Towards a Results-Oriented Public Service in Kenya: The Modern Human Resource Management Perspective

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Abstract

In order to transform a public service that by and large is characterized by corruption, low productivity, inefficiency, lack of transparency and accountability to an accountable, responsive, functioning and performance-based one, there must be change of both behavior and culture of the society. The paper employs modern HRM practices to Public Service, exploring what may be referred to as 'revolutionary changes' that would go a long way in changing the Civil Service towards delivering desired results over time. The paper advocates devolved structures, reduced bureaucracy, empowerment of staff, proper HR planning, Management Development, creating high performance workplaces, lifelong learning and instilling of values, with common vision, mission, objectives, and strategies for service delivery in a planned and systematic way, as the way forward for efficient and effective service delivery. The paper finally proposes a continuous effort to streamline, revitalize, depoliticize public service and make all civil servants accountable. The most important component in transforming public service is an enlightened public; not just in urban but also in rural areas. An enlightened citizenry will not just check the quality of services but also demand their rights.

Key Words: Management Development, Strategic Human Resource Management, Training, Meritocracy

Introduction

Public service efficiency in delivery of results/services has been a challenge in the world and particularly in the third world countries. Most of the public service structure was inherited from colonial masters and was meant for control and exerting authority. It has had weaknesses which apparently are largely conservative. This has affected development process in the third world countries.

Today governments are putting in considerable effort in making the public service effective. In the better part of 2003, there was energy and a feeling that things must be done in a better way owing to the changes in the environment. While this may not be the first attempt by the government to introduce public service transformation it is a step in the right direction. It is important to note that much of the practices took place without the benefit of the systematic planning now associated with strategic HRM. The reforms are at a stage where the focus is on leadership and the need for commitment, integrity and professionalism in putting in place strategic programs for the future.

Public service ethics in Kenya are governed by a number of instruments. These include the code of regulations for civil Servants, public service commission Act cap 185, the Penal code 63, the Prevention of Corruption Act cap 412, the Presidential Parliamentary Elections Act and Professional Association/Complains Committees

Besides the above-mentioned instruments, there are also other watch dog institutions that also regulate public service ethics. These are Office of the Controller and Auditor General, the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Investment Committee, Inspector of State Corporation and the Kenya Police Anti Corruption Unit.

It was observed during the dissemination workshop that despite the existence of the above instrument and institutions, the level of public service ethics in Kenya is still very low. There was unanimous agreement that this is due to the following reasons: outdated instruments; inaccessibility of the instrument; poor or lack of induction of civil servants;   failure by government to implement recommendations made by the watchdog institutions; reluctance of ordinary citizens to report wrongdoing and unethical behavior of civil servants due to mistrust of the police; decline of professionalism in the civil service and ineffective enforcement of the Code of Regulations and other instruments guiding the conduct of civil servant.

The government has taken a number of initiatives to address some of the shortcomings identified by the study. The major initiative undertaken by the government are as follow: appointment of an Integrity Officer in the Office of the President to monitor the integrity of public servants; the launching of the Public Service Integrity Program to create awareness of what is expected of civil servants; avail and disseminate the code of Regulations to civil servants. In this regard, the government has circulated over 5000 copies of the Code of Regulations to civil servants; the government has also reactivated the police anti corruption unit; publication and tabling of the Anti corruption bill in parliament and the National Code of Conduct Bill: and the publication and tabling of the Economic Crimes Bill.

Context of Public Service Reforms in Kenya

In most African countries and particularly in Kenya, the public service for a long time has been characterized by the corruption, low productivity inefficiency, lack of transparency and accountability.

It is now becoming increasingly necessary for Kenyans to take a considered look at the national stock of human resources. It is not enough to consider the changing form of HRM or to a talk of human capital without taking account of the specific working conditions facing people in Kenya now. An understanding of the context of HRM must, for example, take cognizance of the current state of the economy and in particular the way the economy has been plundered through graft and mismanagement. Kenya has consistently been ranked among the most corrupt nations in league tables prepared by such bodies as Transparency International. The prevalence of graft appears to have been fostered by an opportunistic approach to appropriating public service gains, pressures from the extended family for material support, an uncaring attitude to the utilization of state resources and weak governance structures in which politicians and senior public servants have historically flouted the law with impunity. The latter feature has in turn set a bad example for ordinary people. A culture of low accountability especially in the misappropriation of foreign aid has led to foreign donors freezing aid, especially from the early 1990's subsequently starving the economy of much-needed financial support.

The question of ethnicity has impinged heavily on the workplace. It manifests itself mostly through favoritism in recruitment, career advancement and the provision of training opportunities. Although such practices are widely criticized by the intellectual elites, others interpret them in terms of the notion of obligation to close relatives and friends (Kamoche, 2003).   Other observers (e.g. Blunt, 1985) see it as an adaptive response to workplace alienation whereby workers from the same rural area come together to give each other psychological and material support in the unfamiliar city environment.

The consequence of these developments is that for a long time the state has been unable to fund basic education, health and infrastructural development to the required standard, and has had to undertake an ambitious privatization program which has inevitably led to massive lay-off and high unemployment in an economy in which the state (and civil service) was previously a major employer. The near collapse of the infrastructure (e.g. the transportation and telecommunication systems, unreliable electricity supply and so forth) has brought more pressure to bear on production costs which are invariably passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices. This means that whereas the government has had good policies and programs to deliver services to improve the lives of its people and therefore bring development, the system has not functioned as expected.

The interventions have not achieved significant results as intended in most cases. This is because of the nature of civil service; the structure, size, culture, composition, political interference, leadership and commitment of the government to reforms. This centralized system is not just at the top heavy and costly but worse, most of the expenditure is concentrated in unproductive activities, leaving little for rural activities.

In today's world where performance is the key, democratization is taking root, societies are enlightened and expectations are high, the old system of doing things has proved to have outlived its usefulness. The initiatives to change the face of public service have more often than not resulted in dilemma. Retrenchment as had its repercussions in terms of development in the country.

Most activities in civil service reforms in developing countries according to (Nunberg 1995) have concentrated understandably on short-term cost containment measures. Considerably, more emphasis will have to be given to longer-term management issues if sustained improvement in government administrative capacity is to take place. More attention needs to be paid to devising a coherent over arching strategy for civil service reform and detailing the set of tactics by which the strategic goals will be achieved.

Highlights of Reform Experiences In Other Countries

In a study carried out by the United Nations (2001) In 14 countries; Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Finland, Germany, Hungary, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Republic of Korea, UK, and US, there were four broad reform concerns that to different degrees were publicly stated by governments: to reduce public expenditure, maintaining the attractiveness of the investment climate and the competitiveness of national firms; to improve policy responsiveness and implementation by overcoming resistance from vested interest to the implementation of legitimate policies or reduction of some programs; to improve government as an employer by making it responsible to attracting sufficient numbers of appropriately skilled employees while restraining aggregate employment costs andto improve service delivery and build public and private sector confidence by enhancing the degree of respect and trust accorded to government by private sector and by the public.

Depending on the context of specific countries the approaches to reforms focused on increasing efficiency, achieving expenditure reductions and streamlining government. Whereas most of the outcomes were positive, there were concerns arising from implementation of the reform programs. Some of the concerns were: performance measures were un-even; implementation gap: reforms not meeting all expectations; Little progress in civil service human resource management; reform fatigue in relation to new public management (new government concepts just emerging); Small "club" of reformers – reforms not widespread; attempt to introduce greater flexibility in civil service pay system was difficult; civil servants became excessively cautious because of political oversight and significant politicization of senior levels

Application of Modern HRM to Public Service

Currently in Kenya, the traditional approach used to managing people is an emphasis on administrative procedures – evident in large public corporation currently being privatized. (Kamoche, 2003). Modern HRM involves putting in place strategies that will basically ensure the maximum utilization of people in an organization. This is done in a systematic and planned method. Modern Human Resource practices may contribute to the desired transformation of the public service. This requires a shift in the way of managing employees of the government or state corporations to ensure that they deliver results as required change begins with leadership of public service. These are people who are equipped with knowledge and experience on modern/advanced Human Resource Management.

When peoples needs are not satisfied or when the outcomes are unsatisfactory frustration may be experienced leading to negative attitudes towards employment and even to anti social behavior in the workplace (Cole,2002) Hawthorne experiment showed that when employees feel that they are important and their work is valued by management they will perform better. Leaders in various Ministries should give the necessary direction and promote best practices in Human Resource Management. Line Managers should also be empowered. There is need to move from the culture of control, rules and regulations to a more empowering management style with performance appraisal and meritocracy as well as promoting innovativeness. This can only be done if the government is socially responsible to its workers. This means, ensuring that there is a significant commitment and contribution by the government to the welfare of the employees and to ensure that they lead a meaningful life. This is a key to introducing better results in the public sector.

The public sector should invest in training of staff at various levels on skills, values, culture change, vision and mission of their various section and that of the government overall. The department /Ministry should work out professionally its staffing needs and ensure that there are no redundancies.

The employees should be paid wages that are practical and can make a difference in their lives and which take cognizance of realities. Else this will be "asking people without facilities to perform, is like asking one to swim hard and fast in a swimming pool without water!!" Change of culture will only happen over time, if the communities are empowered with knowledge of their rights. A system of reporting is necessary to change the way services are delivered. Leaders are always required to cast the first stone in setting the standards of behavior and building up an ethical corporate culture.

The national economic and competitive success are being increasingly determined by fast moving open markets, dynamic enterprises, highly skilled workforces and the forces of globalization, the public service must enter the equation as an active player, proactively developing and managing regulatory frame works, and responding to growing expectations of quality service. Above everything else, public sector reforms are an indication that the public service has become a dynamic variable in the equation of successful government. In an era where competitive successes relies significantly on primary production, managed markets and secure industrial capacity, the public service is representing a force for encouraging stability. Its role is managing stable regulatory frameworks in the context of relatively low public expectations of government services. The public service must rise above every sector, shade off its bad image and lead the way in ensuring economic growth.

A re-conceptualization of service users as consumers of public service has meant that passive recipients of services are increasingly seen as active customers, and serious attempts should be made to find out what customers expect. To achieve goals, experience through out the commonwealth has shown that successful reforms are built on foundation of balanced organizational and attitudinal changes. For comprehensive revision of traditional public service personnel management policies, supported by tight monitoring of total staff numbers and costs, is accompanied by a conscious process of re- -orientation for staff in which both quality of service and accountability to the public are being emphasized. Such a deliberate process of changing attitudes, in step with reforming structures highlights the central role of staff commitment to change.

The move form a climate of administration to management is offering an opportunity to tighten up role and responsibilities at all levels. The concern f or quality and increasing identification with the public requesting services are an important aspect of this new culture. This gives us hope that a new public service value system will emerge in which quality like probity, more traditionally, is taken as a moral as much as a regulatory issue. There is need to design strategies that will ensure that public servants are self-motivated by a new set of values and most crucially that their own aspirations coincide with organizational goals. Issues of remuneration and general staff welfare are therefore, an integral part of reforms. The management of change requires that public servants at all levels feel a sense of involvement in the process, and share a vision of change. Such involvement from the beginning ensures commitment to the new order.

The re-invention means a fundamental transformation of the public servants, systems and organization to realize an unprecedented increase in their efficiency, effectiveness, adaptability and capacity to innovate. The initiative is about turning bureaucrats into entrepreneurs. It is about creating public organizations and systems that will habitually innovate, that continually improve their quality, without having to be pushed. It is about creating public service that has an in-built capacity to improve or a self-renewing system.

Implementing a High Performance Workplace Strategy in the public service

This is done by: providing strong vision and leadership; drawing from a diverse talent pool; putting disciplinary and grievance procedures in place; involving employees in problem – solving; giving employees greater autonomy; ensuring equality and fairness; monitor the success of your policies; introduce flexible ways of working; adopt family-friendly policies and childcare support; run a work-life balanced program; look at areas where employees would become more productive through increased skill levels, and introduce appropriate training, people management, employee involvement, diversity and equality, training and development.

The benefits of creating a high performance workplace in public service has increased job satisfaction and therefore a good environment for increased productivity. The employees will therefore; show greater commitment, dedication and support to the business; be more receptive to and better prepared for change; be better informed; Offer ideas; See how they fit into the organization and the contribution they are making; feel valued and so give their best; be more productive and the public service can see: lower absenteeism;

lower staff turnover and better retention of employees and their skills, so better value out of training and development; senior managers who know what is actually going on at the "shop floor"; a higher rate of innovation; successful introduction of new forms of work organization; managing the resultant changes and a better ability to react rapidly to threats and opportunities and ultimately enhanced productivity and competitiveness

Leadership is a key element in successful implementation of large-scale change (Norman & Keys, 1992). The leader shows the need and sets the vision, defining the basic purpose, goals and parameters of change.

Professionalism in government or any other field rests on two foundations: one is a competent base, a special body of knowledge or definable skill acquired through study and practice. The concept of professionalism however also suggests a shared value system, a code of ethical conduct that manifests themselves in the application of knowledge, the use of particular skills and in the exercise of control over practice. (UN 1999, ST/ESA/PAD/SER.E. /3/P97)

Reinforcing Core Public Service Values

Reinforcing core public values should be based on a number of elements: revaluation of learning, integrity and competence; stress on merit system while paying due regard to affirmative action in favor of minorities and historically otherwise disadvantaged groups; growing sensitivity towards and respect for the citizens' needs; low tolerance for laxity, corruption and crime; increasing recognition of the need to acknowledge and to reward industry, loyalty, accomplishment and merit; increasing recognition of the value of neutrality of the civil servants and of the need to secure a degree of autonomy of public personnel management from extraneous pressure in order to safeguard high quality performance, motivation, integrity and professionalism in the public service and increasing recognition of the value of cross cultural and international links as means towards the improvement of professional image and performance of the public service (ibid p. 24)

Management of Change

The state must be in the forefront of implementing change and smoothening the path for progress. This entails pro-active measures to develop enabling policy frameworks to promote new technologies, set up performance measurement and evaluation systems, overhaul administrative structures and design adequate patterns for the collection of internationally comparable reliable and accurate data for policy making purposes.

Pritchard (1995), have outlined the basic steps in managing a transition to a new system; identifying tasks to be done, creating necessary management structures, developing strategies for building commitment, designing mechanisms to communicate the change and assigning resources. It is important to remember that change to a new system is difficult, comprehensive, long-term process. Leaders will need to maintain their commitment, keep process visible, provide necessary support and hold people accountable for results

Principles of change applied to Results Based Management

The principles include: time – any change will take time hence transformation from the current process; resistance – fear of the unknown; leadership – commitment and ability of change of leaders; persistence- leaders should learn to be persistent; consistency – the primary mistake managers make is that they become inconsistent. This tells employees, the manager is not serious, hence lack of credibility and initiative – should be seen have self interest.

When you focus on key processes, i.e. the activities and tasks themselves, rather than on abstract ideas such as "culture" and "participation", then the change process can begin in earnest. An approach to change based on process alignment, and starting with the vision and mission statements, analyzing the critical success factors, and moving on to the core processes is the most effective way to engage staff in an enduring change process.

Many change programs do not work because they begin trying to change the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of individuals. The only way is that changes in these areas will lead to changes in behavior through the service. When desired behavior does not emerge, managers frequently look confused at the apparent changes to deliver results.

Faced with rapid change Public Service Reform need to develop more focused and coherent approach to managing people and the following key dimensions of the service must be addressed: culture- the beliefs, values, norms and management style of Public Service; organization - the structure, job roles and reporting lines of Public Service; people - the skill levels , staff potential and management capability; Human Resource's Systems- the people focused mechanisms which deliver the strategy (employee selection, communications, training, rewards career development).

Empowering Citizens

"Empowerment" of the citizens also forms a major plank in the managerial platform. It is hypothesized that citizens around the world are chafing under burdensome bureaucratic rules which restrict their range of options and access to quality services (Fredrickson, 2008). It is assumed accordingly that privatization; out sourcing of public services and de bureaucratization are avenues that lead not only to greater citizen/consumer satisfaction, but also to more freedom and more complete democracy. In other words, 'managerialism' has pitted "rules-bound administration" more efficient entrepreneurial "results oriented management". Success in modern government largely depends on widening the basis of citizen participation and galvanizing support for broadly shared objectives.

Promoting Professional Ethics in Public Sphere

Putting people first means treating people as valued customers rather than as charges, this signifies making government officials "less remote and more responsive" and also "less bureaucratic and more entrepreneurial", or results- oriented (Caillods 2000).

Conclusion

High performance and quality service stated, as one of the ultimate aims of civil service, cannot be achieved without a conscious policy and program to instill appropriate attitudes and ethical standards. Some aspects of the new reform program are likely to be very sensitive in implementation and it will be necessary for all affected to see evidence of clear and sustained political commitment.

There is need to build a civil service that commands the trust and respect of the community
Building up a civil service with integrity means building a culture of probity and honesty which will not only ensure the clean and efficient operations of the government but also forms the basis for maintaining public trust and support to the government.

Recommendations

The vision of the government should be to develop a fully decentralized system of governance based on open, predictable and transparent policy making and implementation process, and effective community participation in public affairs. Since public service is complex it is important to consolidate the gains made so far by the government while focusing on integrating modern HRM practices. There should be a deliberate effort to ensure that all employees understand a game plan in public service transformation.

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