

Gender, Leadership Style and Employee Engagement

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Abstract

This study sought to establish the relationship between gender, leadership styles and teacher engagement in public secondary schools of Murang'a County, Kenya. A survey research design was used. A sample of 368 respondents was selected from a target population of 3,860 teachers in 306 public secondary schools using systematic random sampling followed by use of random numbers. Data was collected using a questionnaire. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods like mean and percentages, and t-test respectively were used for data analysis. The findings of this study revealed that most schools were headed by male principals (66.3%), with only about a third of the principals being female (33.4%). The study findings also showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the respondents' perception on leadership style due to gender. However, there was a significant difference between respondents' perception on employee engagement and gender. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education and other players in education need to come up with, and enforce gender parity policies in recruitment, appointment and promotion of women so that discrimination against women ascension to leadership is eliminated. The Teachers' Service Commission should be tasked with the role of implementing such policies to the letter. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in women leadership domain and recommends strategies that will promote it.

Key Words: Gender, Women, Leadership Style, Employee Engagement, Principals

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I. Introduction

According to Shuck and Herd, (2012), to be a leader of today's dynamic workforce demands a willingness to understand and navigate the new approaches to leadership in an evolving landscape. The changing psychological contract has meant that organizations have had to find new ways to motivate their employees to encourage them to give their best. Many employees are looking for environments where they can be engaged and feel that they are contributing in a positive way to something larger than themselves.

The Millennials or the Y Generation is a cohort of employees that has taken over the workplace in large numbers. They are often described as entitled, spoiled with poor work ethic and little respect for authority. Their styles of work are very different from that of the both X generation and the baby boomers. They usually raise questions to challenge the status quo. Employees are attaching a lot of importance to satisfying their own individual demands and being more responsible for their own futures and careers (Lumley, Coetzee, Tladinyane, & Ferreira, 2011).

The employees of today expect that they will be involved in decision making, participate in the activities of the organization in addition to being treated with respect and fairness (Burke & Ng, 2006). As a result, one of the characteristics of today's workforce is their high level of mobility (Lumley *et al.*, 2011), which results in voluntary turnover creating a major challenge in the management of talent and human capital (Du Plooy & Roodt, 2010). To scholars and practitioners, the changing dynamics of work should call for a new leadership that is not just interested in the amount of work done, but also with how it is done (Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011). One of the seven principles in the ISO 9001:2015 standard is employee engagement. In the ISO 9001:2008 standard, which is the predecessor of ISO 9001:2015, the same principle was referred to as employee involvement. It implies that there is need for organizations to move from mere employee involvement and embrace employee engagement which is associated with enhanced employee outcomes for the benefit of the employees, the organization and all other stakeholders.

Thus, providing a work environment and conditions that encourage employees to be willing to do and then go ahead do more than what is expected of them by the employer as per their job description is the challenge for business today, not just satisfying employees and retaining them in the organization. This is in agreement with Batista-Taran *et al.* (2013), who says that mere motivation of employees in today's competitive work environment is not enough if conditions that encourage engagement are absent.

As leaders of their schools, principals are charged with the responsibility of developing an educational environment that ensures satisfaction and raises organizational commitment (Aydin, Sarier, & Uysal, 2013).

When supervisors exhibit more relationship related behaviours towards employees, a higher level of engagement is observed in them (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007; Saks, 2006). Research has shown that women are better school leaders than men (Msila, 2017), which could be related to their leadership styles.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

School leadership quality is among the biggest factors ensuring high-quality student learning worldwide. School leaders should always work consciously toward creating congruency between organizational and individual needs fulfillment for improved productivity (Woestman & Wasonga, 2015) in an effort to increase the level of teacher engagement.

Disengaged teachers will produce a low number of matriculation grades and high numbers of form four graduates who are not able to further their education given the current Commission for University Education (CUE) entry requirements to colleges and universities, implying a high wastage rate. This is likely to increase the level of unemployment in Kenya due to lack of necessary and relevant education and skills. Unemployment is likely to lead to increased levels of crime, drug abuse and slow economic growth.

A study by Ndethiu (2014) reported that it is becoming increasingly necessary for more research to be carried out to study factors that encourage employee engagement and more so in the 21st Century. Empirical studies indicate that leadership style has been linked to teacher dissatisfaction (Aydin *et al.*, 2013) and is also a predictor of employee engagement (Popli & Rizvi, 2016).

Women school leaders are said to display better interactivity with children than their male counterparts, which helps them achieve greater engagement with learning and better results. However, their involvement in school leadership is relatively low due to entrenched negative perceptions coupled with several sociocultural barriers. According to the researcher, not much has been done to study teacher engagement in public schools in Kenya in relation to the gender of school leadership. The purpose of this study therefore was to establish the relationship between leader gender, leadership style, and employee engagement in public secondary schools of Murang'a County.

II. Literature Review

Transformational Leadership Style

Transformational leaders portray a genuine concern in the wellbeing of their followers, which means that this form of leadership entails the development of an emotional connection between the leaders and their employees (Men & Stacks, 2013).

According to Bass (1990), transformational leadership takes place when leaders broaden and lift the concerns of their followers to higher levels, make them understand and be willing to agree with and welcome the reason why their organization exists. Transformational leadership promotes capacity development for the employees and brings higher levels of personal commitment amongst them to their jobs and organization goals. Transformational leadership is characterized by four elements namely; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). Such leaders devote a lot of energy to leading their employees and also value and respect the gifts and abilities of their workers. As a result, transformational leaders earn trust, respect and admiration from their followers.

Transactional Leadership Style

Transactional leaders reward or punish followers in order to achieve organizational goals (Hoy & Miskel, 2010 as cited by (Zeinabadi & Salehi, 2011) and for leaders to receive compliance from them (Burns, 1978). Such leaders are action oriented and results focused (Batista-Taran *et al.*, 2013) and emphasis on planned and scheduled work.

Transactional leadership is founded on the traditional, bureaucratic authority and legitimacy where followers get certain valued outcomes upon acting in accordance with the wishes of their leader. These exchanges allow leaders to accomplish their performance objectives, complete required tasks, maintain the current organizational situation, motivate followers through contractual agreement, direct behavior of followers toward achievement of established goals, emphasize extrinsic rewards, avoid unnecessary risks, and focus on improving organizational efficiency (McCleskey, 2014). Burns (1978) first carried out a study on transactional leadership which indicated that transactional leaders are those who want to motivate followers through processes and actions that attract or appeal to their self-interests. Bass (1985) conceptualized that transactional leadership results in followers meeting expectations placed on them, upon which their end of bargain is fulfilled leading to their being rewarded accordingly.

Authentic Leadership Style

Authentic leadership is inspirational, motivational, visionary, and unshakably moral, compassionate, and service-oriented because it applies the qualities of both ethical and transformational leadership (de Mello e Souza Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008). Because they are wholeheartedly concerned about the well-being of the employees, authentic leaders are able to appreciate the differences among individual employees, spot matching talents, and assist employees to capitalize on their strengths (Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008).

Dark Leadership Style

Dark leadership is characterized by, manipulation, dominance, and coercion, rather than influence, persuasion, and commitment. Rosenthal, & Pittinsky (as cited in (Pryor, Odom, & Toombs, 2014) indicate that dark leadership has a selfish orientation, implying that it is focused more on the leader's needs than the needs of the larger social group. Dark leadership often involves imposing goals on constituents without their agreement or regard for their long-term welfare (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

The impact of dark leadership tends to be felt in the longer term as evidenced by the weakening effect on morale and motivation of employees. Benson and Hogan (2008) support this argument by pointing out that the toxic behavior of dark leaders tears down the ability of people to work together productively in an organization over the long term. Higgs (2009) agrees with this view point when he makes the observation that the behaviours of dark leadership eventually impact negatively on individual, group and the organization performance through the work climate that such leaders create, which unfortunately can lead to employee disengagement. Based on employee engagement literature, leadership involves courteous treatment of employees, understandable company values and company's standards of ethical behavior (Andrew & Sofian, 2011) which dark leadership conspicuously lacks.

Employee Engagement

Engagement takes place when employees are provided with the resources that will help them achieve their targets, and believe that they are needed, valued and respected in their work place. This could result in an improved individual or group performance and a firm background on which organizational sustainability can take place (Kim, Kolb, & Kim, 2013). Engaged employees work harder for longer stretches of time; take action proactively to budding threats and challenges; expand their roles at work, and; adapt more readily to change (Macey *et al.*, 2011) and thus have high chances of contributing positively by attracting and retaining new clients, as well as infecting their colleagues with their positive attitude (Crabtree & Robison, 2013). On the other hand, disengaged employees are unhappy at work and also actively show their unhappiness by action (Attridge, 2009). Leaders therefore have a choice to either stimulate their followers through material rewards and also inspire them to work for a cause beyond themselves (Khan *et al.*, 2016).

Women and School Leadership

Women leadership continues to be highly encouraged and treated as an important subject of discussion but is rarely appreciated, interestingly. Education stakeholders have a general negative attitude towards women leadership in schools (Mberia, 2017).

A number of researchers reveal that although women proliferate the teaching force, women leaders in educational institutions are few. States News Service (2009) agreed with this position by pointing out that women made 57 percent of the undergraduates in U.S. colleges, and they earned a majority of the doctoral degrees awarded in the country, yet men continued to dominate in the most coveted leadership positions throughout the profession of education. The situation has not changed much today because women are still lagging far behind in their proportionate representation in administration in education at all levels. (Gupton, 2009). Men are still four times more likely than women to serve in the most powerful position in education (Robinson *et al.*, 2017).

However, school leadership needs to be critically re-considered as a number of researches have revealed that women make better leaders in schools than men. For example, Msila (2013) found out that many well-run schools in South Africa had women at the helm. This could be due to the fact that women are more transformational as leaders than men. They thus serve as role models who assist employees develop their skills, and motivate them to be dedicated and creative. Such an approach to leadership is more effective in today's less hierarchical organizations. Women are known to be more cooperative, empathetic and kind than men who seen as more private, confidence, aggressiveness and independence. Women have a tendency to adopt a more democratic (participative) style while men tend to adopt a more autocratic (directive) style (Valerio, 2009).

Women need to be resilient, courageous and bold to overcome the social stereotypes that stress that they cannot succeed in leading organizations because leadership differences between men and women are very minimal despite the society's stereotypes and often misguided pronouncements (Msila, 2013). Thus women need to be encouraged to take up leadership positions because being in administration helps a person educate on

a great level. However, due to the extra responsibilities that a woman has, to access the same opportunities as a man to be promoted, a woman needs to be way better than him.

III. Methodology

This study adopted a survey design. A quantitative approach was applied because the data collected through questionnaires from respondents was analyzable using the standard statistical tools. Multistage sampling design was applied so as to first sample schools (clusters). Cluster sampling technique guarantees that each cluster is represented in the sample and thus reflects the characteristics of the population with some level of accuracy. The study population was 3860 teachers in 306 schools out of which 92 schools were selected, representing the 30% recommended by Hill (1998). Random numbers were then used to sample 368 respondents. An independent sample t-test was performed to test if there is any significant difference of the respondents' perception of leadership style due to their (the principals') gender at a level of significance of 0.05.

Transactional and transformational leadership were measured using 20 items from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X rater form) on a Likert 5 point scale. Authentic leadership was measured using the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ), which is a 16-item theory-driven survey instrument developed by Walumbwa *et al.* (2008) using five separate samples obtained from China, Kenya, and the United States. Dark leadership was measured using questions developed based on the main features of the leadership practices namely; dominance, coercion, manipulation and selfish orientation. Employee engagement was measured using a self-report questionnaire containing 9 items from Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) on a Likert 5-point scale.

IV. Research Findings And Discussion

Gender of the Respondents and their Principals

The findings in Table 1 revealed that most schools where the respondents were teaching were managed by male principals (66.3%), with only about a third of the principals being female (33.4%). These findings agree with other findings in different parts of the world showing low percentages of females in secondary school leadership. For example, a study by Bandiho (2009) in Tanzania reported that 12.7 percent of secondary school principals were women. In Uganda, a similar low percentage (14%) of the principals of coeducational secondary schools were women with no women principals in boys' schools, yet men were found heading girls' schools (Kagoda & Sperandio, 2009). Similar trends were reported by studies in Melanesia which revealed that 8 percent of secondary school principals in Vannatu were women (Strachan, 2004), a percentage that later dropped to 3.9 % in 2008 (Warsal, 2009) while in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, only 2.9 percent of secondary school principals were women (Akao, 2008). A similar low representation of women in secondary school leadership was reported in South Africa by Phendla (2009) and Pakistan by Shah and Sobehart (2008). The notion by Sperandio and Kagoda (2010) that under-representation of women in secondary school leadership is a common problem in developing countries, bringing into question issues of social justice and sustainable development therefore makes sense.

A study by Combat (2014) revealed that this low number of female leadership in schools is attributed to gender socialization, beliefs in meritocracy, and the influence of patriarchy which create a cycle of discrimination that disadvantage women in career advancement. Sperandio and Kagoda (2010) attribute the problem to factors like societal understanding of leadership, the schooling and career aspirations of girls, the organizational characteristics of the education system, and the expectations and preparations of teachers for leadership positions. These opinions are supported by Mythili (2017) who argues that the under-representation of women as school leaders is due to socio-cultural traditions entrenched in the hegemony and patriarchy in the education system. He also says that it could be due to non-acceptance of leadership of women by other women as well as men colleagues, hesitation on the part of the women to take risks as school leaders, lack of family support and other social compulsions, cultural context of the society where competitiveness is not encouraged or accepted and many other factors that limit the women from aspiring and seeking an identity as school leader.

This is portrayed by the current situation in Kenya indicated by the reluctance by Parliament to pass the gender law which demonstrates institutionalized biases in society, where matters affecting women are easily relegated to the periphery, where they are ignored or intentionally forgotten. This has happened a number of times in Kenya even after the President, Uhuru Kenyatta pleaded with the Members of Parliament (MPs) in 2018 to pass the gender law but he was ignored as evidenced by the actions that ensured that the law was not passed. Vincent-Höper *et al.* (2012) agree with this observation when they say that underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is an increasing problem in Germany.

The findings also indicated that majority of the respondents were male (54.1%). Female respondents were 45.9%. This suggests that there could have been some level of gender balancing by the Teachers Service Commission when posting teachers to work in secondary schools in Murang'a County. This supports the gender concerns in the 2010 Kenya Constitution that are anchored in Article 27 (3) of the Constitution which states that

“women and men have the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres”, and Article 81 (b) which states that “not more than two thirds of the members of elective bodies shall be of the same gender”. This is also captured in other words by the Kenya 2010 Constitution when it directs that there should be 1/3 representation of either gender in the recruitment, promotion, and appointment exercises (Muchemi, 2013). The two thirds gender rule applies in the public service appointments as well. The essence of the gender rule is to promote equity and inclusivity

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents and their Principals by Gender

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Respondents		Principals	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	160	54.1	197	66.6
	Female	136	45.9	99	33.4

The independent sample t-test was performed to test if there is any significant difference of the respondents’ perception of leadership style due to their (the principals’) gender.

The findings in Table 2 showed that the p-value was greater than the significance level ($\alpha= 0.05$), for all leadership styles except employee engagement. This therefore means that there is no statistically significant difference between the respondents’ perception on leadership style due to gender. This finding means that there is a shared perception between male and female teachers on their work engagement in relation to the principals’ leadership style applied. However, there is a significant difference between respondents’ perception on Employee Engagement and gender.

This finding contrasted the results of other studies by Al-Taneiji (2006), Ibrahim and Al-Taneiji (2013) and Fennell (2005) which found that that female principals were more effective and transformational in their approach to leadership than their male counterparts. Ibrahim and Al-Taneiji (2013) also found out that female principals were able to create more transformational atmospheres and practice more interpersonal relations than male principals in the United Arab Emirates. This study also reported female headed schools posted better performance than male headed schools, a finding attributed to the fact that female principals were more likely to consider and implement changes to meet performance standards than their male counterparts. In a similar vein, Sperandio & Kagoda (2010) established that female head teachers were seen as interested and concerned in the well-being of students as they lobbied for resources to improve their schools.

Table 2: The Independent Samples t-test-Gender

Leadership styles	t-value	p-value(Sig.)
Transformational Leadership	-0.416	0.678
Transactional Leadership	-0.679	0.498
Authentic Leadership	0.168	0.867
Dark Leadership	0.530	0.597
Employee Engagement	2.077	0.039*

*The mean difference is significant at 0.05 level

V. Conclusion

The study findings showed that male school principals were about twice more (66.3%) than female school principals (33.4%) despite the fact that there was no much difference between the number of female teachers (45.9%) and male teachers (54.1%) among the respondents in the study. There was no statistically significant difference between the respondents’ perception on leadership style due to gender. However, there was a significant difference between respondents’ perception on employee engagement and gender.

VI. Recommendation

The study recommended that the Ministry of Education and other players in education need to come up with and enforce gender parity policies in recruitment, appointment and promotion of women so that discrimination against women ascension to leadership is eliminated. The Teachers’ Service Commission should be tasked with the role of implementing such policies to the letter. A further recommendation was that there was need for mentorship programs in the Ministry of Education that should be cascaded downwards up to primary school level so as to encourage females to take leadership positions in an effort to change the perception and attitude towards women leadership.

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