EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATORY MECHANISM USED IN ORGANIZATIONS: EVIDENCE FROM MOI UNIVERSITY, KENYA

Ezekiel Kipkorir Mutai

Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya

Thomas K. Cheruiyot

School of Business and Economics, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya

Joseph Kiprono Kirui ✉

School of Business and Economics, University of Kabianga Kericho, Kenya

Mnyorokirui@Gmail.Com

Abstract

Participatory management approach has become part and parcel of management in modern organization and its relevance in Moi University cannot be gainsaid. This study sought to: identify the types of participative mechanisms used at Moi University and investigate the views of employees toward participatory management system. A survey design was adopted as a framework to guide the study. The study targeted 2536 employees but a sample of 507 drawn proportionately across the entire organizational hierarchy, was selected using Stratified random sampling procedure to participate in the study. Participatory management was found to be beneficial to the organization in many ways such as boosting the employee morale, improving quality of decisions and trust between management and employees. However, its implementation in public institution must be done within the limits set in the statutes that created the organization. It was concluded that participatory management has not been very effective in Moi University because of management's reluctance to share power, non-liberal information sharing, and crisis of confidence and lack of preparedness on the part of workers representations. It was recommended that university management should try to introduce changes that would reduce the current bureaucratic procedures that are in place in order to expand the space for employee participation.

Keywords: Participatory mechanism, delegation, performance, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Participatory management is a measure of degree of orientation of top management towards ceding power of decision making to support staff. Often top managers are reluctant to share decision making with subordinate. Employee involvement is defined as the use of one or more methods which are designed to obtain a higher degree of employee commitment to the success of an organization and to enable them to participate and contribute to the decision making process on matters that affect them. Armstrong (1995*)* argued that employee involvement is the concept of recognition that employees have a great un-tapped potential but that management retain the right to manage. Participation on the other hand is about employees playing a greater part in the decision making process. It is a democratic philosophy that respects all members of an organization as an infinite resource able to contribute knowledge and creativity to improving its ability to survive (Butin, 1996*).* It is a management concept giving employees more control over the day-to-day activities on their job (De Cenzo and Robins, 1996).

Employee involvement is vital in this era of transition to an informational and technological age. This is because organizational examinations, regarding objectives, structure, clarity and the general environment becomes important during this era of globalization and as such Moi University is not left behind in this quest.

Statement of the Problem

With respect to changes taking place in organizational work environment like downsizing, significant changes in the way work gets done must also occur whereby employees are required to do more with less resources. The magnitude of work dictates that it cannot be done without assistance in form of employee involvement.

Employees participate in management through delegation, work teams, goal setting and empowerment (DeCenzo and Robins,1996:55). In today's work arrangements, more employees at all levels will be required to delegate some of the job tasks and responsibilities to other organizational members. This requires employees to be given certain amounts of authority to make decisions that directly affect their work.

In any Organization, Moi University included, employee participation in management can only be achieved through the above mentioned methods. The purpose of this study was to identify employee participatory mechanism in place at Moi University.

Objectives of the Study

To identify the types/ forms of participative mechanisms used at Moi University

To investigate the views of employees toward participatory management system.

Research Questions

What are the types/ forms of participative mechanisms used at University?

What are the views of employees towards participatory management system?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee participation in management is a widely discussed concept in human resource management and is considered as a crystallization of the notion of industrial democracy. It is an expression of employer's desire to bind employees into a team working together towards a common objective.

According to Bulin (1996), participation is about employees playing greater part in the decision making process. It is a democratic philosophy that respects all members of an organization as an infinite resource able to contribute knowledge and creativity to improve its ability to survive.

The British Institute of Management (1977) defines employee participation as the practice in which employees take part in management decisions and it is based on the assumption of a community of interest between the employer and employee in furthering the long-term prospects of the organization and those working in it (Cole, 1997). It is a mental and emotional involvement of a person to group goals and shares responsibility in them and this motivates employees to make personal contribution towards organization's objectives (Saleemi , 1997).

As a philosophy, employee involvement and participation is vital for any organization to remain competitive in the dynamic and changing environment because organizational examination regarding objectives, structure, clarity and general environment become important during times of organization development.

Participation also increases workers motivation level by providing satisfaction of non-economic needs hence meeting psychological objective. Since an organization is considered as a social place where each and every worker has vested interests, participation is therefore required. This ensures the human dignity since the workers become partners in the gains of productivity.

Popular participation in any activity depends on several factors. According to Oyugi (1973) some of these factors are, positive orientation by the leadership and the organization, existence of formal and institutionalized provisions and the ability and willingness of the people themselves to participate.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded on Mc Gregor's (1960) theory "Y" and Ouchi (1981) theory "Z" (1981). Theory "Y" states that employees are naturally inclined to expend efforts in working. They seek responsibility and have capacity of self-direction provided they are properly motivated by management through recognition that they strive for self-satisfaction. In this way, management's task is to harness the innate attributes of the employees to contribute willingly to the achievement of organizational objectives. Theory Z 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.

According to Ouchi,(1981) theory "Z", an important features of Japanese management practice include provision of lifetime employment, great concern for individual worker and emphasis on seniority which leads to job security and a strong sense of belonging, confidence and loyalty to the aims and cultures of the organization. Other features includes promotion from within the organization; insistence on compulsory retirement of some workers at age of 55 years; a high degree of mutual trust and loyalty between management and workers; no specialized career paths and lifetime job rotation as a central feature of career development.

In Eyre and Pettinger (1999), Ouchi asserts that successful management under theory Z requires: First, a high degree of cooperation between members of working groups, departments and other sections of the organization since consensus for decision making depends upon good interpersonal relationships between associated workers; minimizing status differences so that informal relationships between managers and those managed can be build.

Second, is the creation of trust between workers themselves and between workers and their supervisors and managers. This depends on the assumption of integrity of each individual concerned and his/her commitment to the goals of the organization and the workers ability to work with the very minimum supervision; this trust is essential if decision - making by consensus is to be achieved and successful.

Third, communication of information throughout the organization on operational factors, environmental issues, and all other matters of concern to the work-force is freely supplied to enable it make informed and intelligent judgments when contributing to the group decisions. Responsibility for decisions made through involvement still remains with individual managers in the final analysis. Finally, a policy of long-term employment coupled with clearly defined career structure will be pursued, to retain the services of valued staff to reinforce and reward commitment to the organization.

The gap that exist in the practice of participatory management in total as envisaged in Ouchi's theory "Z" and the aspect of reward to commitment and retention of valued staff in Kenyan organizations in general and universities in particular is the premises in which this study was based on together with the status difference minimization which is an important factor in creation of trust between workers and management.

According to Saleemi (1997) effective workers participation requires strong labour union and welfare motivated ideology rather than a weak union and politically motivated ideology like the case in Kenya where unions are dominated by political pressures and ideologies concentrating least on the welfare of employees and organization. Waweru (1984) agrees with Saleemi that workers' participation in managerial decisions is not possible under the present property relationships in Kenya. This is due to free enterprise mode of production that makes it difficult to reconcile the institution of private ownership of the means of production with the postulates of sound workers participation in managerial function.

As indicated by Armstrong (2001:793) consultation and representative participation enable employees to take part through their representatives in management decision making. Moi University's decision making organs Council and Senate provides for this form of participation whereby teaching and non-teaching employees participate through their representatives.

Evans (1999) further identified three levels of participation in any organization that he listed down as:

- Government Participation, which involves the overall policy decision;
- Management Participation involving decisions made below board level and finally
- Job-centered Participation whereby individual employees or work groups are involved in decision making on how to do the job and this restores self- reliance on the workers.

The Moi University calendar 1996/97 indicates that the University Statutes established various committees that involve both employees and students through their representatives so that they articulate matters affecting them. Employees' participation and involvement can vary according to the level at which it takes place, the degree to which decision-making is shared and the extent to which the mechanisms are formal or informal (Dessler,1997). The levels of participation in management include: *Job level:* where the mechanism of involvement and participation should be as informal as possible. Here work teams may be called upon on an ad-hoc basis to consider a particular problem and briefing can be used to provide for informal two-way communication. *Management level:* this can involve sharing of information and decision making about issues which affect the way in which work is planned and carried out. Here formality is emphasized where consultative committees with specific terms of reference which

are clearly defined on matters they can discuss. Quality circle and suggestion schemes are other mechanisms for involvement.

Participation also provides an excellent opportunity for education and training of employees in Moi University as it embraces the principles of the learning organization. To achieve successful implementation of employee participation programmes in any organization, Dessler (1997) argues that employees must be involved in the formation of participation programmes to the greatest extent practical; continually emphasizing to employees that the committees exist for the exclusive purpose of addressing such issues as quality and productivity. They are not to be avenues for dealing with management on mandatory bargaining items which are normally addressed by unions and management like pay and conditions of work. Management must ensure that the participation committees are not set up when union organized activities are beginning in the organization. It should also ensure that the committees are filled with volunteers rather than elected employee representatives and such membership must be rotated frequently to ensure broader employee participation.

From the above discussions, it is clear that employees' participation is crucial for better results in any organization, Moi University included

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

Study was descriptive in nature. A survey design was adopted as a framework to guide the study.

Target Population

All the employees of Moi University at various levels totaling 2536 were targeted in the study. However, due to financial and time limitation a representative sample of 507 employees were randomly selected to participate in the study and were drawn proportionately across the entire organizational hierarchies.

The study adapted a 2- stage sampling process, first, respondents were stratified into various strata comprising of various campus. Second, in each stratum employees were categorize into two levels: *General employees* and *Management.*

The Data

A questionnaire was used to collect data. This instrument was administer on the selected respondents and given a period of two days to responded. However, before the instrument was administered it was piloted to establish it reliability and validity.

The data generated from the study was analyzed using qualitative techniques. Descriptive statistics, percentages, frequencies and graphical methods were used where applicable in analyzing and presenting the data describing the phenomena under investigation.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Types/Forms of Participation in Decision-Making Process

Participation in the decision making process in the university takes various forms and the data obtained indicated that 28.6% of participants do so in committees, while those who participate as individuals constitute 18.6%. Those who participate through representation constitute a majority of the respondents 47.1% and those who participate through other forms other than as individual members of committees or by representation constitute 5.7%.

Respondents views on Participatory Management system

Respondent interviewed stated that if staff is involved in decision-making processes within the University, there are a number of benefits that accrue to both the staff and the organization. Benefits of involvement according to respondents include staff motivation hence higher performance. Another benefit is that it reduces resistance to change and creates commitment to organization objectives. Better utilization of organization resources is another benefit of participation in decision making by employees.

The study also found that participatory management enhances team building. Team building is a very important aspect of management of human resources in any organization. Since participatory management is one method of team building, it has positive effect on employee performance in that when employees work as a team, output tend to be high and cases of absenteeism will be minimized since work teams regulate. When employees are involved in decision making process in the university, it results in better utilization of the skills they possess and this in turn improves the quality of decisions.

Through employee involvement, quality decisions are arrived at and in the process, it assists in team building which is crucial in any organization management. When employees participate in decision making process, a sense of belonging is enhanced among university employees which helps in the implementation of the decisions so arrived at.

Though respondents acknowledge the benefits of participatory management, some appreciated that fact that the system has negative effects. A total of 62.5% of those who see that employee participation should not be encouraged think so on the ground that it causes a lot of delays in decision making, threatens the mandate of managers to be accountable and manage the organization. It also may lead to leakage of crucial information to unauthorized

persons particularly strategic decisions. This group of respondents who felt that there was no need to encourage staff to participate in decision making process constituted only 9.4% of the total respondents of 340 who completed and returned the questionnaires while 90.6%supported the idea of encouraging employees to participate in the decision making process through whatever means available for doing so in Moi University.

Another negative effect of participatory management on performance is that in situations where there is no trust, it is viewed by management as a threat to their authority to manage.

Incompetent managers hide on committees to avoid being accountable for the decisions that are supposed to be made by them on day to day basis by forwarding such issues to committees to make the decisions for them. This also affects the organization performance and affects employee morale and performance.

During the research, it was established that most employees felt that they are not given a chance by management to participate in the decision making process in the university. Another observation made was that when staff gave suggestions on the decisions, management ignores them. This demotivates them to participate in future discussions.

One recommendation that was given by the respondents was that staff should be encouraged to participate in the decision making process in the university, so that they can have a sense of belonging. Trust and confidence building is another very important suggestion which the respondents gave through the questionnaires. Since many of the employees felt that even if they make suggestions to management on certain issues, they are not taken seriously and this creates a sense of mistrust and lack of confidence in management.

Placement was another recommendation that came out clearly. Most respondents particularly the non-teaching staff recommended that placement should be commensurate with the skills and appointment based on merit and professional qualification. Low salary was another factor that was mentioned severally as a demotivation in Moi University. Majority of the respondents felt that for improved job satisfaction and performance there is need to review the salary to match rising cost of living. University staff and particularly the teaching staff felt that they were poorly remunerated despite their high academic qualification.

The findings of this study showed that the decision making system in place in Moi University is established in the statutes of the Moi university act and their membership clearly spelt out.

CONCLUSIONS

From the data collected, it can be concluded that majority of the university staff were male 68.8%. It was also revealed that the major methods of decision making is by committee system

which cuts across all the levels of decision-making even those made at operational level is done by few individuals through small committees as earlier mentioned in this document.

The research also showed that there are various other ways in which staff in the university are involved in decision making and these include individuals being involved as experts in a given field, as supervisors, as representatives of unions, as heads of departments and deans and members of task forces and sub-committees.

It is not only involvements in decision making in the university where staff participate but they also often participate in the implementation of the decisions and policies to enable the university meet the stated objectives as spelt out in the act (Moi University Act 1984).

From the above summary it can be concluded that employee participation in both decision-making and implementation is a very important function and component of management not only in Moi University but in all public universities and organization in general. This is true in that there are wide ranges of measures and structures put in place in the university statutes to ensure that all stakeholders in the university are involved which includes both staff and students.

It can also be concluded that the university emphasizes more on participatory approach to decision making. From the findings it could be concluded that committee system is the widely used system in decision making process.

Another conclusion that is drawn from the study is that despite delays in decision making as a result of employee involvement, the benefits outweighs the drawbacks of the scheme in that it helps in employee motivation, creation of a sense of belonging and team building, reduced resistance to change which is very crucial, quality decisions, better utilization of employee skills and a general commitment to the organization objectives.

The foregoing is clearly summarized thus; "Workers participation is a means to reduce power inequalities between management and workers. It can range from simple information to taking joint decisions. Joint decision making is intended to enhance communication, overcome resistance to change and reduce conflicts between labour and management" (Monapa and Saiyadain, 1979).

However lack of the evidence suggests that participation has not been very effective in Moi University context. The main reasons for this has been management reluctance to share power, non-liberal information sharing, crisis of confidence and lack of preparedness on the part of workers representation.

In summing up the conclusion on the subject of participatory approach to decision making process, Kahuthu.C. (2003) States thus; "In assessing the optimal levels of decision making and the type of actors who need to be involved, it seems sensible to ensure that

decisions are made where all the relevant information is available. More generally trust needs to be built or restored to enable staff to willingly invest in their time and energy in participating."

The above quotation clearly shows that for effective participation in decision-making, there is need for free flow of relevant information, which only occurs in an environment where there is mutual trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the findings of the study the following recommendations can be made;

i. Moi University as an organization is highly bureaucratic and this has made the system not efficient as a result of attendant 'red-tapes' and 'bottle necks' associated with bureaucracy. It is therefore recommended that the red tape be reduced in order to allow decision to be decentralized so that the university could continue to remain relevant in its objectives and mission in a competitive environment.

ii. The methods of involvement should be expanded to give chance to all the stakeholders to participate and contribute to the shaping of the university through decision making. It is therefore recommended that suggestion box be put in place where staff and other stakeholders can give their suggestion. This is best done through suggestion boxes. A committee should critically analyze the suggestions so obtained and a feedback system and a feedback system also be put in place to evaluate the system.

iii. Employees normally see management as the responsibility of those at senior positions in the university and think as individuals, they have no role to play in decision making. It is therefore recommended that all staff in the university should be encouraged and motivated to contribute in decisions that help to shape the policies in the university. University management should reinforce the efforts made by staff towards participation in decision making.

iv. Since decision making process in the university is always done through committee, most staff members especially lecturers see such meetings as time consuming and this has always discouraged them in attending such meetings because it always takes a long time for a meeting to end. In this respect, it is recommended that meetings should be short and this can only be achieved by shortening the agenda.

v. It was also revealed that most employees are not satisfied with their jobs not because of the responsibility as such, but because they feel demotivated. The major reason for the demotivation is that job placements are not commensurate with the qualifications. Lack of proper scheme of service which is comprehensive especially for the non-teaching staff is what is lacking in the university and most respondents reported that they have been in one

grade for over ten years and all this time they do not have a clear career progression. In this, it is recommended that the university put in place a proper scheme of service for all cadres of staff in order to address the issue of staff morale.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the study carried out, it was clear that the field of employee participation in decision making in organizations is a recent area in management which has evolved in the last century, and with the current trends in globalization, more research should be conducted in specific areas of employee participation in decision making in organizations generally, and public universities in particular. This should be done with a view to bring about general understanding on the ways and means of improving the scope and nature of participatory management approaches within the legal constrain created set by statute that creates public institutions. It was recommended that further research be done on legal constrain on implementation on participatory management.

REFERENCES

Armstrong, M. (2001) A handbook of Human Resource Management Practice. 8th ed. London: Kogan Page.

Armstrong, M. (1995) A handbook of personnel management practice 5th ed.London: Kogan page.

Beach, S. D. (1985) Personnel; The management of People at work. 5th ed. NewYork: Macmillan.

Bennett R. (1997) Management. 3rd ed. London: Financial Times Pitman Publishing.

British Institute of Management.(1997) Employee Participation – The way ahead. London: IBM

Bulin, J.G. (1996) Supervision skills for managing work and leading people. USA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Cole G, A. (1997) Personnel Management. 4th ed. London: Letts Educational.

_____,(1996) Management Theory and Practice. 5th Ed. London: Lett Educational.

_____, (1995), Organizational Behaviour. London: DP Publications.

De Cenzo, D.A. and Robbins, S.P. (1996) Human Resource Management.4th ed. New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc.

Dessley, G. (1997)   Human Resource Management. 5th ed. New Delhi: Prentice Hall.

Evans David (1999) Supervisory Management, Principles and Practice. 5th ed. London: Continuum.

Eyre, E. C and R. Pettinger (1991) Mastering Basic Management. 3rd ed. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Flippo, E. B (1984) Personnel Management. 6th ed. Singapore: McGraw Hil Company.

Griffin R.W,(1999) Management. 5th ed. New Delhi: AITBS.

Kahuthu,C (2003),"Participation in Management." Nairobi: Kenya Institute of Management

McGregor, D.(1960)The Human Side of Enterprise. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Monapa, A. and Saiyadain, M.S (1979) Personnel Management, 2nd Edition. New Delhi: Tata McGrawhill.

Milkovich G.T and Boundream J.W. (1991) Human Resource Management. 6th ed. USA: Richard D.Irwin Inc.

Moi University (1996), Moi University Calendar 1996/97. Nairobi: Government Printers.

Ouchi, W. G. (1981) Theory Z: How American Business can Meet the Japanese Challenge. New York: Addison- Wesley

Oyugi, W. U. (1973) "Participation in development planning at the local level" in Rural Administration In Kenya, Management and Administration. (David K. Leonard,ed). Series: No.2. Nairobi: EALB.

Sagaimo, P.O. (2002) Management Dynamics towards efficiency, effectiveness, competence and Productivity. Nairobi: EAEP.

Saleemi, N.A. (1997) Personal management simplified. Nairobi: N.A Saleemi Publishers.

Steers,R.M. (1991) Introduction to Organizational Behaviour. London: MacMillan.

Vroom,V.H and P.W. Yetton. (1973) Leadership and Decision – Making. London, University of Pittsburgh Press.

Waweru, E.M. (1984) Management of Human Resource in Kenya. Nairobi: KLB.