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The Influence of Role Clarity and Job Autonomy on the Performance of Private University Campuses in Eldoret, Kenya

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Abstract:

Employee engagement is the extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs, are committed to the organizational goals, and put discretionary effort into their work. Private universities in Kenya, like other businesses, are struggling to improve their performance and to remain competitive. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between employee engagement and performance of private universities in Kenya. Based on the study, this paper examines the relationship between role clarity and job autonomy, on the one hand, and performance of private universities in Kenya, on the other. The study was guided by self-determination theory. Correctional research design was used with the target population of the study consisting of 141 employees. The employees were selected using simple random sampling technique and totalled 74 employees. The researcher used document analysis and questionnaire as the major tools of collecting data. Data obtained was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. From the results of the research, it is evident that there is a significant relationship between job role clarity and performance of private universities in Kenya. University employees understand their roles through possession of job descriptions, work instructions and also how their jobs contributed to the success of their institutions. This enables them to work towards a common goal as an institution. Based on the research findings and conclusions, it is recommended that private universities in Kenya should pay attention to ensuring that every employee has a clear role and that each staff member understands how their work contributes to the success of their institutions. The study would be of significance to managers of universities in Kenya and would add knowledge to other scholars since the findings portray the relationship of employee engagement and performance.

Keywords: Role clarity, job autonomy, performance, private university campuses, Kenya

1. Introduction

Job clarity and job autonomy are aspects of employee engagement in organizations. Employee engagement comprises the positive attitude held by the employee toward the organization and its values (Robinson, Perryman & Hayday, 2004). Saks (2006) defines employee engagement as the distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual's role performance. Kahn (1990) defines it as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". The cognitive aspect of employee engagement concerns employees' beliefs about the organization, its leaders and working conditions. The emotional aspect concerns how employees feel about each of those three factors and whether they have positive or negative attitudes toward the organization and its leaders. The physical aspect of employee engagement concerns the physical energies exerted by individuals to accomplish their roles commitment', and the behaviour is 'going the extra mile' (Purcell, 2013).

Employees are the main drivers of organizational performance, competition and survival. Golamzadeh (2009) states that more than ever managers undeniably agree that businesses in the 21st century demands more efficiency and productivity than any other times in history. The strive among businesses to increase their performance has called for employee engagement to become a top business priority agenda for senior executives. In a rapid economic cycle, business managers know that having a high-performing workforce is essential to growth and survival. They recognize that a highly engaged workforce can increase innovation, productivity, and bottom-line performance while reducing costs related to hiring and retention in highly competitive talent markets (Lindsey, 2015). Henry Ford, an American industrialist, underscored the importance of human resources by stating that he did not mind losing his business, burn up his building, but let him keep the employees and he would restore the business right back to prosperity (Khan & Heaphy, 2013). Like other sectors, performance of educational institutions is determined between the performance of the staff and their engagement to the work.

1.1. Job Role Clarity and Performance

Job role clarity is a prerequisite of engaging employees in their job roles to fulfil job expectations (Khan & Heaphy, 2013). Owor (2015) has revealed that employees who experienced high degree of role clarity in their jobs were more likely to be engaged

($r=0.55$, $p=0.00$); when employees get clear role profiles they feel obliged to respond in kind and “repay” the organization in terms of engagement. In service settings, role clarity provides an opportunity for customer-contact employees offer quick services to customers at the service encounter without having to refer to their superiors for advice. Such prompt response is likely to delight customers leading to greater satisfaction.

Terje, Göran and Sander (2011) add that when there is lack of role clarity among customer-contact employees, negative outcomes are likely to occur, such as the concerned employee misleading customers by providing incorrect information, which leads to poor service quality experiences for the customers. Therefore, when customer-contact employees are clear on what they are supposed to do in their job, they are more likely to adopt favourable attitudes towards work in terms of exhibiting greater perseverance in handling job challenges and displaying higher dedication in serving their customers (Suan & Nasurdin, 2013).

Srikanth and Jomon (2013) carried out a research on the role ambiguity and role performance effectiveness, moderating the effect of feedback seeking behaviour. The purpose of their study was to understand the influence of a contextual factor (role ambiguity) and personal characteristics (feedback seeking behaviour) on role performance. By gaining better clarity regarding their roles, employees will better relate with the end goals of an organization. Srikanth and Jomon collected data from 176 employees of a large information technology organization using survey technique by physically administering the questionnaire with the help of the Human Resource department in two phases. The first phases gathered data from the employees and co-workers and the second from the supervisors. They performed data analysis using hierarchical multiple regression. Results showed that feedback seeking, both from a supervisor and co-workers, ameliorated the effects of role ambiguity on role performance. Specifically, compared to feedback seeking from co-workers, feedback seeking from a supervisor was found to be more useful in reducing the effects of role ambiguity on role performance.

1.2. Job Autonomy and Performance

Autonomy refers to the extent to which employees’ experience substantial freedom and discretion in their work. Autonomy is one of the dimensions of job redesign which affect desired outcomes through experiencing control and discretion over work (Jose & Mampilly, 2014). The major defining characteristics of autonomy are the freedom and discretion to make decisions about how to schedule work.

Basing on self-determination theory, job autonomy is considered as an essential weapon which fosters satisfaction while need for autonomy is important in finding out the employees’ outcomes (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 2008). In relation to the university service, job autonomy is important in discovering the degree of how employees of the service sector can adapt to the changes (Iqbal, 2013).

Raza, Nousheen and Mohsin (2013) investigated the effect of job autonomy on job satisfaction and organizational commitment with a moderating role of organizational culture in the fast food sector of Pakistan. A sample of 107 employees was considered for this study. Employees included waiters, managers, supervisors and floor in-charges of top fast food restaurants operating in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Results showed that an increase in job autonomy results in an increased level of job satisfaction and employee engagement and organizational culture moderates this relationship.

In their research findings, Langfred (2004) and Fernandez (2007) draw attention to the idea by Yong and Choi (2009) that autonomy has an expected outcome of higher motivation, satisfaction and performance. Research has also indicated that job autonomy has a huge impact in influencing employees work attitude (Naus *et al.*, 2007). This is because employees who are empowered to control over their work will be able to meet the job demand and adapt with ambiguity that placed on them which also may reduce the role ambiguity that they have faced. In this regard, previous research avers that job autonomy helps in reducing role ambiguity (Çekmecelioğlu *et al.*, 2011).

On the other hand, Çekmecelioğlu *et al.* (2011) also reports that job autonomy may lead to a higher level of employee creativity and performance. This is because job autonomy provides freedom and discretion so that employees become more independent to carry out their task. Therefore, it may boost employees’ self confidence level. Additionally, autonomy may also give employees more opportunity to show their extra role behaviour (Runhaar, Konermann & Sanders, 2013).

Muhammad and Muhammad (2014) have investigated the special effects of job stress, working conditions and job autonomy on employee satisfaction. They collected quantitative data from the industrial sector and private banking scatter (financial institutions) of Punjab (Bahawalpur) using a sample size of 180, including the administrative, accounts and finance official. The researchers circulated 160 questionnaires to administrative, accounts and finance staff. For analysis, he used regression analysis techniques. The results showed that job stress has a relationship with employee satisfaction. Job autonomy and working conditions also have positive impact on employee satisfaction.

Susanti (2011) examined the relationship between job autonomy and work outcomes (job performance, job satisfaction and job stress), self-efficacy as a mediating variable. The research also investigated the impact of job satisfaction on job performance and job stress on job performance. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to examine the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes, job satisfaction on job performance, and job stress on job performance. Results showed that the estimated model in this research is acceptable based on its score of the goodness of fit index. The structural relationship showed that job autonomy significantly related to job satisfaction and performance, but not significant with job stress. It also showed that self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction, and job performance. In addition, this research found out that self-efficacy did not mediate the relationship between job autonomy and job stress. There was no significant relationship between job autonomy and job performance but this research showed that job satisfaction significantly related to job performance. These results are important notes in job designing.

It is important for employees to have significant roles in organizational decision-making process (Ince & Gul, 2011). For them to effectively play their part in decision-making, employees need job autonomy. This is reiterated by Volmer *et al.* (2012) who state that job autonomy is a part of job characteristic that enriches employees' competencies in problem resolution. On the other hand, job autonomy has been found to be very useful in sustaining and improving employees' contribution to the organization (Holz-Clause, Koundinya, Franz & Borich, 2012).

Kroth and Puetz (2011) posit that job autonomy is one of the important requirement factors that help to foster a supportive work environment. When employees' need for autonomy is fulfilled, many of the positive outcomes are received in an organization (Gillet, Colombat, Michinov, Pronost & Fouquereau, 2013). Gillet *et al.* (2013) have demonstrated in their research which also concurs with other past studies that these positive outcomes has been found to increase wellbeing (e.g. Panaccio & Vandenberghe 2009; Brien, Forest, Mageau, Boudrias, Desrumaux, Brunet, & Morin, 2012), organizational commitment (e.g. Tremblay, Cloutier, Simard, Chênevert & Vandenberghe, 2010; Meyer, Stanley & Parfyonova, 2012) and work engagement (e.g. Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Lens & De Witte, 2010; Zacher & Winter, 2011).

1.3. Statement of the Problem

In the current economic times, business organizations strive for more efficiency and productivity in order to survive the intensely competitive market. Businesses strive to increase their performance based on advanced techniques of operation, which in turn pose more challenges for managers because organizations need more number of employees with increased technical and professional skills. These skilled workers may not be well managed with old styles of management; they expect operational autonomy, job satisfaction and status.

Kenya's higher learning institutions have in the recent past experienced high staff turnover and brain drain. For the human resource management practitioners in these organizations, the major challenge is to find ways of attracting and retaining creative and dedicated staff and to determine which working conditions stimulate employees to give their best, to go beyond what is expected and persist in the face of difficulties (Wachira, 2013). A survey conducted at Presbyterian University of East Africa by the Human Resource Office (2014), on employee job satisfaction and engagement, reported that 50% of the University's work force merely showed to work to do only what is expected of them. The staff of the university were not willing to contribute more and thus were not considered engaged in their work and that they were willing to leave if better opportunities available.

In the event of insufficient engagement of the employees, service quality and customer satisfaction could be affected in the private universities. Basing on previous studies (Nold, 2017; Mmako & Schultz, 2016), institutions of higher learning (both in Kenya and other countries across the globe) have not given employee engagement the attention it deserves, thus it still remains a problem. Many studies have been done on employee engagement; they addressed the issues pertaining to employee engagement in the learning institutions using different variables for example job satisfaction, leadership styles, emotional intelligence in public universities and banks and descriptive research designs were employed in each case (Mwangi, 2011; Wachira, 2013). Most of Kenya's private universities have suffered significant levels of high staff turn-over and a great reduction in student enrolment. Therefore, the comparative study among private universities in Kenya examined the relationship between employee engagement and their performance.

2. Materials and Methods

The study used a correlational research design to explore relationship between employee engagement and performance of private universities campuses in Eldoret, Kenya. The design enabled the researcher to find out if there existed a relationship and the nature of the relationship between the variables. The target population for the study constituted all permanent teaching and non-teaching staff members of private university campuses in Eldoret, which was a total of 141 staff members. There are three private university campuses in Eldoret: Catholic University of Eastern Africa, University of Eastern Africa – Baraton and Mount Kenya University.

Simple random sampling is a technique of sampling where every respondent has the same probability of being chosen to form a sample. In the study, teaching and non-teaching staff of private university campuses in Eldoret, Kenya were selected by simple random sampling. The sample size was obtained using the following formula from Nassiuma (2000):

$$\frac{Nc^2}{c^2 + (N - 1)e^2} = n$$

Where, n = Sample size, N = Population, c = covariance, e = standard error. Substituting the above figures, the sample size was determined as follows:

$$n = \frac{141(0.25^2)}{0.25^2 + (141 - 1)(0.02^2)} = 74$$

The researcher used simple random sampling to obtain 74 respondents as distributed among the campuses in Table 1.

University Campus	Total Population	Sampling Procedure	Total
Catholic University of Eastern Africa – Gaba campus, Eldoret	78	$\frac{78}{141} * 74$	41
Mount Kenya University - Eldoret Campus	43	$\frac{43}{141} * 74$	23
University of Eastern Africa, Baraton - Eldoret Extension Centre	20	$\frac{20}{141} * 74$	10
Total	141		74

Table 1: Sample Size

The researcher used questionnaire as the major tool of collecting data. A document analysis guide was used to collect secondary data regarding the staff retention and student enrolment according to faculties, programmes/departments and campuses. Data obtained was organized according to the research questions of the study. Data was analysed by use of descriptive and inferential statistics and presented in form of pie-charts, graphs and tables. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages and mean were used to enable the researcher to meaningfully describe the results obtained while in inferential statistics. Pearson correlation was applied to determine the nature of the relationship between variables at a confidence level of 95%.

3. Results

3.1. Job Role Clarity

The study sought to establish the extent to which the Universities had put in place measures to support job clarity. The items examined included work instructions, job descriptions and work plans. The research findings on this item were as shown in Table 2 below.

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Work instructions	72	1	5	3.47	0.855
Job descriptions	72	2	5	3.92	0.818
Work plans	72	1	5	3.46	0.887
Total Mean				3.62	

Table 2: Job Role Clarity

The findings in Table 2 above show that the employees knew and understood the scope of tasks to be undertaken in their respective work places to a large extent (mean=3.62). This was mostly done by issuing job descriptions (mean=3.92), whereas use of work plans and work instructions was to a moderate level (means of 3.46 and 3.47, respectively).

The study further examined the extent to which employees in private universities in Kenya experienced job role clarity. Their responses on the various items provided were as summarized in Table 3 below.

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
I have clear work instructions	72	1	5	4.13	0.838
I understand day-to-day objectives of my department	72	1	5	4.24	0.796
I know how my job contributes to the success of my organization	72	1	5	4.35	0.858
My supervisor sets performance goals/targets for me	72	1	5	3.74	0.888
I have clear duties and responsibilities for my job.	72	1	5	4.21	0.871
I have no doubt that what I do on my job is really important.	72	1	5	4.14	0.954
I have a clear understanding of the goals and objectives of my organization.	72	1	5	4.19	0.944
The level of work responsibility given to me is reasonable.	72	1	5	4.18	0.845
Total Mean				4.15	

Table 3: Job Role Clarity

The findings shown in Table 3 indicate that the employees in the private universities knew and understood the scope of tasks to be undertaken in the respective jobs (mean = 4.15). The employees understand their roles through possession of job descriptions (a document that indicates duties and responsibilities of a job holder that is signed by both the supervisor and employee, work plans a schedule of activities to be done by the employee), work instructions (directives and guidelines on how to perform the job) and also finding out if conflicts exist due to role ambiguity. They also understood how their jobs contributed to the success of their institutions.

3.2. Job Autonomy

The study also sought to identify if the universities had put in place measures to guarantee job autonomy for their employees. The results were as shown in Table 4 below.

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Prioritize duties	72	1	5	3.38	0.879
Planning tasks	72	1	5	3.33	0.993
Flexible work schedules	72	2	5	3.43	0.901
Total Mean				3.38	

Table 4: Job Autonomy

From the results in Table 4, job autonomy was practiced in the private universities at moderate level (mean=3.38). The uses of prioritization of duties, planning of tasks and flexible work schedules were all done at moderate levels in the institutions. The research further sought to identify the degree to which employees in private universities experienced job autonomy. Their responses to various items provided were as summarized in Table 5 below.

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
I have the decision-making authority I need to do my job effectively.	72	1	5	3.58	0.975
I am allowed to decide on how to get my job done.	72	1	5	3.74	0.805
I have the control over scheduling my work	72	1	5	3.82	0.845
I am able to modify what my job objectives are	72	1	5	3.28	0.967
I am free to choose the methods to use in carrying out my job.	72	1	5	3.64	1.025
Total Mean				3.61	

Table 5: Job Role Clarity

The results in Table 5 show that the respondents agreed that there was job autonomy in their institutions (mean = 3.61). This implied that there was commendable degree to which the job provided substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the employee in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in performing the work.

3.3. Performance of Private Universities in Kenya

In the study, performance was measured using student enrolment in private university campuses in Eldoret, Kenya. Specifically, this indicator referred to the number of new students registered in academic years from 2014 to 2016. The table below provides the research findings obtained from the universities' records.

University Campuses		2014	2015	2016
1	No. of Students	2523	2214	1901
	Percentage growth		-12.25%	-14.14%
2	No. of Students	524	445	429
	Percentage growth		-15.08%	-3.60%
3	No. of Students	164	239	257
	Percentage growth		45.7%	7.53%

Table 6: Performance of Private University Campuses in Eldoret

Table 6 above indicates that the student population growth rate in the year 2015 and 2016 declined in two campuses; one campus had positive population growth rate in the two years since it was a newly established campus which had not experienced clearance of students for graduation. The highest registered decline in student population by one of the university campuses was -15.08% in the year 2015 while the lowest decline was -3.60% in 2016.

3.4. Pearson Correlation

Table 7 below gives a summary of correlation between the performance of the private universities, on the one hand, and job role clarity and job autonomy, on the other hand.

		Job Role clarity	Job autonomy	Performance
Job role clarity	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	72		
Job autonomy	Pearson Correlation	0.426**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	72	72	
Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.540	0.437	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.021	0.048	
	N	72	72	72

Table 7: Pearson Correlation

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 above indicates a correlation coefficient of 0.54 for job role clarity. This implied that there was a moderate positive correlation between job role clarity and performance of the private universities in Kenya. The table further indicates a correlation coefficient of 0.437 for job autonomy, which showed that there was moderate positive correlation between job autonomy and performance of the private universities.

3.5. Test of Hypotheses

The hypothesis for job role clarity stated that there is no significant relationship between job role clarity and performance of private universities in Kenya. That on job autonomy stated that There is no significant relationship between job autonomy and performance of private universities in Kenya. The hypothesis test results for job role clarity and job autonomy were as indicated in the table below.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.303	.291		4.485	.000
	Job Role clarity	.001	.009	.009	.059	.003
	Effective communication	.016	.012	.204	1.354	.518
	Job autonomy	.012	.014	.121	.870	.037
a. Dependent Variable: Performance						

Table 8: Coefficients

Table 8 above shows that the p-value for job role clarity was 0.003, which was less than 0.05. Therefore, the research did not accept the null hypothesis, but accepted the alternative hypothesis. This implied that there is a significant relationship between job role clarity and performance of private universities in Kenya. Moreover, the table, in regards to job autonomy, shows that the p-value was 0.037, which was also less than 0.05. The null hypothesis was therefore not accepted and alternative hypothesis was accepted. This meant that there was significant relationship between job autonomy and performance of private universities in Kenya.

4. Discussion

The results of the study showed that there is a significant relationship between job role clarity and performance of private universities in Kenya. This is in agreement with the findings of Terje, Göran and Sander (2011) who established that when there is a lack of role clarity among customer-contact employees, negative outcomes are likely to occur; for instance, the concerned employee may mislead customers by providing incorrect information, which leads to poor service quality experiences for the customers. Similarly, Owor (2015) has revealed that employees who experienced high degree of role clarity in their jobs were more likely to be engaged; when employees get clear role profiles they feel obliged to respond in kind and “repay” the organization in terms of engagement.

The findings further indicated that there was significant relationship between job autonomy and performance of private universities in Kenya. This finding reiterated those of Raza, Nousheen and Mohsin (2013), who investigated the effect of job autonomy on job satisfaction and organizational commitment and established that an increase in job autonomy results in an increased level of job satisfaction and employee engagement and organizational culture moderates this relationship.

5. Conclusion

From the results of the research, it is evident that there is a significant relationship between job role clarity and performance of private universities in Kenya. University employees understand their roles through possession of job descriptions, work instructions and also how their jobs contributed to the success of their institutions. This enables them to work towards a common goal as an institution. The findings also showed that there is a significant relationship between job autonomy and performance of private universities in Kenya. The degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the employee in scheduling the work results in the improvement of the performance of the private universities in Kenya.

6. Recommendations

Based on the research findings and conclusions, it is recommended that private universities in Kenya should pay attention to ensuring that every employee has a clear role and that each staff member understands how their work contributes to the success of their institutions. Line managers/ supervisors and heads of sections should ensure that this is adhered to avoid overlaps and duplication of tasks. In addition, universities should examine the extent to which they grant job autonomy to their employees. Employees should be given substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the employees in scheduling their tasks. Such freedom would result in a significant degree of improvement in the job performance. Universities also need to develop flexible working environments and schedules.

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