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The Influence of Team Characteristics on Employee Performance in Eldoret Water and Sanitation Company, Kenya

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Abstract:

The study sought to find out how characteristics of a team affect employee performance in Eldoret Water and Sanitation Company (ELDOWAS). The study was based on Theory Z advanced by William Ouchi in 1981 which places great importance on the participation of the working force in operational decision-making, involving them in the operations of the affairs of the organization and ensuring that their commitment to the organization is encouraged and rewarded. A descriptive study design was used with both probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling techniques being used to obtain the required number of respondents. In particular, stratified, purposive and simple random techniques sampling were used. A sample of 80 respondents was drawn from three departments in ELDOWAS, namely technical, commercial/financial and personnel departments. The study was conducted from June 2007 to September 2007. The nature of data involved was both qualitative and quantitative data. Data was collected through the use of structured questionnaires and interviews. The data was then analyzed and presented by use of both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. To analyze the degree of relationship between variables, a Chi-square was used in testing the hypotheses. The research established that team characteristics had certain effects on performance of employees and finally on the overall organizational performance. It was thus concluded that team characteristics are significantly related to employee performance. There is need to provide effective and efficient information to reduce cases of difficulties among team members, which have potential impact on them. As such, managers should take time to ensure that employees and their representatives are provided with appropriate and timely information so that the change is managed constructively and effectively without cases of rejection due to misinformation.

Keywords: Team Characteristics, Employee Performance, Eldoret Water, Sanitation Company, ELDOWAS

1. Introduction

Organizations using teams, or “super teams,” as they are sometimes called (Dumaine, 1990), send powerful messages about trusting and empowering workers. Responsibilities undertaken by self-managed teams involve such traditional “management” functions as preparing an annual budget, timekeeping, recording quality control statistics, monitoring inventory, assigning jobs within groups, training other team members, adjusting production schedules, setting team goals, resolving internal conflicts and evaluating team performance (Sims & Dean, 1985).

Scholars have predicted that self-managing teams would be used increasingly as organizations move towards the 21st century. In *The Coming of the New Organization*, for instance, consultant Drucker P. (1989) predicts that:

In the information-based organization, the knowledge will be primarily at the bottom, in the minds of the specialists who do different work and direct themselves....A good deal of work will be done differently....Traditional departments will serve as guardians of standards, as centres for training and the assignment of specialists; task-focused teams....The need for a task force (team), as its assignment, its composition, and its leadership will have to be decided case by case....One thing is clear, though: it will require greater self-discipline and even greater emphasis on individual responsibility for relationships and for communication.

A team is a group of people who are interdependent and who recognize that the success of each one of them hinges on the success of the group. Wellins, Byham and Wilson (1991) define work team as “An intact group of employees who are responsible for a ‘whole’ work process or segment that delivers product or service to an internal or external customer.”

1.1. Characteristics of Teams

1.1.1. Team Size

There is no definite number that clearly demarcates small from large groups. It seems more appropriate to define groups in terms of process, not number of individuals. Groups are small as long as each individual in the group can recognize and interact with every

other group member (Bostrom, 1970). Recognition means knowing who is in the group and remembering something about their specific behaviour when the group met (Bostrom, 1970).

As the size of the group increases, complexity of group transactions and decision-making increases enormously. The possible number of interpersonal relationships among group members grows exponentially as group size increases. This has the effect of delaying decision-making. At the same time, there is a high tendency for team members to disagree because of varied views. Bostrom (1970) provides these calculations.

Group Size	Number of Possible Relationships
3	9
4	28
5	75
6	186
7	441
8	1056

Table 1: Group Size and Possible Relationships

Different perceptions of relationships increase complexity of transactions among group members. Individual members can also have very different relationships with two or more other members.

1.1.2. Synergy

Synergy is the product of cooperation within a group. The end product of efforts by group members working cooperatively is not necessarily just the sum of those individual efforts (Salazar, 1995). Sometimes, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. When the joint actions of group members produce performance that exceeds expectations based on perceived abilities and skills of individual members, synergy has occurred (Salazar, 1995).

Negative Synergy

Negative synergy refers to the product of joint action of group members that produces a result worse than that expected based on perceived individual abilities and skills of members (Salazar, 1995). The whole is not greater than the sum of its parts in this case. Nevertheless, groups can often produce exceptional results because they share the labour required to research even technical or complex subjects; they can pool knowledge and share information and can correct errors more readily because there are more heads devoted to spotting mistakes and bad decisions (Rothwell, 1998).

1.1.3. Social Loafing

This is the tendency for individuals to reduce their work effort when they join groups. Social loafers miss some meetings and show up late in others. They fail to complete tasks that are important to overall group performance. Social loafers exhibit scant effort because of weak motivation, disinterest in the group, or poor attitude. Social loafing increases with group size. It happens because individual group members often do not see the connection between their personal effort and the outcomes desired by the group (Karau & Williams, 1993).

A group that achieves success typically has little problems with loafers. This is especially so when each group member perceives that his/her individual effort is necessary for the group to succeed (Karau & Williams, 1993). If a group member's individual performance can be identified separately from the group, social loafing will be decreased (ibid.). Social loafing, therefore, decreases when the group members see work as meaningful (Karau & Williams, 1993). Group tasks become meaningful when members have a say in what is done and how it is accomplished.

1.1.4. Team Norms

Schein (1969) defines a team norm as a set of assumptions or expectations held by the members of a group or an organization concerning what kind of behaviour is right or wrong, good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, allowed or not allowed. Wahrman (1972) describes norms as "beliefs which members of a group are aware they share, and believe they have a right to demand that other people abide by them." Norms may be either implicit (not actually articulated) or explicit (formally stated either orally or written, or both). Whether or not individuals adhere to group norms depends upon a variety of factors. Chief among them is the degree to which they have their membership in and identify strongly with the group or organization (Cheney, 1983).

1.1.5. Leadership and Group Effectiveness

In organizational settings, groups typically operate with appointed leaders, many of whom hold positions of authority within the formal organization. Those leaders can choose to empower fellow group members by embracing a functional notion of leadership and encouraging others to share leadership, or they can make other more restrictive choices. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) suggest that the real measure of leadership style has to do with how leaders go about making decisions.

Although formally-appointed leaders have special responsibilities for planning, conducting and evaluating meetings, these functions can easily be shared with others. In a sense, common guidelines for responsible group membership apply to all group members. However, arguably the appointed leader should function more as a positive role model for the group members.

The following are some of widely accepted guidelines:

1. Come to meeting prepared to participate actively and constructively
2. Encourage the expression of diverse points of view
3. Establish and sustain norms of critical evaluation in a climate of mutual supportiveness
4. Work within the rules, criteria and other established and agreed upon limitations
5. Interact ethically.

Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish a mission, task or objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive. A person carries out this process by applying his/her leadership attributes (beliefs, values, ethics, characteristics, knowledge and skills).

Bass (1989), in his theory of leadership, states that there are three basic ways to explain how people become leaders. The first two explain the leadership development for a small number of people. These theories are:

1. Some personality traits may lead people naturally into leadership roles. This is the Trait Theory.
2. A crisis or important event may cause a person to rise to the occasion, which brings out extraordinary leadership qualities in an ordinary person. This is the Great Events Theory.
3. People can choose to become leaders. People can learn leadership skills. This is the Transformation Leadership Theory. It is the most widely accepted theory today and the premise on which this guide is based.

Bass (1990) observes that self serving leaders are not effective because their employees only obey them, not follow them. They succeed in many areas because they present a good image to their seniors at the expense of their people.

Bolman and Deal (1991) assert that the basis of good leadership is honourable character and selfish service to the organization. In the eyes of employees, such leadership is seen in everything the leader does that affects the organization's objectives and their wellbeing. A respected leader concentrates on what he/she is (beliefs and character), what he/she knows (job, tasks, human nature) and what he/she does (implement, motivate, provide direction). Blake and Mouton (1985) concur that people want to be guided by those they respect and who have a clear sense of direction. To gain respect, they must be ethical. A sense of direction is achieved by conveying a strong vision of the future.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The complexity of most of the processes that are operated in organizations places them beyond the control of any one individual. The only really efficient way to tackle process improvement or problems is through the use of some form of teamwork.

However, despite the formation of teams that undertake various tasks in different departments and sections, many organizations seldom undertake team building. This has resulted in poor performance. Teambuilding helps to create an atmosphere of openness and trust. Members feel a sense of unity and a strong commitment to accomplishing organizational objectives. Teams are known to work through a well defined structure with specific address on goals, roles, team identity, consensus decision-making, team training and development and effective leadership. Team building enables teams to function effectively by simply sticking to their team structure that guides the team on its day-to-day operations.

ELDOWAS has made concerted efforts to supply safe drinking water and sanitation services to residents of Eldoret town. One of its major development goals is to enable people access water and sanitation services at affordable rates. These efforts can only be realized through teamwork. Some of the activities in ELDOWAS that require teamwork include meter reading, water connection, water treatment, maintenance and repairs of water systems, sewage treatment works, transport services, security services and constructions.

The study, therefore, sought to examine how team building as a human resource function could have a lasting effect on the employee performance. In the context of ELDOWAS, employees work in teams and are charged with important tasks that are geared towards acquisition of organizational goals. Every team has a leader from whom other members seek direction and guidelines. Every team has its unique goals and guided by specific norms. Team building thus becomes a performance correlate because teams directly affect the quantity and quality of job performance. The study thus sought to answer the extent to which these team building efforts reflected in organizational performance through collective employee performance in ELDOWAS.

2. Materials and Methods

ELDOWAS is a company owned by the Municipal Council of Eldoret. It is autonomous and was established under the Companies Act cap 486 of the Laws of Kenya. Prior to the establishment of ELDOWAS, the water and sewerage department of the Council executed the water and sewerage services. ELDOWAS area of jurisdiction is the entire Eldoret town and its environs. ELDOWAS has its headquarters in Eldoret town. It has field stations with employees outside the headquarters. These stations are Chebara Dam in Marakwet District and Kaplimo Treatment Plant.

This study was conducted using a descriptive study design. The target population of the study was all employees of ELDOWAS. This consisted of the Managing Director, three heads of departments and employees under the three main departments, namely technical department (97), administration and personnel department (23) and commercial/financial department (40). The sample consisted of 80 employees (male and female), respondents selected from the 160 employees. This sample represented 50% of the employees. This number as considered enough to represent the views of the other employees in ELDOWAS.

This study employed stratified sampling, random sampling and purposive sampling techniques to select participants. The basic methods that were used for the collection of primary data were questionnaires and interview guide. Data collected was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive techniques included frequency distribution tables and percentages. Inferential

statistics involved the use of Chi-square. The Chi-square was used to establish the relationships between the research variables. Data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 2007.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Characteristics of Teams and how they Affect Employee Performance in ELDOWAS

The study sought to document characteristics of teams and how they affect employee performance in ELDOWAS. To achieve this, respondents were requested to give the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with given list of characteristics. The results were as shown in Table 2 below.

Statements on team Characteristics	Strongly Agree F (%)	Agree F (%)	Undecided F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Strongly Disagree F (%)	Total F (%)
Teams ensure speed in performing tasks	37(46.3)	35(43.6)	4(5.0%)	3(3.8)	1(1.3)	80(100)
Teams enable tapping of knowledge and expertise of others	38(47.5)	28(35.0)	4(5.0)	10(12.5)	-	80(100)
Teams reduce cases of absenteeism and lateness	20(25.0)	38(47.5)	3(3.8)	11(13.7)	8(10.0)	80(100)
Team work improves ability to solve problems	42(52.5)	25(31.3)	5(6.3)	6(7.5)	2(2.5)	80(100)
Teams reduces incidences of misuse of resources	38(47.5)	24(30)	4(5.0)	14(17.5)	-	80(100)
Teams lead to efficiency in task accomplishment	37(46.3)	29(36.3)	3(3.8)	11(13.8)	-	80(100)
Team work leads to improved customer service	49(61.2)	26(32.5)	3(3.8)	2(2.5)	-	80(100)
Teams improves employee performance	41(51.3)	30(37.5)	1(1.3)	6(7.5)	2(2.5)	80(100)
Team norms guide them in daily activities	47(58.6)	13(16.25)	3(3.8)	13(16.3)	4(5.0)	80(100)
Working in teams leads to high productivity	34(42.5)	30(37.5)	6(7.5)	6(7.5)	4(5.0)	80(100)
Working in teams lead to employee reluctance	10(12.5)	18(22.5)	3(3.8)	16(20.0)	33(41.3)	80(100)

Table 2: Characteristics of Teams
Source: Research Survey (2007)

As noted in the table above, out of 80 respondents, 37(46.3%) strongly agreed, 35(43.6%) agreed, 4(5.0%) were undecided, 3(3.8%) disagreed whereas only 1(1.3%) strongly disagreed that team activities ensured high speed in performing tasks as opposed to working individually. On the other hand, 38(47.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 28(35.0%) agreed, 4(5.0%) were undecided while 10(12.5%) disagreed that working in teams enables one to tap the knowledge and expertise of other members. On team activities, with respect to reducing incidences of absenteeism and lateness, 20(25.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 38(47.5%) agreed, 3(3.8%) were undecided, 11(13.7%) disagreed while only 8(10.0%) strongly disagreed. On the other hand, 42(52.5%) strongly agreed, 25(31.3%) agreed, 5(6.3%) were undecided, 6(7.5%) disagreed while 2(2.5%) strongly disagreed that team work improves ability to solve problems.

When asked if team activities reduce incidences of misuse of organizational resources, 38(47.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 24(30%) agreed, 4(5%) were undecided while 14(17.5%) disagreed. On whether or not teams lead to efficiency in task accomplishment, 37(46.3%) strongly agreed, 29(36.3%) agreed, 3(3.8%) were undecided, 11(13.8%) disagreed.

Majority of the respondents, 49(61.2%), strongly agreed, 26(32.5%) agreed, 3(3.8%) were undecided while 2(2.5%) disagreed that team work leads to improved customer service. On the item that teamwork improves employee performance, 41(51.3%) strongly agreed, 30(37.5%) agreed, 1(1.3%) were undecided, 6(7.5%) disagreed while 2(2.5%) strongly disagreed.

On the item that team norms guide employees in their daily activities, 47(58.6%) strongly agreed, 13(16.3%) agreed, 3(3.8%) were undecided, 13(16.3%) disagreed while 4(5.0%) strongly disagreed. Again, on 'working in teams leads to high productivity', 34(42.5%) strongly agreed, 30(37.5%) agreed, 6(7.5%) were undecided, 6(7.5%) disagreed while 4(5.0%) strongly disagreed that working in teams leads to high productivity. On working in teams leading to employee reluctance, 10(12.5%) strongly agreed, 18(22.5%) agreed, 3(3.8%) were undecided, 16(20%) disagreed whereas 33(41.3%) strongly disagreed that working in teams leads to employee reluctance. These results are indeed a positive attribute of teams since every employee appears to be involved as part of whole in company's achievements.

It can be observed from the research findings that employees of ELDOWAS view teamwork very positively. This is healthy for the organization, considering that all items on characteristics of teams and how they affected employee performance were highly rated. None of the items were rated less than 74.9% with the highest being 93.7%.

3.2. Hypothesis Test Results

The tested hypothesis stated that there is no relationship between team characteristics and employee performance. To test this hypothesis, team characteristics were tested against performance. The results were as shown in the table below.

Performance against	High speed Performance of Tasks	Teams Solve Problems	Efficiency in Task Accomplishment	Improved Customer Service	Improved Employee Performance
Chi-square value	46.447	33.130	24.131	29.757	41.112
Degree of freedom	16	16	16	16	16
Significance	0.000	0.007	0.020	0.003	0.001

Table 3: Chi-square (χ^2) Results for Hypothesis
Source: Research Survey (2007)

As shown in the table above, the Chi-square results indicate the existence of a significant relationship between the independent variable (employee performance) against high speed performance of tasks, solution to problems, and efficiency in task accomplishment, improved customer service and improved employee performance. The independent variable tested against high speed performance of tasks yielded a Chi-square value of 46.447 with 16 degrees of freedom and p value of 0.000. This means that employee performance is significantly related with team characteristic.

On the other hand, the Chi-square value for performance against teams solving problems was 33.130 with 16 degrees of freedom and p value of 0.007. This again shows that there is a relationship between the two variables at $p < 0.05$. Moreover, the Chi-square value for employee performance against efficiency in task accomplishment was 24.131 with 16 degree of freedom and p value of 0.020. This also shows that there is a relationship between the two variables at $p < 0.05$. However, there is a strong relationship between performance against improved customer service as well as improved employee performance. The independent variable tested against improved customer service yielded a Chi-square value of 29.757 with 16 degrees of freedom and p value of 0.003. Employee performance is significantly related to improved customer service at $p < 0.005$. The independent variable tested against improved employee performance yielded a Chi-square value of 41.112 with 16 degrees of freedom and p value of 0.001. This means that employee performance is significantly related with improved employee performance as a result of teams at $p < 0.005$.

From these results the hypothesis that there is no relationship between team characteristics and employee performance was rejected. The alternative hypothesis was thus accepted which states that there's a significant relationship between team characteristics and employee performance in ELDOWAS and that the variables constituting team characteristics were all significant in employee performance. Generally, based on the above findings, working in teams leads to minimal wastage of resources, efficiency in task accomplishment, employee participation in decision making and consequently leading to improved customers service and overall performance in the organization.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Concerning how characteristics of teams affect employee performance, the research findings indicated that there is a significant relationship between employee performance and team characteristics. Good team characteristics tend to promote high speed performance of tasks. In addition, teams enable tapping of knowledge and expertise of others and reduce cases of absenteeism and lateness. The hypothesis tests indicated that team characteristics correlate with employee performance.

From the findings above, it is clear that team characteristics are significantly related to employee performance in ELDOWAS. It is, therefore, imperative that working in teams as opposed to working individually gives employees freedom to grow and gain respect and dignity by managing themselves, making decisions about their work, sharing challenges together which enhance employee performance. In addition, cases of absenteeism and turnover are greatly reduced. Employees working in a team feel that they have a stake in the outcomes and want to make contributions and do not want to let it down. There are also few cases of misuse of organizational resources as suggested by the management.

There is need to provide effective and efficient information to reduce cases of difficulties among team members, which have potential impact on them. As such, managers should take time to ensure that employees and their representatives are provided with appropriate and timely information so that the change is managed constructively and effectively without cases of rejection due to misinformation.

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