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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect transactional leadership style on employee engagement in public secondary schools of Murang'a County in Kenya. A survey research design was employed. The target population was 3,860 teachers. Systematic random sampling followed by use of random numbers were applied to sample 368 respondents in 306 Public Secondary Schools. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistical methods that provide measures of central tendency like the mean, standard deviation and percentages to describe the characteristics of the variables of interest in the study. The inferential statistical tools applied in this research were correlation analysis and linear regression. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS) version 23 was used to assist in data analysis. The results showed that transactional leadership had a positive significant effect on employee engagement and its dimensions. Based on the findings of this study, it was established that applying transactional leadership style on employees could increase employee engagement. It was recommended that strategies be put in place by the Ministry of Education through the Teachers Service Commission to ensure appropriate application of transactional leadership style by leaders in schools. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the leadership–behavioural outcomes domain that are significant to school leaders and recommends strategies that will enhance employee engagement.

Key Words: *Transactional Leadership, Employee Engagement, Teachers, Principals, Secondary Schools*

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INTRODUCTION

In the current environment of increasing global competition and slower growth prospects, raising employee engagement is seen as a key strategy for organizational success. Employee engagement builds zeal, dedication and alignment with the organization's strategies and goals hence achievement of high performance levels and superior business results (Nwinyokpugi, 2015). In today's world, employee engagement is the way to improve performance with fewer employees and dollars (Datche & Mukulu, 2015). There are three levels of employee engagement; engaged - refers to employees who go the extra mile; not engaged - refers to employees who do the bare minimum; disengaged- refers to employees who have mentally quit but still hang about.

A lack of work engagement is a worldwide problem and not limited to any specific sector. Globally, Only 13 percent of employees are engaged, the others being psychologically detached from their places of work and therefore not likely to be productive (Crabtree & Robinson, 2013). In United Kingdom, 17 % of employees are truly engaged, 63 % are "not engaged", and 20 % are disengaged (Huckerby, 2002). The implication is, 83 % of employees are on the job being paid and benefits for compensation of their energy which is not available to the organization. In the U.S, 26% of employees are actively engaged, 54 % are neutral about their work, and 20 % are disengaged (Fleming, Coffman, & Harter, 2005). In Africa, employee engagement is still at very low levels and has been linked to drivers of engagement like work place harmony (Nwinyokpugi, 2015) and authentic leadership (Omar, 2015). In Kenya, the low levels of employee engagement have been linked to the leadership styles (Detche & Mukulu, 2015; Ndethiu, 2014) and to poor work-life balance (Kangure, 2014).

Without engaged employees, meticulous planning, possession of sophisticated machines and equipment, and being up to date with technology are not likely to yield the expected results for any organization, large or small, and even if they do, it will be short lived. 'Engaged' employees are more productive, engender greater levels of customer satisfaction, are more likely to lead to organizational success and are key to ensuring that an organization wins the customer loyalty (Cook, 2008). Employee engagement has the potential to significantly affect employee retention, company reputation and overall stakeholder value. At the same time, actively disengaged employees are toxic to every aspect of the organization, which complicates the ways and means of implementing the most excellent customer service strategy effectively (Hoffman & Tschida, 2007).

Organizations that understand the conditions that enhance employee engagement will have accomplished something that competitors will find very difficult to imitate, to the detriment of those that do not understand or may not be willing to tore the line. As a result, suitable leadership styles that bring about employee engagement in organizations need to be practiced in order to encourage improved performance (Popli & Rizvi, 2016).

The traditional view of a 'job for life' has changed dramatically. Employees are now more likely to build an assortment of skills and competencies that will help them develop multiple careers. The nature of jobs has also changed. Likewise, management practices have shifted so that the old maxim: 'when an employee sells his labour , he also sells his promise to obey commands' no longer holds true (Cook, 2008). The age of leader as position is rapidly fading. In the past, managers could realize results by applying a command and control style of leadership which adopted a 'carrot and stick' approach to ensuring productivity and achieving results. According to Shuck and Herd, (2012), to be a leader of today's dynamic workforce demands a willingness to understand and navigate the new approaches to leadership in an evolving landscape.

The opening up of market places, globalization, increased competition, the growing power of the customer, technological advancement, pressure on margins and the demands of stakeholders have all

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contributed a different employment environment from that known to our parents. Employees nowadays have the privilege of having more choice in where and how they work. They expect that they will be involved in decision making, participate in the activities of the organization in addition to being treated with respect and fairness (Burke & Ng, 2006). As a result, one of the characteristics of today's workforce is their high level of mobility (Lumley *et al*., 2011), which results in voluntary turnover creating a major challenge in the management of talent and human capital (Du Plooy & Roodt, 2010). Many employees are looking for environments where they can be engaged and feel that they are contributing in a positive way to something larger than themselves. The changing psychological contract has meant that organizations have had to find new ways to motivate their employees to encourage them to give their best.

One of the seven principles in the ISO 9001:2015 standard is employee engagement. In the ISO 9001:2008 standard, which is the predecessor of ISO 9001:2015, the same principle was referred to as employee involvement. It implies that there is need for organizations to move from mere employee involvement and embrace employee engagement which is associated with enhanced employee outcomes for the benefit of the employees, the organization and all other stakeholders.

What is important to the idea of employee engagement is the aspect of not just creating a workforce that is satisfied and committed to the organization but one that works hard to go an extra mile to offer discretionary effort to satisfy the customer (Cook, 2008). Thus, providing a work environment and conditions that encourage employees to be willing to do and then go ahead do more than what is expected of them by the employer as per their job description is the challenge for business today, not just satisfying employees and retaining them in the organization. This is in agreement with Batista-Taran *et al*. (2013), who say that mere motivation of employees in today's competitive work environment is not enough if conditions that encourage engagement are absent. Organizations therefore have to work harder to ensure that they win the loyalty of the best employees.

The teacher is a very important resource in the education system. This means that, efficient teacher management and utilization is critical to the quality of learning outcomes (MOES & T, 2005). Brown and Wynn (2009) proposed that failing to address high attrition rates could have a negative impact on the overall education system in terms of; a deficit of quality teachers and instruction; loss of continuity and commitment; and devotion of time, attention, and funds to recruitment rather than support. As leaders of their schools, principals are charged with the responsibility of developing an educational environment that ensures satisfaction and raises organizational commitment (Aydin, Sarier, & Uysal, 2013). Müller, Alliata, and Benninghoff (2009) argue that attracting and retaining competent teachers is a key concern when it comes to managing the supply and demand of teachers. The problem of teacher exit cannot simply be solved by training and recruiting new teachers to replace those who quit.

Attempts to raise employee engagement levels are to founder unless there is a willingness and energy at a senior level in any organization to take a holistic and long-term approach to building commitment to the organization (Cook, 2008). Companies that focus on building engaging leaders will see an exponential impact on employee engagement (Hewitt, 2014). Global engagement report suggests that 'companies will need employees to go above and beyond in different ways—not just to engage by working harder, but to engage in ways that show resiliency, learning, adaptability and speed' (Hewitt, 2014). A serious gap that needs to be addressed by employees, employers, and the Human Resource Development professionals is evident because of the inconsistency arising from the expected benefits that are linked to employee engagement and the

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prevailing level of engagement that exists in organizations today.

Statement of the Problem

School leaders should always work consciously toward creating congruency between organizational and individual needs fulfillment for improved productivity (Woestman & Wasonga, 2015) in an effort to increase the level of teacher engagement.

Despite efforts by the government of Kenya to increase teachers' salaries, provide bursaries through the Ministry of Education and Constituency Development Funds to improve access, participation, and performance of students in national examinations (MOEST, 2010), and train teachers like in the Strengthening Mathematics and Science in Secondary Education (SMASSE) program that has been going on for several years now, reports on teacher absenteeism, teacher dissatisfaction and high turnover, and poor performance in national examinations are common and these could be indicators of low levels of teacher engagement. For example, a study by Kenya National Union of Teachers (2015) indicated that more than 200,000 of teachers in public schools wish to leave teaching because of professional and personal needs. Uwezo East Africa (2014) reported that about 12% of teachers are absent from school which is about 35,000 teachers on any given day. Teacher absenteeism is a serious obstacle to the delivery of quality education (Komoni, 2015). Recent researches in Murang'a county indicate high levels of teacher dissatisfaction and desire to quit the profession (Njiru, 2014; Wachira, 2013).

Disengaged teachers will produce a low number of matriculation grades and high numbers of form four graduates who are not able to further their education given the current Commission for University Education (CUE) entry requirements to Colleges and Universities, implying a high wastage rate. This is likely to increase the level of unemployment in Kenya due to lack of necessary and relevant education and skills. Unemployment is likely to lead to increased levels of crime, drug abuse and slow economic growth.

Leadership style has been linked to teacher dissatisfaction (Aydin *et al*., 2013) and is also a predictor of employee engagement (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). According to the researcher, not much has been done to study teacher engagement in public schools in Kenya. The rationale behind this research study was to establish the relationship between dark leadership style and teacher engagement in public secondary schools in Murang'a County, Kenya.

Research Objective

To examine the effect of transactional leadership style on teacher engagement in public secondary schools of Murang'a County, Kenya.

Research Hypotheses

H_0: There is no significant effect of transactional leadership style on teacher engagement in public secondary schools of Murang'a County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transactional leaders reward or punish followers in order to achieve organizational goals (Hoy & Miskel, 2010 as cited by (Zeinabadi & Salehi, 2011) and for leaders to receive compliance from them (Burns, 1978). Such leaders are action oriented and results focused (Batista-Taran *et al*., 2013) and emphasis on planned and scheduled work. Dimensions of transactional leadership according to Bass and Riggio (2006) are: (i) Contingent reward: The most important target of a transactional leader is to realize organizational objectives. To achieve this, the leader offers different awards to raise the performance and motivations of his followers. His followers usually receive the award upon meeting the set targets. (ii) Management –By- Exception: It is applied in two ways, active or passive. If the management is active, leaders take corrective actions on the mistakes of followers by tracking their performance which means leaders continually follow performance and pass action to correct errors as they arise. On the other hand, if the management is passive, leaders wait until the errors occur, which means that they normally fail to

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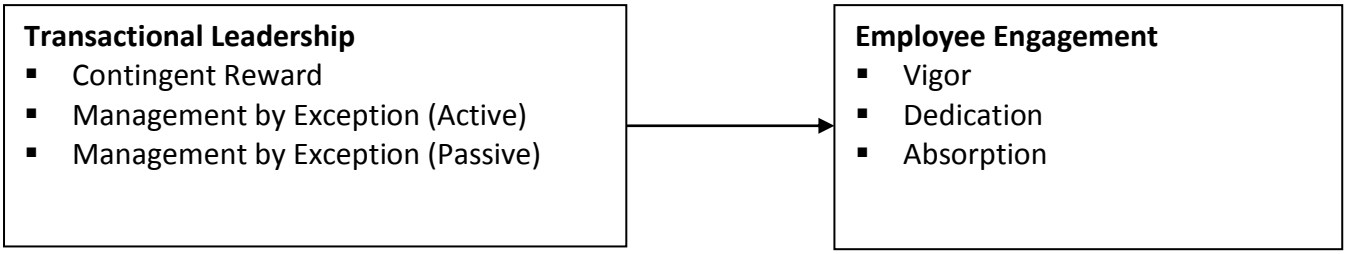
intervene until serious problems occur after which they take relevant corrective action.

Popli and Rizvi (2016) carried out a study whose results revealed significant relationships between leadership styles and employee engagement where transactional leadership style reflected a statistically significant relationship with engagement. In another study, Padmanathan (2010) found that both transformational and transactional leadership positively portrayed employee engagement, but transactional leadership showed more positive effect on employee engagement as compared to transformational leadership. A similar study by Ndethiu (2014) revealed that transactional leadership style and employee engagement have a significant relationship.



Independent Variable **Dependent Variable**

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study used survey design. this design affords the researcher an opportunity to capture a population's characteristics and test hypotheses by applying correlation as a statistical tool (Goodwin, 2016). A quantitative approach was adopted because the data collected through questionnaires from respondents was analyzable using the standard statistical tools. Multistage sampling design was applied so as to first sample schools (clusters). Cluster sampling technique guarantees that each cluster is represented in the sample and thus reflects the characteristics of the population with some level of accuracy. The study population was 3860 teachers in 306 schools out of which 92 schools were selected, representing the 30% recommended by Hill (1998). Random numbers were then used to sample 368 respondents. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between employees' perceptions of their leaders' transactional leadership and employee engagement. A statistical significance test (at a level of significance of 0.05) was performed to determine if the correlation arrived at was significant or was due to chance in the form of random sampling error by testing hypotheses. Regression analysis was applied to explain the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. F statistic was used to test the significance of the regression model.

Transactional leadership was measured using 9 items from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X rater form) on a Likert 5 point scale. The computed cronbach's alpha coefficient for the variable was 0.881. Where the computed alpha coefficient is greater than 0.80, it is considered as an acceptable level of internal reliability (Bryman, 2008). Employee engagement was measured using a self-report questionnaire containing 9 items from Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) on a Likert 5 point scale. It had a computed Cronbach's alpha coefficient value of 0.897 which was acceptable because it indicated a high internal consistency of the scale used.

FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics

Table 1: Opinions of Respondents on Employee Engagement

Leadership Item	Mean	SD
At my work, I feel bursting with energy	3.40	0.95
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	3.72	0.898
I am enthusiastic about my job	3.90	0.883
My job inspires me.	3.89	0.907
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	3.79	0.905
I feel happy when I am working intensely	3.74	0.845
I am proud of the work that I do	4.08	0.798
I am immersed in my work.	3.60	0.900
I get carried away when I am working	3.04	1.090

The results in Table 1 showed that all the studied items had means above 3.0 meaning that the respondents were positive and generally agreed with the items. Apart from the item "I get carried away when I am working", all the other studied items had a standard deviation of below 1.0. This indicated that the respondents were in agreement with one another, the reason why there were no extremes in scoring the items. The reliability of employee engagement variable was found to be 0.897. Since the alpha was greater than 0.8, it was acceptable.

Descriptive Statistics on Transactional Leadership

The results presented in Table 2 showed that six out of the nine transactional leadership items considered had a mean of above 3.0, implying that the respondents were positive and agreed with such items**.** However, the items 'Fails to interfere when problems become serious', 'Practices the principle, "if it isn't broken don't fix it"' and 'Waits for things to go wrong before taking action' scored low means of 2.43, 2.77, and 2.43 respectively, which means that the respondents disagreed with them.

Six items had standard deviation that was above 1.0. This showed that there were extremes in scoring the items in the positive and negative. The item "Fails to interfere when problems become serious" had a standard deviation of 1.162 which shows very high dispersion of the scores given by the respondents. This showed extreme negative and extreme positive scoring of the item by the respondents.

Table 2: Opinion of Respondents on Transactional Leadership

Leadership Item	Mean	SD
Provides assistance in exchange for effort	3.55	0.927
Very clear on the reward if goals are achieved	3.58	1.161
Express satisfaction when expectations are met	3.93	0.95
Concentrate attention on dealing with mistakes, complaints and failures	3.35	1.123
Keep track of mistakes	3.45	1.103
Takes corrective action on mistakes	3.66	0.965
Fails to interfere when problems become serious	2.43	1.162
Practices the principle, "if it isn't broken don't fix it"	2.77	1.144
Waits for things to go wrong before taking action	2.34	1.273

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation between Transactional Leadership and Employee Engagement

Items		Employee Engagement	Transactional
Employee Engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.286**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	296	296
Transactional	Pearson Correlation	.286**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	296	296

****. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

The results in Table 3 showed a very weak positive correlation was found between transactional leadership and employee engagement (r= 0. 286; p-value<0.01). The results mean that 8.18 % (0.286^2) of variation in employee engagement in secondary schools in Murang'a Country is explained by transactional leadership style of their principals. Other factors outside transactional leadership therefore explain 91.82% of variation in employee engagement.

The findings agreed with those of a study by Omar (2015) which indicated that rewards and recognition had significant positive effects on job engagement. A similar study in Kenya by Njoroge (2015) found a weak positive correlation between transactional leadership and organizational commitment (r = 0.392; p-value <0.001). The findings were similar to those of a study by Metzler (2006) which indicated that transactional leadership style positively predicted employee engagement though in this study, 75% of the respondents were young people in their twenties. This probably explains why rewards are likely to positively affect their job engagement because the transactional components deal with the basic needs of the organization (Ibrahim & Al-Taneiji, 2013), and the rewards are likely to appeal to young people because they may not be expecting a personal enrichment unlike older employees. Muchemi (2013) supports this view point when she observes that different age cohorts are likely to differ in attitudes, values, and perspectives which are shaped and influenced by the different social, political, economic environments and events, they that experience on daily basis.

The findings of this study disagreed with those of a study by Khuong and Yen (2014) in Vietnam which indicated that transactional leadership style negatively correlated with employee engagement. According to Burns (1979), the relationship that occurs between most leaders and their followers is transactional because the leader approaches the follower with the idea of exchanging one thing for another. However, transactional leadership confines the leader to using behaviors that are based on rewards for the purpose of realizing greater organizational performance from employees, which regrettably have effects that do not last long according to Batista–taran (2013).

Leaders who basically reward performance according to expectations are unlikely to energize a workforce that is looking forward to personal enrichment (Metzler, 2006). This kind of leadership is very unlikely to generate commitment and zeal to the task objectives (Khan *et al*., 2016). This agrees with Ibrahim and Al-Taneiji (2013) when they argue that transactional leaders are not interested in providing high level motivation, job satisfaction, or commitment because they focus on the basic needs of their staff according to Bass (1985). Great leaders are aware that leadership is not built on transactions alone, but also on recognition and appreciation of the human spirit (Goleman, 1998;Goleman, 2003; Maccoby, 2007).

Table 4: Pearson's Correlation between the Dimensions of Employee Engagement and Transactional Leadership

	Transactional Leadership
Vigor	0.177
Dedication	0.237**
Absorption	0.283**

****. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

The results shown in Table 4 indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between vigor and transactional leadership style (r=.177, p 0.001). However, the relationship between dedication and transactional leadership was statistically significant (r=.237, p 0.001). A statistically significant relationship was also found between absorption and transactional leadership (r=.283, p<0.01). These results agreed with the results of a study carried out by Khan et. al. (2016) that show that there was no statistically significant correlation between vigor and transactional leadership (r=.187, p>0.05) but a positive relationship that was statistically significant existed between dedication and transactional leadership (r=.276, p 0.05), and also between absorption and transactional leadership (r=.298, p<0.05).

The findings were also similar to those of an earlier study by Metzler (2006) whose findings were that transactional leadership style positively predicted employee vigor, dedication, and absorption. However, a difference was observed in the results relating to the vigor dimension of employee engagement. While the results of the study by Metzler (2006) showed that there was a positive relationship between vigor and transactional leadership, the findings of this research study and those of Khan *et. al.* (2016) reported that there is no statistically significant correlation between vigor and transactional leadership.

Regression Analysis

Table 5: Regression Results of Transactional Leadership on Employee Engagement

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	.626	1	.626	16.77	.000
Residual	109.805	294	.373		
Total	110.431	295			
R.=0.288	R^2=.082	R^2= .080			

The model to be tested was:

$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x + \varepsilon$

Where;

Y= Employee Engagement

β_0= level of employee engagement in the absence of transactional leadership

β1= intercept for the independent variable

X=Transactional leadership

ε=Error term

The model was found to be valid (F (1,274) =16.77, p-value<0.001) as shown in Table 5. These results have the implication that the relationship between transactional leadership and employee engagement is significant and not by chance. The fitted model equation is Y= 0.286X.

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Hypothesis Testing

Table 6: Regression Coefficients of Transactional Leadership on Employment Engagement

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.377	.241		14.037	.000
Transactional leadership	.095	.286	.075	1.295	.000

****. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

This equation showed that standardized employment engagement will increase by 0.286 units with one unit increase in standardized transactional leadership style. The high residual sum of squares (109.805) indicated that the model does not explain a lot of the variations in the dependent variable which implies that there are other factors that account for a greater percentage of the variation in the dependent variable. The model shows that transactional leadership in this research study significantly explains the variation employment engagement. Therefore, the hypothesis Ho1: there is no significant effect of transactional leadership style on employee engagement is rejected and the alternative that transactional leadership style has a significant effect on employment engagement supported.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that transactional leadership style has a positive significant effect on employee engagement but only two of its dimensions; dedication and absorption. Transactional leadership style has no significant effect on the vigor dimension of employee engagement. This is probably the reason for the very weak positive correlation found between transactional leadership and employee engagement (r= 0. 286; p-value<0.01).

School Principals should discover the rewards, resources, training, and the supervision the employees need. This is what Vroom (1964) meant in his expectancy theory of motivation and management when he proposed that a reward should be aimed at satisfying a need that an employee will consider important to him.

It is necessary that the TSC in coordination with the Ministry of Education puts in place organized evaluation strategies through policy that gives school principals the opportunity to assess their performance on a regular basis to help enhance their leadership skills. The '360 degree' feedback system if applied will give the principals a complete knowledge of their skills, strengths, and weaknesses as viewed by themselves and others, and thus provide them with an opportunity to become more aware of themselves. This will open their eyes on the areas that they will need to improve on so as to increase teacher engagement in their schools.

Suggestions for Future Research

A more detailed research study can be carried out to establish the effect of each component of transactional on each component of employee engagement. This will give a deeper understanding of how the different dimensions of transactional leadership style can be applied in an effort to achieve higher levels of employee engagement in schools and other organizations.

This study only concentrated on the teachers within public secondary schools. Future research studies can investigate the effect of transactional leadership style on employee engagement using a variety of respondents in the similar or different institutions, for example teaching and nonteaching staff, so as to compare levels of engagement among different categories of employees. In the same vein, a study can be carried out on the effect of transactional leadership on employee engagement at the group or team level because not much is

known about this aspect of engagement. This is because people work in teams to achieve organizational goals.

A study that collects views from the leader and their followers can be carried out because this study only considered leadership views from the followers.

Other leadership styles apart from transactional leadership can also be studied. This will provide education managers with important information that will guide in coming up with strategies that positively influence employee engagement levels. This will provide the school principals with a rich pool of what to do and what not to do so as to increase teacher engagement.

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