



INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT TO FOSTER INCLUSION ON STAFF PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: A SURVEY OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES WITHIN NAIROBI COUNTY

ABEDNEGO NDOLO MULINGE, DOUGLAS OGOLLA, SARAH ACSAH

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Abednego Ndolo Mulinge^{*1}, Douglas Ogolla², Sarah Acsah³

^{*1}MBA Candidate, Kenya Methodist University [KEMU], Nairobi, Kenya

²School of Business & Economics, Kenya Methodist University [KEMU], Nairobi, Kenya

³School of Business, Kenyatta University [KU], Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Affirmative action and equal employment legislation have helped diversify the workforce in numerous workplaces. The central idea of inclusion is not based on having an awareness about difference, it is about being conscious of difference, not about assimilating and homogenizing difference, it is about appreciating the essence of difference, not about making varied people the same, it is about the capability that an organization can derive from deliberately nurturing and integrating different groups of people so that they fit together. The researcher, therefore, sought to examine the influence of leadership commitment to foster inclusion on staff performance. The target population in this study was 2380 staff of the three public universities within Nairobi County. By use of Cochran's sampling formula, a sample size of 331 was obtained. The research utilized a questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. The study adopted descriptive survey research design and the data was analyzed through SPSS V23. There existed a strong positive correlation between leadership commitment to foster inclusion and staff performance. The researcher recommended that future research should be directed towards validating the results of this study by conducting a similar research in other sectors in Kenya using data collected from different sources. Further research should also be conducted to investigate other factors that affect staff performance.

Key Words: Leadership Commitment, Inclusion, Staff Performance

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is the act of creating a work environment in which everyone feels valued and accepted and allows them to make their best contribution to the organization. Affirmative action and equal employment legislation have helped diversify the workforce. However, they have not always helped in creating an environment of inclusion wherein the full potential of employees is realized (Mor Barak, 2011). According to Martin *et al* (2015) diversifying the workforce must be accompanied by organizational inclusive behavior (OIB) and equity in order to triumph.

Hiring a workforce for the sake of increasing representation, as majority organizations do, is actually counter-productive (Bendick et al., 2010). Leaders in universities, therefore, must devise strategies to eliminate systematic barriers and create avenues in which all the employees are able to contribute to their fullest potential. Organizations that use an inclusive framework will consequently have better output (Stewart & Johnson 2009).

Are diversity management and inclusion different concepts? Inclusion as a concept goes beyond diversity management, which remains the dominant paradigm in employees' management (Pitts 2010, Choi & Rainey 2010). In many ways, however, diversity management is the first step toward creating inclusive environments. According to Pless and Maak (2014) an inclusionary approach values the differences in individual employees and leverages diversity in creating a playing field that is not levelled but raised so that everyone feels supported and performs at their best. Diversity management, although an integral part of inclusion, ignores the dynamics and outcomes of exclusion (Groeneveld & Verbeek 2012). Further, diversity management focuses on improving recruitment and training for mainly women and minorities in the workplace,

inclusion focuses on the removal of barriers to enable optimum performance from all employees. A stream of research suggests diversity lowers performance or has no significant relationship with performance suggestively because heterogeneous groups take longer to form and often have conflicting ideas. These adversely affect performance. Employees belonging to diverse groups are likely to be excluded from important networks and decision making processes (Choi & Rainey 2010). The lack of consensus on the impact of diversity and diversity management on performance is a valid reason why inclusion has promise as an area of study, both as a concept and as a lens through which organizations can encourage full participation from the individual employee rather than focus on a certain group or demographic. Inclusion goes beyond diversity management wherein "people with multiple backgrounds, mind-sets and ways of thinking are made to work effectively together and to perform to their highest potential in order to achieve organizational objectives based on sound principles" (Pless & Maak 2014). Research has shown that perceptions of inclusion predict job commitment and performance (Shore et al 2011).

Important as it has been proven, inclusion is lacking in many universities the world over. For instance, the institutions of higher learning, globally, are yearly ranked. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings, for instance, compares universities across many aspects except organizational inclusive behavior practices (Brics 2015). According to Aduda (2015) at the 18th conference of rectors, vice chancellors and presidents of African universities, heads of African universities called for national and regional initiatives to rank higher education institutions to encourage innovation and competitiveness in excellent performance. The conference proposed a review of standards used

by international organizations to rank universities citing unsuitability of some of the criteria to African universities. Participants were in support of a system which would seek quality solutions to instil competitive performance in university programs for prosperity. One such solution would be OIB geared toward enhanced employee performance.

In Kenya, universities had been unable to attract and retain staff with diverse qualities. In majority of them staff were skewed toward certain ethnicity and religious backgrounds (Orido 2010). It appeared, for some universities, ethnic and religious adherence played a much more important role in the selection of staff than otherwise. Sifuna (2012), confirms this as he asserts that over and above academic and professional qualifications a prospecting employee had to decent from the relevant ethnic group. Consequently numerous staff positions in the universities were not competitively filled. This, partly, explained why vacancies were rarely advertised thus making them somewhat a preserve of a few “correctly placed” personalities. He further noted that a trend had emerged where chancellors, vice chancellors and council chairpersons were appointed from the community where a university is located. The appointment to other tiers of leadership, he noted, would follow a similar pattern resulting in universities being the ethnic enclaves they had become.

Statement of the Problem

Organizational inclusive behavior had not been embraced in universities in Kenya. Diversity management, instead, had been fully appreciated and implemented. Universities, like any other organization, had particular interest in staff performance as it influenced achievement of the set goals. Unfortunately, diversity management alone could not and had not resulted in improved employees’ performance as universities would

have liked. They had only managed to achieve representation of diverse groups of people at the workplace. This had been possible through implementation of the equal employment opportunity and affirmative action laws. As such, the backdrop in diversity management was, therefore, one of fulfilling the law and not leveraging on it to advance staff performance. Other than looking accommodative to all groups of people, universities in Kenya had not registered any staff performance gains attributable to diversity management practices. This was because under diversity management an environment of inclusion in which all employees are respected and valued and therefore enthusiastic enough to render best contribution, had not been achieved. Consequently, staff performance had been compromised. Unless the challenge of non-inclusive work environment in Kenyan universities was resolved, the institutions of higher learning would continue to suffer compromised staff performance, poor development record and ultimate compromised quality of graduates. This was evident as universities had not come out to shed light on the benefits of a diverse workplace that is inclusive with respect to access to a wide range of information, better decision making, better problem solving and more innovation.

Objective of the Study

1.3.1: General Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of leadership commitment to foster inclusion on staff performance in public universities in Nairobi County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Social Identity Theory

This theory was contributed by Tajfel, (1979). He proposed that the groups which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. According to him, groups give us a sense of social identity; a sense of belonging to the social world. Tajfel defined social identity as a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership. In order to better our self-image, we improve the status of the group to which we belong. For instance, "Kenya is the best country in the world in athletics." We can also enhance our self-image by discriminating and holding prejudice views against the out-group; the group we do not belong to. We, therefore, split the world into "them" and "us" based on a process of social categorization. In this case people are put into social groups. The "them" denotes the out-group while the "us" is the in-group. Social identity theory offers that the in-group will discriminate against the out-group to enrich their self-image. Group members in an in-group will seek to find wanting aspects of an out-group thus promoting own-image. Tajfel suggested that stereotyping is also founded on a normal cognitive process; the inclination to group things together. In so doing we tend to make conspicuous the differences between groups and the similarities of things in the same group. We categorize people in the same way. We perceive the in-group as being different from the out-group and members of the same group as being more comparable than they actually are. In the researcher's work, the university leadership, at any given level, was seen as the in-group while the staff are viewed as the out-group. The inability of university leadership to incorporate staff views in decision making, unfair/inequitable treatment on them and failure to foster inclusion in the overall running of the university related so

well to the theory. The leadership felt that their opinions were better; they were more experienced, had more authority and thus constituted an in-group. Sub-ordinates on the other hand were categorized as the out-group. They most likely, began to feel so and thus adopted the identity of an out-group; stopped giving free, honest and informed advice thus literally behaving an out-group. Emotional significance was built around the group where one felt they belonged and self-esteem would be bound with the group as well. This signalled absolute absence of inclusion in the university.

Empirical Review

Mor Barak's (2005, 2011) model identifies the leader as a key factor in influencing the employee experience of inclusion. The leader puts in place policies and procedures to guide organizational activities relative to inclusion and ensures employees are well informed of the same. In the same breath, Shore *et al* (2011) theoretical framework of inclusion identifies leader philosophy, values, strategies, decisions and practices as antecedents of perceived work group inclusion. Leadership commitment to diversity is vital in diversity management (Gavino *et al* 2010; Podsiadlowski *et al* 2013) and inclusive workplaces. In order to create a culture of inclusion, leaders must view and treat others as unique and different, engage individuals and groups in genuine dialogue, model appropriate behaviors and actively address resistance to organizational inclusive behavior efforts. Such leaders qualify to be referred to as "authentic." Authentic leaders build benevolence and integrity with their followers by encouraging absolutely open communication, engaging their followers, sharing critical information and sharing their perceptions and feelings about the people with whom they work. This results in a realistic social relationship arising from followers' heightened levels of personal and social identification. A realistic social relationship is likely to lead to

gestures of good will being reciprocated even to the extent that each side is willing to go above and beyond the call of duty. Authentic leaders create an open and fair work environment conducive to employee organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Employees come in unique personalities. They require belonging so as to render their best contribution to the organization. Shore *et al* (2011) are in support of this view as they argue that uniqueness and belongingness work in concert toward creating an inclusive work environment. Such an environment eventually drives organizational commitment, organizational citizenship and intention to stay, job satisfaction and performance. Most literature on organizational inclusion agrees that willingness to engage in positive interactions, building a vision and an active strategy for inclusion, information sharing, recognition of employees and open communication are all ways to create an environment that positively impacts performance (Shore *et al* 2011, Stewart & Johnson 2009). Since performance is a fundamental theme within the field of Human Resource Development (HRD), scholars and practitioners alike should respond to the needs of the workplace that arise from the issues of diverse teams. In the recent past companies have been noticed to use diverse work groups and teams for task completion (Garrison *et al* 2010). The potential for disruptive conflict which can derail organizational effectiveness is thus on the rise according to Klein *et al* (2011). It is essential, therefore, for HRD scholars and practitioners to explore functional team formation and development. This can only happen if leadership insists on organizational inclusive behavior. Knowledge in how to build high performing productive teams of diverse individuals will make a positive contribution to the overall viability of organizations (Garrison *et al* 2010; Klein *et al* 2011). The relevance of such knowledge cannot be overemphasized as differences often create barriers to performance and hinder team and organizational success.

Gilley *et al* (2010) noted that organizations often fail to emphasize effective team building as the frequency with which managers display effective team facilitation skills is very low. This reflects a weakness on the part of the organization's management to offer leadership towards organizational inclusive behavior. HRD professionals should thus accept the challenge to design interventions for individuals and teams which facilitate learning and improve performance for the entire organization (Swanson & Holton 2009). Specifically, interventions that help develop deep-level similarity may improve team learning and performance (van Emmerik *et al* 2011). As top leadership facilitates organizational inclusive behavior-advancing practices and activities the resultant understanding of self and others among employees reduces intergroup and intragroup anxiety and prejudice (Phills *et al* 2011). Organizational leadership should thus work to give teams composed of diverse people adequate time to get to know one another (Lauring & Selmer 2011). It is, additionally, submitted that functionally dissimilar teams which make the most of differences in values, beliefs and attitudes about their jobs might be principally effective (Ostergaard *et al.*, 2011). This optimum utilization of diverse workforce happens when an all-inclusive work environment is created. It was, therefore, crucial for the researcher to look into the effect of leadership commitment to foster inclusion on staff performance in public universities within Nairobi County.

Conceptual Framework

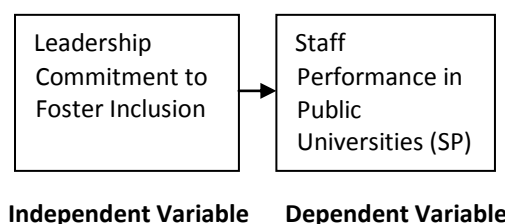


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed descriptive survey design. In this study, descriptive survey was more useful at bringing out the facts as they were. The researcher studied both non-academic and academic staff in chartered public universities within Nairobi County. There were 3 chartered public universities; University of Nairobi, Technical University of Kenya and Multi-Media University of Kenya, in Nairobi County. The researcher carried out a survey of the three. The study emphasized public universities since they were expected to have similar staff selection and management structure, policy and procedure, similar staff and institutional performance benchmarks and formed the bulk of universities in Kenya. The target population was 2380 staff; composed of both non-academic and academic staff as drawn from the each subject university website. The researcher used a sample size of 331 subjects. The researcher made use of stratified random sampling design to arrive at the 331 subjects' sample. This researcher made use of primary data. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was structured; had open-ended, closed-ended and fixed alternative questions.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The study collected data through a questionnaire whose copies were distributed to a targeted sample of 331 employees of the public Universities within Nairobi County. 228 (69%) of the sampled respondents duly filled and returned it. Failure to obtain 100% response rate was due to some questionnaire copies being misplaced while others were not fully filled (31%; n=103). The respondents were requested to state their gender as this could also affect the staff performance. The study findings showed that 59% of the respondents were male while 41% were female. It is inferred, therefore, that the majority of the respondents were male. This

depicted gender imbalance in the public universities within Nairobi County. Age of the respondents was considered to influence the staff performance in the public universities.

The results inferred that majority (38%) of the respondents were aged between 31 and 40 years, 37% were aged between 41 and 50 years, 16% were aged above 50 years while 9% were aged between 18-30 years. It is clear that most of the respondents belonged to the age bracket of 31 and 40 years. It was considered that the academic qualification of staff would influence their performance. Majority of the respondents (37%) were holders of Masters Degree, 35% had attained a PhD degree, 22% selected the Bachelor's degree option, 14 % chose the diploma option, 1% selected the certificate option while the "others" option had 1% choice (CPA). The position a staff member held at the university was considered to affect their performance. The findings inferred that 90% of the respondents were academic staff, while 10% were non-academic staff. It was deduced; therefore, that majority of the respondents were academic staff. This meant that the results of the study could be generalized to other institutions as the academic staff affected the overall performance of a university. Length of service was considered to influence staff performance in the public universities. The findings indicated that 67% of the respondents had worked in the public universities for between 5-10 years while 22% had worked for between one and 5 years. Eight percent had worked in the institutions for more than 10 years while 3% of the respondents had worked for less than one year. Consequently, it was deduced that majority of the respondents had worked in the public institutions for between five and ten years. Overall, 75% of the staff had worked for more than 5 years. This portrayed loyalty in the public universities as employers. Further, the respondents were also well aware of the influence of OIB on staff performance in public universities.

Descriptive statistics

Staff Performance

The respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which they agreed with some aspects describing the staff performance in the public universities. The results were as follows:

Table 1: Staff performance

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Achievement of key performance indicators	228	1.00	5.00	2.5351	1.10808
Innovativeness	228	1.00	5.00	2.4079	1.15164
Communication effectiveness	228	1.00	5.00	2.6491	1.18346
Problem Solving skills	228	1.00	5.00	2.6667	1.26398
Achievement of my Key Performance Indicators	228	1.00	5.00	2.5132	1.10856
Quality of my decisions	228	1.00	5.00	2.4868	1.16286
Timeliness of my decisions	228	1.00	5.00	2.4781	1.27132
Effectiveness of my decisions	228	1.00	5.00	2.6360	1.17759
Enthusiastic to achieve set objectives	228	1.00	5.00	2.6623	1.07227
Committed to the university mission and vision	228	1.00	5.00	2.5482	1.15432
A valued part and parcel of the university	228	1.00	5.00	2.5439	1.22486
Dedicated to university core values	228	1.00	5.00	2.4693	1.21442
Committed to teamwork	228	1.00	5.00	2.8026	1.42989
AVERAGE SCORES	228			2.56	

Source: (Field data)

The aggregate $M= 2.56$; $SD = 1.23$ portrayed that there was a high variation in the respondents selection of the choices on the listed aspects of staff performance. The mean value was, averagely, 3 implying that the respondents were undecided whether the listed issues affect staff performance.

Leadership commitment to foster OIB

The respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the listed aspects describing leadership commitment. The results were as follows:

Table 2: Leadership commitment to foster OIB

My supervisor:	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Is committed to hiring a workforce that is representative of all segments of society	228	1.00	5.00	2.6096	1.02019
Has policies and programs in place to promote organizational inclusive behavior in the workplace	228	1.00	5.00	2.5000	1.18545
Works well with employees of different backgrounds	228	1.00	5.00	2.4342	1.20574
Incorporates organizational inclusive behavior into the department's/ faculty's /university's vision or mission statement	228	1.00	5.00	2.4561	1.15068
Tries to create awareness and appreciation of individual differences among employees	228	1.00	5.00	2.5351	1.09609
Helps employees understand their own feelings and attitudes about people who are different	228	1.00	5.00	2.3202	1.08986
Is held responsible for getting high performance from all their staff	228	1.00	5.00	2.5263	1.13192
Considers employee's unique abilities, gifts and talents in promoting them.	228	1.00	5.00	2.4474	1.23882
Do you think the university's leadership / your supervisor's commitment to organizational inclusive behavior affects your performance	228	1.00	5.00	1.6360	.87748
AVERAGE SCORES	228			2.38	

Source: (Field data)

The average scores were M= 2.38; SD = 1.1063. This implied that there was a high variation on the respondents' selection of the listed aspects of leadership commitment in the public universities. The mean value was, averagely, two. This meant that the respondents were in disagreement with the listed aspects of leadership commitment.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership commitment to foster inclusion was found to have a strong positive correlation with staff performance. The leader was a key factor in influencing the employee experience of inclusion. The leader had put in place policies and

procedures to guide organizational activities relative to inclusion and ensured employees were well informed of the same. Leader philosophy, values, strategies, decisions and practices are antecedents of perceived work group inclusion. Leadership commitment to diversity is vital in diversity management and inclusive workplaces for maximum staff performance.

Conclusions

The objective of the study was to find out the influence of leadership commitment to foster inclusion on staff performance in public universities. The results showed that all three independent variable, leadership commitment to foster inclusion, when embraced by the public universities, cause a change in staff performance. The regression results also tallied with the correlation results. It can therefore be concluded that the public universities in Nairobi county need to consider leadership commitment to foster inclusion for better staff performance.

Diversifying the workforce must be accompanied by leadership commitment to foster inclusion and equity in order to triumph.

Recommendations

It was evident that when the leaders of the public universities are committed to foster inclusion, staff performance will improve. Apart from

leadership style, organizational commitment is emphasized as another important factor that affects organizational performance. As employees are satisfied, they desire to stay with the university and work for it willingly. Employees that become inspired by committed leaders find themselves wanting the university to succeed. With a committed leader pushing hard on the staff, the staff begin to believe in the success of the university and start to take university success personally. This elicits a stronger sense of commitment from the staff that will have a direct positive effect on productivity and efficiency. Employees want to see the success that they hear about through transformational leaders, and that causes the staff to dedicate more of their time and effort to insuring university success.

Suggestions for Further Research

The researcher recommends that future research should be directed towards validating the results of this study by conducting a similar research in other sectors in Kenya by collecting data from different sources. Further research should also be conducted to investigate the other factors that affect staff performance.

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