

CONCEPTS AND PRACTICE OF THE RECRUITMENT REFORMS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR; THE CHANGING STATE OF PUBLIC SERVICE RECRUITMENT IN KENYA

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Abstract

Recruitment into the public service in Kenya is done by the by public service commission. This is a constitutional office established under article 233 of the constitution of Kenya 2010. Its mandate includes recruiting for the public service, promoting public officers, handling appeals on disciplinary matters, approving retirements and abating pensions; and setting and maintaining standards in the public sector. It established the mission and a vision as any other government department as partner in creating a non-partisan public service that offers quality service and holds the nation together for socio-economic growth to avail a steady supply of highly competent personnel for efficient and effective service to the people of Kenya. The main objective of this article is to increase knowledge on the ongoing reforms in public service recruitment and more specifically to discuss the role of public service commission in recruitment of civil servant, the benefits of ongoing recruitment reforms in the public service and to the challenges of implementing recruitment reforms in public service. Recruitment into the civil service seems to be more complex, cumbersome and complicated because of numerous

guidelines and procedures. Public service recruitment is the process through which suitable candidates are induced to compete for appointment into government jobs and this process should be done professionally and taking into consideration the provisions of the constitution of Kenya 2010.

Keywords: Public Service Commission, Recruitment, Reforms, Public Sector

INTRODUCTION

The current drive to improve management in governments through public service reform programs is to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and the delivery of quality service to the public is common to many African countries, including Kenya. The public sector has, for long, enjoyed a pride of place, particularly since the post-industrial revolution era. Public administration moved away from being mere watchmen, to being the engine of the society and become the major provider of various services, including regulatory and distributive ones. Generally, all societies have some forms of public service provisions for reasons of economics, risk, and moral responsibility. Governments, in many parts of the world, are structurally and constitutionally tied to the civil service, irrespective of the system of government (Olagboye, 2005).

Agagu (2008) explains why the relationship between the government and the public service in Nigeria endured in spite of the various forms of governments the country has been experimenting with since independence. The efficiency and effectiveness of any work place (whether the private or the public sector) largely depend on the caliber of the workforce. The availability of a competent and effective labor force does not just happen by chance but through an articulated recruitment exercise (Peretomode 2001).

Recruitment is a set of activities used to obtain a sufficient number of the right people at the right time from the right places (Nickels et al., 1999), and its purpose is to select those who best meet the needs of the work place, and to develop and maintain a qualified and adequate workforce through which an organization can fulfill its human resource plan. A recruitment process begins by specifying human resource requirements (numbers, skills mix, levels, time frame), which are the typical result of job analysis and human resource planning activities (Cascio, 2004).

Public service Commission is a constitutional office established under article 233 of the constitution of Kenya 2010. Its mandate includes recruiting for the public service, promoting public officers, handling appeals on disciplinary matters, approving retirements and abating pensions; and setting and maintaining standards in the public sector. It established the mission and a vision as any other government department as partner in creating a non-partisan public

service that offers quality service and holds the nation together for socio-economic growth to avail a steady supply of highly competent personnel for efficient and effective service to the people of Kenya (Constitution of Kenya, 2010) .

The Kenyan public service system emphasizes uniformity, standardization, and transparency in recruiting competent applicants. Despite these emphases, it is perceived that the recruitment process lacks equity and transparency, making it difficult if not impossible to recruit the best qualified applicants for available jobs in the service. The perceived problems of recruitment is attributed to factors such as inadequate and invalid standards for evaluating job candidates (as a result of absence of job analysis), sources of locating the potential applicants, transparency and independence of the recruiting authority, and the administrative machinery for determination of qualifications (Babaru, 2003) .

Objectives

The main objective of this article is to increase the knowledge on the ongoing reforms in public service commission recruitment in Kenya and more specifically to:

1. To discuss the role of public service commission in recruitment of civil servants in Kenya.
2. To discuss the benefits of ongoing recruitment reforms in the public service in Kenya.
3. To discuss the challenges of implementing recruitment reforms in the public service in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recruitment theories

On the theories of recruitment Joshi (2005), identified three theories. The first is the objective factor theory which viewed the process of organizational choice as being one of weighing and evaluating a set of measurable characteristics of employment offers, such as pay, benefits, location, opportunity for advancement, the nature of the work to be performed, and educational opportunities.

Secondly, is the critical contact theory which suggests that the typical candidate is unable to make a meaningful differentiation of organization's offers in terms of objectives or subjective factors, because of candidates' limited or very short contact with the organization. Choice can be made only when the applicant can readily perceive the factors such as the behaviour of the recruiter, the nature of the physical facilities, and the efficiency in processing paper work associated with the applications.

The subjective factor theory which emphasizes the similarity between personality pattern and the image of the organization, i.e., choices are made on a highly personal and emotional basis. In prospecting theory the applicant moved from one organization to another searching for job but in mating theory it is the organization that moved from one place to another searching for the most qualified candidates to apply. Veger (2006), called it 'We-find-you' and 'You-find-us' theories. He stated that, We-find-you theory refer to methods where the organization searches for applicant, You-find-us theory refer to the methods where the organization places a job advert and the initiative to apply lies with the potential job applicant. In another perspective, recruitment can be active or passive.

In the case of passive recruitment, the organization waits until an applicant gets in touch with them, such as unsolicited applications. Today, many organizations have websites that contains information for people seeking jobs. In the case of active recruitment, employers actually go in search of potential candidates. In a more elaborate sense, recruitment theories can aptly be formal or informal. The formal recruitment involved posting job advertisement in a newspaper or magazine that is involving some intermediary between the employer and the potential employee. In case of informal recruitment the employer's network of contact is used (Boxman, 1992).

This network could include the personal networks of the existing workforce as well as other employers, people working in the same business or employers in the vicinity. However before the emergence of internet as recruiting source where do candidates get information about job openings in public sector organizations. In the earliest stage, recruitment contact information about objective and subjective characteristics is likely to be the result of exposure to recruitment sources (Allen et al., 2007). There are basically two sources of recruitment where applicants can be drawn in the public sector. These sources are classified as either internal or external. When using internal sources of recruitment the organization turns to existing staffs to fill the available vacant position. Internal source of recruitment are not expensive and are less time consuming, compared to external sources (Jones, 2000).

But if the organization experienced limited pool of candidates internally and the system may not have suitably qualified candidates within then the organization can resort on searching for talent externally. When recruitment is conducted externally, the organization looks outside for potential applicants. External recruitment is likely to be used especially for lower entry jobs in periods of expansion, and for positions whose specific requirements cannot be met by present employees within the organization (Briggs, 2007).

Reforms in Public Service Recruitment

Recruitment is described as “the set of activities and process used to legally obtain a sufficient number of qualified people at the right place and time so that the people and the organization can select each other in their own best short and long term interest” (Kickert, 1997). In another perspective, it means the positive action taken to find the right quality and quantity of personnel into an organization by paving the way for producing the smallest number of candidates who appears to be capable of either performing a task or of developing the ability to do within a period of times, duties acceptance to the employing organization.

Recruitment is integral part of human resource, and involves the process of identifying and attracting or encouraging potential applicants with needed skills to fill vacant positions in an organization (Peretomode, 2001), matching them with specific and suitable jobs, and assigning them to those jobs (Chandan, 1987). Recruitment into the civil service seems to be more complex, cumbersome and complicated because of numerous guidelines and procedures. Public service recruitment is the process through which suitable candidates are induced to compete for appointment into government jobs (Briggs, 2007).

It is a system that offers equal opportunities to all citizens to enter the government service, equal pay on equal job to all employees doing work requiring the same degree of intelligence and capacity, equal opportunities for advancement, equal favourable conditions and equal participation in retirement allowances and make equal demands upon the employees (Kiragu, 2002). Information from job analysis and human resource planning activities activates the next phase in the recruitment process, namely, attracting potentially qualified candidates to apply for vacant positions in an organization.

This can be done through recruitment within the organization (internal sources), and or recruitment outside the organization (external sources). After this phase, the organization should devise selection tools to help sort out the relative qualifications of the job applicants and appraise their potentials for being good performers in a particular job (Jones et al., 2000). Those tools include applications and resumes, interviews, reference checks, tests (Snell, 1999). The essence of these recruitment activities is for the organization to appoint the best applicant with the right ability, temperament and willingness (Mullins, 1996).

Recruitment of personnel for the civil service is one of the crucial tasks of modern government and lies in the heart of the problem of personnel administration (Karanja et.al. 2014). The state and federal civil service commissions serve as employment agents for the civil services in Nigeria and they do the recruitment without a fee (Nwachukwu, 2000). Specifically, the authority for recruitment into the Nigerian federal civil service is the Federal Civil Service

Commission (FCSC). However, the commission delegates' powers to federal ministries and extra-ministerial departments to recruit junior staff to posts graded GL 01–06 (Al-Gazali, 2006).

Recruitment reforms International and African Perspectives

Most reformers do not invent completely new ideas; they buy or borrow management ideas and techniques from elsewhere. Merchants in this trade include organizations and even some academics (Pollitt, 2004). The point we are trying to make is that it is imperative for us to know how public sector reforms enter the governance of 149 different countries, how it is been practiced, and lessons for Africa. For this will make us to appreciate the motives of the international donor agencies in conscripting African countries to embrace the public sector reforms.

It must be pointed out, however, that this trend in the public sector reforms has begun in Europe in the late 1970, particularly in Britain, since Margaret Thatcher took up office (Kickert, 1997). As observed by Agagu (2008), the reform of public service has been placed on the policy agenda of almost every European government whatever their political complexion, although the timing, the pace, the extent, the nature, the reasons, and the impact vary greatly across European countries. These vast arrays of administrative reforms being pursued by European governments were meant to modify the size, the structure, the functions and functioning, the efficiency, and even the culture of traditional public administration.

Following the global reform trend, Korea has adopted many reforms toward New Public Management (NPM), especially the Kim Dae-jung government. Economic crisis, telecommunication revolution, as well as globalization seem to have steered the government towards the NPM style of reform. Like many Western governments, the Korean government has been adopting such reform measures as re-organization and downsizing, deregulation, performance management, customer satisfaction administration, etc. (Kim, 2000).

The Federal Republic of Germany, for instance, realized that “the establishment of an efficient public administration performing its function under the rule of law is one of the most important and urgent objectives of achieving equal living conditions throughout the federal Republic of Germany through the introduction of the new steering model (Seiller, 1993).

The features of this model according to Agagu (2008) includes output and result-orientation; output budgeting and performance indicators; service and client orientation; concern-division model; and delegation of responsibility to business units. This model was basically fashioned after the Dutch local government reforms in the 1980s. The prominent role played by local authorities derives from the fact that the central government plays a relatively minor role in Germany (Kicker, 1997).

In Africa, as observed by Mhone (2003), “the calls for a comprehensive public sector reform was first articulated in the World Bank’s 1981 report entitled, Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa”. The focus of the report is the economic growth and development in Africa.

Stockholm (2005) provides empirical results from the attempts to reform African public service in accordance with the New Public Management (NPM) in five countries: Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. He noted that they all received substantial donor support to implement a NPM-type reform. They show both successes and failures, but, more importantly, they underscore the notions of three generations of reforms in the continent. It is also noteworthy that in the five countries, many of the gains of structural public sector reform program measures have been reversed. This is particularly so in the cases of Ghana and Uganda. In Ghana, a wage hike in 1992 cancelled out the previous gains on controlling the wage bill, which, as a percentage of GDP, nearly doubled from 4.5 percent in 1990 to 8 percent.

Furthermore, by 1996, the size of the public service had risen to 330,000, about a quarter above the level achieved in the late 1980s (Mutahaba & Kiragu, 2002). They stated further that in Uganda, public service numbers have also been on the rise since 1998. The size of the public service is currently put at about 197,000 and is set to increase significantly above that in the medium term. Also, the measures to improve transparency of the compensation package are being reversed by the re-introduction of non-salary allowances. Structural reforms, therefore, had some limited enclave successes in improving service delivery in a few instances.

The Current Public Sector Recruitment Reform in Africa

Public sector reform has gained widespread importance across the various countries. Almost all African leaders see the public sector reform in terms of initiated actions to change or better the existing situation in public policies. That is why Schacter (2000) sees the public sector reform as synonymous with the government. In his opinion, like many African leaders and, to some extent, some scholars, the public sector reform starts with the government action and also ends with the government. This is a wrong notion and conception of the public sector reform. Omoyefa (2008) claimed that this has contributed, in no small measure, to the failure of the so-called public sector reform.

Meanwhile, Schacter (2000) observed that much of the Public Sector Reform activity supported by donors over the past 20 years or so fits into different areas which include the administrative capacity building; strengthening policy capacity; institutional reform; and civil service downsizing. Activities in these areas may be undertaken either as part of a

comprehensive program of public sector reform that covers many or all governmental departments and agencies, or a narrower program that focuses on only one or a few agencies.

The public management reform in the past 20 years has been extensively influenced by this cycle. Although a number of justifications have been made for the current reform efforts across the globe and, particularly, in Africa, it is instructive to note that the public sector reform was not designed to tackle malfunctioning of the public sector, it was not meant to evolve the blueprint for the infrastructural development of African states, and it was not meant to develop the abundant human resources of the continent. Rather, it was an accidental policy by the World Bank and United Nations Development Program to protect their loans and credit facilities granted to African countries for development programs (Harmes, 2006).

So, the public sector reform was driven by the idea of “a call to arms for advancing a new agenda of development assistance, the perception being that financial or technical assistance would not be put to good use until such concepts as transparency and accountability, due process, probity, and efficiency were institutionalized in the system of government of recipient countries” (United Nations, 2005). The international agencies have imposed the public sector reform on the African leaders that the government should not be seen as “Father Christmas”, rendering selfless service to the people. Rather, the government should be seen as creating wealth-like, profit-making organizations. To this end, African leaders see the public sector reforms as commercialization of all state-owned enterprises so as to make profit. Consequently, every sector of the economy is commercialized: health; education; electricity; agriculture; etc. are all commercialized in African countries, whereas these services are heavily subsidized in the developed countries (Omoyefa, 2008).

According to Osborne and Gaebler (1992) Africa has been through periods of intense enthusiasm for the New Public Management for what called “Reinventing government” for partnerships and networks claimed that if the rise of entrepreneurial government is an inevitable shift, rather than a temporary fad, as we argued, we would expect it to happen in other nations as well (as the USA). And, to a startling degree, a similar process of transformation is underway throughout the developed world. In a recent work on state-building and governance by Fukuyama (2004) observed that, there are no globally valid rules for organizational design means that the field of public administration is necessary more of an art than a science. Most good solution to public administration problems, while having certain common features of institutional design, will not be clear-cut “best practice” because they will have to incorporate a great deal of context specific information.

The mistaken perception that countries share a common problem is often accompanied by the idea that there is a smorgasbord of solutions available, any or all of which will be beneficial. This misconception, peddled under the label of “best practice”, has had tragic consequences in some developing countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2003).

A major factor contributing to the failure of most public sector reform efforts, according to World Bank (2000), has been the “technocratic” approach taken by donors. For too long, donors treated the public sector reform as an “engineering” problem- a phenomenon to be addressed through “blueprint” or “textbook” solutions. There was an assumption that the public sector reform problems and their solutions could be fully specified in advanced and that projects could be fully defined at the outset and implemented on a predictable timetable, over a fixed period.

This accounts for the formulaic and mechanistic approach favored by donors, featuring quantitative targets for payroll and workforce reductions, redrawing of organizational charts, recruiting of job descriptions, training courses for public servants, installation of a new system for human resources and public financial management, etc. (Schacter, 2000). Perhaps the most easily overlooked lesson about the public sector reform is that it takes a long time to achieve fundamental reform of a public sector. The experience of the developed world would illustrate this well. It took centuries for today’s industrialized countries to develop reasonably, effective public institutions.

In Great Britain, for example, it was only in 1854 that a series of reforms was launched aimed at constructing a merit-based service shaped by the rule of law. It took 30 years to eliminate patronage as the mode of the public sector staffing. Africans are, therefore, attempting to do in the space of a few decades what took hundreds of years in what is now the developed world. It is not surprising that the record, to date, has been full of failure and disappointments.

Role of Public Service Commission in the Recruitment of Civil Servant in Kenya

The public service commission does background investigation of its potential employees which is the process of looking up and compiling criminal records, commercial records and financial records of an individual or an organization. The public service commission conducts its potential employee background checks for employment screening, especially on candidates seeking a position that requires high security or a position of trust, in the government. Results of a background check typically include past employment verification, credit score, and criminal history and even the moral conduct of the applicant. The public service commission uses the background checks as a means of objectively evaluating a job candidate's qualifications, character, fitness, and to identify potential hiring risks for safety and security reasons. It also performs these background checks are also used to thoroughly investigate potential

government employees in order to be ensure that they really qualify for the position. Recently, the public service commission has been conduct these backgrounds in the presences of media coverage. This has increased confidence in the public on the people holding public office. The issues of vetting employees and even relieving them their position of their conduct is questionable has made the public service more transparent.

The public service may want to identify potential employees who routinely have corruption case and other discrimination lawsuits. Primarily it also sees if the potential employee had graduated from high school or received a college degree, graduate degree, or some other accredited university degree. Financial information, bankruptcy, and tax information may be included in the report which the public service commission will evaluate during recruitment and selection of the potential employees.

Benefits of ongoing recruitment reforms in the public service commission in Kenya

Public sector reforms was initiated against the background that the government required a departure from its old traditional method of running administration and the urgent need for a renewed public sector to propel government in its quest for sustainable socio-economic, political, and technological developments. So, there is a need for structural re-engineering of the public sector with the infusion of new spirits, values, professionalism, accountability, responsiveness, and focused sense of the mission for maximum efficiency of the economy. The public sector recruitment reform is the final aspect of the New Public Management (NPM). Although public sector reform may form part of a broader program of institutional and political reform, when associated with NPM, it is more likely to focus on the basic issue of internal organization with reference to size, recruitment, remuneration, career management, and promotion. In many ways, public sector reform incorporates aspects of deconcentration and management decentralization. As with other aspect of NPM, public sector reform spreads to the developing world through the influence of the World Bank, and the “Northern” states who had undertaken similar policies. Public sector reform has become a global phenomenon, but it has had its most significant impact in Africa. World Bank studies shows that between 1987 and 1996, 64% of all public sector reform operations were conducted in the African states.

Public service recruitment reform is a planned intervention to raise the level of public service performance. It must have carefully defined goals and a strategy to attain these goals. The ultimate aim of the public service reform is to see remarkable improvement in the public service outputs, such as more effective and responsive service deliveries.

This is the driving force behind the public service reform. The public sector recruitment reform is about strengthening the way that the public sector is managed and sees it as the total

overhauling of the government administrative machinery with the aim of injecting real effectiveness, efficiency, hard core competence, and financial prudence in the running of the public sector (Omoyefa 2011).

The public sector reform in Kenya, for instance, was conceptualized as soon as the new constitution was promulgated on August 20 2010. The Constitution's argument for this reform was to improve on public sector performance and to deliver the promises of the constitution to the Kenyans. Also, the recruitment reforms were intended to bring in an accountable and transparent way, to enhance the performance of the public service to achieve good governance and optimum resource utilization that is in scarcity due to the misrule of the past regimes (Yasin, 2011).

Challenges of implementing recruitment reforms in the public service in Kenya

One of the biggest challenges facing public service reforms is how to involve the citizens in formulation and implementation of the reform strategies at all levels. Public institutions need to take deliberate steps to ensure that organized civil society groups and other community forums are engaged in the formulation and implementation of recruitment reform strategies in public sector. Government should embrace a culture of participation, accountability and transparency at levels.

To achieve this, public officers need to be sensitized on the benefits of involving the general public in recruitment policy formulation. The Government should also enhance mechanisms for enhanced participation of the private sector in public recruitment policy formulation and decision-making in order to improve democracy accountability, efficiency, equity, effectiveness and sustainability in the provision of social services both at the local level and countrywide. This can be achieved through the recognition of the private sector organizations and the civil society group. These institutions can play an important link between the private sector, communities and the state in improving recruitment reforms in public sector.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident from the discussion that the main vehicle of the government is the public service and its personnel. Hence, it is imperative to harness this resource. Building of critical institutional capacities for good governance, economic growth, and development is a pre-requisite. Nonetheless, any reform to this end should be carefully formulated and implemented, taking into account the specific needs of the continent.

This article has argued that although the public service recruitment reform is essential in order to invigorate the process of service provision to the public, an attempt must be made to

indigenize the public sector reform in Kenya. It has exposed the taproot of the failure of the public sector reform in Kenya and has proffered future directions. On the basis of key findings, following recommendations are made.

1. There should be equitable distribution of vacant positions to ensure the marginalized and small ethnic nationalities are given an equal opportunity by the major groups.
2. The traditional method of recruiting was jettisoned in favour of electronic methods in almost all public sector organizations in Kenya with the simple aim of ensuring equity and good governance in all its ramifications.
3. E-recruitment should be introduced in order to solve all these impending problems through improving accessibility to internet and other modern technological gadgets which has been a the problem.

A WAY FORWARD

This article recommends for empirical studies to be conducted on the effectiveness of recruitment reforms in public service in Kenya. This will enable the public service commission to establish how effective the reforms has been and also highlight the weakness and strengths of the recruitment reforms system.

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