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RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Analysis of the Effect of Career Path Development on Employee Turnover Rates in the Public Sector: A case of Kerio Valley Development Authority, Kenya.

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Abstract

Employee turnover is currently a rampant issue in many organizations in Kenya, for various reasons, at several rates and with a number of effects. This study sought to examine the effect of career path development on employee turnover in the public sector in Kenya by focusing on Kerio Valley Development Authority. The study specifically sought to: establish whether the organization had a career path development policy, find out whether the organization provides opportunities for promotion of employees, and to establish whether KVDA has a training policy for employees. The study was guided by Equity theory as propagated by John Stancy Adams. The theory emphasizes that individuals will be better motivated when they are treated equitably and demotivated if they are treated inequitably. A descriptive survey research method was adopted in the study. From a target population of 600 employees, a sample size of 120 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling technique. Questionnaires, interview schedules and observation checklists were then used to collect data. Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics respectively. The study established that there is a high rate of employee turnover at Kerio Valley Development Authority and lack of clear career path development for employees is a major cause. The study recommendations that to minimize the high turnover rates the organization should provide training and development opportunities to the employees to enable them to acquire prerequisite skills and abilities for career development. The study further recommends that the organization should develop better human resource policies and guidelines to provide clear career path growth for its employees.

Introduction

Employees are important human capital assets for organizational existence and performance that without them an organization cannot effectively survive in the current highly competitive business environment. Meaghan & Nick, (2002) have observed that Employees are crucial to the organization since their value to the organization is essentially intangible and not easily replicated. Employees are major contributors to the efficient achievement of the organizations' success (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000). Moore & Attewell (1991) have observed that human resource can be a deciding factor for an organizations performance and success. Beardwell & Claydon (2007) have also put emphasis on the importance of human resource when they observe that an organization can obtain meaningful and long lasting success through the correct handling of its human resources. The success of any organization depends on its human resource for the organization to perform effectively and efficiently. It is because of this background, that employees are very critical to the success or failure of any organization for this case the Kenyan public sector.

According to Abbasi & Hollman (2000), employee turnover is the rotation of workers around the labour market between firms, jobs and occupations and between the states of employment and unemployment. Price (1977) has defined "turnover" as a ratio of the number of organizational members who have left during the period being considered divided by the average number of people in the organization during that period.

Due to globalization, employee turnover is an important issue that poses a major challenge for organizations all over the world today which is heightening competition. This is important that organizations must continue to develop tangible products and provide services which are based on strategies created by employees. High employee turnover can have a devastating effect on an organization especially if the lost employees are high performers. This is because human capital is central to organizational performance, growth and general business outcomes.

Employee turnover rates are considered to be one of the persistent problems in organizations (Armstrong, 2009). Pine (2000) has observed that employers today are faced with the challenge of hiring, retaining qualified and capable employees. In particular circumstances, turnover involves quality employees who have worked for the organization for many years, high performers, experienced and loyal employees.

While studies have established that health turnover is good for an organization more especially as it is likely to introduce new ideas and techniques that can move the organization to greater levels of success Khatri *et al*. (2001) observed that high employee turnover could influence the performance of organizations and has the potential to cause high loss of human resource and low productivity levels leading to high technology loss. On the other hand, Mullins (2000) has observed that staff turnover can lead to increased direct costs including advertising, interview time, administrative expenses, supervision and training. Employee turnover also has a disruptive effect of the use of managerial time. Another intangible cost is the effect of high employee turnover on the morale, motivation, job satisfaction of staff and on the level of organizational performance and customer satisfaction.

Turnover on the other hand, can be costly for an organization (Hellman, 1997) as employees who leave the organization can cause disruptions in the operations, work team dynamics and unit performance. The costs that can be incurred as a result of high turnover include: leaving costs, recruitment costs of replacements, training costs and indirect costs of downtime as new employees take time to adjust and gain proficiency. Many organizations are concerned with the process of recruitments and selection which is not only time consuming but very expensive in terms of advertising costs, agency fees, screening, testing assessment, background checks, interviews, and travel and relocation costs (Frank *et al*, 2004).In additional to the above costs, if an organization has made significant investment in training and development of its employees, that investment is lost when employees leave. Moreover high turnover rate can also impact on the morale of the staff and the organization reputation as an indication of poor working conditions and making retention and recruitment very difficult and time consuming. Kharti *et al* (2001) have observed that high turnover has been found to be a major source of poor morale among the employees in many organizations and this shows that there is an association between high turnover and the level of morale of staff in an organization.

Since long term retention of a highly productive workforce is in demand, a major goal of human resource is to attract, recruit and retain highly qualified and productive and competent staff. Thus it is important for organizations to understand how to minimize the turnover rate through analysis of the antecedents of organizational withdrawal decisions. It is for this reasons, that employee turnover rates in the Kenya's public sector is a critical issue that needs to be addressed urgently to enable the government execute its mandate effectively.

Though employee turnover is a much studied phenomenon (Shaw *et al*.1998) there is no standard reason why employees leave organizations.

The employee turnover aggregate statistics of data in the United States of America indicates high rates of turnovers in the early decades of the nineteenth century and a decline in the twentieth century on a major variation in 1930 onwards during the economic crisis in the World War years of 1914-1918 and 1939 to 1945 which brought unprecedented turnover rates of about 25% and 40% respectively due to the large reduction in spending and implementation of policies hence the low rates witnessed in the post war era (Armstrong 2003, Appleby 1948).

Yoder & Staudohar (1982) have observed that in Japan the turnover rate differs with that of America because the Japanese organizations are unwilling to terminate jobs of employees who in return become loyal to their own firms. Africa case is that unemployment levels have been on high increase. Nigam & Singer (1974) pointed out that people may not have alternatives of employment opportunities and not easy to give up their jobs and employees leaves their jobs for various reasons some which include organizational and personal on grounds of higher salaries and career development, management style of leadership, supervision conflicts and social aspects like marriage where an employee leaves to join his or her family

In the Kenyan public sector, employee retention is one of the most critical issues facing organizational managers as result of skilled manpower, economic growth and high employee turnover (Michael, 2008). The turnover means that an organization may gain a new knowledge employee who can become its competitive advantage. The loss of knowledge is a threat for the organization which increases the significance of knowledge continuity. There is dire need to encourage employees to remain in the organizations and to increase productivity beyond that which is at a minimum accepted standard using scarce resources (Kimanthi, 2000).

The public service sector in Kenya originated from the British colonial Administration. At independence there was no major change in the structure of the service apart from the replacement of the exiting expatriates with Kenyans under a policy known as Kenyanization (Aseka, 2002).It is important to note that at independence there was a critical shortage of staff to fill the vacancies of the colonial administrators who had left. Education at the time was aimed at producing the workforce that will take up the available vacancies. This challenge prompted the government to send Kenyans to foreign countries such as the United Kingdom, United States of America, Russia and India for training to prepare them to fill the vacancies. The policy of Kenyanization led to the rapid expansion of the public service (Aseka, 2002).By the year 2002, the total number of Public Service employees had risen to 272,000 (Ministry of Planning and National Development, 2003a:13).

The rapid expansion of the Civil Service led to high wage bill leading to inability by the government to offer competitive remuneration to its employees. Although the cost of living continues to rise, the remuneration of the public sector employees has stagnated. To cope with the ever increasing cost of living the public servants engage themselves in other economic activities to supplement their income. Most of the economic activities are undertaken during official working hours leading to poor service delivery in the sector (Aseka, 2002). To solve the problem, in 1993 the government introduced reform programme aimed at improving work performance and service delivery in the public sector. The first phase of the reform programme focused on employee reduction. During this phase the size of the pubic civil service was significantly reduced by 37% through measures such as Voluntarily Early Retirement Scheme, abolition of posts that had remained vacant for too long, freezing recruitment into the public service except critical areas and strict enforcement of mandatory retirement age of 55 years. The second phase of the reform programme focused on rationalization of the public service to improve performance and productivity. In this phase, there was the introduction of performance management strategies to enhance work performance in the public sector. The strategies focused on improving service delivery in the ministries and departments and creating a customer and result oriented culture in the public service sector (Directorate of Personnel Management (DPM), 2002d).On the third phase of the government reforms involved deepening ministries and departments rationalization initiatives in which government institutions such as Kerio Valley Development Authority reviewed their functions, structures and staffing with the aim of enhancing efficiency and productivity. As the result, the number of the employees raised from 193,000in 1991 to 272,000 in 2002 Ministry of Planning and National Development (MPND, 2003a:13). The intention of the reform programmes was to fight corruption and restore public confidence in the civil service.

The impact of employee turnover has received considerable attention by senior management, human resource management professionals and industrial psychologists. Scholars agree that the impact of staff turnover varies from organization to organization. To some extent there are also arguments that can be made in favour of a certain level of staff turnover. Torrington *et al* (2005) has observed that organizations need to be rejuvenated with "fresh blood" from time to time if they are to avoid being stale and stunted. They have observed further that a degree of turnover helps managers to keep firm control over labour costs more especially organizations which are subject to regular and unpredictable changes in business levels.

In the recent past, researchers have been considering the alternative ways to understand how employee turnover process is enacted and what organizations, managers and employers can do to prevent flight of competitive human capital (Harman *et al* 2007). Significant amount of literature has examined the effects of employee turnover and its cost to the organization. In addition, researchers have investigated causes and consequences of employee turnover and retention (Hale, 1998; Lake, 2000; Abbasi & Hollman, 2000; Backman, 2000; Khatri *et al*., 2001; Hussain *et al*, 2012; Khan *et al*, 2011).

Most of the research studies have concentrated on the development of the detailed list of predictors and antecedents of employee turnover and tested employee turnover theories in Western cultural work settings but ignoring the developing countries such as Kenya. Furthermore, previous researches have missed out to look at the effect of career path development on employee turnover rates in the public sector in Kenya. This constitutes a serious academic and research gap in the literature thus calling for more attention and more robust research contribution in the field of management research. Kenya as a developing country presents distinctive socio-political, economic, administrative and organizational structure which make it rich context for research. The literature on the current state of employee turnover and retention in Kenya is limited. Therefore, deficiencies in the literature necessitated putting in rigorous research contribution to better understand 'ways and means' to manage employee turnover and retention in Kenya public sector more specifically in relation to Kerio Valley Development Authority. Consequently, this study attempted to analyze the effect of career path development on employee turnover rates in the public sector in Kenya with special reference to Kerio Valley Development Authority.

Statement of the Problem

A low rate of turnover is good for an organization, more especially as it is likely to introduce new ideas and techniques that can improve the performance of an organization. However, a high turnover has a social- economic problem that can be costly for an organization as employees who leave the organization can cause disruptions in the operations, work team dynamics and performance. The costs that can be incurred as a result of turnover include leaving costs, recruitment cost of replacement, training costs and indirect costs of downtime as new employees take time to adjust and gain proficiency.

In the recent past research has been done to identify the causes of high employee turnover in organizations (Shaw et al., 1998; Huling, Roznowski & Hachiya, 1993; Huselid, 1995 and Price, 1977). In Kenya studies have also been done to establish the causes of employee turnover in the public sector (Buta, 2012, Kuria, Wanderi & Ondigi, 2011, Mokaya, 2008). It is important to note that despite the fact that many studies have been done to address the problem of high employee turnover rates in organizations, still the problem continues to persist which is creating an academic gap to be researched further. The current study sought to analyze the effect of career path development on employee turnover at Kerio Valley Development Authority.

Material and Methodology

The study was conducted at Kerio Development Authority and its stations located in West Pokot, Elgeyo-Marakwet, Uasin Gishu (Headquarters) and Baringo Counties in Kenya.

This study used descriptive survey research method. A survey is a non-experimental, descriptive research method that is useful when a researcher wants to collect data on phenomena that cannot be directly observed (Jackson, 2009: 89). According to Babbie (2005: 252), survey methods are the best when collecting original data from describing a population too large to observe directly.

The researcher used stratified sampling to select respondents for the study. In conducting the process of random sampling the researcher identified the population then the criteria for stratification was identified and followed by listing the population according to the defined strata or subgroups. The required sample size of 20% of the population resulting in a sample of 120 respondents was selected. The sample ratio was 0.2 which was obtained by getting the total population of 600 in Kerio Valley Development Authority and divided by 120 respondents earmarked for the study and representing the sample size. Mugenda & Mugenda (1999) suggest one may use a sample size of 10% but for better and more representative results higher percentage is recommended. The researcher used the existing departments as the strata to choose respondents to participate in the study. Both qualitative and quantitative were used in data collection. The study utilized questionnaires, interview schedules and observations checklists as tools of data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Effect of Career Path Development and Employee Turnover Rates

According to the findings in Table 1, 70% of the respondents disagreed that there was no supervision for their work at Kerio Valley Development Authority, while 25% agreed that they were usually supervised.

Table 1: Presence of Supervision for Respondents' Work

		Frequency	Percent
Respondents	Strongly Agree	7	7.0
	Agree	18	18.0
	Undecided	5	5.0
	Disagree	44	44.0
	Strongly Disagree	26	26.0
	Total	**100**	**100.0**

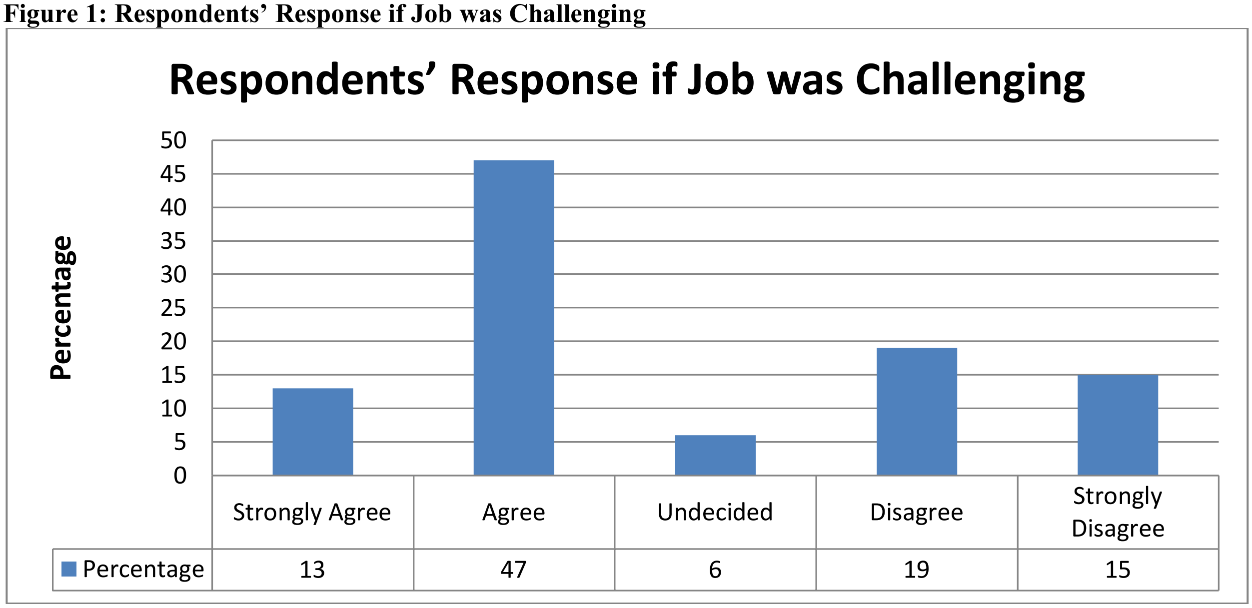
Source: Field Data, 2014

Interviews with the top level managers established that employees were closely supervised and given support whenever they were in need. This was noted to motivate employees who in turn had an impact on the quality of service. During the observation, the researcher noted that the employees were minimally supervised and were carrying out their tasks independently.

Respondents' Opinion if Job was challenging

From the findings as indicated in Figure 1, 60% of the respondents generally agreed that indeed their jobs were challenging. However, 34% of the respondents disagreed with this opinion.

Figure 1: Respondents' Response if Job was Challenging



Source: Field Data, 2014

Observation sessions revealed that the employees were working as teams hence noting challenges related to their work was not easy. However, it was observed that the job they engaged in was skilled though some departments had not mechanized their operations

HR Career Development Policy

The findings indicate that there was no Human Resource Career Development Policy as 50% of the respondents attested to this. However, 34% agreed that there was a Human Resource Career Development Policy for employees.

Table 2: Presence of Human Resource Career Development Policy

		Frequency	Percent
Respondents	Strongly Agree	7	7.0
	Agree	27	27.0
	Undecided	6	6.0
	Disagree	34	34.0
	Strongly Disagree	26	26.0
	Total	**100**	**100.0**

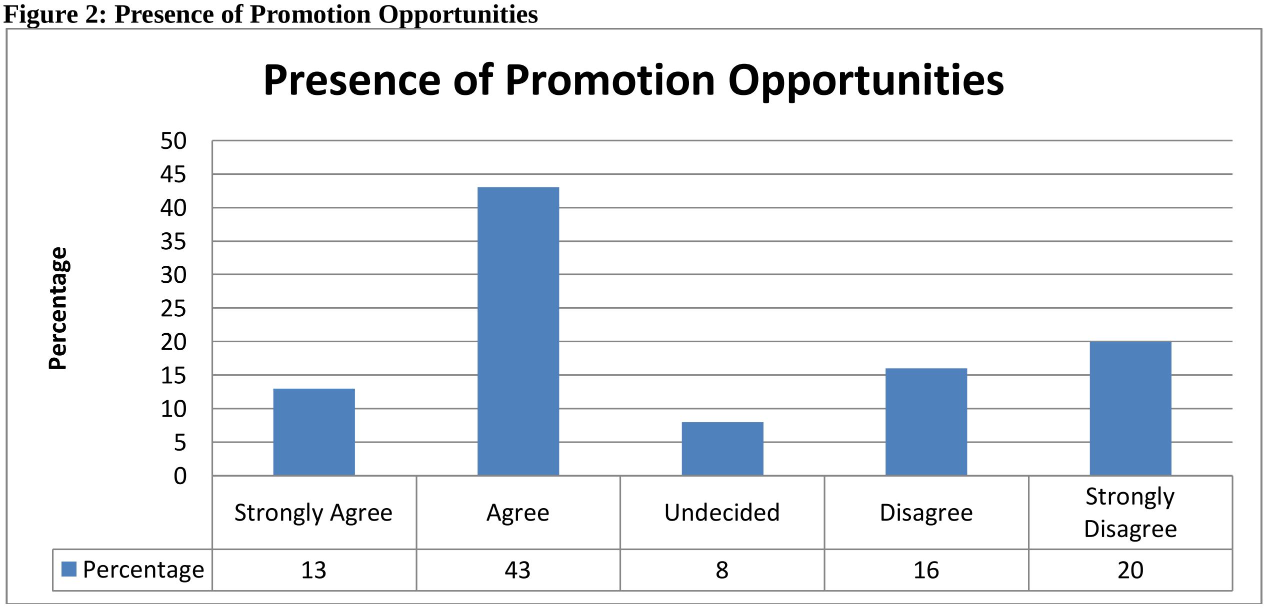
Source: Field Data, 2014

Table 2 shows that the organization did not have a clear Human Resource Career Development Policy for its employees.

Promotion Opportunities

According to the study in relation with promotion opportunities, 74% of the respondents disagreed that there were no promotion opportunities while 19% agreed that such opportunities were available.

Figure 2: Presence of Promotion Opportunities



Source: Field Data, 2014

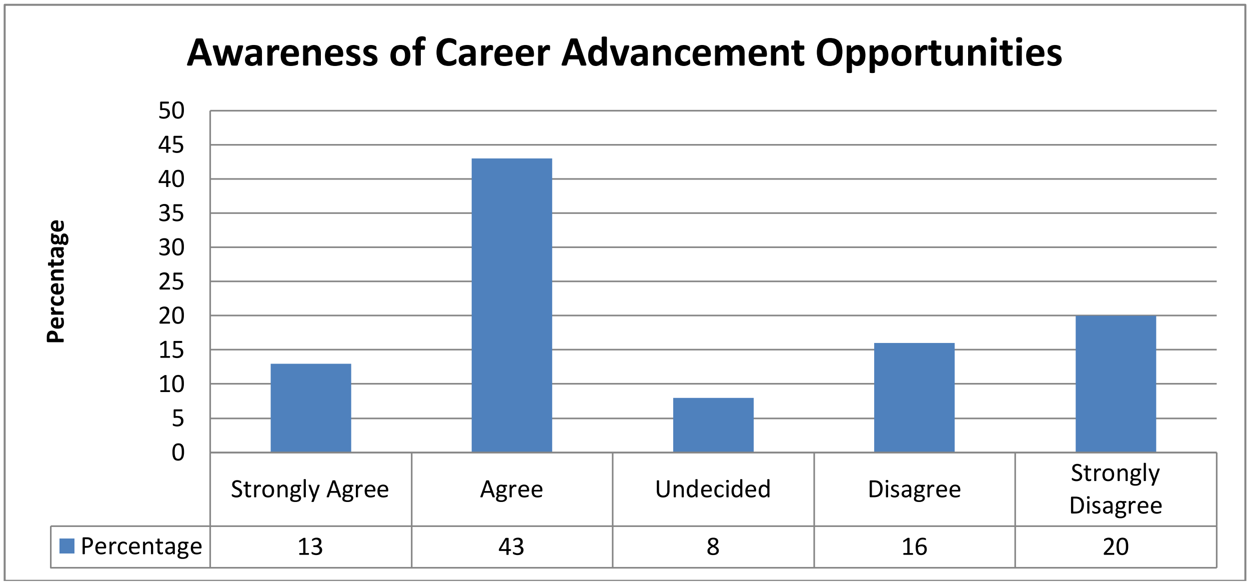
Interviews with top level managers confirmed that the structure within Kerio Valley Development Authority did not conveniently provide for employee promotion and development but was being worked on to incorporate internal development and professional growth of the employees.

Career Advancement Opportunities

According to Figure 3 concerning awareness of career advancement opportunities, 56% of the respondents disagreed that they were not aware of such opportunities while 34% agreed that they were aware.

Top level managers confirmed that previously, not all employees were aware of the career advancement opportunities within Kerio Valley Development Authority. This was because managers did not communicate frequently with the employees. However, few determined employees had sponsored themselves to school in pursuit of academic excellence.

Figure 3: Awareness of Career Advancement Opportunities



Source: Field Data, 2014

The findings in Figure 3 show that the employees were not aware of the career development opportunities within the organization.

Consultation of Employees on Management Policies

Regarding employee consultation on major management policies on Table 3, 68% of the respondents disagreed that they were not consulted while 25% agreed.

Top level managers in interviews agreed that employees and station managers were consulted in formulation and implementation of managerial policies through the ‘open-door’ policy that they had.

Table 3: Consultation of Employees on Management Policies

		Frequency	Percent
Respondents	Strongly Agree	8	8.0
	Agree	17	17.0
	Undecided	7	7.0
	Disagree	36	36.0
	Strongly Disagree	32	32.0
	Total	**100**	**100.0**

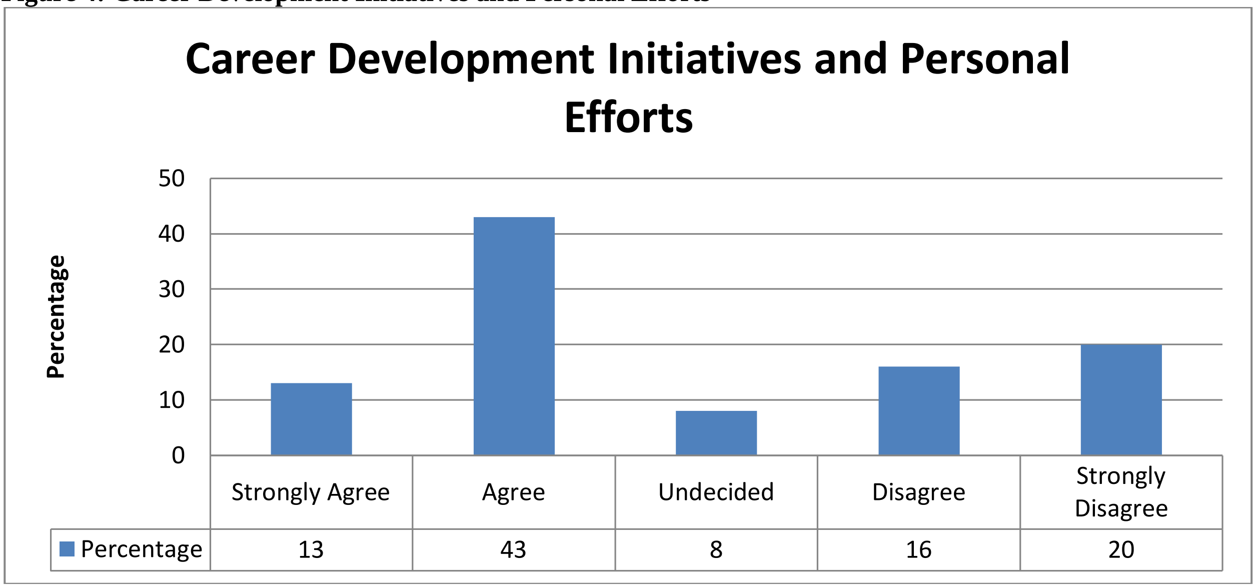
Source: Field Data, 2014

The study also established that there was no regular consultation among employees and top level management.

Career Development Initiatives and Personal Efforts

According to Figure 4, 56% of the respondents agreed that their personal efforts influenced their career development initiatives. On the contrary, 36% of the respondents disagreed with this opinion.

Figure 4: Career Development Initiatives and Personal Efforts



Source: Field Data, 2014

The study also established that there were career development initiatives among the employees and that they made individual efforts for the same.

Basis of Promotions in Kerio Valley Development Authority

The findings on Table 4 indicate that 67% of the respondents disagreed that Kerio Valley Development Authority promotions were not done on individual employee merit. However, 26% agreed with this.

Table 4: Basis of Promotions in Kerio Valley Development Authority

		Frequency	Percent
Respondents	Strongly Agree	7	7.0
	Agree	19	19.0
	Undecided	7	7.0
	Disagree	35	35.0
	Strongly Disagree	32	32.0
	Total	**100**	**100.0**

Source: Field Data, 2014

The study established that the basis of Kerio Valley Development Authority promotions was not done on individual employee merit.

Presence of Employee-Related Human Resource Departments

With regards to Table 5, 99% of the respondents agreed that there was a Human Resource department while 74% agreed that there was a training and development department. However, 74% disagreed that there was not office responsible for employee salaries. Likewise 85% disagreed that there was no mentoring department and 81% disagreed there had not attended any training.

Table 5: Presence of Employee-Related Human Resource Departments

Respondents' Response	Yes		No	
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Presence of Human Resource Department	99	99.0	1	1.0
Training and Development Department	74	74.0	26	26.0
Employee Rewards and Salaries	26	26.0	74	74.0
Mentoring Department	15	15.0	85	85.0
Attended any Training	19	19.0	81	81.0

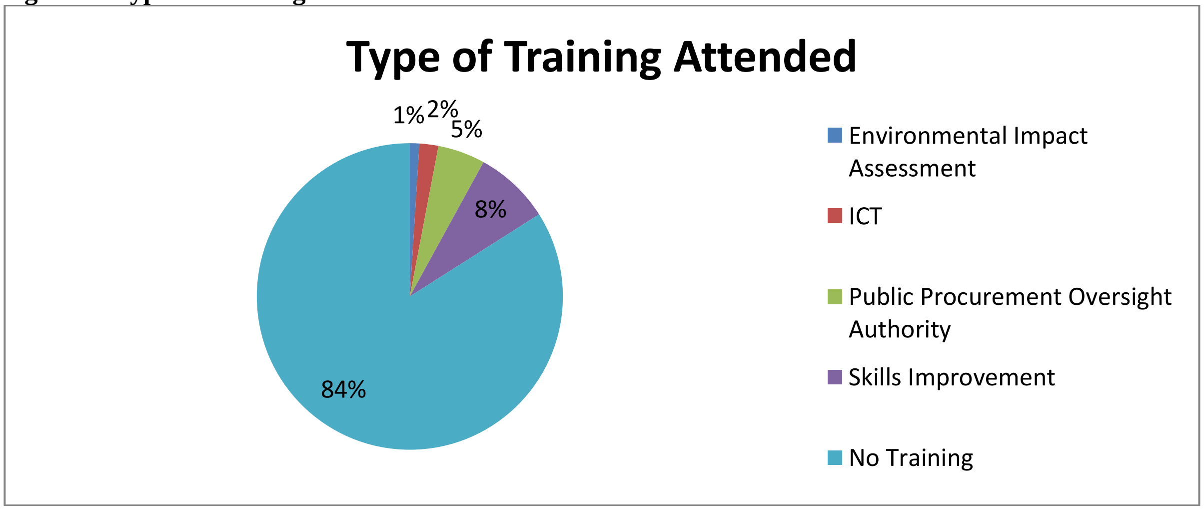
Source: Field Data, 2014

The study established that there were other Human Resource related departments that handled employees' issues.

Employee Job Training

According to Figure 5, 1% of the respondents indicated that they had attended environmental impact assessment training, 2% had attended ICT training, 5% had attended Public Procurement Oversight Authority training while 8% had attended general Skills Improvement training. 84% of the respondents attested to the fact that they had not attended any form of training. Figure 5 illustrates.

Figure 5: Type of Training Attended



Source: Field Data, 2014

The study established that most of the employees had not attended any type of training.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The general objective of this study was to analyse the effect of career path development on employee turnover in Kerio Valley Development Authority. The study found out that a big percentage of employees in Kerio Valley Development Authority felt that there was no clear professional advancement in the career development hence being a catalyst for employee turnover. The study reveals that most employees were strongly disagreed that lack of human resource career development policy for employees contributes to turnover.

Based on employee career path development, the study established that there was no Human Resource Career Development Policy as 50% of the respondents agreed and this influenced employee turnover at Kerio Valley Development Authority. With relation to promotion opportunities, it was established that 67% of the respondents agreed that Kerio Valley Development Authority promotions were not done on individual employee merit. Employees felt that they were not motivated due to lack of promotions which offered career growth hence possible employee turnover. The study established from Kerio Valley Development Authority management that lack of promotions leading to employees stagnating in their positions was due to the inadequate funding from the government. On the other hand, employees expected to work in jobs that provided them with opportunities to be promoted to new and challenging positions. In light of the findings of the study, it was established that employees who were not considered for any promotions for longer periods in the organization were not motivated and were likely to leave.

Conclusions

The general objective of this study was to analyse the effect of career path development on employee turnover in Kerio Valley Development Authority. The study made the conclusions with special regard to the objectives of the study.The study established that the jobs that the employees were undertaking were challenging. It was also established that the employees were closely supervised and given support. From the study findings it was established that there was no career human resource development policy in place at KVDA and the staff therefore were not aware of career development opportunities within the organization. The study further established that the organization did not provide opportunities for promotion for staff and that there were no structures in place. It was established that there was no consultation between the employees and top management on career development initiatives hence employees were individually sponsoring them in advancing their careers. From the study it was established that KVDA did not have an office responsible for staff development and training and that there was no training policy in place.

Recommendations

From the conclusions the study recommends that, it is necessary for KVDA to develop a clear career development policy .This will enable the organization to minimize high turnover of employees as most of them are likely to leave when the is no policy to guide them on their career development.

The study also recommends that KVDA should develop policies and guidelines for promotions within the organization. This will help to retain employees who likely to leave due to unavailability of opportunities for promotion.

The study recommends that KVDA should develop a training and development policy for the employees. Training and equipping the employees with relevant skills, knowledge and competence is very useful for the purposes of organization succession planning. Continuous training will allow employees to get a chance of attending relevant training in their field areas of expertise.

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