

Career Advancement Influence on Employee Engagement

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ABSTRACT: Employee engagement is a critical part of job performance especially in the Non-Governmental organization (NGO) given its unique characteristics of short term employment. Further, the role of career advancement in the context of the NGO sector needed to be empirically ascertained in order to analyze the relationship between employee engagement and career advancement. The study sought to assess the influence of career advancement on employee engagement in NGO's operating in Meru County, Kenya. The study used descriptive research design and purposive sampling method to arrive at 172 respondents. Survey questionnaire instrument was used to collect data from the primary source and were analyzed using ANNOVA and Chi-Square test. The study revealed that 54% of variation on employee engagement is influenced by career advancement. Further, unit change in career advancement of an employee will increase employee engagement by the rate of 0.365. Even when career advancement opportunities are non-existent, employee engagement was still positive at 0.351. The finding of this study corroborates similar research work and places critical importance on employee career advancement and performance management especially in the context of NGOs given the dynamic nature of their work.

Key words: employee engagement, career advancement, employee commitment,

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I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Employee engagement is a major concern for firms and human resource management practitioners as it signifies the level of commitment and involvement of employees to their organizations. Engaged employees show higher levels of job satisfaction, dedicate more time and energy to call of duties as well as passion for the work they do. Research have shown that firms with higher employee engagement are more likely to have superior performance than those with low levels of employee engagement (Sundaray, 2011). Engaged employee display relatively higher affective and cognitive connection with their organization (McEwen, 2011). Further, engaged employees are less likely to exit their work, thus reducing firms turn over and procurement cost, besides ensuring firms` stability (Dulagil, A. 2012).

Gallup (2017) revealed that 87% of organizations worldwide do not have engaged employees. Most of the organizations with disengaged employees were in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Sub-Saharan Africa regions. The report also indicated that organizations with engaged employees had 17% higher productivity and 20% higher sales.

A study by Mokaya & Kipyegon (2014) showed strong positive correlation between organizational performance management and personal development and growth opportunities with coefficients of 0.733 and 0.596 respectively. Essentials for employees` engagement strategies included employee participation, career growth opportunities, employee empowerment, performance recognition and setting of realistic goals.

Career advancement is one key element of employee engagement in a workplace. In order to promote culture of engaged work force, firms initiate formal career plans, establish mentoring programmes, institute structures that support individual career advancement by pursuing continued professional studies. Studies have established that planned career programmes empower employees, reduce frustration at work, and improves competitive advantage of the firm as well as improving personal self-esteem. In addition, effective career plans reduces employee turnover, reduce operational costs and enhances degrees of equity and fairness especially to disadvantaged populations (Agochiya, 2011). Thus, employees who feel their future careers are assured tend to get engaged in the work, hence increasing labour productivity.

Career programmes are designed either from organizational or individual needs perspectives. Consideration of personal strength, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) conventionally addresses academic, professional and social competencies. Research have shown that besides the academic and professional advancement that promotes the culture of employee engagement, social capital also strengthens the employee engagement because of work environment (Goad, 2010). Tanuja (2012) added that social capital nurtures trust, shared knowledge, synergy and reciprocity. The net benefit of this capital is realization of an

enabling work environment that support and facilitate individual and group learning with a significant improvement in job performance.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Increasingly, organizations are using employee engagement as a promising strategy to increase retention and improve labour productivity. The median employee stay at one organization is about 4.2 years in the developed economies with slightly longer period for developing economies (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2018). Dale Carnegie (2012) findings stated that while there are many research studies that point to the percentage of engaged and disengaged employees, few studies have considered what really drives employee engagement especially in NGOs. The role of career advancement in this sector and its relationship with employee engagement has not received fair prominences in the broader employee engagement studies.

In Kenya, Non-governmental organizations employs a significant population of Kenyan workers across varied genders, age brackets and professional cadres(NGO Coordination Board, 2017). Unlike other sectors of economy, research about employee engagement is remarkably undeveloped in the Non-governmental Organizations. On the contrary, employee engagement is considered one of the most powerful measures of a company's vigor towards competitive advantage and high performance. The study hence aimed to investigate the influence of career advancement practices on employee engagement in Nongovernmental organizations operating in Meru County, Kenya.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- a) To assess the influence of career advancement on employee engagement in Non-governmental Organizations operating in Meru County, Kenya

1.4 Research Hypothesis

- a) H_02 : There is no significant influence of career advancement on employee engagement in Non-governmental Organizations operating in Meru County, Kenya

II. THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Andrews Brown Engagement Pyramid Model

Andrews Brown Engagement Pyramid Model viewed engagement as a progressive combination of satisfaction, motivation, commitment and advocacy resulting from employees' movement up the engagement pyramid. Satisfaction is at the lowest level and is the most passive of measure of engagement. This is what make employees to just show up for work (Abbas, *et al*, 2014). It is the base level of employee contentment and includes factors such as: whether or not employees can do their job; how happy they are with their pay; and how they like their working environment. A motivated worker on the other hand will go the extra mile in the performance of their work. As the employees progresses up the ladder they attain commitment (Rana et al, 2014). While motivation works at an individual level, committed workers become positive ambassadors to their companies.

At Advocacy level employees are proactive in speaking about the company they work for and products and services the organization offers. A company that attains advocacy reaps the rewards in both sales and recruitment since it enjoys free advertising from the most credible of sources. Finally, engagement is the combination of all the preceding factors. An engaged worker is satisfied, motivated, committed and is an advocate for their organization(Paradise, 2008). The Andrew Brown Model provides research basis for interrogating levels of employee engagement and relates it to the study under investigation regarding the role of career advancement in the NGO sector in Kenya.

2.2. Empirical Literature Review

Career advancement opportunities in a workplace is a key motivator as it enhances personal and co-workers productivity (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2011). According to Hoxsey (2010), job satisfaction and promotion of talent are strongly related. It is evident that supportive relationships enable employees to learn from each other and help them in developing their career. According to Mohamad and Abdul (2014), both organization career management and individual career management are important to career success, since they support the ability of employees to achieve career advancement whether to progress in one organization or to move across organizations.

Employees who are career focused might develop strong involvement with the organization and would probably increase their desire to remain in the organization if the organization is also paying attention to employees' career development. Khalid et al (2015) concluded that employees are career conscious and they demand growth and development at their job. They asserted that organizations who fail to fulfill

employee's career needs can lose valued employees and customers as well. According to (Bambacus, 2010) commitment became higher when continuous learning opportunities were provided for related career development activities resulting to positive outcomes on success of one's career which eventually helps the employee to be more engaged.

Conventionally, opportunity for career development and progression is a key organizational driver of employee attraction and engagement. Generally, employees recognize the important relationship between organizational commitment, employee engagement and career satisfaction. In South Africa, research has shown that organizational support and growth opportunities were in deed the best predictors of employee engagement (Rothmann&Rothmann, 2010). Further, leading-edge career program to establish the organization firmly as an innovative leader committed to building employee capacity and enhancing employee engagement is vital. Thus, focusing on career development as a means of building employee capacity and enhancing employee engagement is an important practice.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study applied descriptive survey design as recommended by Mugenda&Mugenda (2003) targeting employees in 26 non-governmental organizations operating in Meru County.

Purposive sampling technique as proposed by (Saunders, 2009) and (Bryman, & Bell, 2007) was used to select 172 respondents drawn from the target population samples who had worked in their respective organizations for at least 3 years. The demographics of gender, age, grade of the staff and locale were also duly considered.

Structured questionnaires instrument with both close and open ended questions were employed in order to benefit from the precision and uncontrolled free opinion of the target respondents as recommended by (Kasomo, 2006). Pilot study was conducted with NGO workers in Meru County who were not part of the identified NGOs for the research. Validity and reliability tests were also conducted and ascertained.

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data and generate both descriptive and inferential statistics. SPSS was also used in generating tables, pie charts and graphs. A multiple regression model was developed and used to analyze the effect of career advancement on employee engagement as shown in the regression equation,

$$Y = \alpha_i + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \dots$$

Where Y = Employee Engagement,

α_i = Intercept

β_1 = Slopes coefficients representing the influence of the associated independent variables over the dependent one.

X_{1i} = Career advancement opportunities

β_{2i} = Regression coefficient of career advancement

ϵ_i = Error term

However, only career advancement opportunities was selected for publication.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Career development opportunities are an essential part of employee engagement and closely associated with employee retention and hence boost productivity. Different career advancement elements such as personal, professional and financial growth, as well as higher responsibilities and autonomy are perceived differently as indicators of career advancement in relation to the number of years the respondents had worked in the same position. From the findings it was concluded that respondents who had worked for less years see opportunities for professional growth, higher responsibility and personal growth compared to those who had worked for longer period in the same position as evidenced in table 1.

Table 1. Association of period worked and indicators of career advancement

Time Worked in Current Position	Indicators of Career Advancement						Total
	Personal Growth	Professional Growth	Financial Growth	Higher Responsibilities	Autonomy		
Up to 2 years	9	22	7	11	0	49	
3-4 years	12	28	9	4	0	53	
5-6 years	0	3	2	2	1	8	

	2	3	1	3	1	10
	2	1	0	1	0	4
Total	25	57	19	21	2	124

Statistically, the association between time worked in the current position and elements perceived as an indicator of career advancement was significant at 95% confidence level ($P < 0.001$, $\alpha = 0.05$).

Besides, there are different ways in providing employees career growth opportunities which are not necessarily climbing up the organization hierarchical ladder. The study established that gaining experience in a range of tasks (50.8%), secondment (17.7%), acting in higher positions (16.1%), gaining experience in a specific task (13.7%) and special projects (1.6%) as importance of career advancement factors. These findings concurred with that of (Bambacus, 2011) where continuous learning opportunities provided for related career development activities resulting to positive outcomes on success of one's career advancement.

Professional qualifications are considered important for career advancement. Ironically, 54% of the respondent indicated lack of necessary qualifications in applying for higher positions as insignificant. Equally, 71% of the respondents opined that desire to take on additional responsibilities was not significant. Thus, lack of desire to take on additional responsibilities do not affect application for jobs for higher positions. This concurs with Kruse (2012) that employees not only work for getting promotions but also use discretionary efforts to achieve the organizational goals and hence can take additional responsibilities without necessarily seeking promotion.

The study showed that majority of the employees (77.4%) do not consider lack of confidence as significant in applying for higher positions. Equally, significant number of employees (69.4%) do not desire to relocate to another area in order to take up a higher level position. Most of the employees (88%) also do not prefer remaining in current job position in order to climb up the career ladder, thus corroborating with Khalid et al, (2015) who established that employees are more career conscious and they demand growth and development in their job.

Employee retention is beneficial for the organization as well as the employee career advancement. However, the study revealed different factors that contribute to employees' exit from organization with regard to career advancement. These are lack of opportunities to advance (41.1%), unfair promotional systems (11.3%), lack of internal career guidance (4.0%), not certain what the future holds (26.6%) and lack of management support in career growth (16.9%).

The study further adduced that challenging, stimulating and rewarding work (34.7%) and supervisors' keen interest in employees' professional development (28.2%) was found to be significantly contributing to engagement employees. This finding was also corroborated by (Shuck, *et al*, 2011) who stated that employees who perceive a work task as a challenge rather than a hindrance are more likely to be engaged.

4.1 Hypothesis Test

H₀2: There is no significant influence of career advancement on employee engagement in NGO's operating in Meru County, Kenya.

Given the resulting χ^2 at ($p = 0.000$, $\alpha = 0.05$), we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that career advancement influences employee engagement.

Further, the regression analysis shows a strong positive relationship $r = 0.735$ and $r^2 = 0.540$ which shows that 54% of variation on employee engagement is influenced by career advancement. This agrees with the findings of Mokaya and Kipyegon (2014) where they found that an increase in personal development and growth by one unit would increase employee engagement by 0.344.

The model described as $Y = .351 + .055 * X_2$, meant that a unit change in career advancement will increase employee engagement by the rate of 0.365. Even when career advancement opportunities are non-existence, employee engagement is still positive at 0.351

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggests that career advancement is one significant area an employer should give attention to when creating an environment in which the employees can become engaged. Personal growth, professional growth, financial growth, higher responsibilities and autonomy are perceived differently as indicators of career advancement in relation to the number of years one had worked in the same position. Employees who had worked for a shorter period perceived opportunities for professional growth, higher responsibility and personal growth as career advancement while those who had worked for longer period in the same position perceived higher responsibilities and autonomy as indicators of career advancement.

Career development opportunities are an essential part of employee engagement and closely associated with helping the employees stick with the organization and boost performance. Achieving performance targets is one of parameters of assessing performance. The researcher recommends employers and employees to be actively involved in setting performance targets where not only the employees are held accountable for achieving goals and meeting expectations, but performance is effectively addressed throughout the organization. Further, based on the research findings the employers in NGO sectors needed to link career advancement, employee engagement and employee performance as a measure of sustainable motivations.

5.1 Recommendations for further studies

The study revealed that employees saw their current position as a training ground for the next career move in their organizations. However, the study also found out that lack of career advancement contributed to the highest number of employees to exit the organization which is a contradiction. The researcher therefore recommends further studies to find out the influence of career advancement opportunities on employee turnover to unearth this contradiction.

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