



The Utility of Biodata in Employee Resourcing: Evidence from SME Managers in Zvishavane Town

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Abstract

Employee resourcing is a very vital antecedent to human resource management in SMEs. Resourcing organizations with skilled, talented and knowledgeable employees ignite organizational effectiveness, efficiency and growth. The purpose of the study was to establish the usefulness, effectiveness and efficiency of bio-data in employee resourcing in SMEs. A qualitative research methodology was employed to carry out the study. A (fifteen) item unstructured interview guide was used to collect data from (thirty) SME managers in Zvishavane town. Participants comprised 23 male and 7 female. The (thirty) participants for the study were sampled using the snowballing sampling technique. Data was analyzed using content data analysis method. The study revealed that bio-data was a very essential and useful instrument for employee resourcing in SMEs. Bio-data provides momentous assessment of employees' current and future performance. Employees or potential employee's previous activities and behavior play a critical role in establishing the future behavior and performance of an employee. The study further established that bio-data is prone to manipulation by employees and employers. The manipulation of bio-data renders the instrument ineffective and results in the mismatch of employees' performance and their purported bio-data.

Keywords: Employee resourcing, Bio-data, SMEs, Employees, Employers, Staffing, Recruitment and Selection

JEL Classification: G21, G43, J3

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Introduction

Employee resourcing is of paramount importance in equipping SMEs with the right number and quality of staff. The process of employee resourcing assists SMEs to engage high caliber employees who possess skills and competencies, which give organizations a competitive advantage in setting up viable and sustainable businesses. The importance of employee resourcing in business has ignited the debate among academics and researchers on the instruments and methods that can be employed to improve staffing in organizations. The debates on employee resourcing have put bio-data at the centre of the discussion since it is one of the most used tools in staffing. Over the years, academics and researchers (Abomeh and Blessings 2013; Bizon 2016) have been scrutinizing the relevance of bio-data to employee resourcing and organizational effectiveness. Studies (Kembo and Onyango 2017; Raiden, Dainty, & Neale, 2008; Bates 2004) on bio-data continue to

gain impetus regardless of the introduction of contemporary scientific human capital resourcing systems and procedures. Employee resourcing has the potential of transforming an organization into an effective and efficient organization which meets its targets. The role of employee resourcing is to ensure that the right number of people with the requisite skills are placed at their respective positions in organizations. Appropriately deploying the human capital in an organization makes the organization effective and efficient and also gives it a competitive advantage. Most SMEs in Zimbabwe fail to grow into big companies because of hiring incompetent people with very little zeal to realize set goals and targets (Nyanga 2013). Newly established firms are more susceptible to the effects of choosing employees who are not keen to expend their energy towards the realization of organizational objectives. Poor employee resourcing may lead to poor performance at departmental and organizational levels. Studies of Abomeh and Blessings (2013) Bates (2004) indicated that several SMEs failed to grow and survive largely because of poor employee resourcing at corporate or departmental levels. According to Dainty, Raiden, & Neale (2009), employees are the most essential assets of any organization, hence the absence of adequate and competent staff render organizations ineffective. Organizations that apply appropriate tools and instruments in employee resourcing tend to get the best employees from the labour market. Bio-data is one of the instruments that can be employed to select employees for SMEs. All organizations throughout the globe irrespective of size and location rely on bio-data for employee resourcing in various departments. The usefulness of bio-data has, however, been questioned because organizations relying on it for employee resourcing commit errors like selecting incompetent employees and deploying people in wrong positions which have continued to surge in both emerging and established organizations. The process of employee resourcing in SMEs has become a difficult exercise crammed with vagueness and contestations. There is a very high labour turnover in SMEs in Zimbabwe. The high rate of labour turnover has made significant number of SMEs lose significant amounts of money in staffing. What has, however, remained unclear was what exactly propels high labour turnover in SMEs. It is, therefore, critically useful to interrogate the usefulness, effectiveness and efficiency of bio-data in employee resourcing.

Literature Review

Studies on employee resourcing (Tao, Zhang and Qu 2017; Cook 2016, Nguyen and Gatica-Perez 2016; Foley and Williamson 2018) have been under the microscope for a very long time. There has been a sharp increase in the amount of research on recruitment and selection across the globe (Mbirashava 2017). Academics and researchers have defined employee resourcing related terms such as bio-data, recruitment and selection differently. Bates (2004) says, 'Bio-data refers to all historical and factual information about the life and work experiences of a person. It includes personal particulars such as date of birth, gender, religion, race, nationality, residence and marital status.' It is concerned with people's information on childhood, education, employment, behaviour, morals and values, socio-economic status and leisure pursuit. Bio-data provides information regarding a person's character, identity and behavior. It covers an array of a person's information that reflects his/her historical perspective such as marital status, education, gender, place of origin, religion, opinions, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Bio-data is a selection tool that uses an individual's personal, educational and work experience history to select and deploy employees (Yan, Ying, & Zhang, 2009; Furnham, 2005). Bio-data is collected using formal or informal methods such as well designed forms which are completed and submitted to human resource managers or line managers by employees or prospective employees. The data collection form is usually structured and repeatable so that it can consistently provide the required information about the applicant (Funham, 2005).

Employee resourcing involves a range of methods and approaches employed by managers in equipping their firms with competent staff who have the zeal and enthusiasm to realize organizational objectives (Kembo and Onyango, 2017). It includes such human resource management functions as staffing, performance appraisal, policy development, documentation and change management. Employee resourcing is a process of making sure that the organization engages and retains the labour force it requires to achieve its objectives. It includes several essential human capital activities such as human resource planning, recruitment and selection, retention, policies and procedures that govern the egress of workers from employment. Dainty et al (2009) argue, 'Employee resourcing is the process of matching human resource capabilities to the strategic and operational needs of the organization'. For purposes of the study, employee resourcing shall be defined as all recruitment, selection, retention and promotion activities of employees in organisations. The study focuses on the effectiveness of bio-data in the recruitment, selection, retention and promotion of employees in SMEs.

Bernthal (2009) is of the view that bio – data plays an essential role in informing the outcome of the selection process of applicants and predicting their performance. Organizations tailor make their bio-data forms to suit their own needs and the needs of the positions they intend to fill. Tailor making bio-data collection forms, however, suffers the risk of being manipulated by unprofessional and unethical human resource managers who can tailor make them to suit the bio-data of specific individuals they will be socially connected to. Most organizations use performance behavior-based interviews to confirm the authenticity of the submitted bio-data. Bernthal & Rioux (1999) observed that some emerging organizations shy employing bio – data as a sole employee resourcing method because they do not have adequate knowledge, skill or resources to develop bio-data collection forms and to collect bio-data from candidates.

For organizations to select competent, skilled and knowledgeable staff who add value to organizations, they need to use employee staffing methods that are devoid of favoritism and discrimination. The International Labor Organization (ILO) and a number of organizations throughout the world have been accused of discriminating employees on the basis of race, color, creed, place of origin and political affiliation (Baert, 2017; Borm and Baert, 2018). In Zimbabwe, most organizations use employee selection policies and collective bargaining laws and procedures to curb discrimination of applicants (Nyanga & Chifamba 2012; Mbirashava 2017). The recruitment and selection, retention and promotion of labour in Zimbabwe are regulated by the Labour Act [Chapter 28: 01], the Public Service Act [Chapter 16:04] and the Constitution of Zimbabwe. The main purpose of bio-data in staffing is to exterminate all forms of negative discrimination and ensure that organizations recruit, select, deploy and retain people who add value to the organization. A study by Baert (2017) that examined risk aversion as a driver of labour market discrimination against homosexual men showed that recruitment discrimination by risk averse employers was consistent with taste-based and statistical discrimination. Another study by Borm and Baert (2018) established that bio-data such as health of transgender individuals was used in employee resourcing. It implies that most organizations in the developed world use bio-data to make employee resourcing decisions.

Foley and Williamson (2018) carried out a study to establish whether anonymising recruitment reduces chances of discrimination and stereotyping in employment. The study revealed that most managers employed hidden signals to infer the gender identities of prospective employees. A study by Leone, Giuliano and Barrios (2019) also indicated that at the initial stages of the screening process, most employers usually use educational pedigree, race or gender as key indicators of the quality of the applicant. Most managers rely on bio-data to select the right candidates for job openings in their organizations. An organization that fails to fully utilize bio-data in employee

staffing is bound to lose talented and skilled staff. SMEs are fragile organizations that can easily be negatively affected by changes in the economic, political, social and technological environments. Well thought out and executed recruitment and selection, retention and promotion procedures result in organizations maintaining a staff that gives them competitive advantage. To this end, it thus implies that the more effective SMEs become in recruiting and selecting candidates, the more likely they are to hire and retain knowledgeable, competent and highly skilled employees with the potential of transforming SMEs into big corporate or conglomerate companies.

There is a positive relationship between bio-data and job performance, labour turnover, absenteeism, productivity and trainability (Furnham, 2005; Mbirashava 2017). Furthermore, Alick (2018) argues that understanding the importance of bio-data as a selection tool is essential, not only for enhancing organizational performance, but also for upholding legal principles and practices. Acquiring knowledge about the validity and reliability of bio-data can also assist in addressing challenges in the recruitment, selection, promotion and retention of competent and motivated staff in SMEs. Staffing SMEs with skilled workers, with the right attitude inevitably enhances organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Mbirashava (2017) argues, 'Bio-data is a critical tool which employers can rely on in staffing their organizations. All forms of industries and organizations irrespective of size require competent staff'. To add more on the importance of bio-data, Bizon (2016) argued that bio data is a vital, valid and dependable mechanism that can be employed to conjecture the future performance of candidates. Bio-data forms are used to collect data on the candidate's past performance and work experience which is useful in forecasting future performance. Yan et al (2009) also indicated that domestically developed bio-data forms were found to be effective in staffing organizations in China. Furthermore, Tao, Zhang and Qu (2017) opined that personality traits had an effect on employee performance. Organizations should therefore consider applicants' personality traits during staffing. Resumes are among the most widely used tools for screening job applicants. Some organizations also use video resumes so as to get more and detailed information about the applicants (Nguyen, Gatica-Perez, 2016; Cook 2016).

The literature review shows that there is scantiness of studies on the usefulness of bio-data in employee resourcing in SMEs. Literature on bio-data focused on ways and procedures of collecting bio-data from prospective employees in well grounded and established companies. There is a little study, if any, which focused on the effectiveness of bio-data in staffing SMEs in developing countries. Recruitment and selection, promotion and retention of staff rules and regulations differ from one country to the other, hence the amount and type of bio-data that is collected also differs from one country to the other. It is, therefore, essential not to have a universal analysis of the usefulness of bio-data throughout the world but to have an area and industry specific analysis. The bio-data that is desired for candidates in emerging companies is usually different from that of established companies because these two categories of organizations have different needs and human resource management philosophies. The meagerness of literature in this area therefore justifies the need to carry out the study. In view of the yawning knowledge gap and challenges SMEs face in using bio-data in employee resourcing, the study investigates the usefulness of bio-data in staffing SMEs (recruitment, selection, retention and promotion).

Methodology

Participants and sites

Zvishavane town is the second largest urban center in the Midlands province. The town is endowed with several natural resources such as minerals like platinum, gold, asbestos, and chrome. Zvishavane town is densely populated by people from nearby rural areas such as

Mbererngwa, Insiza, Chivi and Zvishavane rural. The population for Zvishavane town is further ballooned by employees of mines that surround the town such as MIMOSA mine, Shabani-Mashava Mines, Murowa mine and Sabi mines. The dense population and mining activities in and around Zvishavane have attracted many local and international investors which consequently increased the amount of economic activities in the town. The increase in the economic activities led to the establishment of several SMEs. Most SMEs in Zvishavane however face operational challenges which are mainly propelled by poor employee performance and staffing.

The population of the study comprised approximately (seventy) chief executive officers, managers and owners of SMEs in Zvishavane town. (thirty) participants were selected using the snowballing sampling technique. The first three participants who were identified by the researcher were chosen because of their knowledge of employee resourcing processes and procedures in SMEs. Furthermore, by virtue of being managers, chief executive officers and owners of SMEs, they became key players in SMEs employee resourcing which made them the right people to participate in this study. The first participants that were identified referred the researcher to other potential participants who, in turn, referred them to another group of participants. The process went on until a total of (thirty) participants were identified. Informant participation was based on relevance to the study area rather than being representative hence a non-probability sampling method was utilised. Participants were drawn from SMEs in the construction, mining and manufacturing industries and in sales and marketing businesses.

Design and Procedure

The study utilized an exploratory qualitative approach in carrying out the research. The qualitative research methodology provided the researcher with the opportunity to fully analyze the views of participants, which allowed him to get full and relevant information about the study. The researcher collected data using a (fifteen) item unstructured interview guide. Unstructured interviews accorded participants the freedom to examine reasons and motives, as well as pursue unanticipated thoughts and insight about the subject. Interviews were conducted at SMEs premises in Zvishavane town.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using the content analysis method. To analyze data, all the responses were first slotted into categories on the basis of the meaning conveyed. Responses reflecting the same theme were grouped together. During data collection, all the data was transcribed verbatim by the researcher and in some instances with the concurrence of the respondent audio recorded.

Findings

The study revealed that the majority of SMEs in Zvishavane town were being managed and owned by men. The participants consisted of (ten) male and (five) female owners of SMEs and (thirteen) male and (two) female managers of SMEs. The statistics of participants show that there was a huge difference between the number of male and female managers in SMEs in Zvishavane. The reason for the huge disparity is probably because starting new businesses require a lot of capital which most women do not have access to as compared to their male counterparts. The reason why more women did not get into leadership positions in SMEs is because women are naturally risk averse while their male counterparts are risk takers. The other reason for gender disparity is probably subtle glass ceiling systems consciously or unconsciously put in place by society. The qualifications of participants ranged from diploma to master's degree levels. It implies that most SMEs in Zvishavane town are owned and managed by skilled and competent people



who possess appropriate knowledge which can propel growth of SMEs into big companies. Furthermore, one of the key characteristics of the participants is that the majority of them had a work experience that was above (ten) years. Long work experiences of managers and owners of SMEs are also an advantage in that companies are managed by people who are aware of company management processes and procedures.

All SMEs that participated in the study indicated that they depend on bio-data in employee resourcing. SMEs designed bio-data forms with the following sections; 1) names, place of origin, religion, gender, 2) educational qualifications, 3) work experience, 4) special skills, 5) hobbies and interests. The bio-data that was collected using the designed forms was used in the selection, recruitment, deployment, redeployment and reassignment, placing and promotion of employees in SMEs. The following are some of the verbatim quotes which the researcher recorded; Participant 16, 'The bio-data form, which I designed for my construction company has four sections which cover the personal background, educational background, work experience and hobbies. The information I gather using this form is very useful in selecting employees for my company.' Participant 3 'Most SMEs in Zvishavane rely on bio-data in employee resourcing because it is the only tool they are familiar with'. Participant 13 'In informal SMEs the selection of workers starts by analyzing bio-data on the completed form. First priority, is given to candidates with the highest qualifications and cognate work experience and a traceable work record'. Participant 17 'SMEs in Zvishavane usually do not use the traditional recruitment, selection and promotion methods in employee resourcing but they use non-scientific methods based on social relationships such as promoting relatives.' Participant 7 who is an owner of small mine in Zvishavane said, 'I use bio-data to recruit, select, dismiss and retain staff for my business. Bio-data is extensively utilized in the recruitment, selection, placements and promotion of employees in SMEs. Alick (2018) asserts that any employee staffing system that does not incline on bio-data is compromised and prone to error and abuse. It is very difficult if not impossible to staff organizations without using bio-data because it is the principal instrument that predicts employee behavior. Bio-data provides the employer with information regarding employees' life, work experiences, educational qualifications and hobbies. Such information is very useful in predicting employee behavior.

The study established that the main purpose of an employee resourcing mechanism in any organization is to find the human capital that is gifted with the suitable traits, skills, knowledge, and potential for future development. Organizations should put in place employee resourcing mechanisms best suited to meet their workforce requirements. An effective employee resourcing system demands that companies invest in their workers through effective and efficient recruitment and selection, retention and training which in turn affords organizations continuity and enhancement in their assortment of functions and responsibilities. Prior to recruiting, selecting, appointing and promoting employees it is necessary to establish their skills, knowledge and attitude towards the business and also the employer. Such crucial information can be gathered by collecting prospective employees' bio-data.

It would be amiss for SMEs not to consider the personality of a candidate in selecting, promoting, re-deploying and retaining staff. Personality is a major criterion for employee resourcing hence its potency in staffing SMEs with people who add value to organizations should not be underrated. Personality assessment is viewed by scholars (Mullins 2010) as a type of social engineering and an insidious form of organizational control. The use of bio-data ensures that organizations are staffed by people with the right skills and knowledge about the job and possess the right personality to fit in the emerging SMEs culture. Participant 6 remarked, 'The collection of bio-data provides managers with information about the candidates' personalities which is

an essential aspect in the recruitment, selection, promotion and re-assignment of workers for SMEs.' Participant 29 said, 'I use bio-data to get information on the personality of employees for my company. I run a small supermarket in Zvishavane town and the retention of my customers depends on the personality of a person who serves them. A cheerful shop attendant attracts more customers while a moody employee scatters them. Bio-data is therefore a very essential tool in staffing SMEs because of its ability to provide information on employee personality. The personality of an employee shapes the way he/she relates with his/her subordinates and superordinates and also the external stakeholders (Yan et-al 2009). Organizations should therefore be staffed by people with the right personalities.

Bio-data assists organizations to recruit people who are excessively competitive and work very hard to give their companies a competitive advantage. SMEs need employees who have a high need of achievement, extreme competitiveness, an aversion to idleness and high need to develop an effective team. SMEs that are resourced with employees with the desired personality have higher chances of realizing their set targets and objectives. Over the past two decades, SMEs in Zimbabwe have been operating in a distressed economic environment characterized by shortages of cash in banks, high rate of inflation, and high rate of unemployment. Operating a business in a distressed economic environment require organizations to ensure that all the departments of the organization have the right number and skilled people. Competent and skilled people hedge organizations from being affected by the macro-environmental challenges such as cash shortages. Bio-data is therefore handy in that it assists SMEs to be appropriately resourced. For example, people with a high need for achievement can be identified by examining their curriculum vitae and identifying the achievements they have made during their employment period.

Bio-data provides potential employers with the personal background of candidates which is very essential in predicting the future behavior and performance of workers. Background information of prospective employees is a suitable predictor of future behavior; hence bio-data is very essential in employee resourcing. The results correspond with Yan et-al (2009)'s view that a worker's past behavior is an essential predictor of an individual's future behavior. An employee's employment record, educational background, hobbies and interests play a key role in the selection of people who possess key performance facets such as commitment, loyalty, hard work and team player. Usually SMEs are very fragile because of limited financial resources, unrefined management, lack of good corporate governance (Nyanga et al 2012), hence for them to compete with established competitors they require employees who are duty conscious, committed, loyal and prepared to do their best to give their organizations a competitive edge.

Standardized and coded bio-data forms, which are used to collect data of applicants makes the screening of candidates transparent, consistent and easy. The findings concur with Hunter & Hunter (1984) who argues that bio-data also makes it easier to monitor unfair labour practices such as discriminating candidates on the basis of place of origin, race, religion and tribe. Apart from fairness, bio-data also makes the processing of lots of applications quick and easy. These results are congruent with Furnham's (2005) findings that the use of bio-data in employee selection has a long history of effectively, efficiently, and easily coordinating personnel assessment. However if it is not managed properly ,bio-data has the potential of propelling unethical and unfair recruitment and selection practices in SMEs. Zvishavane town just like many other urban centers in Zimbabwe has astronomically high unemployment rate, a situation which prompts candidates to offer bribes to managers or also become vulnerable to various forms of abuses by those in positions of authority. Decision making in most SMEs rests with one or two people which in turn make bio-data prone to abuse. Some managers ignore essential elements of bio-data and concentrate on trivial data to do with the candidate's tribe, religion and place of



origin which contributes very little to organizational performance. The findings concur with Yan et-al (2009) observation that bio-data may lead to subjectivity in the selection of candidates.

While bio-data plays a key role on employee resourcing in SMEs, it has the weakness of invading on people's privacy. Chief executive officers, managers and other members of the selection board can share the bio-data of prospective employees with strangers. Bio-data consists of personal and private information about a person such as place of origin, socio-economic background, tribe and religion and educational level. Infringing on candidates' privacy by releasing their bio-data to strangers can lead to litigation where companies can be sued for invading people's privacy. Divulged information can be put on social media and become viral thereby disturbing the applicant's psycho-social stability. One of the respondents remarked, 'I was disturbed to see my picture and other important information about my health condition on the Whats App platform. I had given that information to my prospective employer when he asked me about my health condition. I am in the process of suing the company for infringing on my privacy. I have also turned down the employment offer they had given me.' Participant 17 said, 'My blood pressure (BP) went up when I discovered that my curriculum vitae had been put on social media by my prospective employer. I have since lodged a complaint to the manager of the company.' The results corroborate Owens (2007); Reilly and Chao (1982); Yan et-al (2005), who observed that the issues of concern for bio-data are inaccuracy, fake and invasion of privacy. Furthermore ,the crafting of curriculum vitae and completion of bio-data forms is done by candidates, which in turn compromises the reliability of the instrument in employee resourcing. Candidates may add more information which they think will give them more chances of getting jobs and leave out some which they may view as reducing their chances of getting jobs. Inaccuracy of the method in question is further compounded by the fact that bio-data has stability of prediction. Owen (2007) noted that adverse impact of bio-data depends on the degree to which items elicit information that directly or indirectly relates to cultural differences in social, educational, or economic advancement opportunities. The study also revealed that the other weakness of bio-data in employee resourcing is that it has no stability of results since bio-data is constrained by time and context. Peoples' bio-data is frequently transformed by removing outdated information and bringing in new information such as newly acquired qualifications. As a result of the challenges that are presented by bio-data, various nations, Zimbabwe included have provided guidelines, regulations and statutes that restrict certain types of information from being included on bio-data inventories.

Conclusion

Bio-data was widely used by SMEs in employee resourcing and that the paramount aim of employee resourcing is to ensure that organizations appoint the right people in the right jobs. Bio-data is an effective instrument for employee resourcing in SME. Bio-data eliminates a significant amount of unethical employee resourcing practices such as unfair selection of candidates for promotion. The usefulness of bio-data as an employee resourcing instrument hinges on the ability of the selection board to identify key attributes of employees from the data that is provided by prospective employees. Prospective workers with attributes that add value to the organization should be recruited, selected, promoted and retained while those with attributes which do not add value to the organization should not be recruited and let alone selected. Past behavior is a valid predictor of future behavior. Information obtained from job applicants about previous work experiences and education can be used to predict future job performance. 5) If managers fail to manage bio-data properly it can ignite litigation in the organization. Employers should uphold the principles of fairness and confidentiality since they have access to sensitive and personal

information about candidates. Divulging such information can lead to litigation and spoiling the organization's image. The collection of bio-data invades people's privacy hence the collected data should be appropriately managed.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study the following recommendations were made;

- Bio-data for staffing should exclude some items that promote unfair labour practices and do not add value to employee resourcing. Such items include place of origin, number of children, marital status and race.
- SMEs should gather as much information as possible from the prospective employees so that they can make informed staffing decisions.
- Each SME should design its own bio-data collection instrument which addresses its specific needs rather than relying on other organizations' instruments.
- Organizations should desist from all forms of unethical and unfair labor practices when staffing. Failure to uphold the principle of fairness will lead employers to resource their organizations with incompetent and unskilled people.

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