
Building a High Performance Workplace: The Place of Teamwork in Public Universities in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Without the presence of accountability as a collective responsibility, teams working within an organizational environment will not be successful in their endeavors. Further, when cooperativism is nonexistent, individual development and team interdependence will suffer and that professional and personal contributions will not be recognized. The importance of team working in Institutions of Higher Learning purports different objectives such as accountability, reducing duplication of course contents, harmonization of grading systems across colleges and schools, creation of standard operating procedures to unify the activities for better coordination, reducing costs, improving quality, increasing employee involvement, reducing absenteeism, reducing conflict, enhancing creativity and innovation and creating better adaptability and flexibility – all aimed at creating a high performance workplace. The paper, however, advocates an organizational structure that teamwork is brought on board to enhance institutional effectiveness. The need to embrace involvement of all concerned in order to create a conducive work environment in which employees' perceptions of the availability and functionality of teamwork enhances employee performance and institutional productivity.

Keywords: Teamwork, High performance workplace, accountability, quality of work life.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations worldwide have various ways of enhancing their employee performance although the ways vary from one organization to another depending on the actual functions of each organization. However, the performance of Institutions of higher learning in Kenya needs to be one in which can be ranked satisfactorily and to the required standards compared to other learning institutions. The emergence of some private institutions of higher learning in Kenya sprang forth due to the public system's failure to meet the demand for higher education (Chacha, 2004). This alone was a challenge to the public institutions other than other challenges like low funding, increased enrolment among others. These circumstances underscore the crucial role of leadership and management in maintaining morale, enhancing productivity, and helping staff at all institutional levels to cope with momentous and rapid change. Those in higher education management and leadership must understand the place of teamwork in enhancing coordinated efforts across all spheres.

The works of Opiyo (2009) asserts that those organizations performing poorly had implemented wrong management strategies to foster team performances such as the lack of proper use of teamwork among other challenges. Other organizations whose organizational performances have improved were cited as organizations which had implemented effective teamwork strategies and social factors such as team composition, social interactions, team structure, and management style, among others. Harmonization of most of the functioning requires team work that cuts across all the public institutions of higher learning in Kenya. This can go a long way in harnessing cooperation and proper coordination that will not affect the roles played by every individual to reach the desired institutional goals.

This therefore goes a long way to show that team work plays an important role in the achievement of organizational performance. Institutions of higher learning should be challenged to develop more effective team work to enhance organizational performances. Most importantly, they should have confidence in the leadership, based on consistent fairness and support backed with recognition when it

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is due. Poor leadership can result in the failure of any team, whether virtual or not; however, it becomes a much more prominent problem in virtual teams. Inability to effectively communicate to members of the team can all greatly affect a project. It is from this background that this paper attempts to assess the impact of teamwork on institutional performance.

Team Based Workplace

A team based high performance workplace is one in which the traditional structure and management operating system, which concentrates decision-making authority at the top and requires order-following from all levels below, is set aside in favour of a more participative, decentralized style where teams are delegated management control or defined responsibilities (Dackert & Martensson, 2004).

Institutions of higher learning should create a team based high performance workplace to achieve record quality and productivity levels and increased stakeholder, employee and customer satisfaction by concentrating on practices such as:

- Empowering teams to make decisions about their so that employees can make continuous improvements in key performance measures,
- Enhancing communication throughout the institution,
- Building trust between management and non-supervisory employees to ensure worker support or organizational values,
- Focusing on the quality of products and services as the prime strategy to win and keep customers; and
- Creating a learning organization in which worker training and education are seen as continuous investments in productivity so that employees have the knowledge and abilities they need to be able to contribute more effectively to institutional performance.

Embracing ISO

What drives a team to function more efficiently are clear purpose, quality communication, coordination, effective protocols and procedures and efficient conflict resolution mechanisms, and the active engagement of the team members (Armstrong, 1999). In establishing performance standards, Lorenz *et al.*, 2006 asserts that standards are accepted minimum levels of performance. The Institutional goals therefore should be measurable and attainable and the standards should be challenging but not impossible to reach. Standards generally should be set on the basis of observation and common sense and they should be as precise as possible. Where possible, the workers should be involved in establishing their standards and hence contributing to high performance.

The Place of the Leader in Creating a High Performance Workplace

A successful leader must not only have authority but must also have the ability to exercise that authority over subordinates in such a manner as to obtain their cooperation. The extent to which a leader obtains cooperation will depend upon the personal qualities he possesses, the type of supervision he receives, and the organizational climate. The situational view based on the assumption that traits are not what determines whether or not a person will be a leader, but rather, the situation determines the outcome of his success as a leader.

The institutions of higher learning in Kenya requires focused leaders who must develop trust, be a motivator, show competence, be supportive, provide direction and empower others and this will determine the degree in which the leader shall gain group acceptance.

Overcoming the challenges of effective team working benefits the organization in two ways: administrative and individually. The needs of the client and the organizational structure to which the team functions would have an influence on how team performs, along with the other barriers to working as a ‘cohesive unit’. Improved team working and collaborative care reduce staff turnover and shortages as it can increase job satisfaction and reduce workloads; therefore, cutting the recruitment costs.

Institution’s members need to learn to work in teams as this will lead to high morale and enhanced competence of the workers as brought about by work-life balance and better quality of life for them.

In order to achieve institutional performance, interdependence should exist in various factors of an Institution. According to Appelbaum *et al* (2000), there are major determinants of organizational performance including structure, style of management, shared values, staff, strategy, skills and systems. As such, the dynamic nature of the people within an organization dictates the organizational environment and performance at different levels. An individual’s values and approach to work affects the development of individuals, the team and organizational performance (Armstrong, 1999; Burton, 2010).

General View of Team Work Practice

In Kenya, one characteristic of an effective team is a commitment to take time to assess how well members are functioning as a team. Thus, the prevailing individual and team performance must be assessed according to achieving the goal and meeting the objectives set by the institution. The competency of the team could be accessed through: goals and objectives. Whereas most institutions are embracing ISO, the team faces operational errors frequently because there is a lack of commonly understood goals and objectives, utilization and resources; the environment not fully encouraging the team members to contribute ideas and opinions among others.

Conflicts

Conflicts arise due to lack of trust. For example placing another members task to another without proper communication and consultation can lead to serious conflicts and trust between and among the persons involved might diminish. As a leader, there is need to initiate giving and inviting feedback and participation of the team member to open communication.

For control to prevail, procedures must be clearly delivered to each member of the team and engage in interpersonal communication and facilitate an environment where the team members are involved in decision making, creating a team spirit that will impact positively to the institution.

Learning Environment

When a problem arises in the organization, for example salary increment or employee benefits, a team or a committee is formed to look in to the problem. Team work will always apply to solve the problem or come up with recommendations that management will implement. This will give the institution a go ahead in running its operations and learning among team members will be observed smoothly.

Roles of Teamwork through knowledge transfer

Teams are especially appropriate for conducting tasks that are high in complexity and have many interdependent subtasks. Institutions of higher learning operate within a structure that encompasses interdependent tasks. The institutions are faced with numerous problems in deciding the rate of expansion and the student enrollment procedures with strained resources especially infrastructure. The defining characteristic of a team is that its members voluntarily coordinate their work in order to achieve group objectives (Hansen *et al.*, 2009). It is therefore necessary that institutions of higher learning coordinate these tasks through a combined set of experts from different angles of the institution to be able to share knowledge and make informed decisions on how to cope with rapid change, competition and acquisition of the necessary resources. Team members are highly interdependent and each individual must to some extent interpret the nature of his or her particular role. According to Kotlarsky & Oshri, (2005), the role of teams internationally is for Knowledge transfer and it has become a key issue for globally distributed activities. Institutions of higher learning, are also going global by establishing linkages and collaborations with international institutions.

Fenny *et al.*, (2005) asserts that in novel organizational forms, success depends on the rapid transfer of knowledge. Knowledge transfer is indeed a process by which the knowledge of one actor is acquired and is reapplied by another this transfer of knowledge may improve knowledge integration across various subunits of the institutions of higher learning and may contribute to successfully coordinating complex issues affecting the institution. For example, teams confront cultural differences that may include, but are not limited to, different languages, national traditions, values and norms of behavior. Besides, personal interests can also be curtailed.

Teamwork was considered as one of the more progressive tools of current company-organizational practice. Performance of the team is higher than performance of an individual when there is a work requiring broader scope of knowledge, judgments and opinions. The advantage of teamwork is significant growth in productivity in the spheres that require creative solving of different tasks, high degree of adaptability and operative management. Teamwork also creates environment which facilitates knowledge and information exchange and so called knowledge sharing. Other potential advantages are the ability of new forms of work organization to increase the potential for innovation that may add value to products or services, moving them into less price-sensitive markets. Secondly, the ability of new forms of work organization to increase the employability of workers through multi-skilling and the acquisition of higher competencies in problem solving, communication and team working will both help labour market adaptation and support new forms of local and regional economic growth and regeneration. Teamwork could lead to more job autonomy, more responsibility and more job satisfaction. Most of the latest studies refer to the positive impact of teamwork implementation on productivity and company efficiency increase (Cohen and Ledford, 2004). Moreover, lower illnesses and absenteeism rates were reported within team based organizations compared to organizations with lower degree of delegation (Totterdill, 2002).

Effects of Teamwork on Institutional Image

Teams impact Institutional image at the individual, group, and institutional levels. Institutional image is the perceptions that different people hold of an institution. Such perceptions can have different sources depending on how well people know the institution. Some perceptions derived from individual experiences and impressions of the institution, while others are influenced by the marketing and communication activities seeking to influence the image of the institution. Institutional of higher learning builds its image in conducting conferences, exhibitions, collaborations among others. Image is important for an organizations ability to attract and retain relationships with its different internal and external constituencies. Institutions of higher learning need to embrace teamwork where the language of all employees is the same. Conflicts in information delivery and work processes create a negative image that can lead to disastrous results.

The conceptualization of image focuses on how different segments of consumers form perceptions of the institution and how they influence their relationship with the institution. Thus, an institutional image often differs across national cultures, social groupings or people with different attitudes towards life. Hence, the need to develop new forms of work organization including teamwork that is supported by even the government initiatives and more so the Ministry of Higher Education

Link between Teamwork and Institutional Performance

A team is viewed as an aggregation of contributing members committed to achieve a common objective (Cohen & Leford, 2004). It facilitates in streamlining the process, and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of any institution. Team building skills are critical to the effectiveness of a manager, for running an institution. Efficient Leadership leads the way to effectiveness and leaders need to be seen as major contributors to institutional success. Leaders need to set pace for the overall enhancement in productivity, by treating his/her subordinates as co-workers. Some of the inherent qualities, a good leader should have can be enlisted as: A good leader should set the direction and help in determining the goals, and after having done that should step back and become part of the team. He should not be seen as a monitor or a supervisor but as a coach and mentor. He must know when to assume authority and when to begin spreading the authority among team members. A good leader is not one who leads the team but who grooms new leaders in the team (Youndt *et al.*, 1996).

Diversity of skills and personalities

A team comprises of different individuals with complementary skills and who work together towards a common goal. For a thought to come out of different boxes, people need different heads to do it. Multitudes of ideas prove effective for a task. It's through these ideas that one can blend attributes to work that are desirable (Pascal, 1990).

Good communication

It is quite understood that human beings want to be listened to and they want to have a voice in matters that affect them. The same is true with team building. A good communication paves the path

for proper transactions of ideas. Ideas propel work, a healthy way to reckon the buoyancy of an effective communication bridge (Cosby, 1998).

Shared Goals and Objectives

To work as one, it is wiser to share goals rather than distribute it. This instills involvement of the whole team in the decision making process. Besides, a sense of accountability is developed in each of the team members.

CONCLUSION

Public Institutions of higher learning in Kenya should find it important not only in forming teamwork for institutional success but also for managing employees through teams to maximize productivity and improve institutional performance. Thus, every organization will find that it is useful to have a framework for managing employees through teamwork, thus understanding the role of team work in the accomplishment of institutional objectives and performance. This way, team work becomes a motivational tool for both the management and employees.

Work teams are gaining importance in many organizations and they present many potential risks and opportunities, so there is a need to understand the characteristics of effective work teams. Team working has proved to improve organizational performance through involvement, learning and increased communication that transpires through teamwork and team interaction. Teamwork enhances the speed of work process in an organization. They have the potential to quality and productivity aid where workers are motivated in working in plans that he or she participate in laying down.

RECOMMENDATION

Since to goal of every organization and hence institutions of higher learning is to achieve results, which can come by involving employees, it is necessary for the institution at all levels in carrying out reforms that can ensure proper use of team work and the community at large.

Secondly, working in teams and giving workers greater autonomy over work tasks and input into decisions are good for workers, since they enable them to develop, share and apply their knowledge more fully.

Thirdly, job satisfaction can be enhanced by management styles and culture, employee involvement, teamwork, empowerment, and autonomous work position among others. The more easily members communicate with each other the greater likelihood of group cohesiveness. Satisfaction regress feedback and system of reporting information which is accurate, relevant, mind timely and in the form that enables each team member to understand communication

There is need to know whether teamwork has already found its place in the majority of existing institutions, at least in part, and whether the trend of institutional restructuring in the form of teamwork is stable so as to enable the institutions cope with the changing times.

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