

Human Resource Development Climate and Employee Engagement in Developing Countries

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Received: February 23 2019

Accepted: April 28, 2019

Online Published: May 21, 2019

doi:10.5539/ijbm.v14n6p150

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v14n6p150>

Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to identify the specific dimensions of Human Resource Development Climate (HRDC) that significantly affect Employee Engagement (EE). It places the importance of HRDC in enhancing EE within the public sector in a developing country and finds answer to the question on the dimension of HRDC that causes employees to be engaged. The paper uses a self-designed questionnaire, made up of Rao and Abraham (1990) HRD Climate survey and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale by Schaufeli et al., (2002) to gather data from 355 respondents and analysed using multiple regression. Based on the data analysed, results showed that HRDC has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement. Additionally, it was found that employees are highly engaged in situations where their organisation exhibits the HR Mechanism dimension of HRDC. The limitation is, it did not focus on the entire public sector but focused on civil servant. It is therefore recommended that further studies could be carried out with focus on other public sector organisations to confirm or refute the findings. This study adds to the limited literature on HRDC and EE in public sector organisations in a developing country. This finding brings to bear the major dimension of HRDC that managers should focus on to improve employee engagement in a developing country where there exist a high power distance culture.

Keywords: human resource development, human resource development climate, employee engagement, social exchange theory

1. Introduction

Human resource is believed to be the most essential resource in organisations and therefore organisations cannot survive without them. It is the employees' efforts that ensure the organisation's effectiveness and survival. In most cases, employees are willing to put in their best when they are engaged. Employee engagement is 'a positive work-related psychological state characterised by a genuine willingness to contribute to organisational success' (Albrecht, 2010, p.5). Employee engagement (EE) has thus gained momentum because of its predictive influence on employee performance (Ismail, Iqbal, & Nasr, 2019; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007) and now considered a critical indicator for the success of organisations (Rasheed, Khan, & Ramzan, 2013) and determinant of the quality of service, employee retention and financial performance of organisations (Harter, et al., 2002). This may be because of their unique characteristics of having a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This explains why in order to survive and prosper in a continuously changing environment, modern organisations in addition to having 'healthy' employees need employees who are vigorous, dedicated and absorbed in their work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007) which reflects a description of an engaged employee.

Despite the critical role of EE in organisational performance, highly engaged employees could also have negative consequences for the organisation such as employees becoming workaholics which can lead to ill health and life dissatisfaction (Aktar & Pangil, 2017). Workaholics like taking on additional roles and doing overtime and this could interfere with their worklife balance because they make the organisation their key source of identity (McBain 2007; Aktar & Pangil, 2017). Over engaged employees also become too internally focused which inhibits their ability to see changes going on in the external environment (McBain, 2007).

According to Bates (2004), employees' engagement has been declining and many managers have not recognised this change and this is not favourable because disengaged employees can have a negative impact on the organisation. Disengaged employees are usually unhappy at work (Govindarajo, Kumar, & Ramulu, 2014),

experience negative feeling and transfer negative emotions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008) and also not satisfied nor committed and have intention to quit the organisation at any point in time (Saks, 2006). This may be the reason why it is believed that the challenge today is not just retaining talented people, but fully engaging them, capturing their minds and hearts at each stage of their work lives. Thus the question about what should prevail to ensure employees are engaged in a country with high power distance comes up and needs to be addressed.

A lot of studies have focused on how engaged employees affect their outcomes like task performance (Shantz, et al., 2013; Yongxing, et al., 2017), organisational commitment (Albdour & Altarawneh 2014; Cheche, Muathe, & Maina, 2017), counterproductive work behaviour (Ansari, Maleki, & Mazraeh, 2013; Ariani, 2013) with minimal focus on its antecedents and strategies to adopt to ensure EE. There are several strategies to use to ensure EE and thus Mathew (2018) has suggested that it is important that managers decide what their engagement strategy is. The work environment, i.e. the climate of an organisation fosters EE (Macey, et al., 2009). Human Resource Development Climate, (hereafter referred to as 'HRDC') which is an essential part of the work environment, refers to the perception employees have about the development atmosphere of an organisation (Sumithra & Chockalingam, 2017). The literature confirm that a conducive HRDC increases employee engagement. Accordingly, due to the major role engaged employees play, and the fact that the HRDC affects the level of engagement, leaders in organisations have to create a conducive atmosphere and use it as a strategy to enable them update or upgrade their skills, knowledge and abilities to increase their level of engagement. The argument being made is that the existence of an appropriate HRDC is indispensable to ensure EE to ensure organisational success.

In spite of the widely known importance of EE, gaps still exist in the literature in the Ghanaian context. A review of the literature shows that studies on EE have extensively been carried out in developed countries (Aryee et al., 2012; Burch & Guarana, 2014; Nazir & Islam, 2017) with minimal research on developing countries like Ghana thus the non-availability of EE statistics in Ghana (Puni, 2017). Since the characteristics and culture of a nation has an impact on the employees perception of the climate and therefore engagement (Mercer, 2007), the antecedents of EE identified in developed countries may be different from that in a developing country like Ghana; where there is wide spread of informality in the public sector, and therefore the need to conduct this study.

Public sector organisations play significant role towards the development of a country and so the need to ensure employees are engaged and give their all. The study therefore contributes to knowledge on how to ensure EE by having a conducive HRDC in this sector. The public sector includes the organisations that are responsible for the provision of services for the public using different public and private units, mostly financed by public resources or taxes and these services are supposed to be to the wide public interest. Several reasons guided our choice to examine the public sector in Ghana.

The public sector performs major roles in the implementation of government policies and its performance has been low (Obeng, 2012) and performance still appears to be declining consistently over the years (Annan-Prah & Ohemeng, 2015; Asamoah et al, 2013; Obeng, 2012). EE has been cited as one of the antecedents to employee performance with a suitable HRDC being a major antecedent to EE. Thus the argument being made is, if there exist a suitable HRDC within public sector organisation, it will lead to EE and employees will be willing to perform to a satisfactory level and the sector's level of performance will improve. Thus, a call for a research to extend the literature on how the HRDC within an organisation affects EE with focus on the public sector of Ghana is very important. The paper contributes to the ongoing search for effective strategies for transforming the performance within the public sector in Ghana and Africa by focusing on how the existence of a conducive HRDC will lead to EE and result in improved performance. The research is therefore aimed at identifying how the dimensions of HRDC affect EE and assess the link between HRDC and EE in general using social exchange theory (hereafter referred to as 'SET') as the underpinning theory within selected public sector organisations in Ghana.

The paper proceeds as follows: The next section presents a description of the theory guiding the research which is followed by a review of literature and formulation of hypothesis. Thereafter, the section that follows discusses method used for the research which is followed by a presentation and discussion of the results, conclusion as well as an indication of managerial and practical implications of the study.

2. Review of Literature and Hypothesis development

This session presents a review of literature on the theory and concepts used in the paper. It begins with a discussion on the social exchange theory followed by an explanation of EE and then a discussion on HRDC. The session ends with a presentation on HRDC and EE.

2.1 Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (SET) contends that social exchanges involve a series of interactions that generate obligations for each other (Emerson, 1976). Similarly, Mitchell, Cropanzano and Quisenberry (2012) indicate that SET considers social life as concerned with a sequential interaction between two or more parties. This exchange or interaction has the potential to generate high quality relationship under certain circumstances (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). One of such circumstances that ensure a successful exchange is that each party in the relationship must abide by the rules governing the exchange (Emerson 1976) which result in improved relationship. Thus, the social exchange relationship within the organisation occurs when employers take care of their employees by providing a conducive climate, which include the HRDC, and they in turn reciprocate with higher dedication to work, absorption and work with vigour.

The theory is appropriate for this study in that, it helps explain why there exist differences in the level or degree of engagement which results in differences in work outcomes. Employees are supposed to willingly contribute towards the success of the organisation. However, creating and maintaining a conducive HRDC encourages the employees to be more engaged and therefore reciprocate by giving off their best.

2. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement, defined as a positive work-related psychological state characterised by a genuine willingness to contribute to organisational success (Albrecht, 2010), is of prime importance as today's organisations continue to face high competition and rapid changes. Attridge (2009) described engaged employees as people who work with passion, have a deep connection to their company, come up with innovation and move the organisation forward. Such people are more creative, more productive and more willing to go the extra mile which helps the organisation achieve its target (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behaviour (Schaufeli, Salanova, & González-Romá, 2002). Although there are different views on the characteristics of engaged employees, a number of scholars agree that engaged employees have high levels of energy and identify well with their work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Even though several researchers confirm the positive effect of having engaged employees there are few negative effects. For example, according to Imam and Shafique (2014) based on work engagement employees turn to show more turnover intentions. Also high employee engagement may have a negative impact on employees life role because they become too workaholic and this may impact negatively on the employees' health.

2.3 Human Resource Development Climate

Human resource development is the process which ensures that individuals have the requisite skills and abilities. It is a set of systematic and planned activities designed by an organisation to ensure employees have the opportunities to learn necessary skills to meet both current and future job demands (Werner & DeSimone, 2011). Organisational climate is the perceptions of individuals toward distinctive characteristics of the organisational environment (Schneider et al., 2013). It is the perceived attributes by employees towards the organisation and their sub-systems represented in the departments, divisions, units, and branches, and these are reflected in the way the organisation treats its employees (Pareek, 2002). The climate of an organisation therefore has an impact on employees as individuals and collectively as an organisation.

HRDC, an essential part of the organisational climate, describes the perception the employees have on the development atmosphere of the organisation, relative to the various HR practices and systems within the organisation (Purohit & Verma, 2013; Tadesse, 2016). HRDC includes different characteristics like the degree of attention to the human resource, the extent of importance attached to training and developing human resource, effective communication system as well as acceptance of teamwork culture, and the rejection of nepotism, cronyism and other behaviours that disturbs exceptional employees (Benjamin & David, 2012; Chaudhary et al., 2012). This paper uses the conceptualisation of HRDC by Rao and Abraham (1986) who put it under three dimensions - general climate, OCTAPAC culture and implementation of HRD mechanism.

2.4 Human Resource Development Climate and Employee Engagement

General climate describes the importance attached to the development of the human resource by managers of an organisation (Mishra & Bhardwaj, 2002). Employees' perception about the level of manager's commitment towards their development has shown to relate considerably to their attitude to work and behaviour generally. Thus, if employees perceive their managers as committed to their developmental needs and have learning

opportunities it results in improved employee engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Training and development is a strong predictor of employee engagement (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2018) and so managers who embrace training and development practices and therefore help their employees acquire the relevant skills for their jobs are able to retain their employees because such employees perceive their managers to be interested in their wellbeing and improvement (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2006). This perception translates into putting in extra effort and work with vigour. Additionally, an organisation that seeks to train and develop its employees well and reward them for their performance tend to have such employees engaged, hence better service, improved performance and loyalty to their organisation. It is thus hypothesised that general climate component of HRDC will be positively related to employee engagement.

HRD mechanism measures and explains the extent to which issues such as performance appraisal, career planning, rewarding of performance, feedback, and training, among others are implemented within an organisation (Mishra & Bhardwaj, 2002). The literature confirms that when these are implemented effectively, it goes a long way to impact positively on employee engagement. From the social exchange theory's (SET) perspective, rewards and recognition received from an organisation oblige an employee, to responds with higher level of engagement (Saks, 2006). That is to say, rewards and appreciation for work done results in employee's reciprocity by putting in their best. In addition, Shantz, Alfes, Truss, and Soane(2013) stated that employees who hold jobs that provide adequate feedback are more highly engaged which result in higher performance. Furthermore, according to Xanthopoulou et al., (2007) when employees benefit from training, development and learning opportunities, it affects their level of engagement positively. Other HRD mechanisms like performance management (Gruman, & Saks, 2011; Mone, & London, 2010), and training (Azeem, Paracha, & Paracha, 2013; Johnson, Park, & Bartlett, 2018), have been reported to be positively related to EE. It is therefore hypothesised that HRD mechanism will be positively related to EE.

OCTAPAC is an acronym that means openness, confrontation, trust, autonomy, proactivity, authenticity and collaboration. Thus, the OCTAPAC culture deals with the extent to which these variables prevailed, valued and promoted in the organisation (Mishra & Bhardwaj, 2002). Trust is one major variable that has been reported to be related positively to EE (Engelbrecht, Heine, & Mahembe, 2017; Ugwu, Onyishi, & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2014). When employees perceive their leaders to be trust worthy, they tend to put in all efforts to ensure the manager achieves his target. Additionally, other aspects of the OCTAPAC culture like openness (Mishra, Boynton& Mishra, 2014), authenticity (Men & Hung-Baesecke, 2015) autonomy (Shantz, Alfes, Truss, & Soane, 2013), and collaboration (Owor, 2015) have been reported to relate positively with EE. It is therefore hypothesised that OCTAPAC culture will be positively related with EE.

Considering the above discussions on the dimensions of the HRD climate and EE in the organisation, it is hypothesised that the HRDC in an organisation will relate positively to the level of employees' engagement within the organisation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Data Collection

The target population for the study is employees from public sector organisations specifically the civil service. It should be noted that the names of the ministries have not been listed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Stratified and simple random sampling was used to choose the respondents for the study. Each ministry was stratified to ensure that employees from different units/departments will respond to the questionnaire. After the stratification, the simple random sampling was used to identify respondents and questionnaires handed over to them. The researchers handed over the questionnaires to the respondents in person and asked them to complete the questionnaires by hand. This method was used because all the respondents were literate and no one was visually impaired. The traditional hand to paper mode was also used as against the online method to ensure that even those who were not computer literate could respond to the questionnaires. The researchers went back to the organisations after the agreed period of three weeks to collect the completed questionnaires. Even though simple random was used, it should be noted that employees were not obliged to accept and respond to the questionnaire. Respondents were assured of anonymity and also informed that the data collected will be used for research purposes only as part of the introduction to the questionnaire. The filled questionnaire was collected after three weeks. In all 650 questionnaires were administered and received 355 representing a return rate of 55%. This return rate is adequate to use for analysis because according to Baruch (1999) a return rate of 60 +/-20 is adequate.

3.2 Measures

The HRD Climate Survey by Rao and Abraham (1990) was used in the study. This instrument consists of 38

questions on a 5 point scale ranging from 5 (Always almost true) to 1 (Not at all true) to measure the elements of HRDC, general Climate, OCTAPAC Culture, and HRD Mechanisms

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002), was used to measure employee engagement. The instrument consists of 17 items, which are scored on a 7-point scale, ranging from Never (0) to Daily (6). The measure has three sub-scales, namely Vigour, Dedication, and Absorption.

4. Data Analysis and Results

The data was analysed using multiple regression. Results in Table 1 showed that female respondents are more than male respondents with 41% being males and approximately 59% of respondents being females. The age distribution of respondents indicates that majority of the respondents are aged from 31 to 40 years or less.

Table 1. Background of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	146	41.1
Female	209	58.9
Total	355	100.0
Age		
21 - 30	56	15.8
31 - 40	188	53.0
41 - 50	96	27.0
51 - 60	15	4.2
Above 61	0	0
Total	355	100.0

The results of the descriptive statistics of the constructs in the study are presented in Table 2. The results indicate the mean for General Climate, HR Mechanism, and OCTAPAC as 2.8306, 2.9280 and 2.6992 respectively.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
General Climate	355	1.00	5.00	2.8306	.79724
HR Mechanism	355	1.00	5.00	2.9280	.74118
OCTAPAC	355	1.00	5.00	2.6992	.77542
Employee Engagement	355	1.00	5.00	3.7033	1.29686

The Standard deviations are close to 1, hence data is accepted (Field, 2013). However, comparing the values of the means, it is evident from the analyses that employees are highly engaged in situations where their organisations exhibit the HR Mechanism dimension of HRDC. This is followed closely by the General Climate dimension whilst the OCTAPAC dimension records the least employee engagement, the dependent variable.

As shown in Table 3, it could be affirmed that with an 'R value' of .526, it indicates that the strength of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables is 52.6% and this makes the estimated model good enough for generalising the findings. The value of the R^2 (.277) indicates that the independent variables in the study jointly account for 27.7% of variations in employee engagement.

Table 3. Multiple regression showing the effect of the constructs of HRD climate on employee engagement

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.	F	Sig	
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta					
	(Constant)	.876	.385		2.274	.024	19.784	.000 ^b
1	General Climate	.317	.177	.194	1.791	.025		
	HR Mechanism	.561	.201	.320	2.788	.006		
	OCTAPAC	.098	.188	.056	.523	.602		

Note. Durbin-Watson=1.601; R=.526^a; R² =.277

Also an 'F. stat' value of 19.784 and a significant value; $p = .000$ which is less than 5% ($P < .05$) per the rule of thumb, means that all the variables in the model are jointly significant at 95% confidence interval. This makes the multiple regression analyses highly reliable. A Durbin Watson statistic of 1.601 ($1.5 < d < 2.5$) shows that the error terms are not correlated. Hence the data distribution is accepted for regression analyses (Gaur & Gaur, 2009).

It is indicated in Table 3 that the parameter estimate of 'General Climate' is significant at 95% confidence interval. This is shown by a significant value of .025 which is less than .05 per the rule of thumb ($p < .05$). Also the beta value of .194 ($\beta = .194$) shows a positive relationship that exists between General Climate and Employee Engagement. This signifies that a unit change in the General Climate dimension would consequently contribute to employee engagement by 19.4%.

Secondly, the HR Mechanism dimension reports a beta value of .320 ($\beta = .320$) and a significance level of .006 ($p < .05$). It therefore follows that HR Mechanism has a significant and positive relationship with employee engagement ($\beta = .320$; $p < .05$). This means that when HR Mechanism is increased by a unit, it will consequently result in a 32.0% improvement in employee engagement.

Lastly, it is shown that though the beta value of the OCTAPAC dimension shows a positive relationship with employee engagement ($\beta = .056$), the significant value ($p > .05$) signifies that its parameter estimate is not significant at 95% confidence interval. It therefore follows that the OCTAPAC dimension cannot be deemed to be a significant predictor of employee engagement.

From the above analyses, it is established that among all three dimensions, HR Mechanism has the greatest influence on employee engagement ($\beta = .320$), followed by General Climate ($\beta = .194$) whilst the OCTAPAC dimension shows an insignificant relationship with employee engagement.

5. Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study provide support for the hypothesis that HRDC will have a positive and significant effect on employee engagement. This implies, the kind of HRDC existing results in employees' readiness to be dedicated, work with vigour and get absorbed in their work. This may be because training and development is a strong predictor of employee engagement (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2018). When employees perceive the organisation attaches much importance to their training and development, it results in their readiness to give their all. Such organisations value employees expertise and so ready to invest in their training to ensure they improve. Valuing employees' expertise is a unique characteristic of organisations that have achievement culture. This explains the results in that in a research in Ghana by Brenya and Obuobisa-Darko (2017) which focused on the Ghanaian public sector, it was found that the public sector exhibit achievement culture which engenders a sense of purpose in employees. Thus, with the exhibition of achievement culture within these organisations, employees perceive the organisation as being interested in ensuring they are experts and so interested in their development. With these perceptions employees are then willing to be dedicated, work with vigour and put in their best, ie. engaged, to ensure organisational success.

The results also show that between the different variables of HRD climate, HRD mechanism dimension of the HRDC has the highest impact on employee engagement. An aspect of the HR mechanism explains the extent to which rewarding performance is considered within the organisation. A research by Ohemeng, Amoako-Aseidu and Obuobisa-Darko (2018) showed that employees' perception that hard work is recognised is a significant factor when employees' performance is considered. When employees believe that their performance will be recognised they put in their all. This may explain why HR mechanism causes employee engagement. Thus, as leaders reward employees based performance, they tend to work with all their vigour, get dedicated and absorbed in their work.

The public sector organisations in Ghana have systems in place, that ensure employees receive feedback on their performance and this ensures employees performance is managed well. Giving adequate feedback has been cited as an antecedent to EE (Osborne, S., & Hammoud, 2017; Rao, 2017; Shantz, et al., 2013). Giving feedback is one characteristic in organisation that indicate the extent to which HR mechanism is implemented within an organisation (Mishra & Bhardwaj, 2002). Since when employees receive feedback they tend to be engaged, it explains why HR mechanism is related to employee engagement.

6. Conclusion

The need to increase employees' level of engagement in this 21st century where there is high competition and more so in a country where there exist high power distance is imperative. Using the social exchange theory and survey data from Ghana this paper argue that a conducive HRDC increases employee engagement. Empirical data gathered support this argument. It was found that HRDC has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement. Again it was found that employees are highly engaged in situations where their organisations exhibit the HR Mechanism dimension of HRDC. This results have implication for both managers as well as future researchers.

7. Implications for Managers

This study adds to the limited literature and statistics on HRDC and EE in public sector organisations in a developing country like Ghana. It brings to bear and draws managers' attention to the role of a suitable HRDC in ensuring employee engagement which ultimately leads to improved performance. Managers should therefore put in place measures to create a suitable HRDC which will increase employee engagement to improve in their performance. Again, HR managers should formulate policies that will result in managers paying attention to the development needs of employees to create that HRDC.

8. Implications to Future Research

Data on HRDC and employee engagement is minimal in Ghana and the West African sub region in general. It is therefore recommended that research is carried out focusing on these areas in other sectors. Also, a comparative study may be carried out between profit and non for profit organisation and between public and private sector to identify if there are any differences between these.

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