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Influence of Human Resource Management Practices on Sustainable Organizational Competitiveness of Mobile Phone Service Provider Firms in Kenya

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Abstract:

In a rapidly changing and competitive environment, Human Resource Management practitioners are striving to deal with the emerging challenges. The emergent non- standard and non-routine work arrangements contribute to attraction and retention of talents for sustainable organizational competitiveness. Several past studies focused on human resource capabilities, work arrangements and sustainable organizational competitiveness but did not address the issues studied in this research particularly the effect of human resource management practices on sustainable organizational competitiveness of mobile phone service providers in Kenya. The study was grounded on Resource Based View theory. Explanatory research design guided by pragmatism philosophical paradigm was adopted. Multistage sampling design which included stratified random sampling, proportionate sampling and random sampling were used to get the actual respondents studied. Targeted population was 1279 drawn from 3 mobile phone service provider firms in Kenya. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from 258 respondents determined using Taro and Yamane sample size formula. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The Human Resource Management Practices positively influence sustainable organizational competitiveness. The study recommends that mobile phone service provider firms should promote interest of employees whenever undertaking human resource management so as to win their support as this has effect on their competitiveness.

Keywords: Human, resource, management, practices, sustainable, organizational, competitiveness, mobile, phone, service providers

1. Introduction

Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP) are a set of practices used by organizations to manage human resources through facilitating the development of competencies that are organization specific, produce complex social relation and generate organization knowledge to enhance sustainable organizational competitiveness. They play three major roles namely building critical organizational capabilities, enhancing employee satisfaction and improving customer and shareholder satisfaction (Kaplan & Norton, 1992, 1993). Based on the framework, three clusters of human resource management practices measures namely; Employee involvement (participation) performance appraisal and reward management are suggested to help the Human resource management practices demonstrate and drive its business contribution in sustainable organizational competitiveness in this study. According to Aouadet *al.* (2010) the competitiveness of firms inevitably depends on national and regional systems of innovation, which in turn depends on government policies. Therefore, given the constant changes and dynamism of the business environment, securing competitiveness is therefore high on the agenda of most organizations.

Clearly defining and using sustainability-based dependent variables contribute to the understanding of inimitability of the resources (Dierickx & Cool, 1989). This is because, theoretically, even resources that are easy to imitate can provide 'temporal' competitive advantages and favourable performance (Barney, 1991). The definition of 'sustainability' may vary based on industry or time. For example, one year of competitive advantage may be long in a high-tech industry, but not sufficient in the steel industry.

Accordingly, it is believed that the issue of sustainability needs to be more vigorously discussed both at the hypothesis building stage by considering industry or other contextual factors and at the stage of developing an empirical research design (McEvily & Chakravarthy, 2002; Priem & Butler, 2001). This means that entrepreneurial leadership and organizational values do initiate building capabilities and deploy resources, positioning the organization in to a sustainable competitive advantage leading further to gain competitiveness (Raduanet *al.*, 2009; Liu & Huang, 2009).

Understanding sources of competitiveness has become a major area of research in the field of strategic management (Debra & James, 2011). Changing business environment and knowledge economy has made adoption of Human Resource Management (HRM) imperative for sustainable organizational competitiveness. Human resource experts believe that employers which want to position themselves as 'employers of choice' in an economy with limited depleted resources and tight labour markets should consider using sustainable HR capabilities (App, Merk & Büttgen, 2012; Ehnert & Harry, 2012; Lis, 2012). According to Zaugg, (2009) and Darcy *et*

al. (2012) in a study found out that fostering the competitiveness of the HRM system itself is a survival strategy for organizations. It is on this background that this research determined the effect of human resource management practices on sustainable organizational competitiveness of mobile phone service providers in Kenya.

Bowen and Ostroff (2004), Collin and Smith (2006) and Richard and Johnson (2001) looked at the characteristics of human resources as HR competencies and processes in relation to sustainable organizational competitiveness and work arrangements on productivity hence sustainable organizational competitiveness with inconsistencies in their findings. Two most recent studies by Nielen and Schiersch (2014) reported inverse U-shape relationships between the use of temporary workers and organization competitiveness. They found out that the use of temporary agency workers initially improved the firms' competitiveness, but that beyond a certain point the relationship was negative.

Past studies validated the link between HR capabilities and superior sustainable organizational competitiveness in United States and Europe (Boselie *et al.*, 2001, Hoque, 1999; from Asia, Bjorkmand & Xiucheng, 2002; and from Africa Chebregiorgis & Karsten, 2007). Further empirical studies of several researchers indicated a strong and positive association between HR processes and competitiveness of organizations (Cappeli, 1998; Katou & Budhwar, 2006; Kuo, 2004; Huselid *et al.*, 1997; Youndt *et al.*, 1996). Sustainable organizational competitiveness is achieved when a firm is implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any competitor and when these other firms are imperfectly able to imitate the benefits of this strategy (Barney, 2010). The more favourable approach to Sustainable organisational Competitiveness is the use of intangible (or tacit) resources that are generally built rather than bought (Derrick & Cool, 2012).

For any organization to achieve its desired goals there is need for good management of physical or tangible resources as well as intangible aspects such as HR capabilities. HRM practices include HRM functions like staffing, performance appraisal, rewards and employee involvement (Bear, 2005). Organizations should have the tendency of attracting and retaining the most skilled labour as compared to their competitors through an effective HR strategy (Guan & Ma, 2003). Through this, global challenges will be dealt with and the organization will grow. In response to the above demands, businesses have persistently been searching for new means to improve their sustainable organizational competitiveness, while researchers have been putting effort in an attempt to determine such possible sources of sustainable organizational competitiveness at both conceptual and empirical levels.

Accordingly, Lankoski (2000) applied this idea to environmental aspects and points out that economic performance is a multi-causal issue, and therefore any causal effect on overall economic performance or overall competitiveness by a single explanatory factor such as environmental performance is likely to be small. Operationalization of sustainable organisational competitiveness as a sub-segment of overall business competitiveness can be based on the self-assessment of companies, an approach successfully used by (Sharma, 2001) with US and Canadian companies to measure organizational capabilities and sustainable organizational competitiveness benefits, and Wagner *et al.* (2003) argued that to assess the influence of strategy choice on the link between organisational performances on sustainable organisational competitiveness requires definition of a set of items to approximate a theoretical concept of organizational competitiveness. Therefore, this study sought to determine the relationship between human resource capabilities on sustainable organizational competitiveness of mobile phone service provider firms in Kenya. Since there were limited study findings which have been undertaken in Kenya to establish the effects of HR capabilities on organizations' competitiveness in the mobile phone service provider industry, there was therefore need for this research which addressed the identified research gap. The study therefore, established the effect of human resource management practices on sustainable organizational competitiveness of mobile phone service provider firms in Kenya.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study used Resource Based View theory. The resource-based view (Barney, 1991) has become one of the most influential and well-cited theories in the history of management. It aspires to explain the internal sources of a firm's sustainable competitiveness. Its central proposition is that if a firm is to achieve a state of sustainable competitiveness, it must acquire and control valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources and capabilities. The elementary feature of the Resource Based View is that successful firms possess internal resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, and inimitable and lack substitutes (Hatch & Dyer, 2004). Organization therefore, must put in place processes and practices that can absorb the competitive human resource and enable them to apply their competencies (Barney 2002). This proposition is shared by several related analyses; core competences, dynamic capabilities and the knowledge-based view of firm (Nick and Jac, 2002).

Researches on Resource Based View theory, largely treats value creation as exogenous and focuses on incremental opportunities to sustain competitive advantage and defensive measures to impede the deterioration of competitive advantage. According to Wright *et al.* (1994), human resources can be considered rare, as individuals usually create value for the organization with high cognitive ability, which is distributed throughout the total labour population and is rare by definition. Furthermore, historical differences among organizations, ambiguity of the linkage between human resource capabilities and competitiveness and social complexity of human interactions make human resources inimitable.

In summary, Resource Based View highlights the critical role of human resources in establishing and sustainable competitiveness. Value creation begins by delivering value to customers. Lepaket *al.* (2007) categorized this at three levels: individual, organization and society. The former two are termed as micro level and fall under the scope of this thesis. When a firm's customer services and other related issues such as measures of values exceed those offered by competitors then value creation occurs (Sirmon *et al.*, 2007). Mizik and Jacobson (2003) ascertained that value creation alone is not sufficient, and that value appropriation in the form of restricting the competitive forces helps in gaining competitiveness. The superiority of doing something better in the market place gains competitiveness. This understanding of value creation and its linkage to competitiveness is quite central to managers'

responsibilities and their leadership. Sustaining an organization's value is as important as creating value for competitiveness. Resource-based view research has been criticized to give little elaboration of how firms build new capabilities (Cavusgil *et al.*, 2007). Also, the recent management concern has been that, value of a firm's resources should be assessed (Barney & Hesterly, 2006), as sustainable competitiveness of a firm has mostly been inferred from the presence of substantial resources and/or high performance rather than direct measurements (Peteraf & Barney, 2003). This study therefore, answered their call by employing a quantitative method to measure Human Resource capabilities for the technological firms by using Value-Rare-Costly-to-imitate-Organizationally-supported (VRIO) framework (Barney & Hesterly, 2006; Barney *et al.*, 2012; Peng, 2013) to evaluate the human resource capabilities of professional service firms, affecting competitiveness.

This helps build competencies that give one organization unique competencies that act as a source of sustainable competitiveness. Complementarities may exist between the three theories and there is a need to explore how each complement the shortcomings of the other (Peng, 2013). The study is of the view that an organization in an industry with no valuable, rare, heterogeneous and inimitable resources may develop key competencies that will be a source of sustainable competitiveness for the organization. Thus, the unique role of developing competencies while combining key resources to generate sustainable competitiveness from organizations' processes needs consideration by theorists and researchers. In addition, while undertaking this; the existing complementarities suggested by proponents of diverse theories explaining organization strategic behaviour also need to be given attention (Barney & Hesterly, 2006). This theory was relevant to the study because the influence of human resource management practices on sustainable organizational competitiveness were established.

3. Research Methodology

This research utilized Explanatory research design. Explanatory approach provides analysis and explanation why or how the phenomenon being studied happens (Earl, 2010). Explanatory research also aimed to understand phenomena by discovering and measuring causal relationships between variables. Explanation of why and how there is a relationship between two or more aspects of a situation or phenomenon was established by using explanatory design Earl (2010). Information on human resource management practices was therefore sought and its effects on sustainable organizational competitiveness established with the use of explanatory design.

The target population for this study was the staff of mobile phone service provider organizations in Western Region of Kenya. The organizations included: Safaricom, Airtel, and Orange service providers. They were categorized into: Regional Sales Managers, Area Sales Managers, Trade development representatives and Customer Care employees from these organizations and its agencies. These were staff in Western Region. The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling designs. A stratified sampling design was used to select strata from the hierarchies of employees in the mobile phone service provider sector and then random sampling used to select the participants from every stratum of employees in the organizational structure. This guaranteed, in the long run, every possible sample selected with known and equal chance of participating (Joseph, 2012). The categories: Consumer Regional Sales Managers, Area Sales Managers, Trade development representatives, Customer Care employees (under organization) and Customer care staff (under contract) formed the stratum. From the stratum, proportionate sample was obtained and to sample the actual individuals as respondents to answer the questionnaire; random sampling was adopted. The researcher adopted Yamane (1973) model for determining the sample size where the population size is known.

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + Ne^2)} = 1279 / \{1 + 1279(0.05)(0.05)\}; \text{ Hence } 300.61 \text{ approximately } 300 \text{ Respondents.}$$

$$N = \text{population size} = 1279$$

$$n = \text{sample size}$$

$$e = \text{standard error; acceptable level is } 0.05.$$

The sample size from each stratum was obtained using the proportionate allocation since the stratified random sampling design was adopted. Calculation of the sample size was based on the information that the target population is 1279. For example, Regional sales managers for sample: $(300) (8/1279) = 2$ Respondents; the sample size calculation was applied for all the cells.

Questionnaires were used in collecting substantive data for the study. Primary data was first-hand information collected by the researcher from the field while secondary data was obtained from records and manuscripts of the communications regulator (Communications Authority of Kenya-CAK) and documents from sampled organizations like journals and annual reports. In addition, documents from the sampled mobile service providers were used like the annual reports and journals to get data on adoption of new technology (innovation) and response to changing market conditions. Questionnaires were used to collect first-hand information from the respondents. Five-point Likert scale was used to design the questionnaire.

The survey instruments were pilot tested on 5.0% of randomly selected participants (Hair *et al.*, 2010) representing the customer care employees, area sales managers, and Regional sales managers of the related firms within the mobile phone service sector. As a diagnostic rule of the thumb, (the agreed upon) the lower limit for Cronbach's Alpha was 0.70, though it is acceptable to 0.60 in exploratory studies (Hair *et al.*, 1998). The goal of the pilot study was to validate the instruments through content validity, face validity, criterion validity and concurrent validity. The outcomes from the pilot study were discussed with lecturers and colleagues in Moi University to validate the document.

Data from the questionnaires were recorded and descriptive analysis was performed to summarize the data. The direction and strength of the relationship between the independent variable (Human Resource Management practices) and dependent variable (sustainable organizational competitiveness) was examined using Pearson's correlation analysis based on a one-tailed test at 95% level of significance. Correlation tests were conducted to establish the relationship between the variables human resource competencies, human capital processes, human resource management practices and work arrangement with the dependent variable sustainable

organizational competitiveness. The interpretation of the results was based on correlation analysis results were used to draw conclusions concerning the significance of the findings.

4. Results

The study sought to establish the effect of human resource management practices on sustainable organizational competitiveness. The analysis showed that all the item means were above 3.0 except there is no connection between the work I do and the company's strategic objectives ($M= 2.84$; $SD= 1.122$) showing that the responses were significant. "My performance appraisal is done regularly" had the highest mean of ($M=3.99$; $SD= 0.754$) which is an indication that performance appraisal was done regularly as shown in table 1.

Item	N = 258	Mean	S.D
My performance appraisal is done regularly		3.99	0.754
We are rewarded in this organization based on performance		3.80	0.801
I'm always involved in decision making		3.72	0.760
There is no connection between the work I do and the company's strategic objectives		2.84	1.122
Employee needs are recognised as much as their skills in our organization.		3.84	0.763
I'm rarely rewarded for outstanding performance.		3.11	0.968
Managing the complexity of change is a critical management function in our organization		3.90	0.664
We work through self-managing teams.		3.90	0.539
Few employees in this organization are involved in most of the decision making		3.41	0.785
Average		3.61	0.80
SD = Standard deviation. Reliability; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.742			

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Human Resource Management Practices

The findings support (Kaplan & Norton, 1992, 1993) claims that Human resource management practices play three major roles namely building critical organizational capabilities, enhancing employee satisfaction and improving customer and shareholder satisfaction. The findings also concur with Ulrich & Lake, (1990) report that many companies that attempt to align human resource practices with business strategy, and strategic HR framework involves three components. The business strategy which represents the business strategy of the company and defines how the company wins in the marketplace based on customer buying criteria, competition, government regulations and supplier situation. By integrating the strategic HR framework with the business framework, the interrelationships among components can be identified in two linkage chains. In the first chain, human resource practice can be conceptualized as key drivers in building organizational capabilities, enhancing employee satisfaction, and more innovatively, shaping customer satisfaction (Ulrich, 1989; Ulrich & Lake, 1990).

4.1. Sustainable Organizational Competitiveness

The study also sought to get relevant data on the dependent variable. The results from analysis of data on mean and standard deviation showed that all the variable means were above 3.0 showing that all the responses were significant. The guarantee of job security in the organization was significant with the highest mean of ($M=3.92$; $SD= 0.391$) which is an indication that the employees had a feel of good sense of future with the company. These findings concur with Armstrong and Spellman (1993) that human capital is transferable across technologies and human resources has the potential to constitute a source of sustainable competitiveness of an organization.

Item	N = 258	Mean	S. D
I'm guaranteed of my Job security in this organization.		3.92	0.391
A lot of employees have left the Job in this organization recently.		3.71	0.554
I am comfortable to work in this organization in the next five to ten years		3.93	0.449
My organization rewards employees who design exemplary products.		3.88	0.395
I believe in the organization's business future prospects		3.87	0.453
My organization has been making the changes necessary to compete effectively.		3.72	0.552
I feel good about the future of the company.		3.79	0.492
Average		3.83	0.469
SD = Standard Deviation: Reliability; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.700.			

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for sustainable organizational competitiveness

4.2. Correlation of Human Resource Management Practices and Sustainable Organizational Competitiveness

The correlation of Human Resource Management Practices was positively significant ($r = 0.910$, $P < 0.01$) and sustainable organizational competitiveness was also positively significant ($r = 0.559$, $P < 0.01$) as shown in Table 3.

Variables	Y	HRM
Sustainable organizational competitiveness (Y)	1	
Human Resource management practices (X1)	0.910**	1

Table 3: Correlation of Human Resource management practices and Sustainable organizational competitiveness

Notes: ** Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels, * Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels

This implies that the Human Resource Management Practices positively influence sustainable organizational competitiveness. This agrees with Reddington, Williamson and Withers (2005) organizations often target two or three organizational capabilities that are critical but with which they have not totally succeeded. These capabilities might include competitive shared mind-set, speed to market and innovation. Most vitally, human resource management practices should be designed and delivered to build these organizational capabilities and business strategy. Leaders and employees need to be competent, motivated, and empowered to contribute fully in the development of these capabilities (Reddington *et al* 2005).

This agrees with (Boselie *et al.*, 2001; Asia (Bjorkmand & Xiucheng, 2002) and Africa (Chebregiorgis & Karsten, 2007) that there is a link between Human Resource Management practices and superior business performance in United States and Europe. However, in a study of the Malaysian insurance industry which focused on investigation of individual HRM practices relationship to organization performance (Beh and Loo, 2013) found out that there is a strong and positive correlation between performance appraisal practices and sustainable organizational competitiveness. Further, it conquers with Tsai (2006) in a study in Taiwan, found a positive relationship of employees' empowerment and organizations' performance. In a study of Human Capital processes in Chinese small and medium enterprises, participatory decision-making, performance-based pay, free market selection and employees' commitment emerged as the most essential practices for improving sustainable competitiveness (Zhenget *al*, 2006).

Following the literature, human resources management practices are crucial to producing sustainable organisational competitiveness (Pfeffer, 1995; Youndt, *et al*, 1996; Chang and Huang, 2005; Guest, 2011; Barney *et al.*, 2012). As was reported by respondents, specific human resource management practices concerning performance appraisal, staff involvement, rewards management, must be designed to encourage sustainable organisational competitiveness efforts among employees. In organizations, these practices can be perceived as a signal of support that the organizations are prepared to offer to upgrade attitudes and behaviours concerning employees' commitment to sustainable competitiveness. This is why several authors considered the role of human resources management practices as central in the pursuit of sustainable organizational competitiveness (Jabbour and Santos, 2008; Kramar, 2014).

5. Conclusion

The Human Resource Management Practices had significant effect on sustainable organizational competitiveness among mobile phone service providers. The human resource practices should be designed and delivered to build these organizational capabilities and business strategy.

6. Recommendation

Mobile service provider's management should initiate programs of training and education, innovation and team building. The management should create sustainable strategies to devise means on how clients can act as catalyst in the telecommunication value chain to help foster innovation by exerting pressure on supply chain partners to improve overall performance, and also by helping them to devise strategies to cope with unforeseen changes.

Mobile service providers' management should adopt HR best practices and Management processes, such as participation and involvement, effective reward management, appropriate performance appraisal, promotion from within and training and skill development, sustainable organizational competitiveness across organizations and this should be effectively implemented by all organizations and stakeholders.

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