

# IDEALIZED INFLUENCE ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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**Abstract:** The main objective of this study was to find out how idealized influence affect employee engagement in Public Universities in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This study sampled 20 Chairpersons of Departments, 5 Registrars of Academic Affairs, 5 Deans of Students, 5 Quality assurance officers and 313 Lecturers. A total sample of 348 respondents were drawn using stratified random sampling techniques from a target population 5 out of the 31 public university that included; University of Nairobi, Moi University, Egerton University, Kenyatta University and Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. Data was collected using questionnaires and document analysis. Data was analyzed quantitatively by use of mean and standard deviations and qualitatively by regression, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and trend analysis. The results were presented in form of frequency tables. The results indicate that there is a relatively strong but significantly positive association between idealized influence and employee engagement ( $R=.548$ ). The coefficient of determination  $R^2=.301$  implies that idealized influence explains 30.1% of the variation in employee engagement.

**Keywords:** Employee Engagement, Public Universities, Idealized Influence.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays an important role in the engagement of employees. Leadership may be defined as influencing people and other resources to achieve meaningful results. Employee engagement is a key business driver for organizational success. Personal engagement is the harnessing of organization member selves in their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances (Schmitt, Den Hartog & Belschak 2016). Organizational performance is critical to an organization's survival and overtime provides the test to successful leadership. Irrespective of the industry or sector, performance is central to organizational leadership with each leader striving to ensure that the organization they lead records the best performance (Udoh & Agu, 2012).

According to Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson (2016) leaders who are not getting results are not truly leading or, more specifically, leaders who are not getting desired results aren't truly leading. Leaders must learn to understand and focus on desired results. Reed (2015) indicate that leaders deemed effective in program implementation extend themselves to help employees, offer constructive criticism, and explain reasons for suggesting behavior changes.

A study of Australian manufacturing firms by Department of Industry, Innovation and Science (DIISR) (Green *et. al.*, 2011) found that Australian firms lag behind their international counterparts on human capital management practices. Out of 16 countries, Australia comes in number eight, behind the United States of America, Canada, Germany, Japan, Poland, Great Britain and Sweden. A focus on continually up-skilling workers is important to lift firm performance and address workplace challenges, such as those outlined above, and undoubtedly training will continue to be a critical policy lever going forth. However, the training and education reform agenda is not necessarily the lone solution to lifting workplace performance.

Research by Felstead *et. al.*, (2015) in the 2006 UK Skills Survey similarly found that opportunities for the use of abilities (skills utilisation) and opportunities to use initiative were of central importance to UK employees and ranked higher than good pay, yet these priorities were not being met by employers. This lack of full use of existing skills is partly due to a failure of workplace leaders to effectively engage their employees. This realization that people are not always given the opportunity to contribute to their full potential at work may well be the biggest skills and productivity crisis faced today. Evidence, such as that outlined above, indicates that a market failure exists and that Australian work system designs and management practices are in need of reform.

Studies have noted that there is an impending social change leadership challenge; with respect to organizations, initiatives and movements working either internationally or domestically on community development, social innovation, sustainability or otherwise working to strengthen social or environmental systems (Senge, Hamilton & Kania, 2015). Responding to this, leadership development programs have been rapidly sprouting up across Canada, and beyond, focused on mobilizing community, developing and influencing commerce or public policy, or effecting behaviour or culture change (Leadership Learning Community, 2015; Henein & Morrisette, 2007; Stauch & Cornelisse, 2016). While “leadership development” has an extensive history with regards to business or government, the last decade has witnessed a massive increase in the number of programs focused on strengthening civil society and the social economy. These organizations and initiatives are experimenting with new ways of teaching and applying leadership while attempting to address complex local, national or global challenges.

Bukachi (2009) notes that although leadership has been practiced for long in Kenya, tendencies towards transformational leadership are now high in both public and private organizations. Transformative leadership has been daunted with the task of enhancing goal attainment in the re-engineering of the public sector drawing on the NPM. Although transformational leadership has been found to relate to organizational outcomes, past research has been predominantly on overall transformational leadership rather than its dimensions (Saboe, Taing, Way & Johnson, 2015) and there is lack of understanding on the mediators through which transformational leadership relates to these outcomes (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013).

Ndisya and Juma (2016) analyzed the utilization of aspects of transformational leadership at Safaricom. The study utilized questionnaire that was structured and 109 respondents were sampled using proportionate stratified sampling technique. The investigation found a positive connection between inspiration motivation and performance of staff. Participants generally concurred with the presence of inspiration to achieve organization objectives and goals, uphold for building of teams, leaders show of the roles the staff ought to do, and helping representatives discover importance in their work. This implies the adjustments in the moving inspiration had critical changes in performance of staff with the end goal that when rousing inspiration expands, there would be a comparative increment in performance of staff. The examination suggested that there is need on the organizational leadership to develop its representatives' reaction to improve administration to the organization. Likewise, there ought to be further study because of transformational leadership on financial performance on other communication service organizations, government and private area.

Public universities face challenges that can be grouped into three categories namely; the sustainable challenge, the global challenge and the technology challenge. Human resource has become one of the most important resources for public universities as they rely on skilled and non-skilled workforce to be productive, creative and innovative and to provide high-quality customer service to deal with the three challenges. However, the work is demanding and there is no guarantee of job security. Therefore how to attract and retain a committed, productive workforce in turbulent economic conditions that offer opportunity for financial success is an issue that organizations have to address through reforms (Noe *et. al.*, 2011).

Institutions of higher learning all over the world are confronting new difficulties which require changes in their governance and administration styles. The ascent of new partners, inner components, along with globalization and the quick movement at which new information is made and used, development in learners enrolments and in the quantity of higher education organizations are among the ongoing improvements that is a challenge in institutions of higher learning (Jowi, 2012).

Public universities in Kenya have traditionally relied on Government funding to carry out their activities. Due to the harsh economic situations witnessed by the region over the recent past, Government support to these institutions has seen a steady decline forcing universities to operate under very tight budgets. This has led several governments to abandon their responsibility of promoting the growth and development of the higher education sector to the non-governmental

organizations and private individuals Jowi (2012). In this manner, the organizations of higher learning have been compelled to reconsider their technique and potentially search for additional financing sources including setting up salary generating activities. They are trapped in a fix between serious spending cuts and a surge of learners looking for valuable degrees bringing about congestion, low financial plans and staff retention issues (Ngome, 2015). The adjustment in financing expects staff to be completely connected so the organization can get its financial worth.

Additionally, in Kenya, public universities face rivalry as they try to offer university degrees to the general public. The private universities are pose competition for the students and the staffs. As indicated by Mwiria, et al (2007) the private universities account for 17% of the total number of students pursuing degree programs in Kenyan universities. Presently, there are 33 state funded universities with different constituent schools and grounds when contrasted with more that seventeen private universities. Also in the past decade public universities have lost many full time staff to private universities. High staff turnover is aggravated by the exodus of other staff to various destinations and the failure of those sent abroad for further training to return to their home institutions.

Foreign universities are also offering public universities competition as they aggressively advertise their programs in Kenya with others setting up campuses locally (Mwiria, *et. al.*, 2007). Administration is maybe the most important aspect of changes in light of the fact that university education in Kenya has been the subject of much political control and mediation. Somewhat as a result the state funded universities have encountered various strikes and closures in recent times, drawing out the time required for graduation, disturbing academic years and driving forthcoming learners and staff to private and abroad universities.

Dedication is the involvement in one's task and thereby experiencing a sense of pride and taking up the challenges in the work environment with confidence and gusto: absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work. Triggered by the work of Bui, Bui, Zeng, Zeng, Higgs and Higgs, (2017) took a slightly different perspective and defined engagement as, "The cognitive availability and amount of time one spends thinking about a role" It is a lucid well-known fact that engagement has two facets; One the Energy fact and the other being the identification facet.

Americans have continued to lose confidence in their leadership (Schwab, 2013). Evidence of this loss of confidence can be found in polls concerning the President of the United States and how government dealt with the war in Iraq, or the rebuilding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. A November, 19, 2007, U.S. News and World Report article showed the percentage of people who have confidence in various leaders from various segments and institutions in the country. Military leadership received the highest rating with 40%. Religious leaders have had their share of scandal and the confidence of the American people dropped to 21%. Government leaders and the entertainment industry dropped below 10%. Educational leaders were just a bit higher with a 20% confidence level.

Nearly 80% of those polled said that unless there are better leaders, the country will decline, and 51% believed the U.S. is already behind other nations. But it is not just political leaders who are failing in the eyes of citizens. Wall Street, media, nonprofits, and others join the school and the church with low confidence of future success. James Mac Gregor Burns cited an April 1992 poll of American people, who were asked: "Does the political system need rebuilding or just minor change?" Fifteen percent responded minor change, 57% responded fundamental change, and 27% responded "Needs complete rebuilding." When that many people call for major change, it says something about the loss of confidence in leadership.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Transformational leadership is key to employee engagement because it is found to be present in the work place through corporate communications, marketing, safety, turnover, team leadership, influence and organizational awareness, (Holt & Jones, 2005 as cited by Reed (2005). Studies on the role of managers in employee engagement have been carried out in the past, for instance, Schullery, (2013) posited that management holds the key to employee engagement. In his seminal article on employee engagement, Wu (2016) proposed that leadership has the greatest potential to influence followers' feelings of psychological safety by providing a supportive environment in which one feels safe to fully engage in a task. However, Kahn did not consider that transformational leaders appear capable of promoting psychological meaningfulness and availability as well.

Although relations between transformational leaders, engagement, and performance have been established in previous research (Evelyn, 2015, Ndisya & Juma (2016) there have, to date, no studies that specifically examine the influence of

transformational leadership on employee engagement in the Kenyan Public Universities. Though there may be little argument that transformational leaders play a role in shaping the work environment that promotes engagement, much less is known about actual influence of this transformational leadership on the engagement of the employee. Perhaps part of the reason for this lack of understanding is because, as previously noted, leadership is commonly viewed from a macro-level perspective of organizations and firms; hence no attention has been paid to the micro-level processes and influence in the public universities.

According to Kipkebut (2010) employees from private universities were more committed to their universities and satisfied with their jobs than employees from public universities hence turnover intentions among employees in Kenyan public universities is on the increase. According to a study by Halbesleben (2010) daily fluctuations in transformational leadership affect employees' daily work engagement, through employees' daily personal resources (self-efficacy and optimism).

However, if public Universities want to increase employee engagement, leaders in the Universities must understand how to best foster meaning and promote engagement of the employee at the task level. Understanding what creates a sustained level of employee engagement can promote a better understanding of what fosters engagement at an aggregated performance level (overall job performance, group and organizational level performance). The role of the leader in fostering work engagement has received limited research attention. This study therefore sought to establish how idealized influence affect employee engagement in Public Universities in Kenya.

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Idealized influence is clarified in an organization with regards to information creation. The term implies essentially being compelling over beliefs. At the most elevated level of profound quality, leaders and their workers may devote themselves to the best goals. By a long shot the best attribute driven management style is charismatic (Ojokuku, Odetayo & Sajuyigbe, 2012).

Knowledge frameworks exude from people with the capacity to show information utilizing their affiliation. These communications between people acquire social connections when the firm manages a greater social aggregate organization which needs admired impact additionally (Simola et. al., 2012). A leader set the stage for progress by sustaining the correct organization conditions. For focused execution data use, cultivating target straightforwardness and a formative culture are the correct settings (Moynihan et. al., 2011). Charisma is the degree to which the leader behaves in admirable ways that cause followers to identify with the leader. Charismatic leaders display convictions, take stands and appeal to followers on an emotional level. This is about the leader having a clear set of values and demonstrating them in every action, providing a role model for their followers. Genuine trust must be built between leaders and followers. Trust for both leader and follower is built on a solid moral and ethical foundation. Transformational leadership employs the charisma of leaders in order to gain the respect and trust of stakeholders and to instill pride in the latter. In addition, charisma underlines the provision of a common vision and sense of mission necessary for the transformation (Song, Kolb, Lee & Kim 2012). In this way leaders influence the employees' engagement in positive manner.

In essence this is used to describe people, who by being who they are, project power in themselves and have an enormous influence on their followers. The inspirational and idealised leader creates undivided loyalty and devotion without any consideration of own self-interest. He or she has confidence in the vision, takes full responsibility for his or her actions and exudes purpose and trust (Balyer, 2012).

Mr Nelson Mandela, for instance, commanded respect without resorting to any other means. Idealised leaders are able to offer quality judgments and insights and remain calm and focused on the elements that are truly at the root of the issue. Their character and inner strength "command space" in a meeting or room. The essence of this style of leadership is that people want to follow this leader and seem to enjoy being led by them (Kissi, Dainty & Tuuli, 2013). One of the lasting elements relating to this influence is that people often refer to this person in the present tense, even if such a person has died or left the company or organisation many years ago.

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).

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).

Employee engagement is portrayed in the writing as the inverse or direct opposite of burnout, with commitment connected to laborer prosperity and influenced by conditions in the work environment. The improvement of an even workplace is portrayed by the right outstanding task at hand, duty and independence, acknowledgment, backing, equity and seriousness that advances work commitment. On the off chance that these components are checked by pioneer conduct and impact in the working environment, something contrary to work commitment, in particular burnout may happen, with conceivable negative outcomes in the work environment (Hallberg, 2005).

The management in any organization, large or small, set the tone and culture of the organization and it is their responsibility to engage their employees in their work and in the organization's goals and vision (Batista-Taran *et. al.*, 2009) The Corporate Leadership Council (2004) note that managers who demonstrate these characteristics: show strong commitment to diversity, take responsibility for successes and failures, demonstrate honesty and integrity, help find solutions to problems, respect and care for employees as individuals, set realistic performance expectations, demonstrate passion for success and defend their direct reports, significantly promote employee engagement.

Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) broaden this contention by expressing that, by suggestion, worker commitment is portrayed by significant levels of energy and a solid distinguishing proof with one's work. By connecting this build to the meaning of transformation leadership, the contention is advanced that there might be a connection between transformation leadership and work engagement. The study couldn't discover any examinations exploring the potential linkages between work commitment and transformation leadership.

Employee engagement is additionally characterized as "a positive satisfying business related perspective that is portrayed by power, devotion and retention" (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003, p.4). Power alludes to a high condition of mental flexibility and high energy levels, devotion alluded to centrality, pride and difficulties and assimilation to fixation and being charmed in one's work. Employee engagement is explained as regarding other close factors that help the HR practices of worker engagement. It can be characterized regarding strengthening. Mental Empowerment is the view of worker that they can change their work functions to achieve their assignments and settle on significant choices with respect to work undertakings (Yulk and Becker, 2006) engagement is characterized as the degree of energy and choices making that workers considers to tackle business connected matters (Maslach, 2003).

As per an examination by Saks (2006) the results of employee engagement; it is a personal level marvel that indirectly influences the success of a firm by conveying positive individual level results. Engagement causes results like decreased burnout, fulfillment, being committed and better performance (Maslach, 2003) workers feel belongingness to a firm with lower aims to leave (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Employee engagement is considered to be a construct of involvement of employee in his work tasks (Saks, 2006) transformational leadership practicing engagement of employees is related to psychological state development that involves self-efficacy and attaining the targeted goal.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This study sampled 20 Chairpersons of Departments, 5 Registrars of Academic Affairs, 5 Deans of Students, 5 Quality assurance officers and 313 Lecturers. A total sample of 348 respondents were drawn using stratified random sampling techniques from a target population 5 out of the 31 public university that included; University of Nairobi, Moi University, Egerton University, Kenyatta University and Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. Data was collected using questionnaires and document analysis. Data was analyzed quantitatively by use of mean and standard deviations and qualitatively by regression, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and trend analysis. The results were presented in form of frequency tables.

#### **5. FINDINGS**

The main objective of the study was to determine the influence of idealized influence on employee engagement in public universities in Kenya. This was done by examining if idealized influence had other influence in the university other than employee engagement. The study probed various idealized influence aspects that included the university leadership setting goals and objectives for the employees, the university leadership describing the duties and roles of every employee



in tandem with the set goals and the university leadership setting functional examples to organizational employees. The research also probed if the university leadership takes care of the roles assigned to employees to realize performance and if the university leadership goes beyond self-interest for the good of organizational goals.

Majority (95%) of the respondents agreed that idealized influence had other influence in their universities while a few (5%) disagreed to the statement. The respondents indicated that idealized influence enhanced accountability and transparency among the employees in the universities.

Idealized influence can be explained within the organization in the context of knowledge creation. The term idealized influence means simply being influential over ideals. At the highest level of morality, leaders and their employees may dedicate themselves to the best ideals. This finding agrees with the assertion by Ojokuku, Odetayo and Sajuyigbe, (2012) who argue that by far the most effective trait-driven leadership style is charismatic.

**Table 1: Aspects of Idealized Influence in an Organization**

Aspects of Idealized Influence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
The university leadership set goals and objectives for the employees.	425	3.64	1.207	.059
The university leadership has described the duties and roles of every employee in tandem with the set goals.	425	3.60	1.120	.054
The university leadership sets functional example to organizational employees.	422	3.61	1.210	.059
The university leadership takes care of the roles assigned to employees to realized performance	425	3.68	1.158	.056
The university leadership goes beyond self-interest for the good of organizational goals.	424	3.71	1.252	.061

Majority of the respondents agreed that the university leadership set goals and objectives for the employees as shown by a mean of 3.64 and a standard deviation of 1.207. A large number agreed that the university leadership had described the duties and roles of every employee in tandem with the set goals as revealed by a mean of 3.60 and a standard deviation of 1.120. A majority also agreed that the university leadership sets functional example to organizational employees as indicated by a mean of 3.61 and a standard deviation of 1.210. A large number agreed that the university leadership takes care of the roles assigned to employees to realized performance as shown by a mean of 3.68 and a standard deviation of 1.158. Majority of the respondents agreed that the university leadership goes beyond self-interest for the good of organizational goals as revealed by a mean of 3.71 and a standard deviation of 1.252.

These findings are reflected by Simola *et. al.*, (2012) who asserted that knowledge systems emanate from individuals with the capability to display knowledge using their association. These interactions between individuals bring in social relationships when the organization deals with a bigger social collective network which needs idealized influence also. Leaders set the platform for success by nurturing the right company conditions. For focused performance information use, fostering objective transparency and a developmental culture are the right settings (Moynihan *et. al.*, 2011).

The study tested the hypothesis that idealized influence does not significantly influence employee engagement in Public Universities in Kenya. The results is in Table 2.

**Table 2: Independent Effect of Idealized Influence on Employee Engagement**

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.548 <sup>a</sup>	.301	.299	.60447		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Idealized influence						
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	66.436	1	66.436	181.825	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	154.557	423	.365		
	Total	220.993	424			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), Idealized influence

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	2.158	.116		18.608	.000
	Idealized influence	.414	.031	.548	13.484	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee engagement

The results indicate that there is a relatively strong but significantly positive association between idealized influence and employee engagement ( $R=.548$ ). The coefficient of determination  $R^2=.301$  implies that idealized influence explains 30.1% of the variation in employee engagement in public universities in Kenyan. The other variables in the universities explain the remaining 69.9%. This is an indicator of a weak influence of idealized influence on employee engagement.

The analysis from the model had the F value of 181.825 with p-value  $.000 < 0.05$ , while the results of the beta coefficient showed that a unit increase in idealized influence will cause a .414 increase in employee engagement ( $B=.414$ ,  $t=13.484$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that idealized influence are a good a relatively poor predictor of employee engagement in public universities in Kenya. The findings, thus, were sufficient to support the influence of idealized influence on employee engagement; therefore the hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was rejected.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results indicate that there is a relatively strong but significantly positive association between idealized influence and employee engagement ( $R=.548$ ). The coefficient of determination  $R^2=.301$  implies that idealized influence explains 30.1% of the variation in employee engagement in public universities in Kenyan. The other variables in the universities explain the remaining 69.9%. This is an indicator of a weak influence of idealized influence on employee engagement.

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Idealized influence was found to positively influence employee engagement. The study therefore recommended that senior managers should promote a broad, inclusive vision, show strong commitment to goals, and create trust and confidence in employees in order to increase employee engagement.

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