforts [19]. Moreover, there is time and cost savings to appointing internally too. Employers tend to invest a significant amount of resources to develop employees – whether providing structured career development programmes, giving internal or external training, mentoring or appraisal structures – and this can be capitalised on in a new role. There is also the advantage of an existing employee, given their understanding of the business. Induction periods, knowledge of the company background and ethos, and access to essential systems and functions, all take time, but are significantly reduced when hiring from within. Marzo [20] of Talent solutions talks about internal mobility – an increasingly important item on the HR agenda. Today's current and future workers don't just want to know what their career path looks like in their current position, or the role advertised, but rather learn about alternative opportunities within the organisation. Ones that will allow them contribute to the business in new and different ways. For employers, this represents the ultimate form of employee engagement. As HR executives continue to be challenged with tighter budgets, the requirement for specific talent and increased complexity in global workforce planning, many organizations will be forced to staff from within and backfill less senior and less-complex roles. Up-skilling employees to fill roles as and when they become available is a very effective method for engaging and retaining talent, while shortening time to productivity and reducing competitive intelligence leakage. But, ultimately, a balanced approach to internal vs. external candidates will prove most valuable for an organisation's growth, continued innovation and long-term success [12].

2.6. Employer branding:

In today's competitive labour market where companies are competing for the top talent, a company must equally sell itself as an employer of choice. In the same way you make decisions about the brands you buy, employees are making decisions about the companies they work for. Based on their personal motivators, employees will make decisions based on factors such as a company's culture, its approach to workplace flexibility or the perceived career opportunities it offers. Employer branding is concerned with enhancing a company's employer brand to attract and retain talent. Marketers have for decades used tools to build brand awareness, loyalty and trust to win the hearts and minds of consumers. Now HR practitioners are being increasingly called upon to use similar marketing skills to win the hearts and minds of employees. When managed properly, the employer brand has significant benefit in helping to attract, retain and engage the type of employees that a business requires to deliver success.

Employment branding includes activities that help to uncover, articulate, and define a company's image, organizational culture, key differentiators, reputation, and products and services [13]. It refers to the positioning and promotion of benefits, culture, and company values to potential and existing employees. According to CIPD [7] employer brand is a set of attributes and qualities –often intangible- that makes an organization distinctive, promises a kind of particular employment experience and appeals to those people who will thrive and perform to their best in its culture. The Employer brand is a key for talent attraction and is an outcome of organizational policies and practices relating to compensation, training and development, working condition, performance evaluation and promotion among others. Because employment brand is based strongly on the perceptions of the current employees, it is recommended that professionals build a strategy around how to influence company perception by employees. Companies can demonstrate what it expects from its employees and what they can expect in return by creating employee value propositions (EVPs) which are important for establishing the employment brand [6]. Organizations have the ability to promote their brand through websites and career pages; likewise, employees are able to divulge information about their organization through websites as well as traditional methods, such as word of mouth. Employer brand value is an essential element of talent attraction which will widen the pool of candidates paving to better selection. Good employer brand value can attract better candidates and there by contribute to successful talent acquisition by creating more aspirants and wider selection. The need to develop talent and become employer of choice occupies central position in organizational system [13].

3. FUTURE CHALLENGES IN TALENT ACQUISITION

Apart from having good prospects in future, talent acquisition also faces challenges that managers will have to tackle for effective growth of their organizations.

3.1. Contingent workforce:

More and more people are joining the contingent workforce and so HR has a smaller footprint that they are actually managing and the amount of hiring that is taking place for full-time workers continues to decrease. As a result, there are staffing firms that are wholly focused on the contingent work force and this may continue to grow. HR has got to start thinking about total workforce and not just full-time workforce. How organizations manage that and manage their values and brand throughout the total workforce is so incredibly important [23].

3.2. Consultancy:

The issue of third parties — consulting practices, search firms, recruitment process outsourcing (RPO), and more is also another challenge. When hiring for a tricky role, outsourcing it to a search firm to expedite the process is often a smart move [23]. However, outsourcing all of an organization's hiring needs can be problematic — not only are organizations ultimately putting off the need to develop their recruiting and hiring capability internally, instead, they are putting it in the hands of someone who does not work at their start-up.

3.3. Consumerization:

The age of the user experience is here to stay. There are websites, blogs, books, even jobs dedicated to the user experience. In this age it is all about centering services on consumers, a process known as consumerization. Consumers increasingly expect any and all online experiences to be clean, easy, and interactive. When experiences are high-quality and seamless, consumers don't usually have anything to say. But when something is amiss, customers often speak their minds and their voices are heard, loudly. The accessibility of mobile devices and the broad reach of social media mean that consumer feedback happens faster than ever. In turn, other consumers find out about said issues by word of mouth and could have an impact on future business. The candidate experience is increasingly similar to consumerization, but it is taking companies some time to catch up. Even if candidates are not hired, their perspectives on the overall process will have an impact on an organization's brand, customers, and success. A great candidate experience can make all the difference for the business [2].

3.4. Talent Retention:

It is clear that the foremost challenge for management today is how to retain its key talent [26]. Turnover is costly and directly impacts business performance. As a result, rewards professionals will be under increased pressure to make counteroffers, increase new-hire offers, make more frequent exceptions to rewards policies and programs, and offer special deals to retain key employees. According to Scott, McMullen, and Royal, [25], rewards programs are important for retaining key talent and therefore during talent acquisition, management will be required to develop a clear definition of what is considered key talent and then make sure those individuals are identified and managed as such, Ensure that key employees perceive the rewards system as relevant and fair, and confirm that they are paid consistently with relevant external markets, Consider paying key talent above the median of relevant labor markets to lessen the chances that competitors can lure them away, Make sure that key employees perceive that they have opportunity for development and advancement, Make sure that the organization gives particular attention to the employment experience of key talent by using multiple retention methods and managing those methods effectively, Carefully monitor voluntary turnover among key employees, Recognize that key employees are in high demand and will be lured away by increased pay and job opportunities and as such, succession plans and counteroffer policies should be established, Recognize that organization size, industry and sector do not play a substantial role in the retention of key employees and as such be willing to experiment with ideas for retaining key employees from any source.

3.5. Affirmative action:

Another challenge that faces managers in talent acquisition is managing diversity and adherence to legal requirements pertaining to recruitment such as gender diversity and regional balance. The effective management of diversity is defined as 'a holistic approach to creating a corporate environment that allows all kinds of people to reach their full potential in pursuit of corporate objectives' [18]. As described by Kandola and Fullerton [3] cited in Armstrong [3], the basic concept of managing diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people. That diversity consists of

visible and non –visible differences which will include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and workplace covers all kinds of differences that go beyond the traditional understanding of what equal opportunity is about. The Kenyan Constitution obliges the state to provide for the representation of minorities and marginalized groups in governance, and to provide access to employment and special opportunities in educational and economic fields. Following these prescriptions, a new law was introduced requiring that one third of elective bodies should be made up of marginalized groups. Article 81(b) foresees the formulation of an act to promote the representation of women, persons with disabilities, ethnic and other marginalized groups in the Parliament. Recruitment managers will therefore need to develop a recruitment strategy that stresses on the need for diversification. However, this may be misleading because the wrong people can be hired in the name of representation and diversification.

3.6. Ethical issues:

Talent acquisition also has ethical considerations that recruitment managers should observe. There are specific areas in recruiting where most ethical issues arise. These include how a position is represented to a candidate, how candidates are located, and how interviews are conducted. In today's age of radical transparency, organisational values, integrity and ethical standards matter to virtually everyone a company counts as a stakeholder, from customers to shareholders and importantly, current and potential employees and therefore managers must ensure that adherence to these ethical issues is observed.

3.7. Talent shortage and scarcity:

Businesses face the ongoing challenge of finding the right people with the right skills – those who can improve performance, strengthen competitive advantage, and drive sustainable growth. The concern about the scarcity of talent is almost universal. Organizations locally and around the world are competing for the same pool of talents [1].

3.8. Dual career:

Another talent acquisition challenge is the issue of accommodating dual career couples. Dual career is a partnership constellation where both partners are highly educated, have a high upward career orientation, and work full time in a demanding job. In a dual career couple, the professional life plays a predominant role in both partners' identities. Parenthood and related organizational challenges is one of the issue faced by dual career couples, the second one being m anaging geographical mobility aspirations. With nowadays-important role of geographical mobility in career enhancement, dual career couples are likely to be confronted to a mobility dilemma already in the earliest stage of their professional life [1]. Dual careering is one of the reasons why organizations encounter difficulties to hire staff female executives, specifically in the case of international recruitment. Firstly, because women are more often involved in dual career relationship than highly men: Highly educated men do not necessarily live with equality educated and career oriented partners, although women always almost do. Secondly, because women tend to reject job transfers offers more often than men; Men's careers are often given priority and therefore women decide not to relocate. Organizations may thus at one point be required to formulate policies regarding support of married partners especially in cases of transfers.

3.9. Immigrant workers:

The acquisition of immigrant workers is a challenge facing many organizations. In order to compete in today's knowledge based global economy, organizations need to be able to attract and retain the best talent. That talent is no longer primarily locally –based. The need for skills continue to grow and as companies strive to compete, maintaining a diverse workforce that successfully interacts with employees abroad helps provide for greater opportunities to serve clients and customers throughout the **world [4]**

3.10. Performance management:

Managers will also be faced with the challenge of balancing performance management and talent acquisition. The establishment of performance management systems is regarded as a means of getting results from individuals, teams, and the organization at large within a given framework of planned goals, objectives, and standards. It allows for the setting of targets and the development of indicators against which performance can be later measured [29]. Talent acquisition on the hand defines security of tenure and therefore this means that organizations will have to define the terms under which an employee can be fired based on performance.

4. CONCLUSION

During this new era in human capital management, HR professionals will become catalysts for strategic change only when they understand the relationship and interconnectedness of the different components of the end-to-end talent lifecycle. From attracting and selecting talent wisely, to retaining and developing tomorrow's leaders, to helping former employees transition out of the company [2].

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