

SPECIAL FEATURE:

Re-inventing the workforce

By Mwangi Wanjumbi

“I have been in the engineering department of this company for 33 years. I am now 55 years old and I am tired,” declared Otieno alias Mzee wa kazi. This was during introductory session of a training program. “Tired of life, working, eating or what Mr. Otieno?” I enquired amid laughter in the training hall. “There comes a time when a man has to rest and enjoy just being alive and stop to constantly worry about daily occurrences,” said Mzee Wa Kazi. “May I remind you that at 89 years or so Mr. Kimani Maruge, the world’s oldest primary school student is still in school and hasn’t tired yet... Let us, however, compare notes again at the end of the training session,” I intimated.

Mzee wa Kazi cannot be blamed for his feelings. It was his first time to attend a motivational and capacity building seminar during the 33 years he has been rendering uninterrupted service to his employer. He has, however, attended a few technical skills development courses and that is why he has been retained in the engineering department for those many years. Perhaps it is good to take note of the law of diminishing returns commonly

observed by economists. It indicates that one can continue producing results, but at a reducing rate. Without due care, the productivity levels can even reach zero. But, rejuvenation of the body and spirit through training, job rotation, transfer and other forms of staff development can reverse this situation.

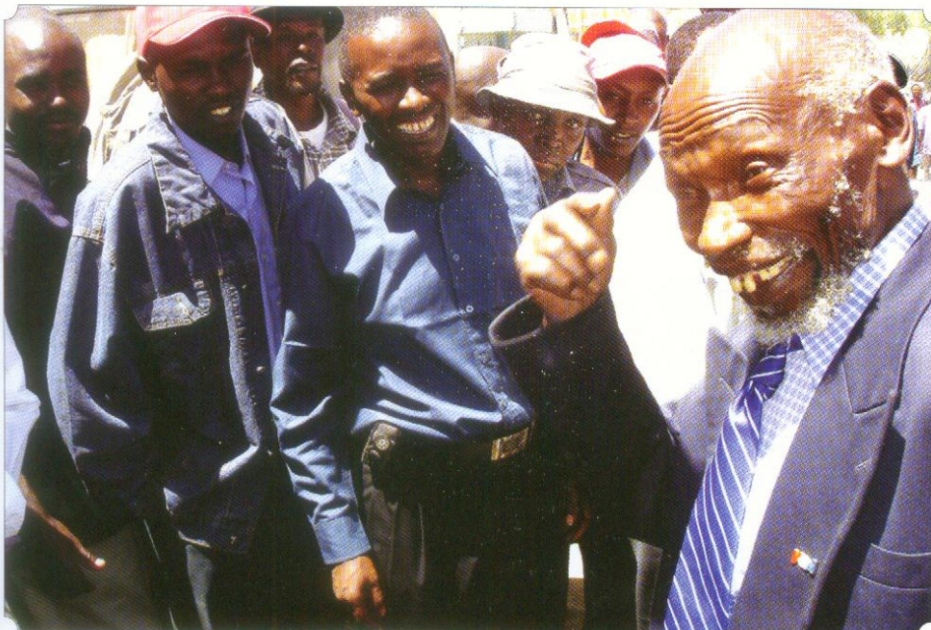
Meanwhile, every time I think of the development of the management science, gurus come to my mind. The first one is Henry Fayoll who came up with 14 principles of management. All those principles are still very relevant in every working situation. They include the principle of team work, discipline, job security, unity of direction and purpose in the work place and so on. The next is Fredrick Winslow Taylor, the management science pioneer who developed the principles upon which performance and remuneration should be based. They include standardization of performance tools based on scientific theories. His theories though unchallenged to-

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date and therefore applied widely are worrisome. This is because they depict man as a tool of performance just in the same way machines are expected to perform. Comparable with the situation whereby human beings use the donkey to do so much sometimes under very difficult conditions only to be rewarded with something to eat? Taylor could be classified as a theory X manager. This is one who believes that workers do not like work and therefore, uses intimidation to get results.

The third management science guru is Professor Elton Mayo, who is credited with recognition of the human relations theory. He carried out studies in what is now known as the Hawthorne experiments proved that performance can be affected by the conditions in the work place, including the relationships of the employees. This theory has continually been developed to what is now the Human Relations approach to development of the work force. The worker is seen as human with social needs, which when attended lead to continually improved performance. Professor Mayo could naturally be classified as a theory Y manager. Theory Y as opposed to theory X points that human beings require the right environment to deliver results. Theories X and Y were developed by John McGregor as he tried to explain managers’ perception of the employee in relation to work performance.

The fourth is Max Weber, who developed the sometimes much maligned bureaucratic system of management. It is unpopular with most people, because it slows down decision making and management processes. Max Weber should, however, be given credit for solving management problems of large institutions. How would presidential instructions, for example, ever reach the District Commissioner all the way down to the chief, who is supposed to pass the same to the citizens? Another example is how the Pope’s authority from the Vatican reaches the many Bishops and priests spread around the world? The



Kimani Maruge (right) talks to amused members of the public during a public function.

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Max Weber theory, though sluggish, indeed addresses the issue of hierarchy of authority, thus ensuring retention of control from top to bottom.

It is sometimes important to understand these concepts especially now that our country is gearing itself towards achieving Vision 2030, whose bulk will without doubt be attained through private enterprise. Surprisingly the discussed pioneers of management science came to the fore during the industrial revolution of North America and Europe, which occurred in the 1920's and 30's, especially after the 1st World War.

During the industrialization period, entrepreneurs had been running family businesses from their domestic backyards in what would be the equivalent to our small owner managed business. The businesses kept on expanding and started becoming unmanageable. This led to the development of the management science by the early pioneers. Their aim was to address the challenges of handling businesses, which were no longer manageable by the families.

Is it not interesting that these are the Barclays Bank, Uniliver Industries, General Motors, General electric and so on of today? They have now become multinational corporations. That means their operations have been spread out in different nations to take advantage of expansion arising out of increase in market needs for their products and services. These multinationals have applied and perfected every management science strategy to become what they are today.

In our circumstances, small businesses are still toying around with Taylor's theory which on its own is not applicable today. This theory does not recognize the human's theory of needs but on the contrary considers an employee as a tool for performance. Personal development of the worker is not considered important except for working or technical skills, which can be acquired through experience. Did you know that this is what is largely practised in Industrial Area factories in Nairobi, Thika and so on? If you

How to improve staff performance



NSSF Building. Staff needs should be addressed at different stages in life including retirement.

doubt just make a few enquiries and you will be surprised by the findings.

What are the alternatives? Certainly, in the absence of change of approach to development of the worker there will be, many like "Mzee Wa Kazi" who will tire before their energies and skills are fully utilized, yet, we are determined to achieve vision 2030.

Holistic staff development approach must be considered. Staff must be developed socially, intellectually and above all their different needs at different stages in life must be recognized. Probably "Mzee Wa Kazi" could now do better being a trainer or supervisor of his younger colleagues. Further training strategy on soft skills of managing people who do the work

could be more beneficial than allowing him to be fatigued into early retirement, and end up whiling away time doing nothing useful.

Interestingly, Mzee wa Kazi finally promised to train himself in other areas of interest so that he can live a long useful life.

Being more than 40 years younger than the world's oldest primary school student, he can even afford to start another career, train in it to the highest level, therefore continuing being relevant for a long time to come.

Did we not see a great grandmother of 94 years graduating with a Masters of Science Degree recently? This proves that the human mind if focused, can accommodate continuing learning throughout life as psychologists would attest.

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The writer is a Management/ Entrepreneurship Trainer and strategist.