

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL-CULTURAL DIVERSITY ON EMPLOYEES' ATTITUDE TOWARDS PERFORMANCE

A SURVEY OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN MERU, KENYA

Faith Mwende Mutegi

Kenya Methodist University, Meru, Kenya

fmutegi2001@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study was as a result of the fact that many universities handle employees and clients of different social cultural background, which if taken with consideration would be a base of tapping knowledge and skills from different social cultural groups and if not handled with attention would affect attitude and therefore performance. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Primary data was collected through questionnaires administered to sampled university employees selected through simple random sampling. The collected data was comprehensively edited, coded and analyzed using SPSS. The results indicated that most of the university employees had a bachelor's degree which highly improved their competence at work thus high performance, religion had an important role to play since it affected the relationship among employees and their work, Gender considerations especially on women was necessary to boost morale and effect gender mainstreaming and income levels of employees affected how they interacted with each other at the work place thus affecting their performance. This study concludes that the above factors affect the performance of employees in private universities in the greater Meru region, Kenya.

Keywords: Social-Cultural, Diversity, Employees Attitude, Performance, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

In the past, diversity was treated primarily as a legal issue. It has been directly against the law to discriminate against anyone. Now organizations are beginning to realize that diversity is not just something to deal with, but instead a reality to build on, to make a stronger, more competitive enterprise (Luthans, 2008). The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and

respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, educational background, geographical location, income, marital status, parental status, work experiences or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment (Owen, 2010).

"Diversity" means more than just acknowledging and/or tolerating difference. Diversity is a set of conscious practices that involve: Understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment, Practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own, Recognizing that personal, cultural and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others; and Building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination (Handy, 2004).

Culture creates the type of people who become members of an organization. Culture trains people along particular lines, tending to put a personality stamp upon them. When people with different cultural backgrounds promote, own and manage organization, they themselves tend to acquire distinct cultures (Aswathappa, 2008). As soon as any organization begins to sell its products and services outside its own domestic market, indeed to set up an operation in a local market to do so, it will be exposed to a different cultural environment, with its own distinct norms and behaviours. Cultural sensitivity can mean the difference between success and failure (Hannagan, 2008).

Social networks can be particularly important in ensuring that knowledge is shaped. What is also required is an aspect of social capital: trust people will not be willing to share knowledge with those when they do not trust. The culture of the company may inhibit knowledge sharing. The norm may be to keep knowledge to them as much as they can because, knowledge is power. An open culture will encourage people to share their ideas and knowledge (Armstrong, 2009).

The benefits of workforce and cultural diversity in organisations include, Improved Organisational Performance. Research into the link between cultural diversity and organisational performance indicates that, within the proper context, cultural diversity does in fact add value to the organisation. However, the relationship between employee diversity and organisational performance is moderated by business strategy. When organizations pursue a growth strategy, higher employee diversity is positively related to productivity and market performance. Employee diversity provides organizations with diverse experience and knowledge, and enables them to build stronger links with customers and the wider community;

aspects beneficial to organizations with an orientation towards growth. Hence, recognition of such benefits creates the need for managers to develop “practices, policies and procedures that are responsive to a diverse community” (Foot, 2008).

Problem Statement

In the past, social-cultural factors were viewed with less importance since many organizations focused more on maximizing profits and ignored the value of human resources. Over the years, organizations have realized the need for social – cultural diversity due to the emerging organizational challenges (Armstrong, 2009). Managing diversity recognizes that people can bring fresh ideas and perceptions which can make the way work is done more efficient and products and services better (Foot and Hook, 2008). The workforce and patterns of work are becoming increasingly diverse: this will provide challenges to employers who cannot rely on their traditional recruitment practices and who will also need to develop policies in relation to managing diversity and the equal opportunities issues that managing an increasingly diverse work force raises. If true increased flexibility is to be non-legislated unfair discrimination. Employers therefore need to ensure that they provide rewarding and satisfying jobs (Foot and Hook, 2008).

An employee’s level of satisfaction might be a function of personal characteristics and the characteristics of the groups to which she or he belongs. The social context of work is likely to have a significant impact on a worker’s attitude and behaviour. Relationships with both co-workers and supervisors are important. Some studies have shown that the better the relationship, the greater the level of job satisfaction. To survive in today’s competitive global environment, development of the human resource capacity in a firm is absolutely important. For firms to have a competitive edge over their competitors, employee satisfaction is of prime importance in improving performance (Cole, 2005). Hence, the understanding and managing of diversity have thus become crucial to the viability of contemporary organizations. So what can managers do to respond to these challenges? That is why the study seeks to establish the influence of social–cultural diversity in the performance of employees in Universities in the greater Meru region.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To establish the influence of income on performance of university employees in the greater Meru region.
- ii. To determine the influence of institutional religious affiliation on performance of university employees in the greater Meru region.

- iii. To establish the influence of gender on performance of employees in the greater Meru region.
- iv. To determine the influence of education on the performance of university employees in the greater Meru region.

Research Hypotheses

This study was guided by the following research hypotheses establishing the relationship between social-cultural factors and employee attitude towards performance in private Universities in the greater Meru region:

- Ho There is no relationship between income level and employees attitude towards performance in private Universities in the greater Meru region.
- Ho There is no relationship between institutional religious affiliation and employee's attitude towards performance in private Universities in the greater Meru region.
- Ho There is no relationship between gender and employees attitude towards performance in private Universities in the greater Meru region.
- Ho There is no relationship between educational back ground and employee's attitude towards performance in private Universities in the greater Meru region.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study was organized within the greater Meru region. The specific focus was a population of 690 employees and a sample of 97 employees was drawn for the study from the various universities. The study was based on the influence of social-cultural diversity on the employees' attitude towards performance of private Universities in the greater Meru region.

Limitations of the Study

Some employees were uncooperative in giving out sensitive information they considered confidential. This was countered by reassuring them of the importance of the study. The study focused on private Universities only, whereas even the Public Universities and tertiary institutions face similar problems. It was not possible to study all institutions because of time and money constrains.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Diversity at the Workplace

Workplace diversity refers to the variety of differences between people in an organization. That sounds simple, but diversity encompasses race, gender, ethnic group, age, personality,

cognitive style, tenure, organizational function, education, background and more. Diversity not only involves how people perceive themselves, but how they perceive others. Those perceptions affect their interactions. For a wide assortment of employees to function effectively as an organization, human resource professionals need to deal effectively with issues such as communication, adaptability and change. Diversity will increase significantly in the coming years. Successful organizations recognize the need for immediate action and are ready and willing to spend resources on managing diversity in the workplace now.

Managing diversity in the workplace is a challenge for any manager, but it can be accomplished using some basic tools. Managers need to do a self-assessment of their own values and beliefs. It is important for a manager to see how your values and beliefs contribute to making you who you are. Then in turn, it is important to recognize that other people may not agree with what you believe in or even understand them. To help you manage diversity, identify things that have influenced your life and have affected who you are and what you believe in. Look at your own ethnic background, your religion, the different places you have lived and your experience with individuals from other cultures. How did all these factors in your life influence you? (Cole, 2006).

Education

UNESCO, 2008, identifies education in the largest sense as any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values. Teachers in educational institutions direct the education of students and might draw on many subjects, including reading, writing, mathematics, science and history. This process is sometimes called schooling when referring to the education of teaching only a certain subject, usually as professors at institutions of higher learning. There is also education in fields for those who want specific vocational skills, such as those required to be a pilot. In addition there is an array of education possible at the informal level, such as in museums and libraries, with the Internet and in life experience. Many non-traditional education options are now available and continue to evolve.

Gender

Today's society has witnessed changes in women's prospects at work and in society. Once, our culture identified men predominately with public or work life, and linked women to private and home life. Gradually, the patriarchal society and women themselves began to change their attitudes and values about the role of women in society. The women's movement, economic

necessity and the greater avenues opened up by court cases and legislation enabled women to seek education and employment in great numbers. Women began to redefine their roles in society and society was forced to adjust-though not without resistance on the part of traditional women and men. How far women have actually come is debatable. Given their virtual absence from the upper echelons of management but few would agree that a majority of women still have not yet embraced the fact that they step up to the same potential that men have. Yet in international management, women frequently encounter stifling reminders of a more patriarchal past. Dealing directly with African cultural firms can be quite awkward for women executives. In these cultures, women are traditionally excluded from or thought incompetent to hold positions of authority outside the home and even start businesses (Hisrich, 2009).

Women play a major role in the production, processing and marketing of goods and services, but for the greater part they have been constrained from contributing fully to the socio-economic development due to lack of availability of technologies.

In recognition of this fact, and in light of the vitally important role which women have to play in the socio-economic advancement, it is clear that government policies on business and national development plans have not fully addressed the integration of women in business and their contribution as producers who have the capacity to improve the socio-economic growth of their country. As a result women's contribution is said to be marginal and only for family use, without realizing that women are now potential producers.

Employee income/remuneration

Employee remuneration is defined as, "the reward or compensation given to the employees for their work performances," according to Management Study Guide. Remuneration is a method of promoting morale, increasing motivation and foster team cohesion. Employee remuneration is the act of rewarding employees for job performance. Remuneration can motivate employees to be more productive but does not have to necessarily be compensation based. Remuneration can also be praise or recognition. However, compensated remuneration can be effective in long-term motivation and productivity, such as a raise or promotion (Owen, 2010).

Remuneration awarded to teams increases productivity levels because the team is looking out for the collective good of the team. Sales managers can use team remuneration to increase new account openings, increasing existing account orders and generating new account leads. Pooling employees in a team with a collective goal increases productivity if you provide worth wild remuneration, such as bonuses or extra commissions (Owen, 2010). Remuneration increases overall employee morale provided the benefits are regarded as equitable. In other words, giving tiered or incremental bonuses based on which employee is the most productive,

the second most productive and so on. Overall morale improves if each employee is granted a chance to reach a set of goals instead of setting one high goal that only one employee can achieve (Owen, 2010).

Culture

The role culture often stereotyped as bureaucracy. Just as Max Weber theory implies there is hierarchy and scalar chain of command with defined and matched authority and responsibility. There are clear job descriptions rules and policies. This implies a tall organizational structure which makes it inflexible and slow to change. This type of culture is evident in stable economic environments or where work is predictable (Rosner, 2003).

The task culture seeks to join the right resources to employees to complete certain tasks. It is very much a small team approach, small organizations cooperating together to deliver a project. The importance is on results and achieving objectives. Individuals empowered with discretion and control over their work. There is clear division of labour and specialization with each member of the team having expertise in a particular area. In such organizations there is no clear leader, influence is widely spread and based more on expert power than organizational/position or personal power.

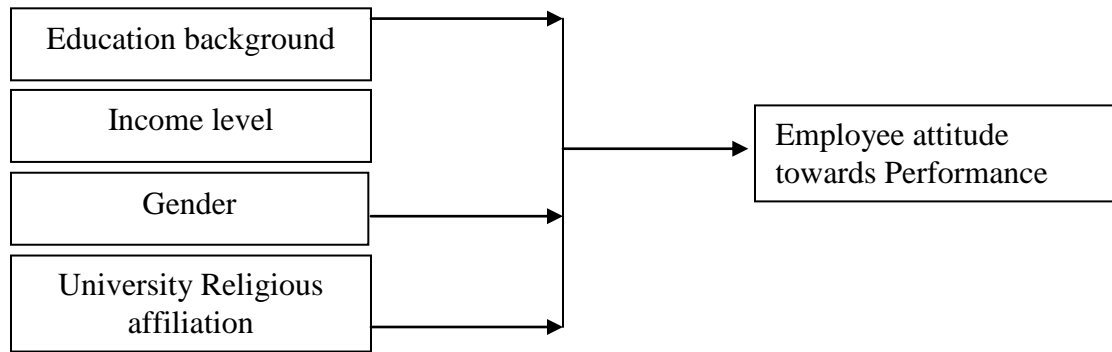
Performance is judged by results, and teams are dismantled on completion of objectives and new teams are formed in order to achieve new goals. This type of culture is reflected in matrix organizations.

Research Gaps

The above named past studies have left gaps that the researcher would like to fill. To start with, many past researches have dealt more on motivation of employees. This study takes to notice that motivation is as a result of employee welfare. In addition, the researcher would also want to undertake the research study because the past studies have not been done in remotely located organizations and have been based in cities where culture is varied while the research would like to carry out the research in the greater Meru region where majorities of the Ameru people dominate. Meru region has also attracted many universities.

Moreover, there is limited literature specifically on social cultural factors and employee performance. It's due to these gaps that the researcher intends to carry out a research study on the influence of social cultural factors on performance of employees in the greater Meru region, Kenya.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study a descriptive survey design was used. Descriptive survey design is the process of collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject under study (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999).

The target population was employees from the Universities in the Greater Meru region. The region has six universities namely: KeMU, Meru University college, University of Nairobi, Chuka University college, Mt. Kenya University, Nazarene University and Presbyterian University of East Africa. The researcher was targeting a population of 690 employees (teaching staff and administrative staff) in the universities from which a sample was drawn for the study.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda, (1999) “Where time and resources allow a researcher should take as big sample as possible”. (Gay, 1992) suggests that for descriptive studies, 10% of the target population is enough. The study took 40 percent (114) of the accessible population which was found representative and adequate for inferential analysis of data.

Table 1. Sampling Frame

Universities	Number of Employees	Sample picked
Kenya Methodist University	258	33
Meru University College	214	27
University of Nairobi	8	1
Chuka University College	183	24
Nazarene University	6	6
Presbyterian University of East Africa	21	3
Totals	690	97

The study adopted a simple random sampling design. According to Kothari (2004) random sampling technique is very common and preferred because it produces unbiased samples with precision in the population. In addition, random sampling often increases precision because many factors operate to make people living in the same area show similarities in their principle characteristics.

The questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. A self-completion questionnaire with closed ended questions was developed. Questionnaires were administered in two ways; some were administered by the research assistant while a few others were left with the busy respondents and picked after five days by the researcher. After data collection, all the questionnaires were coded as part of the data cleaning. The aim here was to eliminate unusable data, interpretation of ambiguous answers and contradictory data from related questions. A coding scheme was developed for the responses to each question. The coding scheme facilitated the development of an appropriate data structure to enable its entry into the computer. Data entry and storage was done using SPSS. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Response Rate

The response rate was 85% as 97 questionnaires were returned well filled in from the 114 that were administered.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to compare difference between more than two mean at a time. The results of ANOVA are shown in table 4.8 below. In the case of age factor, the F value is 2.339. This F value is not significant at the level 0.076. This implies that there is no significant difference between Employee performance and age factor.

Table 2: One way ANOVA between age, education, religion and income with Employees Performance

	F	Significance
Age	2.339	0.076
Education	0.680	0.639
Religion	0.360	0.836
Income	0.950	0.418

The education factor shows that the F value is 0.680 and is not significant at the level of 0.639. This implies that there is no significant difference between education and Employees performance in Universities. The religion factor shows similar results. The F value of 0.360 is not significant at the level 0.639. That is there is no significant difference in the mean of education and Employee performance in universities.

Finally, in the case of income factor, the F value 0.950, this F value is not significant at the level 0.418. This implies that there is no significant difference between Employees performance in Universities and income factor.

Relationship between Income levels and Employee performance

Since both variables are interval, Pearson correlation test was conducted, the result of which are shown in the table below. There is significant positive correlation between Income levels and employee performance with a significant value of 0.01. Income levels and employee performance are related with a high relationship $r = 0.744$

Table 3: Correlation between income levels and employee performance

	Pearson correlation(r)	significance
Income levels	0.744**	0.00

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Relationship between Education and Employee performance

Since both variables are interval, person correlation test was conducted and the results are shown in Table 4. There is a significant positive correlation between Education levels and Employee performance. With a significant value of 0.01. In other words Education levels and Employee performance are related with a high relationship ($r = 0.720$)

Table 4: Correlations between Education levels and Employee performance

	Pearson correlation (r)	Significance
Education level	0.720**	0.00

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

Relationship between University religious affiliation and Employee performance

Since the variables are interval, Pearson correlation test was conducted, the results of which are shown in Table 5. There is significant positive correlation between Religion and Employee

performance with a significant value of 0.01 in other words Religion and Employee performance are related with moderate relationship ($r = 0.674$).

Table 5: Correlations between University religious affiliation and Employee performance

	Pearson correlation (r)	significance
Religion	0.674**	0.00

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Relationship between Gender and Employee performance

Since both variables are interval, Pearson correlation test was conducted, the result of which are shown in Table 6. There is significant positive correlation between Gender and Employee performance with a significant value of 0.01. In other words Gender and Employee performance are related with a moderate relationship ($r = 0.689$).

Table 6: Correlations between Gender and Employee performance

	Pearson correlation (r)	significant
Gender	0.689**	0.00

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Regression analysis of Social-Cultural Factors with Employee Performance

The results of regressing the four (4) independent variables against Employee performance show that the four (4) independent variables that are entered, the R (0.829) which is the correlation of the four (4) independent variables with the dependent variable. After all the inter correlation among the four (4) independent variables are taken into account, and the R square is (0.687). This is the explained variance and is actually the square of the multiple R (0.829)². Thus only 68.7% of the four variables influence the dependent variable.

The ANOVA table shows that the F value of 57.882 is significant at the 0.00 level, what the results mean is that 68.7% of the variance (R-square) in Employee performance has been significantly explained by the four (4) independent variables.

SUMMARY

This research is related with the underpinning of Social-cultural factors towards Employee performance in higher Education sector. The objective of this research is to examine the concept of four variables of Social-cultural factors such as Income levels, Education, Gender and University religious affiliation towards Employees performance in higher Education sector.

Demographic factors such as gender, age, education qualification, occupation and average monthly income have been used to explain Employee performance.

The four (4) variables were tested, using a sample of 97 respondents; data was obtained from University Employees within the greater Meru region. The primary objective was to determine Social-cultural factors influencing employee performance in Universities. Two level of statistical analysis were conducted with two different steps. The first level involved the use of basic descriptive statistics. This level of analysis was intended to enable the researcher to obtain a glance of the basic characteristics of the data. Test level involved two main statistical analyses.

As a conclusion based on the test conducted, the result by regression test shows that the four (4) independent variables namely Income Levels, Education, Gender and University religious affiliation were important in determining Employee performance in a University sector.

DISCUSSIONS

The study sought information to answer four research questions relating to the key variables of the problem under study. Based on the findings, the study found out that there was a relationship between Education and performance of university employees. The study identified that many university employees had a bachelor's degree. This attributed to their skills and knowledge of their work. This contributed to high competency and efficiency, thus improvement of the overall performance particularly in the area studied. In this area of study income levels was taken to affect how employees related with each other at work. This also determined the level of interaction among the employees. The study found out that high income earners felt more superior to the low income earners in the universities. This reduced performance of work since the low earners felt demotivated and lost morale.

Moreover gender of the employees was found to moderately affect work performance of university employees. Many employees felt that as long as one possessed the required knowledge and skills one can effectively perform at work. It didn't matter if one was male or female.

Religion had little influence on performance of university employees since many employees focused more on work than personal matters of their colleagues. They felt that religion was an individual's personal decision and thus there is tolerance in respect of what every employee believes in. However, in relation with the past studies discussed in the literature review of this study, it's evident that income has not been used as a social cultural factor but more as a social economic factor. Yet it affects employees' relations at a social level i.e. how employees interact with each other not merely only at the economic level.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to identify the influence of social- cultural factors on employee performance in universities in the greater Meru region. Three research questions out of four were supported, which were the Gender, Education and income levels are the most critical factors; on the other hand one was not fully supported i.e. Religion. It was found that religion did though not fully affect employee performance. Social- cultural diversity poses challenges in organization due to variations in individual perception and orientation. Understanding and managing diversity has thus become crucial as managers need to understand dynamics in diverse teams of employees.

Nevertheless if challenges of diversity are properly considered organizational productivity will increase, employees will be more motivated and committed to their organizations. The social identity theory explains the challenges of cross-cultural diversity in organizations. The understanding and management of diversity have thus become crucial to the viability of contemporary organizations. Social-cultural diversity in an organization brings about improved organization performance which creates value to the organization. Research into the link between social-cultural diversity and organizational performance indicates that, within the proper context cultural diversity does in fact add value to the organization. However the relationship between employee diversity and organizational performance is moderated by business strategy. Employee diversity provides organization with diverse experience and knowledge, and enables them to build stronger links with customers and the wider community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Of a number of strategies that can be adopted by university managers seeking to benefit from diversity, the most prevalent are Leadership and organisational Policy, Organisational Research on Diversity, and Training and Development on diversity.

Envisioning change in a culturally diverse organization and driving its implementation is the primary responsibility of managers in organisations. Managers should take strong personal stands on the need for change, role model the behaviours required for change and assist with the work of moving the organization forward. Past research has identified characteristics of leaders which are also important in managing diversity. These characteristics include personal openness, approachability, emotional intelligence, empathy, strategic thinking, strong internal locus of control, capacity to trust, being prepared for challenge, and inspiring others.

Diversity should form part of corporate strategy .Human resource practices such as recruitment, training, performance management and compensation should be adapted to respond to diversity related issues. The organisation's policy is an important determinant of

success when implementing diversity initiatives. Top management support should be manifested through the inclusion of diversity in corporate strategy. If there is a mismatch between formal and informal organization practices and values, target individuals may become cynical about formal diversity initiatives. Little behavior and attitude change is likely to occur when the organisation's diversity goals are not perceived as serious. Lastly, diversity-related challenges in the strategic business units of corporate bodies may be addressed through the establishment of common rooms in organizations to serve as ice-breaking venues; establishment of clear communication channels, participatory decision making, team building exercises away from work, and involvement of employees in motivational, leadership and behavioural workshops, as part of diversity training and development. Recognition for the above benefits creates the need for managers to develop practices and procedures that are responsive to a diverse community. Organizations therefore, should match Social-cultural diversity with organization culture in order to improve employee performance in the universities.

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