

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY, ETHICAL LEADERSHIP, GENDER AND AGE AS PREDICTORS OF WORK ENGAGEMENT AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN IMO STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study examined psychological safety, ethical leadership, gender and age as predictors of work engagement among academic staff of tertiary institutions in Imo state. Two hundred fifty three (253) participants who were made up of 119 males and 134 females were selected through a convenience sampling technique from four tertiary institutions in Imo State. Participants were within the ages of 30-64 years with the mean age of 42.67 and a standard deviation of 8.45. Three instruments; Team Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 1996), Ethical Leadership Work Scale (Karianne, Deanne, & Annel, 1997), and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002) were used for the study. The design of the study was cross sectional survey design while data were analyzed using Zero-order correlation and Hierarchical Multiple Regression. The result of the study showed that gender, and age were not predictors of work engagement. On the other hand, psychological safety significantly predicted the three dimensions of work engagement (dedication, absorption and vigour), and overall work engagement. Ethical leadership also significantly predicted work engagement. This study recommends that Industrial Psychologists in academic institutions and other work setting should promote ethical behaviour in both supervisors and subordinates by investing in management training programs that will enhance both leader and followers ethical behaviour.

Keywords: Psychological Safety, Ethical Leadership, Work Engagement, Gender, Age

INTRODUCTION

Academic duties and responsibilities in Nigeria universities have become too challenging for the lecturers, students and parents (Ignatius, & Umotong, 2022). The continued dwindling of the Nigeria economy and the persistent brain drain syndrome has put more pressure on the available manpower in our various universities (Ogunode, & Ishaya, 2021). Universities are the fulcrum of economic, social and educational development of any nation. Universities in Imo State are not excluded from these dangerous negative impacts. Unfortunately, universities in Imo State are more affected because of the high level of insecurity perpetuated by unknown gunmen and other intimidating social vices in the state. This security situation further devastates the loosely held academic staff manpower that service the tertiary institutions in the state (Ogunode, Jegede, Abubakar, & Martina. 2020).

Work engagement is the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; noting their physical, cognitive and emotional performances (Simpson, 2009). According to Frank, Finnegan, & Taylor (2004), employee engagement as the amount of will, effort displayed by employees at their job. It connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy that are usually brought to the work place. Engaged employees are considered as motivated, positive, inspired, and having a great sense of feeling attached to their job and organization.

Work engagement refers to a motivational state (Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010), characterized by exerting one's full self in a work role. It is the level of work commitment and involvement an employee has towards the values of the organization. According to Naqshbandi, Kabir, Ishak, & Islam (2023), an engaged employee is aware of business scenario and works with team members to enhance and improve the performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. This in other words shows that employee engagement acts as an indicator which determines the association of an individual with the organization. Work engagement is composed of three



dimensions: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour refers to energy, mental resilience, determination and investing consistent effort in job (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). Vigour is one of the aspects of work engagement that implies high levels of energy and mental resilience while working. There is also a determined investment in the actual work, together with high levels of persistence even when faced with difficulties. Dedication is about being inspired, enthusiastic and highly involved in your job (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). Dedication is an individual's deriving a sense of significance from work, feeling enthusiastic and proud about the given job, and feeling inspired and challenged by the job (Song et al., 2012). The last dimension, absorption, refers to a sense of detachment from your surroundings, a high degree of concentration on your job, and a general lack of conscious awareness of the amount of time spent on the job (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). Absorption means concentration and being engrossed in people's work, whereby passing time will be intangible and being detached from the job has some difficulties for them. Also, the feeling of safety in every aspect provides positive addictive in ensuring that workers are totally committed and show sense of responsibility to the job.

Psychological safety is the belief that employees' actions in the execution of duties in the organization will not be met with punishment or deprivations. It is the shared expectation held by members of a team that teammates will not embarrass, reject, or punish them for sharing ideas, taking risks, or soliciting feedback. Organizations with psychologically safe work environments: Where employees feel free to ask bold questions, share concerns, ask for help, and take, calculated risks are more devoted and committed to the ideals of the organization.

Individuals experience psychological safety when they feel they can express their true selves at work without fear of negative consequences. In these experiences, individuals feel situations are trustworthy, secure, and predictable. Psychological safety is influenced by social systems that create situations that are predictable, consistent, and non-threatening. Four aspects of social systems likely to influence psychological safety are interpersonal relationships, group and intergroup dynamics, organizational norms, and management style and process (Kahn, 1990). Psychological safety describes an individual's belief that interactions with others are unlikely to result in negative consequences such as a loss of reputation or respect (Aziz-Ur-Rehman. & Siddiqui, 2019)

Thus, a high level of psychological safety is presumably a precondition for much of the communication that enables effective coordination within work groups, such as asking questions, providing feedback, requesting help, or admitting mistakes.

Al-sharafi & Rajiani (2013) defined ethical leadership as the principles, beliefs, and values of the right and wrong that characterize the foundation of organizational behaviour, thereby formulating the pedestal upon which the leaders influence employees in achieving the goals of the organization. Bubble (2012) further defines ethical leadership as the process of influencing employees through values, principles and beliefs that extensively border on the accepted norms in the organizational behaviours.

A study by Caldwell, Dixon, Floyd, Chaudoin, Post, and Cheokas, (2012) found out that the significant issue that challenges modern organizations is the reduced application of ethical behaviour. Such realization informs that the principles of ethical behaviour are widely non-existent thereby drawing the definition that trust among leadership led to increased motivation among employees and this becomes reflected in the productivity and performance of the organization.

Given that employees contribute significantly to company performance, it may be in the interest of companies to identify and foster factors that create optimal conditions for employee success and productivity (Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999). Importantly, the leader has the power to enhance the likelihood of the emergence of these valued outcomes which encompass motivation (Kovach, 1995) engagement (Lockwood, 2007) and commitment. The ability of the leader to influence desired employee states and consequent company success is reflected by Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson, (2008) study which links authentic leadership to engagement,



meaningfulness, job satisfaction and commitment, which ultimately result in enhanced job performance, decreased withdrawal behaviours and heightened investment of effort. A few studies and theorists corroborate this linkage between leadership and employee performance (Gong, Hunag & Farr, 2009).

Age has become an important characteristic for organizations due to the low number of older employees in the workforce (Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, & Dikkers, 2008) and the constant actions mostly by government policies that seek to free up workplaces for younger people (Kooij Tims, & Kanfer, 2008). Hence, understanding the differences among older and younger employees regarding the way they deal with the organizational environment is essential for assessing factors such as employee work engagement (DuBose, 2016). Recognizing age as a multidimensional concept and the variables that might influence it will bring valuable inputs for organizations since the way age is perceived in society will influence Human Resources policies and employee's treatment at work (Schalk Van, De Lange, De Witte, Kraus, & Stamov-RoBnage, 2010).

Zhang and Farndale (2020) conducted a study on Workforce age profile effects on job resources, work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior. The researchers collected responses from 270 employees of multinational firms operating in India and conducted multiple regression analyses to examine the hypotheses. The authors found that age profiles are significant predictors of work engagement. Specifically, the relationship between development opportunities and work engagement was stronger for younger employees than for older employees. However, age profiles were neither positively related to organizational citizenship behaviour nor a moderator of the job resources–organizational citizenship behaviour relationship. The result provided empirical evidence of the life span perspective, suggesting that age profiles influence work engagement. When employees show a positive attitude towards the organization and its value, there is likely to be high productivity yields. This show of positive attitude is the major aspect through which employees get engaged to the organization. Thus, when such positive attitudes are guaranteed, there is most likely to be increased performance in each task measured against preset known standards of accuracy, completeness, cost, and speed.

Similarly, when employees are adequately engaged to the organization, some positive work aspects such as higher employee commitment, higher emotional and intellectual drives will significantly exist in relation to accomplishing the organizational set goals, mission, and vision. An adequately engaged employee is likely to be aware of the business context of the organization and works progressively with colleagues to improve performance within the job and for the benefit of the organization. Saks (2008) notes that engaged employees experience greater attachment to their work and their organization; they are more likely to do things that augment organizational effectiveness

However, within the Nigerian organizational perspective, especially as perceived in tertiary institutions in Imo State, there are increasing challenges and complexities that are likely making employee engagement difficult to attain. Specifically, there is an increasing trend in salary cuts whereby employees' emoluments are gradually being reduced without justifiable reasons. This is peculiar among state government owned organizations especially in Imo state. . There is also the issue scattered payments or non-payment of salaries. There is the continued issue of brain drain nick named *Japa* and the threatening influence of insecurity in the state. These occurrences have greatly affected the possibility of employees showing positive attitudes towards the organization and its value; a vital panacea to increased organizational productivity.

As a result, the psychological safety of these affected employees may become threatened. Ethical leadership may be affected as the prevailing work circumstances do not guarantee quality leadership. With this development, the number of male and female struggling to ensure the stability of the organization is affected as males who are usually the breadwinners as a result of the harsh economic situations and security challenges are not usually available to ensure work commitment. There have been research results that wish to corroborate the role of psychological



safety and ethical leadership on work engagement, but no significant part of the study focused in Nigeria especially in Imo State.

There is a paucity of current studies relating psychological safety and ethical leadership to employee engagement in these present times when employee welfare and job safety is becoming too challenging. This paper hopes to fill this gap in knowledge and provide, where possible, additional insight into the peculiarities existing in the predictiveness of psychological safety and ethical leadership on employee engagement in a challenging period among employees in Imo State.

Purpose of the Study

The researcher aims to examine if, psychological safety, ethical leadership, gender and age can predict of work engagement. Specifically, this research aims at identifying if;

- 1 Psychological safety would predict employee engagement.
- 2 Examine if ethical leadership would predict work engagement.
- 3 Evaluate if gender and age would predict work engagement

Research Hypotheses

1. Gender will significantly predict work engagement among academic staff of tertiary institutions.
2. Age will significantly predict work engagement among academic staff of tertiary institutions.
3. Psychological safety will significantly predict work dedication among academic staff of tertiary institutions.
4. Psychological safety will significantly predict work absorption among academic staff of tertiary institutions.
5. Psychological safety will significantly predict work vigor among academic staff of tertiary institutions.
6. Psychological safety will significantly predict work engagement among academic staff of tertiary institutions.
7. Ethical leadership will significantly predict work engagement among academic staff of tertiary institutions.

METHOD

Design and Statistics

The design used for the study was cross-sectional survey design; this is because of the segment of a large population cutting across different demographic factors involved in the study. Three statistics were used for this study; Descriptive statistics, correlation and hierarchical multiple regression were used to analyse the data.

Participants

The study conveniently selected two hundred and fifty-three (253) participants who were teaching staff from four major institutions in Imo State, namely; lecturers from Imo State University, Owerri, Federal University of Technology Owerri, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri and Imo State University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. Owerri. The participants were made up of males and females with age of 30 to 61 with the mean age of 42. 67 and a standard deviation of 8.54. Imo State University, Owerri, provided a sample size of 63 participants, Federal University of Technology Owerri, provided a sample size of 72 participants, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri provided a sample size of 69 participants and Imo State University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. Owerri. provided 49 participants.

Instruments

The researchers used three instruments for data collection, and they are as follows; Team Psychological Safety Scale (TPSS), Ethical Leadership Work Scale (ELWS) and Utrecht's Employee Engagement Scale (UEES).

The first instrument which is Team Psychological Safety Scale (TPSS) developed by Edmondson (1996) was used to measure psychological safety which is the employees' shared beliefs and learning behaviours in workplace. The scale consists of seven items and scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Previous evaluations of the measure showed that the survey items capture the existence of team psychological safety and showed high internal consistency reliability with an acceptable Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 (Edmondson, 1999). Bresman and Zellmer-Bruhn (2013) reported a test-retest reliability coefficient of .87

Team psychological safety scale was revalidated through a pilot study by the researchers to obtain the Nigerian psychometric properties. At first, face validity was employed before pilot study. The 7 items TPSS was revalidated using 52 secondary school teachers from Owerri, Imo State. Using the SPSS statistical tool, the scale gave a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient reliability of .76, Cronbach Alpha based on standardized items of .78 and a mean score of 18.68

The second scale was Work Scale (ELWS) developed by Karianne, Deanne, and Annebel (2011). It is used to measure ethical leadership. The scale comprises of seven sub dimensions (fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, people orientation, power sharing, role clarification, and concern for sustainability) which measures ethical leader behaviour. Each item was scored on a 5-point Likert format where 1 represent strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree. The ELW scales show good variability and high reliabilities. Report of Cronbach's Alpha for the scale shows that all reliabilities of the ELW scales are above .80. Karianne et, al (2011) obtained a construct validity of .79 by correlating between the ELW scales and the Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) developed by Brown, Treviño and Harrison, (2005). As expected, the ELS was significantly and positively correlated with the seven ELW behaviours, ranging from $r=.51$ to $r=.79$.

The researchers revalidated the scale through a pilot study to obtain the Nigerian psychometric properties. The 38 item Ethical Leadership at Work Scale was revalidated using 52 secondary school teachers from Owerri, Imo State. Using the SPSS statistical tool, the scale gave a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient reliability of .81, Cronbach Alpha based on standardized items of .82 and a mean score of 80.02.

The third scale used for this study was Utrecht's Employee Engagement Scale (UEES) developed by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker (2002). Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES) is a 9 items scale comprising three dimensions of work engagement namely: Vigour, Dedication and Absorption. Examples of items includes; "At my work, I feel bursting with energy". (Vigour), "I am enthusiastic about my job". (Dedication), "Time flies when I am working", (Absorption). The UWES is scored in a 5-pointlikert –type scale anchored from never (1) to always (5). The reliability value ranged from 0.80 to 0.9 for vigour, 0.88 to 0.95 for dedication and 0.70 to 0.88 for absorption (Schaufeli et al. 2002). Schaufeli et al (2002) reported a Cronbach Alpha for scores on this scale to be .95, indicating satisfactory measuring. To obtain Nigerian reliability and validity, Udemba (2018) conducted a pilot study to ascertain the reliability and validity of this scale. The analysis revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .89 for 9 items. Mean score of 28.74, variance of 33.95 and standard deviation of 5.83. For the sub-scales, vigour has Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .67 for 3 items, mean score of 9.64, variance of 3.55 and standard deviation of 1.88. The dedication sub-scale has Cronbach's alpha of .90 for 3 items, mean score of 9.77, variance of

6.719 and standard deviation of 2.59. The absorption sub-scale has Cronbach’s alpha of .78 for 3 items, mean score of 9.23, variance of 5.24 and standard deviation of 2.29.

Procedure

The researchers visited the institutions and sought the permission of the registrar of each of the institutions in the study. Further, to obtain the participants’ approval, the researchers explained the rationale behind the study as purely academic to the lecturers, presented the letter of informed consent and assured them of the confidentiality of their response. The researchers with the help of two research assistants distributed the three questionnaires to the lecturers in different departments and a letter of informed consent simultaneously to each of the participants that were willing to participate in the study. The researcher also presented the letter of identification to the Head of Departments before using it for the study. In general, 265 questionnaires were distributed to the participants but only 253 questionnaires were completed and valid for data analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1: Zero-Order Correlations of the Key Variables Used in the Study

	Age	TPSS	EL	D	A	V	EWE
Age	1	-.105	-.001	-.032	-.026	-.023	-.033
TPSS		1	.371**	.642**	.551**	.366**	.634**
EL			1	.530**	.451**	.438**	.571**
D				1	.680**	.498**	.898**
A					1	.448**	.844**
V						1	.755**
EWE							1

Note: N = 253, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Keys: TSS = Team Psychological Safety, EL = Ethical Leadership, D = Dedication, A = Absorption, V = Vigour, EE = Employee Work Engagement

A correlation analyses of the key variables used in the study is presented in Table 1 above. The results showed that significant positive relationships were found among team psychological safety and ethical leadership ($r = .371, n = 253, p < .01$); team psychological safety and dedication ($r = .642, n = 253, p < .01$); team psychological safety and Absorption ($r = .551, n = 253, p < .01$); team psychological safety and vigour ($r = .366, n = 253, p < .01$); team psychological safety and employee work engagement ($r = .634, n = 253, p < .01$); ethical leadership and dedication ($r = .530, n = 253, p < .01$); ethical leadership and absorption ($r = .451, n = 253, p < .01$); ethical leadership and vigour ($r = .438, n = 253, p < .01$); ethical leadership and employee work engagement ($r = .571, n = 253, p < .01$).

Similarly, significant positive relationships were found among dedication and absorption ($r = .680, n = 253, p < .01$); dedication and vigour ($r = .498, n = 253, p < .01$); dedication and employee work engagement ($r = .898, n = 253, p < .01$); absorption and vigour ($r = .448, n = 253, p < .01$); absorption and employee engagement ($r = .844, n = 253, p < .01$); vigour and employee work engagement ($r = .755, n = 253, p < .01$).

Table 2: Summary of Four Steps Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for Employee Work Engagement on Gender, Age, Team Psychological Safety and Ethical Leadership.

Predictors	Step1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β
Step 1			
Gender	.038	.025	.006
Age	-.034	.033	.019
Step 2			
Team Psychological Safety		.637**	.492**
Step 3			
Ethical Leadership			.388**
ΔF	.314	167.66**	68.62**
R^2	.003	.404**	.533**
ΔR^2	.003	.401**	.129**
Df	2, 250	3, 249	4, 248
Dublin Watson	2.21		

Note: $N = 576$, ** $p < .01$.

The result of a hierarchical multiple regression analysis as presented in Table 2 above tested hypotheses 1, 2, 6, and 7 of the study. The overall model of the three step hierarchical regression analyses was not significant for gender and age [$R^2 = .003$, $F(2, 250) = .314$, $p > .05$]. but was significant for psychological safety [$R^2 = .404$, $F(3, 249) = 167.66$, $p < .01$] and ethical leadership [$R^2 = .129$, $F(4, 248) = 68.62$, $p < .01$]. The overall fit of the model shows that 53.3% of the variation in employee work engagement has been explained. Also, the Durbin-Watson of 2.21 falls within the accepted range ($1.5 < D < 2.5$), indicating that there is no autocorrelation problem in the data and that the error term is independent.

In the tests for hypotheses 1 and 2, gender and age were regressed into the model as control variables. They jointly explained only 0.3% of the variation in employees work engagement. Both gender ($\beta = .038$, $p > .05$, $t = .599$) and age ($\beta = -.034$, $p > .05$, $t = -.543$) were not significantly predictors employees' work engagement. Therefore, the first and second hypotheses were rejected.

To analyse the result of the sixth hypothesis, psychological safety was regressed into the model, and it explained 40.4% of the variation in employees work engagement. Psychological safety also significantly predicted employees work engagement ($\beta = .637$, $p < .01$, $t = 12.94$). Therefore, the

sixth hypothesis is accepted implying that as team psychological increased, employees work engagement increased alongside

To test for the seventh hypothesis, ethical leadership was regressed into the model, and it explained 12.9% of the variation in employees work engagement. Ethical leadership also significantly predicted employees work engagement ($\beta = .388, p < .01, t = 8.28$). Therefore, the sixth hypothesis is accepted implying that as ethical leadership increased, employees work engagement increased alongside.

To test for hypotheses 3, 4 and 5, simple linear regression analysis was utilized to demonstrate of how psychological safety predicts the three dimensions of employee work engagement (i.e. Dedication, Absorption and Vigour). The results are presented below.

Table 3: Result of Simple Linear Regression Analyses for Dedication on Psychological Safety

Variables	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	ΔF	B	df	t	p
	.642	.412	.409	175.75		1, 251		
Psychological Safety					.642		13.26	.000

The result of the simple linear regression testing hypothesis 3 as shown in Table 3 above show that psychological safety is a significant predictor of the dedication dimension of employee work engagement ($\beta = .642, p < .01, t = 13.26$). Therefore, hypothesis three is accepted. The result implies that dedication is positively related to psychological safety.

Table 4: Result of Simple Linear Regression Analyses for Absorption on Psychological Safety

Variables	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	ΔF	B	df	t	p
	.551	.304	.301	109.47		1, 251		
Psychological Safety					.551		10.46	.000

Similarly, the result of the simple linear regression testing hypothesis 4 as shown in Table 3 above show that psychological safety is a significant predictor of the absorption dimension of employee work engagement ($\beta = .551, p < .01, t = 10.46$). Therefore, hypothesis four is accepted. The result implies that absorption is positively related to psychological safety.

Table 5: Result of Simple Linear Regression Analyses for Vigour on Psychological Safety

Variables	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	ΔF	B	df	t	p
	.366	.134	.131	38.91		1, 251		
Psychological Safety					.366		6.24	.000

Finally, the result of the simple linear regression testing hypothesis 5 as shown in Table 3 above also show that psychological safety is a significant predictor of the vigour dimension of employee work engagement ($\beta = .366, p < .01, t = 6.24$). Therefore, hypothesis five is accepted. The result implies that vigour is positively related to psychological safety.

DISCUSSION



The research work studied psychological safety, ethical leadership, gender, and age as predictors of work engagement. The Seven hypotheses guided this study.

The hypothesis 1 which stated which stated that gender will significantly predict work engagement was analysed and the hypothesis was rejected, showing that gender has no significant impact on work engagement. This shows that gender, which has been the term used to describe the physical and biological characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed has no significant impact on work engagement among academic staff of tertiary institutions. Although, some scholars Banihani Lewis, and Syed (2013) argued it, engagement is gendered and that it is easier for men to be engaged than woman.

This finding is similar the empirical study of Sadhna, et.al (2019) who according to their findings indicated that there was no effect of gender on the engagement of employees in the IT sector. The research finding of Chiyem (2019) who examined the predictive relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and employee engagement, and whether age, gender, and marital status moderate the relationship revealed that although POS positively and significantly predicts employee performance and work engagement, age, and gender did not moderate the relationship.

Hypothesis II which stated that age will significantly predict work engagement among academic staff of tertiary institutions was tested and rejected. This showed that age is not a significant predictor of work engagement. This shows that the behaviour or engagement of employees is not determined by the age of both old and newly employed employees.

The hypothesis III, IV and V that stated that psychological safety will significantly predict the three dimensions of work engagement (dedication, work absorption and vigour) respectively were tested and accepted, showing that psychological safety when implored in work environment will significantly have a positive impact on employees three dimension of work engagement. This entails that work dedication is about being inspired, enthusiastic and highly involved in your job (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014).

The hypothesis VI which stated that psychological safety will significantly predict employees' work engagement among academic staff of tertiary institution was tested and accepted. This implies that an increased experience of psychological safety results in work engagement on the other hand, employees working in a perceived psychologically unsafe work environment may disengage from their work and may be reluctant to attempt new things

The hypothesis VII which stated that ethical leadership will significantly predict work engagement was tested and accepted showing that ethical leadership is a significant predictor of work engagement. This entails that ethical leadership in organizations defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown et al., 2005), significantly have a predictive strength on work engagement. Similarly, to the researcher's findings, Asif, et.al (2019) reported that there is a direct effect of ethical leadership on work engagement.

Implication of the Study

The findings of the study have far-reaching implications which are vital to the educational and industrial sector. The finding of the study which says that employees' age and gender do not determine how engaged they will be towards their work provide a serious knowledge for organizations. In other words, employees' work engagement could improve or reduce regardless of the employee's gender or age. This finding has great implication to industrial growth and serves as an insight to industrial psychologists who function in organizational or industrial environment because it gives the opportunity to focus on other variables that could affect work engagement.

In the case of psychological safety, most psychologists understand the concept of psychological safety and meaningfulness. It should be noted that in the school settings, employees'



psychological safety is particularly relevant because it enables employees' to be dedicated and committed to influence the achievement of intended learning outcomes. The finding on psychological safety, therefore, implies that when employees have the feeling that taking an interpersonal risk will not result in embarrassment, shame or ridicule, the possibility of being dedicated and engaged without fear becomes high. Psychological safety, therefore, enables employees to engage, connect, change, and learn new ways of executing their tasks and contributing their quota to the development of the organization without any fear of being punished or victimized. This is significantly important for any organization that aims to grow.

The finding on ethical leadership and its predictive strength towards work engagement implies that ethical leadership is significant in improving or reducing work engagement among employees. This implication serves as a tool to industrial psychologists towards structuring organizational policies and cultures for the purpose of growth and desired productivity outcome. Ng and Feldman, (2015) who asserted that ethical leaders are committed to behave ethically both in their personal and professional lives and do things based upon ethical decision rules support this implication. Ethical leadership construct is found to be distant from the similar leadership constructs and accounts for incremental variance in employees' different work and attitude-related outcomes. Also, the finding on ethical leadership and work engagement should serve as a medium that proffers deep insight and knowledge to industrial psychologists as it has shown that ethical leadership improves organizational objectives by improving employees' work engagement. Therefore, leaders must create an ethically friendly work environment for all employees, communicate ethical issues, serve as role models and put mechanism in place for the development of responsible employees. It is expected that leaders who exhibit ethical behaviour would be more likely to consider the needs and right of employees and treat them fairly. Indeed, all employees want to work for a truly and responsible employer and as such, corporate leaders has to fulfil their obligations on ethical issues and rise up to these expectations

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommend the following:

Given the fact that employees who perceived the workplace to be psychologically safe are more likely to put in more efforts and be immersed in their work, it is recommended that educational institutions and other work settings should ensure transparency, fairness in the application of corporate rules and put measures in place to enhance interpersonal trust and solidarity among workers. Management must show genuine concern and care for the social and psychological well-being of their workers.

For the sake of achieving desired organizational goals and objectives, organizations and leaders should create conditions through which they can enhance employees' perceptions of psychological empowerment and safety. Given that, we recommend that organizations can design empowerment intervention programs to help employees exhibit their maximum potential. Ethical leadership has positive impacts on employee work engagement; therefore, organizations need to promote ethical behaviours both in supervisors and subordinates. The organizations can also invest in management training programs that emphasize both leaders' and followers' ethical behaviour. Another possible way to promote ethical behaviour in the organization can be through making it part of the in-role job requirement. When the display of such behaviours is formally rewardable or punishable, employees (both leaders and subordinates) will feel more obligated to perform them. In short, though having ethical leadership in organizations is not an easy task, organizations need to educate employees, especially higher leadership and supervisors about the importance of ethical behaviour in the organization to get positive organizational outcomes.

Conclusion



Organizations want to get employee engagement right to improve motivation, enthusiasm and buy in to their overall aims, objectives, and strategy. Employee Engagement is a concept gaining significant importance in the past 10 years. Organizations today use engaged employees as a tool for strategic partnership in the business. The concept of employee engagement has now gained even more importance, since many drivers have been identified, which impact employee performance and well-being at workplace. As companies across industries strive to survive and rise above the stiff competition, physical and mental well-being of employees will be one of the important aspects that HR managers need to tend focus on. Hence, employee engagement is today seen as a powerful source of competitive advantage in the turbulent times.

Considering this, the research studied the impact of psychological and environmental factors (psychological safety, ethical leadership, age and gender) on work engagement and revealed interesting findings. Data were collected and analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences and based on the result, it was found that while age and gender did not significantly predict work engagement, psychological safety and ethical leadership are significant predictors of employees' work engagement. Also based on the research findings, recommendations were made on how to enhance psychological safety and ethical leadership in organizations. This is essential because work engagement when improved leads to organizational positive outcomes such as, high productivity, growth, etc.



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