

Selecting People on Merit is key to economic development

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If organisations could ensure that at least 90% of all roles in their organisations are staffed on merit, very few organisations would be struggling with performance. Listening to people and academic discussions in Zimbabwe, you get a feeling that this could be one of the challenges facing our economy. Selecting people on merit means you are getting the best person available for the job through a transparent system.

Why are organisations reluctant to select people on merit?

One of the reasons why most organisations are not willing to implement a merit system in recruitment, selection and promotion is because they want to bring people who are not going to challenge them as they do their job. Most leaders are afraid to have people who challenge them in the organisation. They would rather get an incompetent person as long as the person is not going to question things. So if this trend continues in your organisation, perpetrated by everyone with the power to hire or recommend who gets hired, the whole organisation will be staffed with incompetent people.

Another reason why people do not want to implement merit systems is that they want to bring relatives and friends. In most organisations, you will find clicks of people who are connected in one way of the other through family ties or close relations nurtured in school or church. Instead of looking for the best person to do the job, they look for the person who needs a job regardless of their capacity to do the job.

Other considerations that may compromise a merit system in recruitment, selection and promotion is that we tend to put too much emphasis on qualifications and experience despite ample scientific evidence showing that years of education and experience (over the minimum required for a job) in any job has a very weak though positive relationship with performance. Due to this emphasis, we have excluded highly capable people with a solid performance record.

A corrupt recruitment, selection and promotion system results in people occupying roles beyond their capacity. It has been established through research that 35% of the people employed are in roles that require more capacity than what current incumbents have. This alone should get you worried if you are a CE or a Board member. This implies that a lot of value is being lost in a number of organisations.

The biggest challenge for having people operating beyond their current actual capability is that they tend to bring the job down to a level they are comfortable with. As an example, a CE whose assigned operating level maybe level 5, can bring down that job to level 3, if their actual current potential is level.

This is where you find a CE instead of being strategic and focusing on the future of the business they become too operational. They will be busy with operational decisions that are not at their assigned level. Again, such a scenario would be disastrous for your business.

The assumption in the level of work is that roles should always be supervised by people who are at least a level higher than the work they are supervising. However, due to faulty organisational structures, this is not always the case. The result is gross inefficiencies. In some instances these incapable individuals create havoc in the organisation as they will be trying to protect their role. They fire, transfer and promote people without any sound business reason.

Corrupt recruitment and selection processes lead to the hiring of incompetent people. If organisations could start implementing recruitment, selection and promotion system based on merit, we will start the journey to economic recovery. If every Zimbabwean could promote meritocracy in all facets of life Zimbabwe will have addressed one of the key challenges affecting our economic development.

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