

# **HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, TECHNICAL BENCH COMPETENCIES, REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND PERFORMANCE OF KENYA FOOTBALL PREMIER LEAGUE TEAMS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to review extant literature using a meta-analysis approach in collecting data to identify gaps in the phenomenon of human resource management practices, technical bench competencies, regulatory framework and its link to the performance of Kenya Premier League soccer teams. The study established that soccer has evolved into a multibillion-dollar industry that can contribute towards the achievement of global sustainability agenda by improving the health of millions of people, increasing life expectancy, improved education outcomes and productive employment through soccer-based entrepreneurial business ventures. In Kenya, soccer faces numerous challenges resulting in poor performance of football teams at the national and club level. The study concluded that soccer tribulations in

Kenya can be attributed to several challenges, but resolving some basic human resource management related ones can help raise football standards. This study has also identified human resource management related research gaps on selection, performance management and remuneration criteria for the technical bench and soccer players, and what makes employees want to stay or leave a soccer club. The study has come up with propositions as a basis for future research to clarify the nature of relations of variables in an integrated model upon which data generated solutions can be formulated.

**KeyWords:** Human Resource Management, Technical Bench Competencies, Football Teams

## **INTRODUCTION**

Soccer has been widely acknowledged as important in sports-based approaches towards the achievement of the 2030 global sustainability agenda adopted in September 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly (UN, 2015). This is partly because soccer being a physically exerting activity can make effective and cost-efficient contribution towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 on improving health of millions of people, increasing life expectancy and fighting against leading communicable diseases (UN, 2015; Adetunji & Olusola, 2017). Soccer can also contribute in the achievement of SDG 4 on improved education outcomes by maximising the health and wellbeing benefits of participation in physical activity (UN, 2015; Yelamos, 2019). Soccer based jobs and entrepreneurship related business ventures can help in the realization of SDG 8 on productive employment and decent work for a sustainable economic growth (Mwasiaji, 2020). Soccer is therefore intertwined with social and economic development of nations (Harris, 2014; Deloitte & Touche, 2009; Ozanian, 2014; Forbes, 2015). In order to facilitate soccer development and maximise its social and economic benefits, the football governing body Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) has put in place a regulatory framework and expended immense financial resources in many parts of the world

(FIFA, 2020; Horne & Manzenreiter 2015). Private corporations including international sports companies and television networks have also invested a great deal of resources for soccer development at the grassroots (Chiweshe, 2014; Diejomaoh, Akarah & Tayire, 2015; Unlucan, 2015; Horne & Manzenreiter 2015). National governments in many parts of the world have also heavily invested in soccer development including supporting initiatives geared towards professionalizing the beautiful game at the premier league and lower divisional levels (Barrack, 2014; FIFA, 2020). Though soccer has globally evolved into a multibillion-dollar industry with a significant contribution to gross domestic product especially in more developed countries, football standards for premier league teams for instance have not registered commensurate improvement in some less developed countries such as those in East Africa (Ritaungu, Mwisukha & Onywera, 2012; Chiweshe, 2014).

In Kenya, soccer is one of the most popular sports with millions of supporters, thousands of players, hundreds of clubs participating in myriads of competitions and tournaments at local and national level (Kwalima, 2014; Mwisukha & Mukolwe, 2012). Other popular sports in Kenya include athletics, rugby, volleyball, motor rally, cricket, boxing, swimming and softball. The responsibility of managing soccer rests with Football Kenya Federation (FKF) which was founded in 2011 and recognised by FIFA, CAF and CECAFA in year 2012. FKF which organises Kenya Premier League, Kenya Women's Premier League, FKF Division One and Kenya national football team Harambee Stars, has faced numerous challenges, most of which have received a lot of attention from researchers (Kwalima, 2014; Mwangi, 2013; Munro, 2014; Rukuni & Groenink, 2010). In addition to the myriad of challenges in the management of soccer in Kenya, the performance of the national team at the international level remains relatively low with no much impact as exemplified in FIFA's football ranking at position one hundred and seven (107) in the world (FIFA, 2020). The poor performance of the national team harambee stars has been attributed to several factors including poor management, inadequate funding and low soccer standards in Kenya at the club level (Mwangi, 2013; Munro, 2005). Kenyan clubs have in recent years had some appearances in international tournaments but no continental title to show for it. This poor performance at the national and club level can be attributed to several challenges facing Kenyan football, but resolving some basic human resource management ones could help raise club performance and soccer standards in Kenya (Nyanjom, 2010; Mwangi, 2013; Kwalima, 2014). This is because Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP) can play a vital role in football clubs from manpower planning, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, reward and compensation, disengagement of players and non-playing technical staff (Ovum, 2011; Campbell, 2012; Fulmer & Ployhart, 2014). Whether HRMP can be effective in supporting soccer development at the grassroots and national level is an ongoing discussion among researchers.

The technical competency especially the manager and other coaching personnel is another important variable that require investigation to establish its impact on club performance and

soccer standards. In Kenya, coaches have some discretion and influence in the selection, training and composition of the playing unit. The soccer team comprise of players who are equivalent to employees in a conventional enterprise. There are the first eleven players in the squad who start a match and others on the substitution bench who take up the role in the field when a main player is injured, tired and or is judged to be under performing. The team coach is responsible for formulating strategies for the season, selecting the team formation and the tactics to be employed in each game. The same coach and or another senior managerial staff does the coordination between the board members, the club president, other technical staff and players in the squad. Due to the important role played by the technical bench, successful soccer nations and club management invest heavily in quality coaching for their upcoming players, while the national football federations effectively coordinate the training of thousands of coaches. This sort of complex coordination of several moving components in the soccer value chain requires good governance supported by conducive regulatory framework (Nyanjom, 2010; Mwisukha & Mukolwe, 2012).

In football, the primary issue which can directly or indirectly impact on a soccer development at the grassroots and club performance is the applicable regulatory framework (FIFA, 2020; De Bosscher, *et. al.*, 2011). Similarly, lack of a sports specific governing policy does affect soccer including dispute management between coaches and their clubs. According to Munjeyi (2017), a regulatory framework is a formation of all applicable statutory documents and the means used to administer them, normally sanctioned by industry regulators to govern specific activities by designated agency or body. Many studies have established that a good legal and regulatory framework by national governments and football governing bodies is part of the contextual factors necessary for soccer development (FIFA, 2020; Diejomaoh, Akarah, Tayire, 2015). The legal and regulatory framework within which soccer administration takes place influences the survival and growth potential of sports including football teams (Mwisukha & Mukolwe, 2012). Regulations by FIFA, national governments and soccer federations produces an atmosphere for football teams to grow or crumble (FIFA, 2020; Chiweshe, 2014; Njororai *et.al.*, 2006). In the same vein, FIFA (2020) has observed that when there is too much government interference through excessive regulatory frameworks in a given country, these may inhibit soccer club performance and result in lower soccer standards in a given jurisdiction. Likewise, Nyanjom (2010) observed out that governmental regulatory requirements that are not well streamlined cause challenges to football teams and therefore FIFA tends to suspend international participation for national teams from those countries on account of government interference.

## **Methodology**

This study reviewed extant empirical and theoretical literature using a meta-analysis approach in collecting and critical review of secondary data from research findings of other studies based on primary data (Glasziou, 2001; Stovold *et al.*, 2014). The purpose was to identify gaps in the phenomenon of strategic human resource management practices, technical bench competencies,

regulatory framework and their impact on performance of Kenya premier league soccer teams with a view to formulate propositions for addressing the identified data gaps.

### **Problem Statement**

The human factor in any organization comprises the combined skills and expertise that accords the organization its distinguishing character (Ovum, 2011; Odhong & Were, 2013; Fulmer & Ployhart, 2014). The human elements in the organization are capable of learning, changing and providing the creative thrust necessary in facilitating competitiveness and long-term survival of the organization (Armstrong, 2012). The human factor therefore constitutes a core element of the market worth of any business enterprise. According to Campbell (2012), companies are more likely to take advantage of their market opportunities and develop more effective response strategies if the human resource element is managed more effectively. This view is supported by Ovum (2011) and Campbell (2012) who reported that effective HRMP conveys competitive advantage by cutting labour related costs, enlarging access to superior personnel, improving marketing expertise, enhancing problem solving abilities, creativity and innovation, and reducing turnaround time while responding to environmental change. Since effective management of human resources in organizations adds value, there is need therefore to assess this value to provide a basis for human resource planning and for monitoring their impact along the strategic direction pipeline of an organization (Odhong & Were, 2013). Collecting and analysing data related to human resources helps in focusing management attention and organizational resources required to recruit, retain, develop and optimise their use in the realization of organizational objectives (Armstrong, 2012).

In the context of sports in Kenya, football is not only one of the most popular, but is also intertwined with social and economic development of the country due to its significant contribution to the gross domestic product (Mwisukha & Mukolwe, 2012; Unlucan, 2015). Despite soccer being amongst the richest industries around the world with its core pillar being its human resources (Forbes, 2015; Ozanian, 2014; Unlucan, 2015), very little research attention has been directed towards issues related to HRMP, yet a soccer club also comprise of players and members of the technical staff who are equivalent to employees in a typical firm (Perciballi, 2011). Despite the good will from fans and financial resources available for football development in Kenya, players and technical staff have had to go for long durations without getting their wages in some cases, negatively impacting on soccer standards in the country (Kwalima, 2014). HRMP within the realm of soccer in Kenya therefore continues to be an area with much research potential on parameters such as manpower planning, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, reward and compensation, disengagement of players and non-playing technical staff (Kwalima, 2014). This is more so because football standards for premier league teams in Kenya for instance have not registered performance improvement commensurate to the level of financial resources expended towards soccer development at the grassroot (Ritaungu, Mwisukha & Onywera, 2012). Gor Mahia Football Club for instance last won a major trophy at continental level or the African Mandela

Cup in year 1987. Since then, no football club in Kenya has won a continental title. The dismal performance of soccer teams is partly because football in Kenya faces numerous challenges resulting in poor performance of soccer teams at the national and club level (Rukuni & Groenink, 2010). For instance, the performance of Kenya national team harambee stars during international tournaments has had little impact as exemplified by current football ranking at position 107 in the world (FIFA, 2020). Kenyan clubs have also in recent years made some appearances at international competitions, with no continental title to show for it. The poor performance of the Kenya national team harambee stars and premier league clubs can be attributed to several factors including corruption, lack of exposure through international friendly matches and poor management, resulting in inadequate funding and low soccer standards in Kenya (Munro, 2014; Mwangi, 2013). There are therefore human resource management related research gaps on selection, performance management and remuneration criteria for the technical staff and soccer players, and what makes employees want to stay or leave a soccer club (Campbell, 2012). Resolving some basic human resource management challenges can help improve soccer management and raise soccer standards in Kenya (Rukuni & Groenink, 2010; Chiweshe, 2014; Fulmer & Ployhart, 2014), hence propositions by the current study.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Theoretical underpinnings**

Resource based view (RBV) proposed by Barney (1991) gives emphasize to an organization's proactive choices. RBV posits that an organization can gain sustained competitive advantage by developing competencies that are firm specific, produce complex social relationship; are embedded in a firm's history and culture, and generate tacit organizational knowledge (Odhong *et al.*, 2013). Barney (1991) RBV theory proposes that though environmental opportunities and threats are important variables for consideration, an organization's unique resource such as capital, equipment, employees, knowledge and information allow it to develop and sustain a competitive advantage. This is more so if a resource exhibits attributes such as value, rarity, imitability, non-substitutable and ability for the organization to exploit the resources or capability. Resource-based theory gives more weight to human resources as the most important type of resources a firm has (Helfat & Peteraf, 2003; Holcomb, Holmes & Conelly, 2009). Human resources with a high level of competency and commitment, is a unique resource that creates performance differentials in an organization. This is more so for organization operating in a globalised and dynamic competitive business environment where the capability to rapidly acquire and assimilate new market and technological capabilities is the key to sustainable advantage and improved performance compared to competitors (Mwasiaji, 2019). The Resource Based View is connected to the independent and mediating variables of the current study since it emphasizes the importance of effective management of human capital.

In assessing firm performance, there are several models that have been proposed for purposes of quantifying organizational performance. A popular model is by Kaplan (2010) which proposes quantifying organizational performance on more than just financial returns. The other three performance measurement parameters relate to customer perspective, the internal business processes, learning and growth. Kaplan (2010) balanced score card model can therefore be used to assess progress towards attaining defined goals, notify key stakeholders about scorecard attainment, and in establishing the source of problems so as to take appropriate mitigation measures. The ultimate objective of the balanced scorecard model is quantifying the elements that generate value for an enterprise and directly affects its capacity to prosper (Mwasiaji, 2020). An application of the scorecard model therefore offers an entity with the tools that can be used to transform strategy into a scorecard and communicate the attainments throughout the entity. Kaplan (2010) theory is linked to the dependent variable of performance of soccer teams in Kenya premier league since it addresses important questions about how a football team can assess its social and environmental impacts in addition to economic pay-outs.

Scylla (1982) regulatory innovation theory is another proposition that is linked to the construct of regulatory framework which is the moderating variable in the current study. This theory is relevant to the current study in that it addresses key aspects of an organization's environment including the rules and regulations put in place to control the behaviour of industrial players. According to Mwasiaji (2020), the regulation innovation theory argues that it is difficult to have room for organization innovation within an operating environment with stern governmental control as compared with the same situation in the pure free-market economy. When government's involvement in the industry stalls organizational activities, there will be numerous types of innovations aimed at circumvent government controls. According to Scylla (1982), the game between the market and government finally form a spiral development process, namely, control-innovate, controls again-innovates again. This theory may partially explain FIFA's preference for self-regulation by soccer federation in place of governmental control termed as interference in football matters. Scylla (1982) regulatory innovation theory is linked to the concept of soccer's laws and regulations by the government and FIFA since it addresses crucial questions about how premier league soccer clubs may choose to behave with reference to the set regulatory framework in order to achieve an advantage.

### **Human Resource Management Practices and Soccer Standards in Kenya**

It is globally acknowledged that effective HRMP are essential in extracting positive work behaviour among employees culminating in positive returns for organizations (Armstrong, 2012; Odhong & Were, 2013; Campbell, 2012). Rivulets of research effort have therefore been dedicated in an attempt to provide insights in the nature of relationship between the concepts of HRM and organizational performance. In a study of competitive advantage of sixteen (16) business enterprises, it was established that at some time or another, the studied firms had captured or developed critically needed human resource skills to create an enduring competitive

advantage (Storey and Westhead, 2007). Many other studies have attempted to define the phenomena of human resource management with some describing it as a bundle of practices that impact on organizational performance (Odhong & Were, 2013; Fulmer & Ployhart, 2014). This means that effective management of human resources is one of the business aspects that require continuous repositioning so as to hold some advantage relative to competition (Liesch *et al.*, 2012). Armstrong (2012) and Campbell (2012) have therefore identified human resource management practices to include Manpower Planning, Recruitment and Selection, Training and Development, Performance Management (including appraisals), Reward and Compensation and Employee Disengagement. Other authors have also conceptualized HRMP as internally consistent policies that guide the process of attracting, developing, motivating and retaining employees for purposes development of competencies necessary in the achievement of the set objectives (Buckley *et al.*, 2012).

The position taken by this study is that HRMP are a system of actions implemented to ensure effective functioning and survival of an organization by sourcing, directing, developing and retaining competent employees. Successful implementation of any organization's corporate strategy relies upon effective HRMP. In the context of football, little research attention has been directed towards issues related to strategic sourcing, training, guiding, directing, motivating, compensating, appraising and generally enabling the activities of football players and technical staff, yet they are equivalent to employees in a typical firm (Perciballi, 2011; Kwalima, 2014). For the premier league teams, these serve as reservoirs of players for the national team that has never qualified for international competitions such as World Cup, Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games (Mwisukha & Mukolwe, 2012).

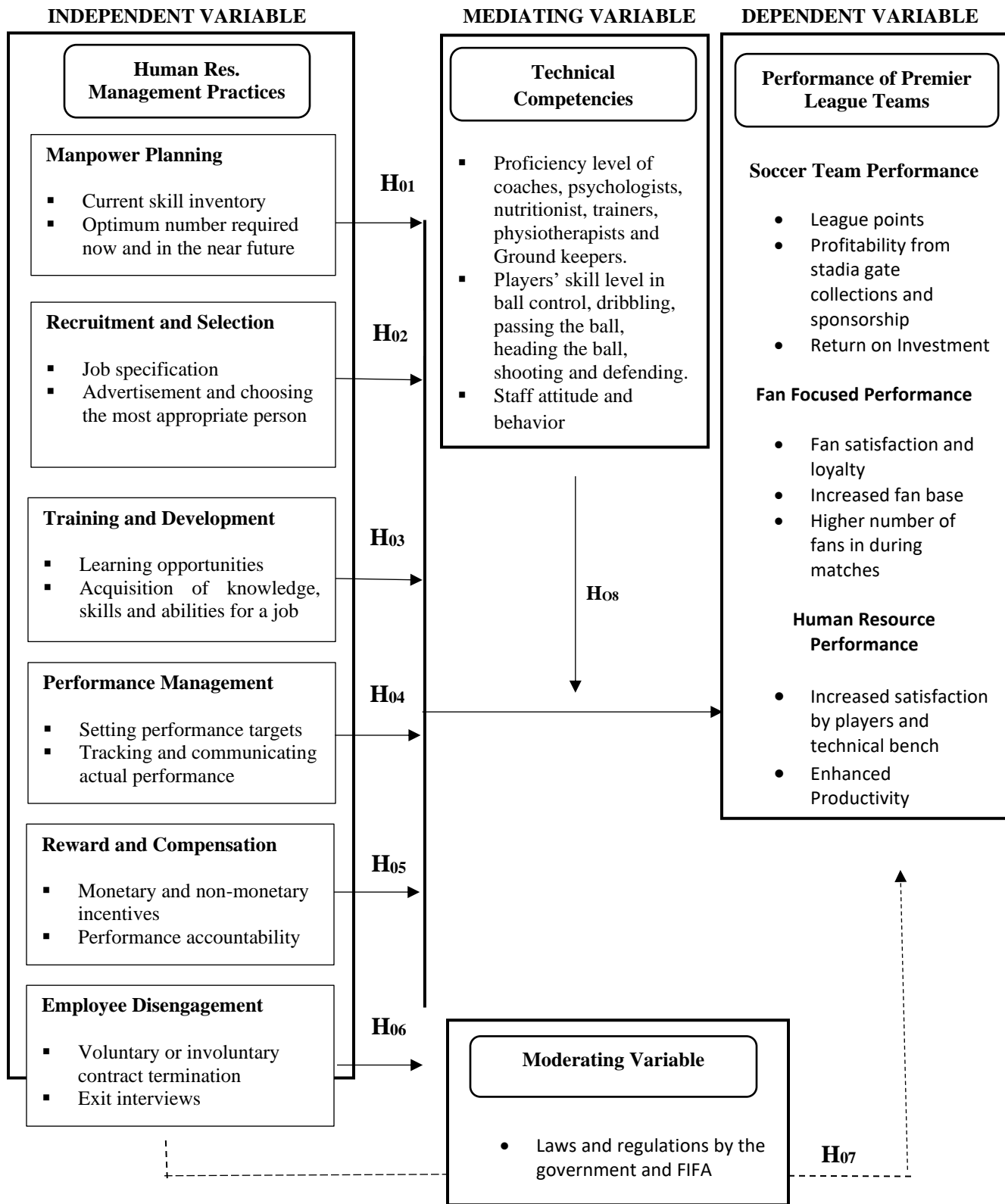
### **Discussion and Implications**

There could be many attributable factors to this dismal performance of soccer teams in Kenya, the management of any organization including a soccer club mainly revolves around people and capital deployment decisions. However, money and good facilities for a soccer club are of no value without suitable players and technical staff supported by effective human resource policies. Though financial resources from corporates and ticket sales, including high class stadiums may be important to the success of a football club, but they mean nothing unless there are right people in the right places. HRMP within the realm of soccer in Kenya therefore continues to be an area with much research potential as one of the avenues to address dismal performance of teams and the related low soccer standards in the country.

### **Proposed Theoretical Framework**

**Figure 1** is the proposed integrated theoretical framework that demonstrates the role of technical competencies and regulatory framework on the link between Strategic Human resource management practices and performance of Kenyan premier league teams.





**Figure 1:** The conceptual framework of Human Resource Management, Technical Bench Competencies, Regulatory Framework, Premier League Football Teams.

## **Propositions**

### **Human Resource Management Practices**

Hiring and retaining the right human resources has been emphasized as one of the critical success factors for any organization (Perciballi, 2011; Armstrong, 2012; Odhong & Were, 2013; Campbell, 2012; Fulmer & Ployhart, 2014). According to Campbell (2012), companies are more likely to take advantage of their market opportunities and develop more effective response strategies if the human resource element is managed more effectively. Since soccer clubs comprise of personnel who can be equated to employees, collecting and analysing data related to human resources management practices for Kenyan Premier Football teams can be used to monitor progress in achieving strategic human resource related goals and generally to evaluate the effectiveness of HRMP in the realization of set objectives (Ritaungu, Mwisukha & Onywera, 2012). Thus, the study proposes that:

**Proposition 1 (P1):** *Human Resource Management Practices determines the performance of premier league teams in Kenya.*

### **Technical Bench Competencies**

Technical bench competencies are the knowledge and skills needed to develop, sustain and manage a soccer club. The more developed the technical skills are, the better the ability of the soccer club to respond to environmental forces so as to grow and sustain its football team. Such competencies which may be taken to imply the understanding of principles, related to position awareness on the field, decision making, ball control, dribbling, passing the ball, heading the ball, shooting and defending skills (Njororai *et. al.*, 2006). Therefore, it can be summarized that relevant knowledge, skills set, availability of facilities is an important predictor of the performance of premier league teams in Kenya (Diejomaoh, Akarah & Tayire, 2015). Based on this, the study proposes that:

**Proposition 2 (P2):** *Technical bench competencies mediate the relationship between Human Resource Management Practices and the performance of premier league teams in Kenya.*

### **Regulatory Framework**

A regulatory framework is the environment in which an organization operates and which can impact on its operations directly or indirectly (Munjeyi, 2017). The legal and regulatory framework within which soccer administration takes place influences the survival and growth potential of football teams (De Bosscher, *et. al.*, 2011). Regulations by FIFA, national governments and soccer federations produce an atmosphere for football teams to grow or crumble (FIFA, 2020). From the theoretical framework, the dotted line H<sub>07</sub> moderates the influence of Human Resource Management practices on the performance of soccer teams. Consistent with both conceptual and empirical literature as outlined above, it is important to link

the adopted regulatory framework (contingent construct) and performance of premier league soccer teams in Kenya (ultimate variable). Thus, the study proposes that:

**Proposition 4:** *Regulatory Framework moderates the relationship between Human Resource Management Practices and the performance of premier league teams in Kenya.*

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this study was to review extant literature in the subject matter, identify gaps in the phenomenon of human resource management practices, technical competencies, regulatory framework and their impact on performance of Kenya premier league soccer teams. The reviewed writings show that football in Kenya faces numerous challenges resulting in poor performance of soccer teams at the national and club level. The study established that soccer being a multi-billion industry can contribute to social and economic wellbeing of humanity. Unfortunately, football in Kenya faces tribulations attributable to several challenges including human resource management practices. The study has also identified data gaps and came up with critical propositions to form a basis for future studies to clarify the nature of relations of variables in the proposed integrated model. This study concludes that it is possible to assess and benchmark a soccer club's technical capabilities, strengths and weakness of its HRMP, and link improvements or backsliding in specific HRM practices with improvements or shortcomings in the performance of a football team in the Kenya premier league. Resolving some basic human resource management related challenges can help raise soccer standards in Kenya at the club and national level.

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