

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

An Assessment of Emotional Intelligence Relationship with Employee Engagement for Public Universities in Kenya

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Abstract:

Emotional intelligence has become a well research construct in relation to leadership and performance. Employee engagement has been of interest as scholars seek to establish now best to motivate employee to give their very best for organizational performance, public universities included. There is limited literature on the relationship between emotional engagement and emotional intelligence specifically for Kenyan public Universities. This paper therefore sought to address this gap. The target population was public universities in Kenya; however, the sample was mainly drawn from the managers and employees of the four public Universities, namely University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Egerton University and Jomo Kenyatta University of Technology. The research design was mixed. A questionnaire was utilized to collect data which was analyzed using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient to establish the relationship. The results indicate that there exists a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement.

Keywords: *Emotional intelligence, employee engagement, universities*

1. Introduction

Institutions of higher learning the world over are facing challenges of low funding and a growing student population hence the need to engage employees is very important. Emotional intelligence has been of interest where scholars have concluded that it is very important and individual and organizational level.

The institutions of higher learning have, therefore, been forced to rethink their strategy and possibly look for extra sources of financing including establishing income-generating activities. The change in funding requires employees to be fully engaged so that the organization can obtain its monies worth.

One variable that has recently gained much popularity as a potential underlying attribute of effective leadership is the construct of emotional intelligence (EI) Sosik and Mererian (1999). EI is described as a set of abilities that refer in part to how effectively one deals with emotions both within oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It has been proposed that in leadership, dealing effectively with emotions may contribute to how one handles the needs of individuals, how one effectively motivates employees, and makes them feel at work (Goleman, 1998b). Today's effective leadership skills have been described to depend, in part on the understanding of emotions and the abilities associated with EI (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Goleman, 1998a).

1.1. Problem Statement

The dawning of the age of accountability wrought by reform movements beginning in the 1980s, necessitated reforms in the educational sector and universities were not exempt. Today universities the world over attempt to advance themselves in academic programs, research and innovation, towards academic excellence in the wake of the competitive era, toward world class university.

Therefore, the trend today is emphasizing reputation and key performance indicators including ranking of universities as the population at large, goes for education in this technology driven orientation. New trends of education are directing towards this change and Vice Chancellors and Presidents of the universities strive hard to realize such aspirations. Therefore, universities are aspiring to be recognized for their prestige in programs, research, publications, faculties, students, innovations, collaborations, industry linkages and entrepreneurs through certifications like ISO and other relevant recognitions. To fulfill such purposes universities, need engaged employees.

Historically, productivity improvement focused on technology and capital equipment to reduce the input of labor costs. Improved output was thought to be more production by applying industrial engineering techniques such as methods analysis and work flow among others. Individual productivity transcends from the individual to help create a more productive organization. This suggests that emotional intelligence, and employee engagement help produce higher performance Bennie L. Felts. 2006 as cited by Reeds (2005). Several studies have been done on emotional intelligence and employee engagement.

A study by Suehs D (2010) on emotional intelligence and employee engagement established a relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement among frontline managers and Supervisors. Further a study on the role of emotional intelligence on employee engagement among Indian professional found out that mood repair in emotional intelligence augments employee engagement in high levels in employees which are manifested through absorption, dedication and high vigor (Sarangi1 et al 2015).

Studies by Nguyen et al (2015) on the Effects of Leaders' Emotional Intelligence on Employee Engagement in Vietnamese Construction Companies revealed that emotional intelligence had positive effects on employee engagement. Singh et al (2013) studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement in Printing Press. The study showed a moderate and significant positive relationship exists. Sidy (2015) investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence, work engagement, creativity and demographic variables. A significant positive relationship was found on the variables. Washington (2017) studied the correlation between emotional intelligence and employee engagement within the Human Service Industry. A moderate yet positive relationship was found. Although these studies have been carried out there remains limited studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement in the public universities, this research seeks to address this gap.

1.2. Objectives

The general objective was to establish the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement.

The specific objective was to establish how emotional intelligence impacts employee engagement

2. Literature Review

2.1. Emotional Intelligence

Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) carried out research based on these earlier works in order to establish Emotional intelligence and a genuine intelligence based on the concept and definition of intelligence. According to them intellect and emotional intelligence are two different constructs and they use different parts of the brain. Therefore, as a term, emotional intelligence first made its first appearance in 1989 in an article by two American academic psychologist, John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey. They defined emotional intelligence as 'the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions.' They came up with an ability model with four separate elements of Emotional intelligence namely identifying emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions and managing emotions. Mayer, Caruso & Salovey (1998).

Daniel Goleman (1995) developed further the work of Mayer, and Salovey and in association with the Hay Group developed the following models of competencies. Personal competencies which determine how we manage we manage ourselves including self-awareness, emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, self-management, self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, achievement orientation and initiative. Social competencies are the competencies that determine how we handle relationships including social awareness, empathy, organizational awareness, self-orientation, social skills, developing others, leadership, communication, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds and teamwork and collaboration. He argues further that the traits are human qualities that every person has access to and it is merely a case of developing these skills to increase emotional intelligence. He came up with one hundred and thirty-seven item Emotional Quotient to measure the five dimensions of Emotional intelligence. In a world of work where people are increasingly accepted to be the competitive edge, any theory that seems to offer the possibility of enabling them to work together more co-operatively and productively is likely to raise a great deal of interest. Such was the case when the concept of emotional intelligence first came to public prominence in 1995. Higgs and Dulewicz (1999) identified seven elements of emotional intelligence broken down into three areas. Drivers, which include motivation and decisiveness, traits that energize people and drive them towards achieving goals. Constrainers: Conscientiousness, integrity and emotional resilience, factors that control and curb the excesses of the drivers. Enablers: Sensitivity, influence and self-awareness, traits that facilitate performance and help individuals to succeed.

Goleman (1999) on emotional intelligence in the workplace argues that emotionally intelligent managers are better able to resolve workplace conflict and are better negotiators and leaders. Emotional intelligence is also an effective way of identifying leadership potential because the qualities that constitute good leadership such as decisiveness, empowering others and openness to change all reflect aspects of emotional intelligence. Therefore, there are aspects of management, leadership and teamwork in which competencies owing their origin to emotional states are at least as important as technical abilities. Managing personal emotions and adapting them to circumstances and understanding others' emotions, is an important aspect of leadership and teamwork.

Emotional intelligence has become a vital part of how today's leaders meet the significant challenges they face. Emotional intelligence can help leaders in an ever more difficult leadership role. In the middle of the 'Talent War', especially at the highest level in organizations, emotional intelligence can give developing leaders a competitive edge. A certain level of emotional intelligence is necessary to learn the emotional competencies (Gowing, in Press). Emotional competencies are linked to and based on emotional intelligence.

2.2. Employee Engagement

Engagement is a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. Engagement has got three dimensions, the emotional engagement where one is emotionally involved

with one's work, cognitive engagement i.e., focusing on the job and physical engagement, being willing to go the extra mile (Lockwood, 2007).

Historically, religion has played a key role in providing a socially constructed frame of reference for people to attach meaning to the work they perform. Indeed, the role of religion in creating a nexus between work and society was of primary concern to Karl Marx who argued that religion had provided the ideological superstructure for capitalism (Livingstone and Fiorenza 1997). He argued that individuals sought self-determination, intentionality and creativity through praxis. The theme of Marx's view that individuals seek self-determination, intentionality and creativity through work has effectively been picked up by the humanistic psychology movement of the 20th Century. Starting with the Hawthorne experiments of the 1930's a string of theories purportedly demonstrated the individual's intrinsic needs for achievement were developed including Maslow's hierarchy of needs in 1970, McGregor's Theory Y of 1985, Herzberg's hygiene factors in 1968 and McClelland's needs-based theories of human motivation in 1987. These theories stressed management's role in fostering motivated employees and have had a pivotal influence in management's approach to employees as the search for high performance in business has historically been seen as a question of motivation Fox 2006 as cited by Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson (2008). Indeed, the high level of recent interest in employee engagement can be characterized as further evidence of management's preoccupation with understanding what drives employee motivation, involvement and engagement in workplace (Saks 2006).

Employee engagement is a relatively new term in HR literature that started to come to prominence from 2000 onwards. Melcrum Publishing (2005) found that from a global survey of over, 1,000 communication and HR practitioners 74% began to formally focus on the issue between 2000 and 2004. Employee engagement builds upon and goes further than commitment and motivation in the management literature (Woodruffe, 2006 as cited in CIPD, 2006a). According to Rafferty et al (2005) the concept of employee engagement has its foundation, on two well-researched precursors – employee commitment and organizational citizenship behavior.

According to Meere (2005) there are three levels of engagement: Engaged – employees who work with passions and feel a profound connection to their organization. They drive innovation and move the organization forward. Not engaged – employees who attend and participate at work but are timeserving and put no passion or energy into their work. Disengaged – employees who are unhappy at work and who act out their unhappiness at work. These employees undermine the work of their engaged colleagues on a daily basis. Therefore, the key elements that underpin a definition of employee engagement include drivers of engagement and outcomes (Robinson, 2004).

2.2.1. Models of Employee Engagement

The approach to employee engagement, discussed by Robinson et al (2004), stresses the importance of feeling valued and involved as a key driver of engagement. Within this umbrella of feeling valued and involved there are a number of elements that have a varying influence on the extent to which the employee will feel valued and involved and hence engaged. Robinson et al (2004) states that this can be a useful pointer to organizations towards those aspects of working life that require serious attention if engagement levels are to be maintained or improved.

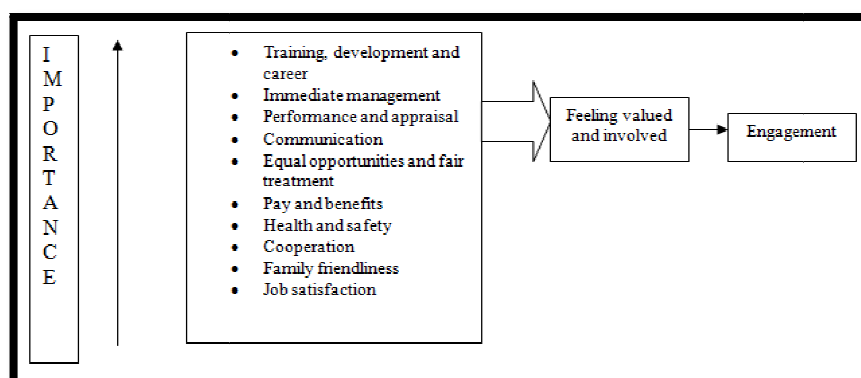


Figure 1: Model of the Drivers of Employee Engagement
Source: Adapted from Robinson Et Al (2004)

The importance of good management and effective communication has been highlighted as key vehicles through which employee engagement can be implemented. The organization must work to engage employees and establish a two-way relationship between the employer and employee. Michaelman (2004) notes that the defining contribution of great managers is that they boost the engagement levels of the people who work for them through selection, expectation setting, motivation and development. Great managers in leading engagement seek the right fit for a person's talent, they work to see that employees are rewarded for their performance and they endeavour to ensure that talent is developed through progressively more challenging and meaningful assignments.

Melcrum publishing (2005) report based on a global survey of over 1,000 multinationals concluded that from an organization's point of view it's the senior executives that set the tone of engagement in an organization. They identified the six top drivers of engagement from senior management perspective as communicating a clear vision of the future, building trust in the organization, involving employees in decision making that will affect them, demonstrating commitment to the organization's values, being seen to respond to feedback and demonstrating genuine commitment to

employee's wellbeing. Moorcroft (2006) came up with four key objectives of a communication strategy that would help create outcomes in support of organization's objectives as follows, helping employees develop a better understanding of how what they do related to the organization's vision, strategies and goals. Create a more dynamic and interactive communication environment that involves employees in thinking about and understanding how they can influence business results. Ensure employees are getting the information they need to help frame and guide their day-to-day decisions. Promote and recognize the desired behaviours and outcomes in communication. The CIPD model of employee engagement model brings various elements of employee engagement together, individual factors, aspects of working life, management, attitudes to work and outcomes for the organization.

The model emphasizes that there is a lot that senior managers and line managers can do to drive up engagement. Therefore, employee engagement has positive impact on organizational performance. If employees are not engagement with the overall strategies and objectives of an organization then their day-to-day activities will not be focused on achieving these objectives. Employee engagement then affects productivity and organizational performance, customer outcomes, employee retention, meaning at work, advocacy of the organization and organizational climate.

2.3. Research Design

The research design for this study was exploratory. The researcher carried out a survey and the responses generated both qualitative and quantitative data. According to Mugenda&Mugenda (1999) qualitative research is advantageous in that it permits research to go beyond the statistical results usually reported in quantitative research and it is best used to explain human behaviour. Quantitative research was chosen because it relies on confirming, proving or substantiating using measurements of the variables. Therefore, quantitative data was obtained from the Likert scale questions. Qualitative data resulted from the open-ended questions and observations. Using both qualitative and quantitative assisted the researcher to avoid bias.

2.4. Population & Sampling Frame

The study was carried out in public universities in Kenya. The target population was four out of the seven public universities. The four public universities were JKUAT, Kenyatta University, and University of Nairobi and Egerton University. There were approximately 1671 employees of JKUAT, 2306 employees at Kenyatta university and 4048 at university of Nairobi and 2664 staff members at Egerton university.

The researcher adopted stratified random sampling because the population of interest was not homogeneous it was heterogeneous. This enabled the target population to be divided into mutually exclusive sub-populations (strata). Then simple random sampling was used in each of the strata to ensure actual representation of the population. The universities have got four categories of staff, management, teaching staff, non-teaching staff and grades I-IV staff.

The main research tool was a structured questionnaire, which was preferred as it would provide a relatively simple and straightforward approach to the study. Therefore, data was collected using a questionnaire and observations were also be made from the existing policy documents. The questionnaire was appropriate to gather data from a large sample minimizing bias and saved on time where responses were within the given timeframe. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents because they were able to read and write. The questionnaire also ensured that there was no opportunity for bias as the questions and responses were presented on paper.

2.5. Pilot test

Validity and reliability evidence of the questionnaire was provided by a pilot test before the questionnaires were administered. The research instrument was pretested using a sample of 1.5% as per Mugenda&Mugenda (1999) that a successful pilot study would use 1% to 10% of the actual sample size. The respondents used for pretesting were similar to the sample under study using procedures similar to those of the actual study.

3. Data Processing and Analysis

Data was coded and entered during the month of February 2010. The data was organized and accounted for in terms of noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities.

The qualitative data was analyzed by first coding, categorizing into themes and analyzing using appropriate statistical tests for descriptive statistics and frequency distributions such as means, percentages, standard deviations and measures of central tendency. The relationship between the variables was expressed using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient.

4. Finding, Results and Conclusion

Emotional intelligence four domains of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and relationship management, were used per university. The drivers of employee engagement were measured. A factor analysis was also carried out. It is worth noting that different universities have different perceptions even though some are similar on the aspects. For instance, in establishing the effect of self-awareness and social awareness on employee engagement a comparison of the four public universities reveals different perceptions with some similarities.

Factor analysis was done to examine emotional intelligence. Normally for less than 30 variables with more than 250 cases, then variables explaining above 60% of the variability are retained and the others discarded. The extraction method used was Principal Component Analysis and the Rotation Method employed was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. The rotation converged in five iterations for EI with 9 variables remaining out of 16. Factor analysis for employee engagement resulted in two factors being extracted.

The results show a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement for all the Universities. The study did not explore the extent of the relationship.

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