

Benchmarking as a Component of Governance in Greater Bushenyi Districts, Western Uganda

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Abstract

This investigation examined the relationship between benchmarking and human resource recruitment process (HRRP) of Greater Bushenyi Districts Local Government (GBDLG). The study was anchored on the institutional theory developed by Scott (2004). This theory is relevant to the conference theme, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in that it highlighted one component of MDGs which is governance. Institutional theorists assert that the institutional environment can strongly influence the development of formal structures in any organization for good governance. Using the mixed explanatory method (quantitative and qualitative), a researcher generated questionnaire and an interview schedule were used to gather data from 377 participants out of 6,488 target population. The contribution of benchmarking to human resource recruitment process was satisfactory. It was concluded that benchmarking positively and significantly influences HRRP for good governance. For countries, to survive in this competitive world, benchmarking must be practiced as a must so that they can be able to borrow a leaf from the best practices of other countries for good governance.

Keywords: benchmarking, human resource recruitment processes

1. Introduction

The United States view always has been that government which is best is that one closest to the people. And if for example, Kansans want to pave their highways differently from North Carolinians, or establish a different school curriculum; the constitution guarantees that they may do so. Madison (2001) asserted that indeed, most states afford their local governments considerable flexibility in maximizing local control independent of state government. This includes the raising of state revenues within certain parameters which differ widely from state to state.

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Benchmarking has been practiced in African countries with the aim of encouraging better human resource recruitment processes among the districts, efficiency, effectiveness and improvement in service provision in local governments. Leaders of organizations all over the cosmos are engaged in benchmarking and human resource recruitment process as part of their functions (Steven, 2000). A well accomplished exercise of benchmarking, recruitment and selection helps to fit square pegs in square holes. Kreitner (2004) noted that the ultimate goal of benchmarking and recruiting is to generate a pool of qualified applicants for new and existing jobs. Everyday benchmarking and recruiting tactics include internal job postings, referrals by present and past employees, campus recruiters, newspaper advertisements, websites, public and private agencies, so-called headhunters, job fairs, temporary help agencies and union halls.

In the period between 1971 and 1979 Uganda was divided into 10 provinces which were directly ruled by military governors. The provinces were an additional tier to the existing local council set up of district, county, sub-county, parish and village councils. The provinces were created by a decree but largely remained an administrative convenience to assist government to oversee district operations. Mitala (2010) pointed out that the provinces were later abolished in 1979 and the Local Administrations Act 1967 and the Urban Authorities Act 1964 continued to govern the relationship between central government and local authorities until 1993. Local government structure in Uganda includes village, parish, sub-count, county, and district levels. At the lower echelon, there is a village which is the lowest political administrative unit. A village usually consists of between 50 and 70 households and may be home to anywhere between 250 and 1000 people. Each village is ran by a local council, that is local council 1(LC1) and it is governed by a chairman (LC1 chairman) and nine other executive committee members (Kavum, 2009).

The importance of human resource recruitment process being the realization of efficiency and effectiveness in an organization cannot be overemphasized. However, there is a general bias originating from benchmarking in Greater Bushenyi Districts (Mutabwire Report, 2012). Under benchmarking, there is a lot of bias based on religion, political parties and sectarianism in GBDLGs. Thus, better practices of HRRP are indeed wanting in Greater Bushenyi Local Governments. The constructs included in this study under benchmarking and human resource recruitment process were not mainly the concerns by the past studies. Many studies that investigated human resource recruitment process in local governments dwelt on cost and productivity, thus, necessitating the need to carry out this study to fill the foregoing gaps. The consequences of this scenario may engender dysfunctional conflicts, corruption, in-house fighting; intrigue, poor quality services delivery and underdevelopment of local areas. Therefore, the researcher investigated the extent to which benchmarking account for the general failure of local government officials to practice in a better way the HRRP for development and suggested specific general practices/processes that need to be adopted to foster development well free from bias and discrimination in local governments.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a process where an organization compares its functions with other organizations for a competitive advantage (Harold, 2000). If an organization cannot compare itself with other organizations, it is likely to perish. An organization performs in accordance with its strategic goals; it may realize that it is facing some problems which are making it not to perform as expected. One way of solving these problems may be to engage in research and development which is good but time consuming and costly (Gareth, 2003). Another way of solving them is through bench marking (Chandan, 1998; Harold, 2000; Kreitner, 1995; Stoner, 2001).

Gary, (1996) also conceptualized benchmarking as a systematic process of examining the products, services and work processes of organizations that are recognized as practicing best practices which an organisation can use as a basis for improving its performance. Benchmarking is a technique of comparing organizations in order to identify best practices in some of them and transfer all or part of them to one's own organization (Templer, 2005).

2.1.2 Human Resource Recruitment Process

Once managers develop a pool of applicants for open positions through the human resource recruitment process, they need to find out whether each applicant is qualified for the position and likely to be a good performer. If more than one applicant meets these two conditions, managers must further determine which applicants are likely to be better performers than others. They have several selection tools to help them sort out the relevant qualification of the job applicants and appraise their potential for being good performers in a particular job. Those tools include background information, interviews, paper and pencil tests, physical ability tests, performance tests, and references (Gareth, 2003).

Rwegasira (2007) conducted a study on: The Effect of Staffing on Organizational Productivity in Ngara District in Tanzania. The findings of the study was that for every job there must be the most qualified person to fill such a post. Also guidelines of central government must be followed to the letter so as to be effective and efficient. Further, poor remuneration by government does not attract many applicants for some jobs advertised in the media, so, government needs to enhance the salaries of civil servants in Tanzania so as to have better qualified workers to apply and fill vacant positions in the civil service. On the other hand, Mbabazi (2012) pointed out that district councilors and civil servants do not mutually agree together in meetings on allocation of government resources nor compare with other organizations on work methods due to meager resources leading to a mismatch to their facilitation in service delivery.

3. Methods and Techniques

The data in these study were obtained using both primary and secondary sources .Primary data were obtained using questionnaires distributed to participants and carrying out interviews to selected focal participants. Secondary data were obtained through documentary analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed in order to describe the situation in figures supported with key informants' views and inferences.

The target population was composed of workers of Greater Bushenyi Districts: 573 administrators, 4,935 teachers, 716 health workers, 127 political leaders and 138 support staff where 377 qualified respondents were with administered with the structured questionnaires while 25 participants were selected for interviews. Cluster sampling, stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were employed. A content validity index of 1 which was above 0.75 indicated acceptable validity of the research instruments and Cronbach's reliability coefficient of 0.937. The statistical parameters used to analyze the data included descriptive statistics, Fisher's one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Pearson linear correlation coefficient and regression analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed by categorizing data into meaningful themes, for easy interpretation in a storyline manner (Gibbs , 2007).

4. Findings and Interpretations

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

More than 53% of Greater Bushenyi Districts Local Governments (GBDLG) staff were male; mostly diploma holders; majority were 39 years old; over 73% were married, with experience

of 5 years and most of them were administrators. These findings revealed that the females in GBDLG still lagged behind in education, the majority of local government staff were young people, a good number of respondents were married which was a requirement for many African societies in terms of attitudinal issues, and many respondents had enough experience implying that there was a high level of retention of employees. The data from interviews indicated that most people interviewed were of one year and above in their work stations at the districts. This meant that the participants included in the study were the right ones to collect focused information for true results. The interpretations for qualitative data was guided by Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree and 4 = strongly agree. These ratings were analyzed using means and intervals which indicated the extent to which they agree on each item as shown in Table 3.

4.2 Contribution of Benchmarking to HRRP

Table 3: The Contribution of Benchmarking to Human Resource Recruitment Process (HRRP) in Greater Bushenyi Districts Local Governments (GBDLG)

Benchmarking	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
We normally hold staff meetings.	3.29	Very Satisfactory	1
Government policies guide action plans.	3.24	Satisfactory	2
District officials are cooperative in work schedules.	3.21	Satisfactory	3
District leaders insist on performance results.	3.19	Satisfactory	4
My district compares level of service delivery with other districts.	3.15	Satisfactory	5
Management practices flexibility in service delivery.	3.11	Satisfactory	6
Management accepts ideas from its workers.	3.09	Satisfactory	7
We normally borrow ideas from other organizations.	2.93	Satisfactory	8
We normally have exchange visits with other districts.	2.77	Satisfactory	9
Management is rigid on procedures.	2.55	Satisfactory	10
Average mean	3.05	Satisfactory	

Legend

Mean Range	Response Mode	Interpretation
3.26-4.00	Strongly agree	Very satisfactory
2.51-3.25	Agree	Satisfactory
1.76-2.50	Disagree	Fair
1.00-1.75	Strongly disagree	Poor

The results in Table 3 showed that the contribution of benchmarking to HRRP of local governments in GBDLG was satisfactory (mean = 3.05). The GBDLG officials clearly followed central government policies on benchmarking and human resource recruitment process laid down by public service. Although the interview data revealed challenging elements of deviations in spite of visibly placed policies and guidelines.

Generally, the participants were satisfied on the practice of GBDLG regarding benchmarking and employing competent and qualified staff to occupy the various vacant positions in the districts. In addition, the attraction of competent persons to express their interest whenever a vacant position

exists and the following of legal procedures in all the activities and operations of the district boosted the level of human resource recruitment process.

However, the findings about benchmarking in this study did not concur with the study conducted by (Matte, 2008) on the Joint Annual Review of Decentralization in Uganda. He pointed out that local the governments in Uganda did not enhance policy and program implementation and that the multi -sector nature of the undertakings did not contain the effectiveness and the timely implementation of the programs in local governments.

4.3 Differences in Benchmarking of Districts

The Fisher's one way ANOVA was used to test the null hypothesis that benchmarking did not significantly differ according to districts (Sig. < 0.05) implying that each district in Greater Bushenyi Districts Local Governments practiced benchmarking differently. Each district followed different guidelines or parameters as may be tailored to local circumstances.

The findings under benchmarking are linked with the Institutional Theory by (Scott, 2005) in a sense that officials in each district did comply with normative pressures resulting from local circumstances and legitimating isomorphism especially in recruiting new employees in local governments for as long as they achieve their individual and corporate objectives. If one was not born in the area or district, he may not be given a job.

4.4 Relationship between Benchmarking and Human Resource Recruitment Process

The Pearson linear correlation coefficient revealed that benchmarking was positively correlated with human resource recruitment process ($r=0.32$, sig = 0.000) thus the null hypothesis was rejected therefore an improvement in benchmarking increases human resource recruitment process of each local government employees. Regression analysis further explained the effect of benchmarking on human resource recruitment process ((F = 710.434, Sig. = 0.000). Obviously, benchmarking contributed 31.6% towards variations in the human resource recruitment process of local governments (adjusted $r^2 = 0.316$). This meant that 68.4% was contributed by other factors apart from benchmarking. These other factors may include participatory democracy and empowerment of local government officials.

The findings of Kanyesigye (2001) study on training and retention indicated that local governments need to rely on guidelines to effectively handle training and retention of their employees. He further contended that all stakeholders should participate where their training needs assessments can be obtained through staff performance appraisal and benchmarking. Under this study the Institution Theory was validated and substantiated.

4.5 Conclusions

Benchmarking leads to better human resource recruitment process if managers do not practice bias and discrimination based on religion, political parties and sectarianism in benchmarking. If the managers deviate from what is ideally expected corruption tendencies may come out of the fore and consequently does not foster better HRRP in local governments.

5. Recommendations

The central government intervention (domination) in district affairs should be regulated or reduced in terms of benchmarking by allowing district officials make decisions concerning their local affairs. The government officials should promote flexibility in rules and regulations in local governance. The Resistance Council Statute of 1993 contained the fact that there should be the principle of non- subordination to prevent higher authorities from dominating lower local authorities. This is because development in local government must be tailored to local circumstances, already known by local government officials. Thus, the Local Government Finance Commission should advise the central government to that effect.

Further, the central government officials should increase on the budget given to the districts to ensure excellent service delivery in these districts. Local government Finance Commission (LGFC) should advise government to augment the allocation of funds in the budget by 100% for sub-national governments for them to be able to execute their agreed programs effectively and efficiently. Such augmentation of funding can help local government officials to facilitate exchange visits (benchmarking) aimed at good governance. This is because article 194 of the 1995 constitution of the Republic of Uganda ,subsection 4(a) LGFC advises the President on all matters concerning the distribution of revenue between the government and local governments and the allocation to each local government of moneys out of the consolidation fund. The augmentation of funds for local governments by 100% is so important in a sense that growth and development of local governments is a springboard for national development.

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