

Perception of Civil Servants towards Promotion on Merit

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Abstract

The study sought to determine the perception of civil servants towards promotion on merit and identify factors that affect these perceptions. The study also sought to investigate the opinions of staff towards performance appraisal as a tool of promotion. The study location was in Kakamega Central District, Kenya. A descriptive research design was adopted for the study and a sample of 320 civil servants selected by stratified sampling. Data was collected using questionnaire and content analysis utilized to analyse qualitative questions. The study found that the civil servants held both positive and negative perceptions towards promotion on merit. The study revealed that certain factors like length of service, academic qualifications and level of employee affect the perception of civil servants.

Keywords: Perception, promotion, merit, civil servants, Kenya

Introduction

The underlying principle of merit promotion is the identification, qualification, evaluation and selection of candidates which will be made without regard to political, religious, labour organization, affiliation, marital status, race, colour, sex, national origin, non-disqualifying physical or mental handicap or age. Merit promotion shall be based solely on job related criteria in accordance with legitimate position requirements. The machinery to regulate appointments and promotion should attract and retain the best personnel as well as maintain the morale of civil servants. The procedure for promotion should be based on the criteria for merit (Wilson, 1994). According to Atoi (2011), job satisfaction is an emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job and attitude towards work. Mathis and Jackson (2004) maintain that job satisfaction is a position resulting from evaluating one's job experiences. Arnett et al. (2002) define job satisfaction as an employee's general affective evaluation of their job. Weiss (2002) argues that job satisfaction is an attitude which describes how content an individual is with their job.

Promotion on merit is adopted by many organizations as a way of motivating their employees to perform better. It is seen as a fair method of rewarding those whose performance is considered exemplary and in the process encourages everyone to strive and perform better.

Thorndike's law of effect states that behaviours that are rewarded are more likely to be repeated than those that are punished (Schermerhorn, 1986). Pinnington et al. (2000) notes that today's employees need instructive, supportive feedback and desired rewards if they have to translate their knowledge into improved productivity and superior quality. Properly administered feedback and rewards can guide, teach and motivate people in the direction of positive change. If the performance level is lower than that of others who get the same reward, there is no reason to increase their output. Lawler (2003) argues that prosperity and survival of an organization is determined on how the human resources are treated. When an employee is motivated, it leads to actions in pursuit of that interest (Armstrong, 2001). The aim of the study was to determine the perception of civil servants towards promotion on merit and identify factors that affect these perceptions.

Literature Review

Danish (2010) contends that human resources are the most important among all the resources an organization owns. To retain efficient and experienced workforce is very crucial in overall performance of an organization. Motivated employees can help make an organization competitively more value added and profitable. Bull (2005) asserts a view that when employees experience success in mentally challenging occupations which allows them to exercise their skills and abilities; they experience greater levels of job satisfaction. Incentives, rewards and recognition are the key parameters of today's motivation programs according to most of the organizations as these bind the success factor with the employees' performance. Lawler (2003) states that there are two factors which determine how much a reward is attractive, first is the amount of reward which is given and the second is the weightage an individual gives to a certain reward.

Paul & Robinson (2007) propose to distinguish between "materialistic" self-interested motivations and "non-materialistic" motivations; and within the latter category, between social, intrinsic and moral motivations. Non-materialistic motivation is particularly strong in the civil service, and so-called "public service motivation" may be defined as an altruistic motivation to serve the interests of the community, which leads civil service employees to commit effort because of the value they attach to a social service or other public goal (François, 2000). Kreitner & Kinicki (2004) assume that motivation depends on certain intrinsic, as well as, extrinsic factors which in collaboration results in fully committed employees. According to Broad (2007), tangible incentives are effective in increasing performance for task not done before, to encourage "thinking smarter" and to support both quality and quantity to achieve goals. Incentives, rewards and recognitions are the prime factors that impact on employee motivation.

Performance appraisals provide the basis for making selection and promotion decisions, determining salary increases, and they are a vehicle for feedback between supervisors and employees (György, 2004; McCourt & Foon, 2007). Performance evaluation enables organizations to adjust with a view to improving on its services for the enhancement of its survival and growth. Furthermore, it helps management to ascertain whether their organizations are improving, deteriorating or stagnant (Boyne et al., 2003). Gaster (2001) advances that the local approach, self-evaluation technique puts considerable emphasis on the workforce/organization to measure their work and the opportunity to reflect and learn from it. Performance incentives may also have positive effects beyond the strict "mechanistic" effect on material motivation – that of clarifying goals and having workers being aware of the importance of performing (Robinson, 2007). Robbins (2001) asserts that promotions create the opportunity for personal growth, increased levels of responsibility and an increase on social standing. Similarly, the recognition which is a central point towards employee motivation honours an employee through appreciation and assigns a status at individual level in addition to being an employee of the organization. Barton (2002) suggests that the factor which discriminates companies from the others is recognition of their reward system. Ali & Ahmed (2009) confirm a relationship between reward and recognition respectively, motivation and satisfaction. The study revealed that if rewards or recognition offered to employees were to be altered, then there would be a corresponding change in work motivation and satisfaction.

Research Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive survey design and the study location was in Kakamega Central District, Kenya. The study population comprised of 3000 civil servants and the sample was selected through stratified random sampling ensuring that civil servants in each subgroup were proportionally represented. Stratified sampling considered the proportions of upper, middle and lower cadre as the strata on which sampling was based.

A sample of 320 civil servants was selected of which 55 belonged to the higher cadre, 173 middle and 92 of the lower cadre. Data was collected through a questionnaire which was then evaluated through content analysis and descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Responses reflecting perception towards promotion on merit in form of mean scores on positive statements on a Likert scale

		95% C.I. Mean					
	Level of employee	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Promotion process is based on merit	Higher	55	3.1	1.18	0.16	2.8	3.4
	Middle	159	2.5	1.42	0.11	2.3	2.7
	Lower	83	2.4	1.33	0.15	2.1	2.7
	Total	297	2.6	1.37	0.08	2.4	2.7
Promotion is based on performance appraisal results	Higher	53	2.7	1.17	0.16	2.4	3.0
	Middle	161	2.3	1.23	0.10	2.2	2.5
	Lower	84	2.8	1.21	0.13	2.5	3.0
	Total	298	2.5	1.22	0.07	2.4	2.7
Promotions are automatic	Higher	53	2.1	1.04	0.14	1.8	2.4
	Middle	161	2.0	1.20	0.09	1.8	2.2
	Lower	84	2.1	1.14	0.12	1.8	2.3
	Total	298	2.0	1.16	0.07	1.9	2.2
When not promoted one is given a reason(s) he/she never merited	Higher	55	1.9	1.29	0.17	1.6	2.3
	Middle	165	2.0	1.29	0.10	1.8	2.2
	Lower	82	2.5	1.31	0.14	2.3	2.8
	Total	302	2.1	1.31	0.08	2.0	2.3
Promotions are based on technical qualifications	Higher	53	3.2	1.05	0.14	2.9	3.5
	Middle	164	2.9	1.23	0.10	2.7	3.1
	Lower	80	3.1	1.30	0.15	2.8	3.4
	Total	297	3.0	1.22	0.07	2.9	3.1
Promotion on merit increases motivation and morale in the organization	Higher	55	4.4	0.97	0.13	4.1	4.6
	Middle	165	4.1	1.22	0.09	4.0	4.3
	Lower	83	3.5	1.50	0.16	3.1	3.8
	Total	303	4.0	1.30	0.07	3.9	4.1
Promotion increases teamwork	Higher	53	4.0	1.00	0.14	3.7	4.2
	Middle	164	3.7	1.24	0.10	3.5	3.9
	Lower	81	4.0	0.97	0.11	3.7	4.2
	Total	298	3.8	1.13	0.07	3.7	3.9
Promotion on merit is carried out in free and objective way	Higher	55	3.0	1.22	0.16	2.6	3.3
	Middle	166	2.9	1.44	0.11	2.7	3.2
	Lower	80	2.6	1.37	0.15	2.3	2.9
	Total	301	2.9	1.39	0.08	2.7	3.0

Source: Research data

The respondents had positive attitude towards promotion on merit based on the following statements: promotion on merit increases motivation and increases teamwork. The findings reveal that the respondents indicate their indecisiveness on the following: promotion process is based on merit; promotion is based on performance appraisal results; promotions are based on technical qualifications and that promotion on merit is conducted fairly. The study indicates that there was significant differences in perception on whether promotion was based on merit and if it was based on appraisal interview results (at $p=0.005$ and $p=0.023$ respectively). These findings suggest that higher cadre employees were indecisive on whether promotions were based on merit, while middle and lower cadre employees were negative that promotions were based on merit. The results conclude that ethnicity, nepotism among others contributed to the promotion of most middle and lower cadre employees.

Significant differences in the responses were observed between higher and middle cadre employees; between higher and lower cadre employees on whether promotion was based on merit; middle and lower cadre employees concurred on this issue. The results were interpreted to mean majority of those not promoted were not made aware as to why they were not promoted. Significant differences were observed in the responses of the civil servants across all cadres reflecting their perception on whether promotions were based on ethnicity and the fact that hard work did not assure one of promotion (at $p=0.01$ and 0.006 respectively). There was significant differences reported between higher and lower cadre civil servants; middle and lower cadre civil servants on whether promotions were based on ethnicity (at $p=0.048$ and $p=0.003$ respectively). The results suggest that the middle cadre strongly agreed that promotion is based on ethnicity.

The findings illustrate that all respondents had negative perception that promotion was based on seniority. Higher and middle cadre civil servants concurred that hard work did not guarantee one promotion when an opportunity arose while lower cadre civil servants were indecisive. It was established that interviews were conducted through a panel that includes personnel from the ministry. Those promoted believed that strengths used to make decisions of promoting them were their ability, education, performance, age and seniority having a moderate effect.

Factors influencing perception of civil servants towards promotion on merit

There was significant variation in the employees' perception towards promotion on merit with cadre of employee ($p=0.008$), employees' marital status ($p=0.006$), academic qualifications ($p=0.091$) and employees' length in service ($p=0.039$) at $p=0.1$. The significance testing was done at $p=0.1$ which reveals subtle disparities between employees' perception that sometimes are difficult to notice at lower value of significance testing. These findings portrayed employees' perception towards promotion on merit as being varied according to these characteristics. The study exposed that there was no observed relationship between employees' perception towards promotion on merit with gender of employee ($p=0.193$), age ($p=0.638$), length served in current grade ($p=0.335$) and whether employee had been promoted before or not ($p=0.263$) at $p=0.1$.

Table 2: Responses reflecting relationships between employee characteristics and mean scores on perception towards promotion on merit

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Level of employee	Between Groups	3.14	2	1.570	4.867	0.008
	Within Groups	98.71	306	0.323		
	Total	101.85	308			
Gender of respondent	Between Groups	0.56	1	0.563	1.705	0.193
	Within Groups	101.29	307	0.330		
	Total	101.85	308			
Marital status	Between Groups	4.67	4	1.167	3.650	0.006
	Within Groups	97.18	304	0.320		
	Total	101.85	308			
Age	Between Groups	0.56	3	0.188	0.566	0.638
	Within Groups	101.29	305	0.332		
	Total	101.85	308			
Academic qualification	Between Groups	3.13	5	0.626	1.921	0.091
	Within Groups	98.72	303	0.326		
	Total	101.85	308			
Length of service	Between Groups	3.86	5	0.772	2.380	0.039
	Within Groups	97.95	302	0.324		
	Total	101.81	307			
Length in current Grade	Between Groups	1.91	5	0.383	1.149	0.335
	Within Groups	99.63	299	0.333		
	Total	101.54	304			
Whether have been promoted since joined civil service	Between Groups	0.42	1	0.417	1.257	0.263
	Within Groups	101.20	305	0.332		
	Total	101.62	306			

Source: Research data

Significant differences among these mean scores were between higher and middle cadre employees (Least Significant Differences=0.041) and between higher and lower cadre employees (Least Significant Differences=0.002). These findings describes the perception of middle and lower cadre employees towards promotion on merit were the same but differed from that of higher cadre employees. The implication is that the civil servants at the middle and lowercadre have a negative perception towards promotion on merit.The study affirmed that the middle and lower cadre employees strongly believe that promotion is not conducted on merit.

Perception of civil servants towards performance appraisal forms

The findings enumerated that the lower cadre civil servants do not fill performance appraisal forms yet they are instrumental employees. The results established that the appraisal system is functional in all the ministries unlike before when actual performance spelt out challenges and hiccups in its administration. Performance Appraisal Systems (PAS) has been applied in Kenya’s public service but the adoption and acceptability is not meeting the laid down expectations. The success of PAS depends entirely on an officer’s ability to set smart targets. In the absence of well-designed targets, end of year appraisal proves difficult and stressing to both supervisors and supervisee. Most of the higher and middle cadre employees were indecisive on the fact that performance appraisal form does not capture the actual performance, measures items which are not related to performance, does not give room for disagreement and does not give enough space to explain about performance.

Their mean scores ranged from 2.6 to 3.2 for higher cadre employees and 2.7 to 3.2 for middle cadre employees. The results inferred that the revised appraisal form has a clear general objective that is to manage and improve performance of the Public Service by enabling a higher level of staff participation and involvement in planning, delivery and evaluation of work performance. The study illustrates that most of the higher cadre employees disagreed (mean score =2.2) that performance appraisal forms are filled by supervisors while most of the middle cadre employees were indecisive (mean score = 2.7) on this issue. At 95% confidence interval, the mean scores of higher cadre employees varied between 1.9 and 2.5 while that of middle cadre employees varied between 2.4 and 2.9. These findings suggest that higher and middlecadre employees had different perception regarding who fills performance appraisalforms. The middle cadre employees remained indecisive since there are sections to be completed by appraises and the supervisors.

Table 3: Responses reflecting perception towards performance appraisal as a tool of promotion

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% CI for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
It's difficult to understand and fill	Higher	55	2.4	1.05	0.14	2.1	2.7
	Middle	163	2.5	1.28	0.10	2.3	2.7
	Total	218	2.5	1.23	0.08	2.4	2.7
Does not capture the actual performance	Higher	55	3.0	1.22	0.16	2.7	3.4
	Middle	165	3.1	1.23	0.10	2.9	3.3
	Total	220	3.1	1.22	0.08	2.9	3.3
Measures items which are not related to performance	Higher	55	2.6	1.16	0.16	2.3	3.0
	Middle	162	2.7	1.27	0.10	2.5	2.9
	Total	217	2.7	1.24	0.08	2.5	2.9
Does not give room for disagreement	Higher	54	2.9	1.27	0.17	2.5	3.2
	Middle	163	2.8	1.30	0.10	2.6	3.0
	Total	217	2.8	1.30	0.09	2.6	3.0
Is written in technical terms which are difficult to understand	Higher	55	2.1	0.85	0.11	1.9	2.4
	Middle	164	2.2	1.14	0.09	2.0	2.4
	Total	219	2.2	1.07	0.07	2.1	2.3
It's normally filled by supervisors	Higher	55	2.2	1.10	0.15	1.9	2.5
	Middle	164	2.7	1.42	0.11	2.4	2.9
	Total	219	2.5	1.36	0.09	2.4	2.7
Does not give enough space to explain about performance	Higher	55	3.2	1.29	0.17	2.8	3.5
	Middle	162	3.2	1.34	0.11	3.0	3.4
	Total	217	3.2	1.33	0.09	3.0	3.4

Source: Research data

There was no significant variation between the responses of higher and middle cadre employees on whether performance appraisal form was difficult to understand and fill ($p=0.51$); does not capture the actual performance ($p=0.66$); measures items which are not related to performance ($p=0.66$); does not give room for disagreement ($p=0.59$); is written in technical terms which are difficult to understand ($p=0.66$) and does not give enough space to explain about performance ($p=0.87$). The respondents concurred that performance appraisal forms are written in understandable form and it was not difficult to fill. There was significant variation ($p=0.04$) between the higher and middle cadre employees on whether performance appraisal forms are filled by supervisors. Higher cadre employees disagreed while middle cadre employees were indecisive.

Conclusion

On the basis of these findings the statements regarding promotion were divided into two, positive and negative statements. The civil servants on overall had positive perception towards promotion on merit based on, promotion increases motivation and teamwork. It was thus concluded that when promotion is conducted in fairness, it motivates the employees and enhances teamwork.

Majority of civil servants observed that the promotion on merit exercise was not a success in their ministries. They cited lack of uniform scheme of promotion for all the civil servants. Though promotion of civil servants is implemented by the public service commission, they believe the public service scheme on promotion is not uniform across the ministries. The commission is responsible for stagnation of employees at one level for too long. The public service commission depend on information about performance appraisal results to promote their employees. This can be detrimental to a hardworking employee who may be appraised negatively.

The study established that certain factors affected the perception of the civil servants towards promotion on merit. The most significant factors included the cadre of employee ($p=0.008$), length of service ($p=0.039$), marital status ($p=0.006$) and academic qualification with ($p=0.091$). There was no observed relationship between employees' perception with gender of employees, length served in current grade and age. On this basis, it was determined that the most significant factors affecting the perception of civil servants towards promotion on merit included the length of service, academic qualifications, level of an employee and marital status.

The study ascertained that performance appraisal system was in place. Promotion of civil servants is pegged on the results of the appraisal form which is finalized by the supervisors. It is worth noting that PAS has not effectively been disseminated to the employees of the lower cadre or support staff, yet this is the category of officers who discharge essential service tasks. Inability of these officers to relate their daily activities to the strategic objectives of the ministries render performance inconsequential. The higher and middle cadre of employees remained indecisive on the fact that performance appraisal forms do not capture the actual performance; measures items not related to performance; does not give room for explanation about performance. It was thus concluded that the lower cadre or support staff are not involved in the filling of the appraisal forms yet this category carry out essential tasks.

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