

Strategic Human Resource Practices And Employee Satisfaction In Public Sector In Kenya. A Case Of Public Health Workers In Nairobi County.

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Abstract

This study discusses about strategic human resource practices (SHRP) and shows its relationship with the employee satisfaction. It gives enlightenment about what SHRP is all about in relation to employee satisfaction. In this study, SHRP is broken into three variables which include Reward system, Communication system and Training and Development though that is not inclusive of all the SHRP. This study looks into the above three mentioned variables. These are factors that help satisfy employees in order to perform on their duties well for their benefit and that of the company or organization in general. If there is lack of motivation in workplace, inefficiency will be evident. The study therefore answers the following 4 questions. Firstly, what is the level of satisfaction of employees in public sector in Kenya? Secondly, what is the role of the reward system on employee satisfaction in public sector? Thirdly, what is the role of communication system on employee satisfaction in public sector? And fourthly, what is the role of training and development on employee satisfaction in public sector?

Keywords: Employee satisfaction; strategic human resource practices; reward system; communication system; training and development.

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I. Introduction

Industrial actions or strikes have been rampant within the public health sector by the health workers globally and this has been increasing trend as it has been shown by evidence. For a long time now spanning to a decade and beyond, the health workers in Kenya including Doctors, Pharmacists, and Dentists among others have time and again engaged into both minor and major strikes especially in the public sector.

A range of concerns have been raised by these striking employees including but not limited to lack of implementation of collective bargaining agreements, low salaries and un-unified pay, poor work conditions among others.

Recently, the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) who had held an industrial action for over 56 days under the leadership of their Secretary General Dr. Davji Atallah decided to call off the strike after having had a series of failed talks and mounting tensions. The 7000 member body, Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentists Union (KMPDU), agreed to call off the strike on 8 May 2024 after two days and nights of negotiations.

The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) together with Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Health had to rush to beat the Employment and Labour Relations Court order which required them to agree on a return to work formula or face the court's ruling on ending the dispute. They had been given 48 hours to do so from 6th May 2024.

According to an article published in National Library of Medicine, "In 2017, public sector physicians, nurses, and clinical officers went on separate nationwide strikes for a combined 250 days. Physicians were on strike for 100 days (December 5, 2016 to March 15, 2017) and nurses were on strike for 150 days (June 5, 2017 to November 2, 2017). Clinical officers, who are mid-level, non-physician clinicians in Kenya, launched their own 20-day strike in the midst of the nurses' strikes. Strikes in Kenya are associated with significant decreases in inpatient and outpatient admissions in public facilities but their association with health outcomes including morbidity and mortality is less clear".

Doctors in public hospitals downed their tools also between the months of November and December 2011 just after the public Lecturers strike. According to MedicalKenya (10/12/2012), in December 5, 2011 the doctors led by the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists union chairman Victor Ng'ani went

on strike and marched from the Kenyatta National Hospital to Afya House with slogans reading 'Healthcare is a Right'.

The strike called by Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) saw the paralysis of public health services sector for some days in Kenya (MedicalKenya, 10/12/2012). This led to loss of lives in different towns in Kenya such as Mombasa due to lack of medical attendance to patients in hospitals. The health workers were calling for a raft of changes, including a 300 per cent salary increase. According to medicalKenya (27/3/2012) the nurses from public hospitals went on strike on March 1st 2012 to protest the government's failure to implement a salary increase agreed the previous year, when they also stopped work to press for improved services in Kenya's mostly ill-equipped public hospitals. The government announced late Thursday March 2nd 2012 that it was sacking the 25,000 striking nurses, but they vowed to keep up the action nonetheless. Luke K'Odambo, chairman of the National Nurses Association of Kenya, said that the sacking did not make sense in any way, and that it was not possible to dismiss such a large part of the workforce. The workers, led by the Union of Kenya Civil Servants, held processions from Uhuru Park to Kenyatta National Hospital where they entered the compound demanding the "release" of their colleagues whom they claimed were being threatened with the sack if they join in the industrial action. They proceeded to Afya House and ended up at Parliament Buildings.

According to Armstrong (2008) strategic human resource practices is one of the key issues in any organization or from which the management and the supervisors should consider or give priority to. Human beings are motivated to do their things in order to achieve their aims and objectives, (Davila & Elvira, 2009).

This therefore calls for the need to point out the motivation factors that can help reduce these work vices such as strikes, bribes among others. Employees who are not motivated will most of the time be characterized by unethical business practices like excessive sick offs, frequent leaves among others. Sacking such employees or punishing them may be expensive to both the company and also the employees and therefore considering adequate employee motivation factors may be an important initiative to take. This study therefore will only point out the factors that satisfy and also those that dissatisfy the employees at the public health sector and the level of employee's motivation at their work place in this sector in Kenya.

A research done by Harvey and James (1996) shows that a negative relationship exists between a nation's level of industrialization and the strike activity among its labor force. This means that negative outcomes are bound to be experienced in the Kenyan economy due to these rampant vices. The industrial actions in Kenya continue to be rampant where the doctors, nurses, lecturers and teachers among others continue to go on rampage. If this issue is not looked into, it will continue slowing down the growth and development of the country or lag the country behind. The country's blue print vision 2030 and the millennium development goals will not be achieved in such situations. Strategic human resource practices therefore need to be put in place and/or be practiced well to ensure that such actions are curbed. This therefore calls for the need to study the role of strategic human resource practices on employee satisfaction in Kenyan public sector.

II. Material And Methods

This study was carried out on healthcare practioners specifically the Kenya Medical Practioners and Dentists between January 2025 and April 2025. A total 700 adult subject (both male and females) of aged ≥ 18 , years were included in this study.

Study Design: This study used a positivist approach. It was based on knowledge gained from 'positive' verification of observable experience rather than, for example, introspection or intuition. Scientific methods and experimental testing were the best way of achieving this knowledge. This study relied heavily on experimental and manipulative methods. These methods ensured that there was a distance between the subjective biases of the researchers and the objective reality of the study. This generally involved hypothesis generation and testing: proving or refuting. Typically, quantitative methods were used.

Study Location: The research was carried out in the capital of Kenya, Nairobi. The public sector was studied through the public health workers in Nairobi County.

Study Duration: January 2025 to April 2025.

Sample size: A sample of 700 public health medical practitioners, Pharmacists and dentists were studied as shown in table 1 below.

Sample size calculation: According to Downing and Clark (2010) the accuracy of a study depends on the size of the sample, not the population. Chow, Shao and Wang (2003, p 259) recommends a sample size of 10% from the population. This study worked with the 10% sample size as recommended by Chow et al (2003). Using the

sample calculator, the researchers took a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5% which gave a sample size of 700 from the population of 7000. This is how the researchers came up with the 10% sample size which was used in the study.

Table 1: Population Distribution

Cadre	Number of staff	Sample size (10%)
Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists	7000	700
Totals	7000	700

Source: Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists union website.

Research Design

In this research, both the case study design and descriptive study were used where a mixture of Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists, from randomly selected hospitals in Nairobi were studied. A case refers to the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or small group, frequently including the accounts of subjects themselves. This method of study was especially useful to the researchers in trying to test theoretical models, for example, equity theory, by using them in real world situations. Descriptive research is a research that provides an accurate portrayal of characteristics of a particular individual, situation, or group. These studies are a means of discovering new meaning, describing what exists, determining the frequency with which something occurs, and categorizing information. The main goal of this type of research was to describe the data and characteristics about what was being studied. The idea behind this type of research was to study frequencies, averages, and other statistical calculations.

Subjects & selection method: According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) Population is the entire group of individuals, events or objects having a common observable characteristics. Target population in this study was the employees from the public sector in Kenya being represented by the Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists from public health sector in Nairobi County. The sector has capacity of 7000 members according to Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) website. The researchers narrowed down to averages of responses of each variable and then generalized to the employees in public sector in Kenya.

Inclusion criteria:

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals in such a way that the individuals selected represent the large groups from which they were selected. Simple random sampling was used as the sampling procedure in this study. Simple random sampling is where the researcher randomly selects a subset of a population. In this sampling method, each member of the population has an exactly equal chance of being selected. The sample was picked from the population and then studied.

Procedure methodology

The study relied on primary data. Primary data was collected using questionnaires. The questionnaires were filled by the respondents and then collected later by the researchers. The data was analyzed and tabulated.

The study used structured questionnaires. A structured questionnaire is a questionnaire that asks very specific questions about the research being carried out. The questionnaires used a five point likert scale. The questions were based on the research objectives which included; assessing the level of satisfaction of employees in public sector in Kenya, to assess the role of the reward system on employee satisfaction in public sector, to find out the role of communication system on employee satisfaction in public sector and to determine the role of training and development on employee satisfaction in public sector in Kenya.

Test of Reliability and Validity of Instruments

A pilot study of 10 public doctors who were randomly selected was carried out to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaires. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), questionnaire validity refers to whether the questionnaire measures what it intends to measure and the data gathering should match the decisions the researchers need to make. The researchers determined that the questionnaires were valid after the data gathering matched the decisions the researchers needed to make.

Reliability in questionnaire studies relates to the ability of the questionnaire to produce the same results even if tested over again. To achieve this, the researchers tested the questionnaires to 10 employees in two intervals of 5 days which included 5 doctors in first pilot test and another 5 doctors in the second pilot test. The researchers concluded that the questionnaires were reliable since they gave same results and that respondents were devoted and they had consistent degree of concentration and interest in the study. The errors detected were corrected. The 10 doctors involved in the pilot study were not included in the study to avoid replication though their responses were included in the final analysis.

Statistical analysis

Data analysis was done using measures of central tendency like weighted mean to summarize the responses. The collected data was presented using pie charts, tables, and bar charts. The data was analyzed and presented through (SPSS) Statistical Package for Social Scientists and MS Excel. A five point likert scale was used to get weighted mean and results interpreted based on the below likert interpretation table.

Table 2: 5 Point Likert results

How to Interpret 5 point likert results		
1	Strongly Disagree	1.0-7.90
2	Disagree	1.8-2.59
3	Neutral	2.6-3.39
4	Agree	3.4-4.19
5	Strongly Agree	4.2-5.00
Range		5.0-1.0=4.0
Interval		5.0÷4.0=0.80

III. Results

This section presents the findings of the data collected on the role of strategic human resource practices on employee satisfaction in public sector in Kenya. The data analysis was done based on the objectives of the research study which include: to assess the role of the reward system on employee satisfaction in public sector; to find out the role of communication system on employee satisfaction in public sector; to determine the role of training and development on employee satisfaction in public sector in Kenya.

Rate of Response

The researchers administered 700 questionnaires to the selected respondents. The response was good since a total of 679 questionnaires were answered and collected within 14 days. Only 21 questionnaires were not returned. This means that the response rate was 97% which is acceptable since Babbie (2010) recommends a response rate of between 80% and 85%. The analysis is presented in form of tables, bar charts and interpretations of the same are given.

Marital Status of the Respondents

Table 2 below gives information on the marital status of the respondents. Most of the respondents were married since they formed more than half of the population which constituted 57.45%. Those who were single formed 32.54% while the widowed formed 8.54%. Separated ones formed 1.47%. This information was important since it helped the researchers to know the social classification and patterns of the workers in the area of study. It also helped the researchers to know more about responsibilities of different categories of marital status in the public sector.

Table 3: Marital Status of the Respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	221	32.54%
Married	390	57.45%
Separated	10	1.47%
Widowed	58	8.54%
Total	679	100%

Number of years worked

When seeking information about the numbers of years worked by employees, table 3 below indicated that 2.21% had worked for less than 3 years and 17.53% had worked for 3-5 years. Those who had worked for 6-10 years had a percentage of 29.45% while 17.53% had worked for 10 years and above. This means that most employees had worked for the sector for a period of between 3-5 years. The Employees who had worked for 6-10 years were few at a percentage of 50.81% and this meant that the employees were not leaving the sector sooner even when the challenges were faced. The larger number of employees had worked for a period of 10 years and above. This meant that employees were not leaving the sector despite the challenges. The information was crucial for it helped the researchers to deduce the rate of employee turnover over years. It helped the researchers to know whether the public sector retained workers for longer time or shorter time.

Table 4: Number of years worked

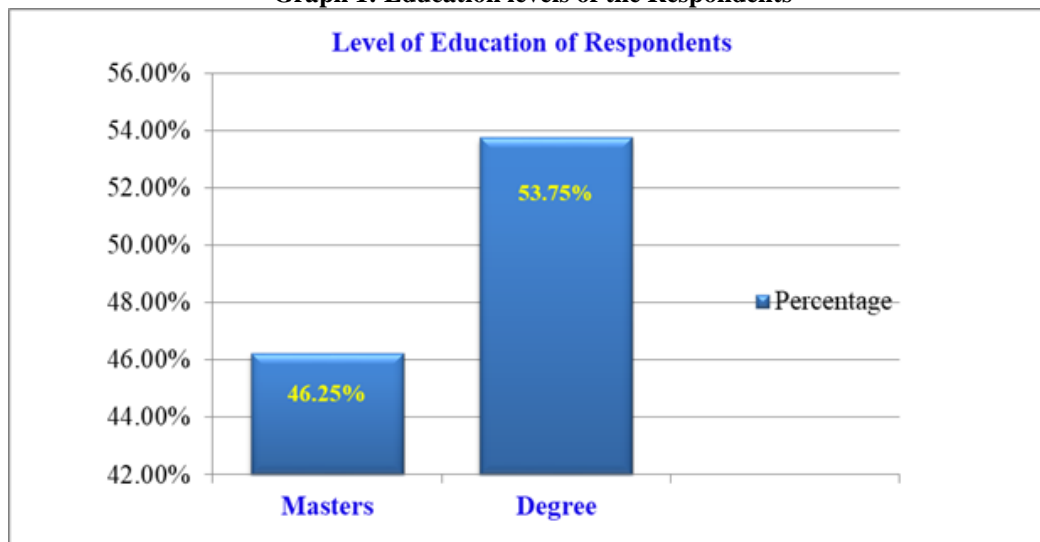
Number of years worked	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 3 years	15	2.21%
3-5 years	345	17.53%

6-10 years	200	29.45%
10 years and above	345	50.81%
Total	679	100%

Level of Education

Figure 2 below shows the education level of the respondents. Larger number was those who had degree level of education which constituted 53.75% those who had learned up to masters' level were 46.25%. It means that the employees working in this sector were educated and thus qualified for the jobs they were performing. This information helped the researchers to know how qualified were the employees in the public sector and whether their qualifications matched their satisfaction in the same sector.

Graph 1: Education levels of the Respondents



Employee Satisfaction

The table 4 below shows the questions asked about the employee satisfaction and the overall score obtained for the satisfaction of the employees. The overall score for the satisfaction was 2.44201 as shown in the table below. This meant that 48.84% of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their employer in public sector while 51.16% indicated that they were not satisfied with their employer in the public sector.

This meant that the employees were generally not satisfied though the margin between the percentage of the satisfied employees and that of unsatisfied employees was small. Most of the employees scored very low for the working environment which had an overall of 1.62592. When asked whether they would leave their current employer for an equal opportunity in private sector, they agreed. This question scored 3.789396. There was a clear indication and response that they would immediately leave their current employer if they were offered such an opportunity.

Table 5: Overall Employee Satisfaction

Question Asked	1	2	3	4	5	Total Responses	Weighted Mean
	SD	D	N	A	SA		
I am happy working with my current employer	210	310	70	58	31	679	2.10162
I have great deal of respect for my employer	199	279	89	72	40	679	2.226804
I feel that my colleagues and I are treated equally	100	131	86	232	130	679	3.237113
I would leave to private sector if I got equal opportunity	50	100	36	250	243	679	3.789396
My employer is an equal employer	211	149	58	124	137	679	2.745214
I am comfortable	319	175	40	97	48	679	2.086892

working with my employer							
I would wish to work with my employer for rest of my life	298	331	15	10	25	679	1.723122
I enjoy the working environment	410	205	2	32	30	679	1.62592
Totals							2.44201

SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, N-Neutral, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Agree.

Role of Reward System

The reward system overall score was found to be 2.113612455. About 42.27% of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the reward system in the public sector while 57.73% indicated that they were not satisfied with the reward system in the public sector. This indicates that the larger number of employees in public sector was not satisfied with the reward system in the sector. This indicates that the larger number of employees in public sector was not satisfied with the reward system in the sector. Though the researcher's findings did not concur with those of scholars like Musomba (1993), the researcher concluded that maybe in 1993 when Musomba was carrying out his research, the reward system in public sector was good.

Musomba (1993) studied motivational factors that affect performance among managers of Kenya railways and he found out that most managers were motivated by salaries and wages. He indicated that over 70% of employees were motivated by rewards such as salary and wages. The situations in the public sector in Kenya in 1993 are not the same as today 2025. Unlike 1993, there are a lot of industrial actions especially by doctors and teachers in public sector. However, there is likelihood that the same reward systems used in 1993 when Musomba did his research are still the same systems in place up to today. The economy is so dynamic and since there are a number of years from 1993 to 2025, those systems have become obsolete; they can't match with the rising living standards within the current economy. There is therefore the need for different or better strategic reward systems in public sector which are in line with the current dynamic economy.

The findings put across by Hong (1995) when he conducted a study about the employee motivation in service companies in USA were that employees who receive better implemented benefit programs tend to be more motivated. He concluded that employee benefit programs have greater impact on work motivation and on productivity. The researchers agree with these findings because if the reward systems are implemented well, the employees will be satisfied and they will be productive and avoid such vices like industrial actions.

Table 6: Reward System

Question Asked	1	2	3	4	5		
	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total Responses	Weighted Mean
I am happy with the reward system in this company	210	310	70	58	31	679	2.101620029
I am satisfied with the allowances given to me	352	217	11	54	45	679	1.855670103
The annual salary increment is satisfying to me	232	131	86	100	130	679	2.653902798
I am satisfied with gifts and presents awarded by my employer	374	195	8	92	10	679	1.776141384
I am satisfied by the promotions given by my employer	243	174	47	119	96	679	2.486008837
I am satisfied with the recognitions given by my employer	320	181	32	102	44	679	2.070692194
My salary is satisfactory to me	259	347	15	31	27	679	1.851251841
Totals							2.113612455

SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, N-Neutral, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Agree.

Role of Communication

The findings in table 6 below represent the overall score against the communication in the public sector as scored by the respondents. The overall score as shown in the table below is 1.998948033. This score means that the respondents were not satisfied by the communication practice of the public sector. Only 28.55% of the respondents scored that they were satisfied by the communication of the sector while 71.45% scored that they were not satisfied by the communication system of public sector. This means that the public sector was not doing well in the communication area. Most respondents indicated that their views were not listened and

addressed to. They also indicated that incase by any chance their views are listened to, they don't get relevant feedback for their grievances. Largest number of the respondents indicated that the employer never gave them time or opportunity to ask questions. If the management in the public sector do not put good communication mechanisms it will mean that there will be no avenues of airing grievances and solving them and therefore it will automatically result to industrial actions. Though the major issue may be the salaries as witnessed, the causal factor is the lack of enough strategic human resource practice in communication. Management in public sector ought to create well-structured strategic communication systems where there could be forums of discussions and airing of views between the management and the employees. In this case there will be no such industrial actions since the grievances raised will be discussed in and on time and a solution sought for or an agreement arrived to. The researchers conclude that the major failure was lack of good or enough strategic communication systems. The researchers agreed with the findings of Downs (1991) where she studied the relationship between communication satisfaction and organizational commitment in two Australian organizations and found that a positive relationship existed between communication satisfaction and organizational commitment. Poor communication in an organization will lead to lack of commitment of the employees towards the organization as found out in this study.

Table 7: Communication System

The following is a Likert Scale to analyse the communication system							
Question Asked	1	2	3	4	5	Total Responses	Weighted Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree		
Management listens to and addresses my concerns	110	398	81	62	28	679	2.263622975
My employer consults me on matters affecting employees	405	210	5	36	23	679	1.618556701
My employer communicates in a way that I understand	231	129	83	99	137	679	2.678939617
My employer provides relevant responses to my concerns	406	209	5	50	9	679	1.59646539
My employer does not undermine my personal views	257	217	11	115	79	679	2.325478645
My employer gives me time to ask questions	381	202	8	70	18	679	1.736377025
My employer asks about my concerns	341	250	15	47	26	679	1.773195876
Totals							1.998948033

SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, N-Neutral, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Agree.

Role of Training and Development

The training and development scores are represented in the table 7 below. The overall score was 3.646907216 as shown in the table. This means that the respondents agreed that the training and development was practiced well. 91.17 % of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the training and development as practiced by the public sector while 8.83% indicated that they were not satisfied with the training and development as practiced by the public sector. It was clear that the public sector was doing well in the trainings and development it organizes and conducts to enhance the growth and productivity of the employees. Most respondents indicated that the policies used by public sector for training and development were good. They also indicated that the trainings were relevant to the development of their career path as well as future career goals. "Although job satisfaction factors can be very unique to each individual, training and development are important to most people" (Shelton, 2001 p.13). Shelton (2001) went ahead and pointed out that more training and development to employees lead to higher satisfaction, while less training lead to lower satisfaction. The researchers agree to this finding since their findings also pointed to the same. Okanya (2008) carried out a study entitled "Reconciling organizational performance and employee satisfaction through training: The case study of Soroti District Local Government, Uganda" and found out that over 50% of the respondents were motivated by training and development. This means that training and development leads to higher motivation if practiced well.

Table 8: Training and Development

The following is a Likert Scale to analyse the communication system							
Question Asked	1	2	3	4	5		
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total Responses	Weighted Mean
Management listens to and addresses my concerns	110	398	81	62	28	679	2.263622975
My employer consults me on matters affecting employees	405	210	5	36	23	679	1.618556701
My employer communicates in a way that I understand	231	129	83	99	137	679	2.678939617
My employer provides relevant responses to my concerns	406	209	5	50	9	679	1.59646539
My employer does not undermine my personal views	257	217	11	115	79	679	2.325478645
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My employer asks about my concerns	341	250	15	47	26	679	1.773195876
Totals							1.998948033

SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, N-Neutral, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Agree.

IV. Conclusions

The study concludes that strategic human resource practices play a major role in satisfying employees. It also concludes that the said strategic human resource practices were not well practiced in the public sector and therefore the employees in the sector were not satisfied hence resulting to the evident widespread strikes. The overall satisfaction level after considering all the factors of study therefore was 42.27% against 57.73% which represented those not satisfied.

The findings shows that despite the fact that the reward system and Communication system played bigger roles in the dissatisfaction level, the training and development on the other hand played also a big role to satisfy the employees.

It shows clearly that training and development which scored a satisfaction level of 91.17% against 8.83% of dissatisfaction on the same category, was really a practice which was well done.

However, the failure to do well in strategic human resource practices such as communication and reward system leads to higher levels of general dissatisfactions and hence leading to the repeated strikes and threats towards the same.

To curb the widespread strikes, the public sector employer needs to work on cross-functional communication and improve it as well as ensuring that reward system such as pay and incentives are harmonized to help increase satisfaction levels.

V. Recommendations

Based on the study, the findings showed that the employees in public sector were not satisfied. Strategic human resource practices such as reward system and communication were found to be less satisfying practices and therefore the researchers recommends that the public sector put measures across that ensure that there is better reward system such as fair remuneration, wage and salary, benefits, and opportunities for promotion among others. The researchers also recommend that the communication channels be improved to ensure that there is a better communication between the management and the employees. Good communication channels will help reduce the dissatisfaction of the employees since the employees can air their views anytime there is a problem and go the dialogue way instead of industrial actions.

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