



Original Research Article

The effects of transformational leadership on employee engagement: A survey of civil service in Kenya

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This study aimed at establishing the effects of transformational leadership; a leadership approach believed to cause changes in individuals and organizations, on employee engagement. The emphasis was on the influence of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration of supervisors in the civil service in Kenya on engagement of subordinates to the organizations. A survey data collected from 252 civil servants from 18 top performing state corporations was used to explore the existing relationships. Stratified random sampling was employed to select the respondents for the study. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaire and data analyzed with the help of the SPSS version 22. The findings revealed that transformational leadership though positively related to employee engagement in general; the leader behaviors of intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration of supervisor were found to be positive and moderately related to employee engagement. Supervisors' inspirational motivation of leader was weak and insignificant while idealized influence was negatively related to employee engagement. The researchers thus recommends that HR managers should develop training programs for leaders in civil service around transformational leadership with emphasis on inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized concern if these leaders are to influence their subordinates' engagement to their organizations.

Key words: Transformational leadership, employee engagement, civil service

INTRODUCTION

The concept of employee engagement is an important issue in the civil service. Civil service refers to those branches of government that are not legislative, judicial or military and not only form the largest percentage of workforce in any economy, but are also usually charged with the responsibility of offering services for the benefit of the public. Employee engagement has generated a great deal of interest in recent years as a widely used term in organizations and consulting firms (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Much evidence points to the fact that there is a direct linkage between employee engagement and profitability (Czarnowsky, 2008) and thus organizational performance. Employee engagement has been characterized as a distinct and unique construct that

consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components associated with individual role performance (Saks, 2006). Engaged employees often display a deep, positive emotional connection with their work and are likely to display attentiveness and mental absorption in their work (Saks, 2006).

While this is the scenario, the meaning of employee engagement has remained ambiguous to most academic researchers and practitioners who use it in conversations with clients. The term is used at different times to refer to psychological states, traits and behaviors as well as their antecedents and outcomes of such traits (Macey and Schneider, 2008). While Employee engagement is defined in many ways the following definitions will be preferred;

Engagement is the willingness and ability to contribute to company success; the extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work, in the form of extra time, brainpower and energy (Towers Perrin, 2003).

In today's world, employee engagement remains the ultimate prize for employers at a time when virtually every organization is struggling with cut-backs and financial pressure - trying to improve performance with fewer employees and dollars. This is because there are clear links between levels of employee engagement and organizational performance. While some studies reveal that pay and benefits play an important role in attracting and retaining employees (Towers & Perrin, 2003), such are also known to play a less important role in employee engagement. What are believed to influence employee engagement are factors like strong leadership, accountability, autonomy, sense of control and opportunities for development (Towers and Perrin, 2003). Meyer and Allen (2006) found that leadership can be used as an antecedent for organizational commitment. Leadership is regarded as a critical factor in the initiation and implementation of transformations in organizations. The role that every manager must fill in the workplace is thus leadership. Managers often make the assumption that being managers, they are also leaders and that their subordinates' will automatically follow them (Hall, Guirdy, Mckyer, Outley and Ballard, 2008). This is not always the case and thus organizations need transformational leadership if their subordinates' are to be engaged and hence achieve set objectives.

Transformation is defined as a leadership behavior that transforms the norms and values of employees, whereby the leader motivates the workers to perform beyond their expectations (Yukl, 1989). This leadership focuses on the enhancement of followers' involvement with the goals of the organization (Bass, 1994) leading to employee engagement in the long run. A central aspect of transformational leadership style is the need for change for the benefit of both the individual and organizations they lead. As promoters of change such leaders will influence their subordinates' to follow in their direction. Transformational leadership acts as a bridge between leaders and followers to develop clear understanding of followers' interest, values and motivational levels (Bass, 1994). It basically helps followers to achieve their goals working in the organizational setting and encourage followers to be expressive and adoptive to new and improved practices and changes in the environment (Bycio et al., 1978 as cited in Ghafoor, 2011).

Although most researches have explored the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance (Howell and Avolio, 1993; Pillai and Williams, 2004), few studies have been done on the effects of this leadership style on employee engagement. This is important since despite leadership being important in steering organizations to success, leadership is not complete without followership, and leaders are thus expected to influence followers if they are to achieve organizational objectives (Cropanzo and Mitchel, 2005).

The said followers need to be highly committed in their jobs and engaged to their organizations if the stated goals are to be achieved.

In Kenyan public service, transformative leadership has been fronted and is daunted with the implementation of public policies, projects and programs. This leadership style is believed to have enhanced public service performance as reflected in the rise in GDP from 1.7 after the post-election skirmishes in 2007/2008 to 2.8 percent and then 5.6 percent by 2011 (Government of Kenya, 2013) and further achieve the set vision 2030 for industrialization. Despite the improved public service performance in the listed firms, the question as to whether transformational leadership has influenced employee engagement in the public service remains unanswered. The general objective of this study was thus to establish the effect of transformational leadership style of supervisors in the civil service in Kenya on their employees' engagement levels. Specifically the study explored employees' perception of the idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration of their immediate supervisor and its influence on employee engagement in the public service in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

Relationship between leadership behaviors and employee engagement

Bass (1985) depicted transformational leaders as having four distinct factors; charisma (idealized influence), inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation known as the four I's of transformational leader. Idealized influence refers to behaviors like showing that benefits of the group are more important to leader than benefits of the individual. The leader demonstrates high ethical norms and becomes a role model for the subordinates (Bono and Judge, 2004). Both idealized influence and inspirational motivation of leader (together called charisma) have a positive influence on their followers and can change the self-focus of employees from negative to a positive focus (Lievens et al., 1997). The result is that subordinates become more involved (engaged) with the vision of the leader and are willing to make more sacrifices for that vision (House and Howell, 1992) leading to achievement of organizational goals.

Inspirational motivation is related to idealized influence but while charisma is held to motivate individuals, inspirational motivation is about motivating employees within the entire organization. Transformational leaders displaying inspirational motivation encourage their followers to become part of the overall organizational culture and environment (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2003). Leaders with inspirational motivation challenge followers with high standards and provide meaning into their tasks. This might be achieved through motivational speeches and conversations and other public displays of optimism and enthusiasm, highlighting positive outcomes,

and stimulating teamwork (Simic, 1998). The followers are willing to invest more effort in their tasks, feel encouraged and optimistic about the future and believe in their abilities.

Inspirational motivation thus focuses on communication of an appealing vision of the future and the use of symbols to articulate this vision (den Hartog and Muijen, 1997). In other words the supervisor is optimistic and enthusiastic about the future (Bono and Judge, 2004) thus influencing their subordinates' commitment to the organization.

Intellectual stimulation involves arousing and challenging followers' awareness of problems and their capacity to solve those problems (Bono and Judge, 2004). The leaders question assumptions and beliefs of followers and encourage them to be innovative and creative, thus approaching old problems in new ways (Barbuto, 2005). The leader empowers followers by persuading them to propose new and controversial ideas without fear of punishment or ridicule (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2003). They impose their own ideas judiciously and certainly not at any cost (Simic, 2003). This encourages follower initiative and independence in handling issues. The supervisor challenge to the subordinates to see problems from a different perspectives, make such workers active thinkers within the organization and consequently employees become more involved in their organization. Through intellectual Stimulation, the leader challenges assumptions and takes risks to solicit followers' ideas (Stone, Russel and Patterson, 2003). Leaders with this style may stimulate and encourage creativity in their followers leading to higher engagement levels.

In individualized consideration, the leader responds to the specific, unique needs of followers to ensure they are included in the transformation process of the organization (Simic, 1998). People are treated individually and differently on the basis of their talents and knowledge (Shin and Zhou, 2003) and with the intention of allowing them to reach higher levels of achievement that might otherwise have not been achieved (Chekwa, 2001; Stone, Russell and Patterson, 2003). Individualized influence of supervisor may take the form of personal expressing words of thanks or praise to subordinate, fair workload distributions, and individualized career counseling, mentoring and professional development activities. Besides having an overarching view of the organization, the transformational leader must also comprehend those things that motivate followers individually (Simic, 2003) thus leading to individual engagement to their organizations. Here the supervisor acknowledges followers' feelings and emotions and their need to grow and develop themselves (den Hartog et al., 1997). In this leader behavior, employees are seen as unique individuals who need specific individual attention that is congruent with the developmental phase they are in (Avolio and Bass, 1995). The leader may also respect and celebrate individual contribution that each follower can make to the team. These followers have a will have aspirations for self - development and have intrinsic motivation for their tasks. Individualized consideration therefore is the degree to which the leader attends to each

follower's needs, acts as their mentor or coach and listens to his or her concerns and needs.

Together, the four main dimensions of transformational leadership are interdependent that is they must co-exist and they are held to have an additive effect that yields performance of follower beyond expectations (Hall, Johnson, Wysocki and Kepner, 2002). Transformational leaders ultimately not only encourage their employee's performance but also make the employees to have an interest in work and the organizations they work for.

Zhang (2010) conducted a study on the relationship between perceived leadership style and employee engagement among 439 sales assistants in Sidney Australia. The results showed that employee engagement is associated with an employees' perception of leadership style in his or her direct supervisor, negatively when classical or transactional leadership styles are perceived and positively in the case of visionary or organic leadership. Moreover three employee characteristics moderated the relationship between the perceived leadership style and employee engagement in different ways. Chung-Fang & Yi Ying (2012) also conducted a study on Taiwanese hotel industry and found that the leaders in this industry exercised transformational leadership with employees believing that their managers emphasized high quality performance.

Research hypothesis

H1: Employee perception of idealized influence of his or her supervisor is positively related to engagement.

H2: Employee perception of inspirational motivation of his or her direct supervisor is positively related to engagement.

H3: Employee perception of intellectual stimulation in his or her direct supervisor leads to engagement.

H4: Employee perception of individualized concern of his or her direct supervisor is positively related to his /her engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Integrating the literature review and hypotheses described earlier, this study proposed a research model of transformational leadership attributes as independent variables and employee engagement as dependent variable. The framework hypothesized that all the four leadership attributes; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration are positively related to employee engagement. The study adopted a descriptive research design which is known to describe phenomena by measuring the relationships using correlations and regression analyses to validate the findings (Durrheim, 2002). The study was also cross-sectional in nature. Cross-sectional surveys are studies that yield data that can be modeled by regression analysis (Jones and Moon, 1987).

The target population was 4000 civil servants working in

Table 1 Cronbach's Alpha for study variables

Item alpha	C's Alpha based on standardized items	No. of items	Comments
Transformational leadership	.821	16	Accepted
Employee engagement	.795	13	Accepted

eighteen top performing state corporations drawn from a list on the 2010 / 2011 performance contracting results (Report on Evaluation of performance of Public Agencies for financial year 2010 / 2011). A sample of 364 respondents was drawn using Watson (2001) sample size table at 95% confidence level. The sample was stratified based on organizations within the 3 major cities of Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu and the environs.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data. According to Cohen (1989) a questionnaire is a self-report instrument used for gathering information about variables of interest to an investigation. The questionnaire being the main tool was preferred for its advantages in permitting respondents a greater depth of response, time to verify answers, anonymity and as economical in terms of time and money.

The questions on transformational leadership were adopted from Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire – MLQ (Bass and Avolio, 1995) comprising 16 items on the four attributes of transformational leader with few modifications to suit the study. The MLQ has been found to be very reliable (Howell & Higgins, 1990) as a self – report of transformational leadership attributes. Hegers' (2007) research instrument measuring employee engagement using three distinct components, of what employees say, how they strive and their duration of stay was used. Based on the foregoing discussion, all items for independent and dependent variables were measured on a five-point likert - scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). A five point scale was considered appropriate for this study to reduce confusion and help respondents to maintain consistency in their ratings.

The participating organizations were approached through a consent letter to the organizations management. A senior manager such as regional head or departmental manager was approached to randomly select the participants for data collection according to the categories identified earlier in the sample size. The senior manager was deemed the best as they had control and authority of subordinates and would lead to the desired respondents. The researcher employed the help of two research assistants to administer the questionnaire to respondents in identified organizations within the three Kenyan cities where the respondents did reside and work. The entire instrument was administered to the respondents following a brief set of instructions. Subjects were asked to grant informed consent and indicate if they wished for more information. Participation was however on voluntary basis and respondents were allowed a 2 day period to complete the instrument and return it to senior manager for

collection. Those not having completed were reminded and given one more day upon which the rest were treated as non-response rates. Data processing and analysis comprise categorizing, manipulation and summarizing of data in order to obtain answers to research objectives (Kothari, 2004). Data preparation was done on completed questionnaires by editing and then coding and then entered into the latest version of SPSS (Version 22) for analysis. Data analysis entailed reliability testing, variable descriptions and regression analysis to determine the influence of the leader behaviors on employee engagement.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability analysis

Reliability of an instrument refers to its ability to produce consistent and stable measures. A reliable measurement will consistently assign the same score to the same phenomena. According to Creswell (2008) reliability refers to stability or consistency of measurements; that is whether or not the same results would be achieved if the test or measure was applied repeatedly. The most common reliability coefficient is the Cronbach's alpha, which estimates internal consistency based on the average inter - item correlation. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient normally ranges between 0 and 1. The closer the value is to 1, the greater the internal consistency of the items (variables) in the scale. The questionnaire employed for this study measured the constructs; transformational leadership and employee engagement. Transformational leadership was measured using 16 questions and the scale had a high internal consistency as determined by Cronbach's alpha value of 0.72 while the second construct employee engagement had 13 items in the scale, also revealed a high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.79. The findings are presented in Table 1

Respondent analysis

The questionnaire for this study was distributed between February and April 20th 2013. The study targeted 364 employees and management from eighteen institutions in the civil service in Kenya who had been in their organizations for at least three years. Out of the 364 questionnaires issued for data collection to the respondents, a total of 265 questionnaires accounting for 73% were returned. After cleaning of data, the researcher

Table 2. Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19.607	4	29.495	.000 ^b
	Residual	41.048	247		
	Total	60.655	251		

Table 3. Regression coefficients for transformational leadership on employee engagement

Model	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)		7.076	.000
II	-.119	-2.022	.044
IM	.020	.315	.753
IS	.309	5.001	.000
IC	.380	5.955	.000

used 252 completed questionnaires (69.2%) which were found valid for analysis. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) over 50% response rate is adequate for analysis while over 70% is rated as very good. The response rate was thus rated as very good and deemed suitable for analysis.

The analysis on demographic data indicated that there were more male employees (55.6%) than females responded. Of the largest age – group was 25 - 29 years accounting for 24.6% of the total. Majority of respondents were in non managerial category (50.4%) and had worked in the organization for between 3 – 5 years, finally the majority of departments had between 10 and 20 members accounting for 50.4%.

Variable descriptions

From the findings of descriptive analyses presented, employees perception of transformational leadership mean was ($M = 4.18$), ranging between agree and strongly agree in the likert – scale. This implies that employees in the public service in Kenya acknowledged the existence of transformational leadership attributes in their direct supervisors. They agreed that their supervisors displayed all the four transformational leadership attributes of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized concern ($M = 4.17$; 4.29; 4.03 and 3.88 respectively). The highest mean was for inspirational motivation ($M = 4.29$); this shows that their direct supervisors displayed more of inspirational values such as enthusiasm about tasks to be performed, expressed confidence that goals would be achieved and articulated a compelling vision about the future. On the contrary, idealized influence of supervisor had the highest standard deviation ($SD = 7.61$). We can infer therefore that managers in the state corporations under study exercised transformational leadership. This finding is supported by Chung-Fang & Yi Ying (2012) who employees in Taiwanese Hotel industry believed that the leaders exercised

transformational.

Regression of transformational leadership behaviors on employee engagement

The transformational leadership attributes of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and idealized concern were regressed on employee engagement to predict their effect on the engagement of civil servants in Kenya. The results of the findings are presented in the Tables 3 . From the findings above $R = 0.57$ and $R - square = 0.32$. This shows that there is a moderate but positive correlation between transformational leadership and employee engagement. R^2 of 0.32 indicates that 32 % of variation in employee engagement in the public service in Kenya is explained by transformational leadership of their immediate supervisor. Specifically the supervisor attributes of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration accounts for 32% of employee engagement in the public service in Kenya.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results shows the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement is significant $F = 29.495$, $p = 0.000$ as presented in the Table 2. The findings imply that the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement is significant and not by chance. The regression coefficients table in Table 3 summarizes the regression equation. The B column gives the values of the regression equation, that is the constant and the coefficient values. This gives the value of the dependent variable employee engagement when the values of the independent variables (attributes of transformational leader) equals zero.

$$\text{That is } Y \text{ predicted} = \beta_0 + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + B_3X_3 + B_4X_4$$

$$\text{Employee engagement} = 1.767 - 0.053 + 0.02 + 0.252 + 0.336 = 2.322$$

This study thus predicts that when transformational leadership in the public service in Kenya is at zero

(missing), then employee engagement will be at only 23%.

From the regression coefficients Table 3, the standardized coefficients column Beta, indicate the extent to which transformational leadership attributes of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized concern of supervisor contribute to employee engagement in the civil service in Kenya. These standardized coefficients Beta values are the estimates resulting from analysis performed on variables that have been standardized so that they have a variance of 1 which is usually done with an aim of answering the question, which of the independent variables has a greater effect on the dependent variable in a regression equation? (Schroeder et al, 1986)

As can be seen from the table, the Beta value for idealized influence is -0.119. This shows that idealized influence of supervisor is negatively related to employee engagement. The study shows that a unit increase in idealized influence of supervisor will lead to a decrease of -0.119 in employee engagement. The relationship is however statistically significant ($T = -2.022$, $p = 0.04$). This finding further confirms the correlation analysis which indicated that employee perception of idealized influence of supervisor in the public service in Kenya though negatively related to employee engagement and is however statistically significant. The alternative hypothesis 1 thus not supported.

The other three transformational leadership attributes of; inspirational motivation (Beta = .020), intellectual stimulation (Beta = .309) and individualized concern (Beta = .380) imply that all the three attributes of supervisor in the civil service in Kenya are positively related to employee engagement. In regards to their statistical significance, inspirational motivation is not significant ($t = 0.32$, $p = 0.75$). However, both intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration of supervisor in the public service in Kenya are significant ($t = 5.0$, $p = 0.000$ and $t = 6.0$, $p = 0.000$ respectively).

The study confirms that both intellectual stimulation of supervisor (31%) and individualized concern (38%) of the supervisor contribute moderately to employee engagement in the public service in Kenya and are statistically significant. (The relationship here is up to 99%, not by chance). However while both intellectual stimulation and individualized concern are significant contributors to employee engagement, inspirational motivation only contributes 2% to employee engagement and is not significant ($t = 0.32$, $p > 0.05$). Idealized influence of supervisor is found to be negatively related to employee engagement is not significant ($t = -2.0$, $p = 0.04$). The regression analysis supports the earlier correlation analysis.

Regarding the effects of transformational leadership variables regressed on employee engagement as the dependent variable. The ANOVA findings reveal $R = .569$ and R^2 is 0.323. The findings indicate a moderate but positive relationship between transformational leadership of supervisor and employee engagement in the public

sector in Kenya. This shows that 32.4% of the variance in employee engagement is explained by transformational leadership. This relationship is further confirmed as highly significant ($F = 29.45$, $P = .000$). From these results we can deduce that transformational leadership positively influences employee engagement, thus an increase in transformational attribute of supervisor will lead to an increase in employee engagement. This finding is supported by Carlson and Perrew (1995) who observed that major changes in organizational mission strategies and level of follower commitment are likely to emerge as a result of transformational leadership. Hon and Lu (2010) also found that the relationship between management and employees positively affect their commitment to continue working for their organizations and will change employee work performance for the better. Meyer and Allen (2006) also confirm that leadership can be used as an antecedent for organizational commitment.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study tested the effect of transformational leadership on employee engagement. Transformational leadership was found to be positively related to employee engagement, with greater displays of transformational leadership by managers in civil service leading to higher levels of engagement by their employees. Three leader attributes of inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized concern are found to be positively related to employee engagement and are significant. This implies that an increase in each of this transformational attributes in managers in civil service will lead to improved levels of employee engagement in organizations which is good for achieving organizational goals. Idealized influence of supervisor was however negatively related showing that an increase in this leader behavior will lead to a decrease in employee engagement to their organizations. This factor though not the subject of this study, may be due to the influence of suppression by transformational leadership possibly due to the fact that employees may not perceive their supervisors as instilling pride in them by being associated with them or making personal sacrifices for the benefit of others.

Based on the findings the study the researchers recommend that Human resource departments should develop training programs that improve transformational leader behaviors of the civil service managers if they are to improve engagement of their subordinates. This may areas such as leaders articulating compelling vision about their organizations future, expressing confidence that set goals will be achieved, looking at issues from differing angles and seeks different opinions when solving problems as well as acting as role model and spending time coaching and teaching employees if they are to achieve higher engagement levels of their subordinates. The HR professionals may also ensure these behaviors in civil

service during recruitment and selection of such managers, training and development as well as rewarding those already displaying the same to have a broad spectrum of and retain leaders displaying transformational attributes.

The study focused on the effects of transformational leadership on employee engagement in the public service in Kenya with special interest on the four transformational behavior of supervisor and their influence on employee engagement. There is however still need for future researchers to focus on specific areas of employee engagement influenced by transformational leadership and their relevance to organizational performance. Future researchers may also be interested in establishing why idealized influence of supervisor was found to be negatively related to employee engagement and what can be done to counter this effect.

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