



THE EFFECT OF SELF-AWARENESS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF EMPLOYEES OF COMMERCIAL BANKS IN KENYA

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Abstract

The study investigated the effect of Self-awareness on the performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya. Performance of employees was measured by efficiency, productivity, turnover and quality of work output, which are all covered in literature review. The theory underpinning the study is Objective Self-awareness Theory. A cross-sectional descriptive research design was used. The population was 31,605 employees of 38 commercial banks in Kenya. The study sample was 395 respondents, which was attained using proportionate stratified sampling method. Reliability and validity of the data collection instrument was tested. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data from respondents. The theory underpinning the study was hierarchy of needs theory. The study formulated the null hypothesis and tested it using the spearman correlation coefficient aided by the statistical package for social sciences. The analysis results at 0.05 level of significance showed that self-awareness has a statistically significant influence on the

performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya. The findings would be useful to commercial banks in Kenya and other organizations in evaluating their leaders' self-awareness in order to improve performance of the employees.

Keywords: Self-awareness, employee performance, values, cognitions, emotions, motives

INTRODUCTION

This study examined the effect of leader self-awareness on the performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya. Self-awareness is a key factor that contributes to the development of authentic leadership. Leaders who have self-awareness behaviour are familiar with both how they view themselves and how others see them (Waida, 2021). Leaders with high self-awareness promote healthy relationships with others at the workplace (Abidin, 2017). This is made possible by the leader who is able to listen attentively to employees that are willing to say what they think about the leader (Avolio & Luthans, 2006). This study considered four elements of self-awareness, which are: values, cognitions, emotions and motives (Gardner et al., 2005). On the other hand, performance of employees is considered a vital element in leadership studies because of its role in the process of organizational performance. It is the accumulated value of the employee behaviour, which contributes to the organization (Campbell, 1990). Performance of employees is dependent on the leader behaviour that can motivate employees toward high performance (Northouse, 2016). According to Olaka et al. (2017), improved performance is mostly associated with leader behaviour in the individual commercial banks in Kenya. Further, the stability of commercial banks in Kenya is majorly dependent on the performance of employees (Ndegwa et al., 2018). There are 38 licensed commercial banks in Kenya with 31,605 employees (CBK, 2021). Commercial banks contribute substantially to the national economy. This study tested the null hypothesis (H_0), which stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between self-awareness and performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya. The regression model used was $P = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SA + \epsilon$ and P-value of 0.05. The null hypothesis was rejected and concluded that self-awareness has a statistically significant effect on the performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya. Therefore, it was recommended that organizations should train their leaders and employees on the competencies that are associated with self-awareness.

Employees are regarded as the most critical resource in many organizations. Their perception of leadership and job satisfaction often determines the level of performance. Commercial banks in Kenya are concerned with how to sustain performance of employees because of its critical impact on organizational outcomes (Shilaho, 2019). Due to the significant

role employees play in organizational performance, commercial banks spend huge resources in trying to establish the best way to maintain high employees performance (Enu-Kwesi et al., 2014). Therefore, the type of leaders commercial banks have determines the level of employee performance. Employee performance problem is indicated by decreased productivity, lack of efficiency, poor quality work output and high turnover intentions (Karoki, 2016). This problem is not necessarily personal, rather it is associated with the low level of leader self-awareness (Hendricks, 2018). Employees of commercial banks in Kenya need leaders that have high self-awareness in order to develop hope, optimism and resilience that can improve their performance (Ribeiro et al., 2018). Despite a chain of reforms being introduced by stakeholders, performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya has not been consistent (Maina & Waitthaka, 2018). Several studies have shown lack of leader self-awareness in the commercial banking sector in most third world countries (Rijsenbilt & Commandeur, 2013; European Investment Bank, 2016). Leader self-awareness problem has also been witnessed in most commercial banks in Kenya (Muchiri & Gachunga, 2018). Few studies have established the effect of self-awareness on the performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya (Muchiri et al., 2016; Sang, 2016). Prior studies scarcely considered self-awareness as a crucial research area in leadership studies. Against this backdrop, the current study addressed the nexus gap between self-awareness and performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya. The null hypotheses for the study states that there is no statistically significant relationship between self-awareness and performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents conceptualization of self-awareness as an independent variable, and performance of employees as a dependent variable. It also discusses Hierarchy of Needs Theory as the underpinning theory of the study. The empirical review is also presented.

Self-awareness represents a state of attention where individuals direct their conscious attention to some aspect of self, regardless of their correctness in self-perception (Hannah, 2011). It also refers to a personal insight of the leader and contributes significantly to the development of authentic leadership. It is a dimension of authentic leadership that is linked to introspection or self-reflection. It shows the understanding of how individuals make meaning of the world around them, based on self-reflective testing of their own hypotheses and self-schema (Gardner et al., 2005). Through self-awareness, authentic leaders not only know their values, motives, feelings and thoughts, but also how they influence others (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Gardner et al., 2005). Thus, a leader needs to be familiar with both how they view themselves and how others see them. Further,

a leader needs to know how their actions affect those around them (Waida, 2021). Self-awareness considers insights an individual has about own qualities, expectations, values, personality, attitude, efficacy, behaviour and actions (Avolio & Luthans, 2006). One of the key characteristics of self-awareness is having a genuine, transparent and trusting relationship with others (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio et al., 2004). Leaders with high self-awareness promote this relationship through open and honest work environments, where employees can express their feedback and criticism without any barrier or fear of the consequences (Abidin, 2017). Thus, self-awareness often comes through others who are willing to say what they think about the leader, especially if the leader is able to listen attentively (Avolio & Luthans, 2006).

Four elements of self-awareness that are relevant to the development of authentic leadership include values, cognitions, emotions and motives (Gardner et al., 2005). Thus, through self-awareness, authentic leaders gain clarity with regard to their core values, identity, emotions and motives triggered by external events (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Self-awareness includes knowledge of an individual's inherent contradictory self-aspects and the role of these contradictions in influencing one's thoughts, feelings, actions and behaviours (May et al., 2003). Consequently, knowing self and being true to self are essential qualities to developing authentic leadership. Self-awareness indicates an individual's basic and fundamental awareness of own knowledge, experience and capabilities (George, 2003). Self-knowledge comes out when leaders are faced with dilemmas, where they learn from the decisions made and the actions taken about their values, motivation, priorities, abilities and shortcomings (Badaracco, 2016). The practice of self-awareness involves tools, such as personality tests to help leaders become more self-aware (Johnson, 2019). Besides the tools, knowing oneself and understanding one's role as a leader should be a priority. Thus, self-awareness behaviour helps a leader set goals and formulate action plans to lead with purpose. Leaders with high self-awareness develop interest to know their followers. It is also worth noting that self-awareness behaviour develops over time through practical application and personal development (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011).

Leaders who are aware of their values and can demonstrate the same through their actions are likely to improve their performance and those of their followers (Ryan & Deci, 2018). Leaders who have values are said to engage in authentic behaviours, which makes followers to be satisfied with them (Banks et al., 2016). Thus, leaders who are perceived to have values, which include ethical standpoint and principled decisions, are seen as caring about their followers and inspiring increased levels of performance of employees. Cognition is a trust that is related to leader characteristics, such as ability, reliability, and integrity (Farid et al., 2020). It is a function of the evaluation of the other person's competence and reliability. Further, Dóci et al. (2015) suggest that the leader needs to perceive employees as reliable and capable so that

they can perform highly. Additionally, a leader needs to provide employees with caring and emotional support and consider them worthy of a reciprocally positive attitude. Research concerning centrality of emotions as a key issue in leadership has generated substantial empirical and theoretical body of work (Klenke, 2007). Self-awareness can be viewed as the management of emotions, where leaders display emotions, attempt to invoke emotions in their followers and demonstrate that emotions influence leadership outcomes (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017). Thus, leader's self-awareness entails understanding differential effects of distinct emotions and being prepared to help employees manage their emotions accordingly. On the other hand, research offers specific understandings on the effects of discrete emotions associated with leader-facilitated directive strategies on employee perceptions and performance (Thiel et al., 2012). In addition to the direct role emotion plays in shaping leader-employee relationships, it is also known that emotions contribute to the broader models of leadership. A key skill of leaders with self-awareness is the ability to help employees deal with negative emotions. Leaders with self-awareness engender positive emotions, which results into optimism, improved performance of employees and attainment of goals (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017). Leaders with self-awareness have a motive of working on organizational goals that can contribute to the development of employees (Epitropaki et al., 2017). Self-view helps a leader to make sense of the world, organize behaviour and predict response of employees, with regard to performance. Therefore, authentic leaders display self-views by making employees recognize and endorse their authentic self (Li et al., 2019).

Performance is the accumulated value of the employee behaviour, which contributes to the organization directly or indirectly (Campbell, 1990). It involves quality and quantity of output, presence at work, accommodative and helpful nature and timeliness of output (Shahzadi & Javed, 2014). Performance is beneficial to the individual employee because of job satisfaction and rewards. Austin and Villanova (1992) observe that before the 1980s, no attempts had been made to model performance of employees as a construct. However, researchers have developed a consensus that employee performance be defined as actual things that employees do and actions they take to contribute to the organizational goals (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015). Despite this consensus, employee performance theory and measurement have received little attention in the field of leadership (Richard et al., 2009). Performance of employees is generally measured by efficiency, quality of work, productivity and turnover intentions (Ondoro, 2015). Additionally, employees who perceive leaders as having self-awareness behaviour are likely to replicate the same behaviour (Leroy et al., 2015). This study measured performance of employees based on four indicators, which include efficiency, productivity, turnover intentions and quality of work.

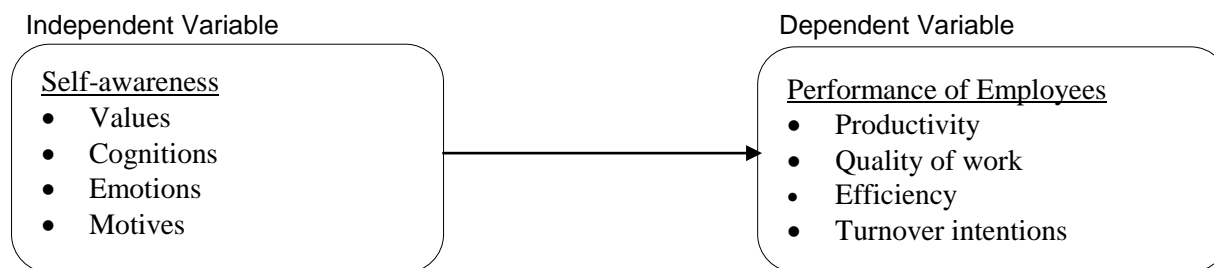


Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework*

Objective Self-awareness Theory was proposed by Duval and Wicklund (1972). They promoted the idea that at any given moment a person could be self-focused or other-focused. Additionally, they believed that inward focus involved comparing the self with standards, which emerge from interactions with external environment. They further argued that once internalized, an individual can make adjustments to his or her thoughts and behaviours. Thus, the more self-focused a person is, the more self-aware he or she becomes. They tested their ideas by conducting a series of experiments. A study they conducted sought to determine if opinions and performance would change as the subject became more self-aware. The findings showed this to be the case (Wicklund & Duval, 1971). Therefore, Duval and Wicklund's research became the basis for contemporary research in the area of self-awareness (Kori, 2020). Their work demonstrated that empirical study of self-focused attention was possible (Morin, 2011). The theory addresses itself to a dichotomy of conscious attention and the conditions basic to the rising and falling of self-focused attention (Williams, 1985). Objective Self-awareness Theory is a motivational theory where a person was assumed to find shortcomings within himself regardless of the self-related dimension of focus.

Literatures show that self-awareness enhances performance of employees (Leroy et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2014; Ribeiro et al., 2018). Research has further indicated that self-awareness leads to enhanced effective teamwork (Lawrence et al., 2018). A study by (Hasanah & Mujanah, 2020) on the effect of self-awareness on the performance of employees of public works in Bangkalan district, Indonesia. The results indicated that Self-awareness has a positive but insignificant effect on the performance of employees. These results contradict the study by (Alferaih, 2022) who sought to find out the effect of self-awareness on performance of employees of Saudi Arabian telecom. The results showed a favourable relationship between self-awareness and employee performance. The results of this study concur with majority of the studies which established that self-awareness has a significant effect on employee performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive research design, which is often used cross-sectional with hypotheses testing (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Descriptive or hypothesis testing research design was based on the study objective, which was to establish the effect of self-awareness on performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya (Kothari & Garg, 2019). Cross sectional study design has been used successfully in previous related studies (Mujuka, 2018; Nyaywera et al., 2018; Dartey-Baah & Agbozo, 2021). The target population for this study was 31,605 employees from 38 commercial banks in Kenya (CBK, 2021). The study was conducted in Nairobi, where all commercial banks in Kenya have a representation. The unit of analysis was the employee. Rule of thumb for determining a sample size for most academic researches is 30 to 500 (Salkind, 2011). Consequently, the sample size was 395 respondents obtained using random stratified sampling (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). Primary data was collected using a structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (Oluwatosin, 2017). The questionnaire used was self-designed. The researcher physically delivered the questionnaires to the respondents and picked them after they were filled. The study used SPSS version 28.0.0.0 (190) to analyze data. Multiple regression analysis helped to objectively assess the degree and character of the relationship that existed between independent and dependent variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this analysis was to make a prediction about the dependent variable based on its covariance with the independent variable of the study. The regression model for this study was a linear model because the objective was to test the linear relationship of the variables. Performance of employees was regressed against self-awareness. The analytical model for testing the null hypothesis that “there is no statistically significant relationship between self-awareness and performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya” is presented as follows: $P = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SA + \epsilon$

Where:

P= Performance

β_0 = Constant

SA= Self-awareness

ϵ =Error term

The results presented in table 1 show the constant was 2.163 and the value for self-awareness 0.512. Consequently, $P = 2.163 + 0.512SA + \epsilon$.

Table 1: *The Effect of Self-Awareness on the Performance of Employees*

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.163	0.166		13.000	0.000
	Self Awareness	0.512	0.037	0.568	13.693	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

Correlation Analysis

The descriptive purposes of correlation coefficients are to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. The closer the positive or negative correlation coefficient is to +1.00 or -1.00, the stronger the relationship (Aldrich & Cunningham, 2016). All variables of the study had a positive relationship between themselves at a significant level of 0.05 as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *Correlation Coefficient Analysis*

Variables	Correlation	Self Awareness	Productivity	Turnover Intentions	Quality of Work	Efficiency
Self Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	395				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000				
	N	394				
Productivity	Pearson Correlation	.495**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000				
	N	395	395			
Turnover Intentions	Pearson Correlation	.443**	.570**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000			
	N	395	395	395		
Quality of Work	Pearson Correlation	.499**	.700**	.499**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000		
	N	395	395	395	395	
Efficiency	Pearson Correlation	.523**	.628**	.483**	.732**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	395	395	395	395	395
**.	Correlation is significant at the 0.01					

Regression Analysis

This study considered the effect of self-awareness on each indicator of employee performance. These indicators included: productivity, efficiency, quality of work and turnover intentions. The objective was to establish the relationship between self-awareness and performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya. The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that, there is no statistically significant relationship between self-awareness and performance of

employees of commercial banks in Kenya. To test the level of self-awareness influence on the performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya, a simple regression test was performed. The results presented in Table 3 show the correlation value was 0.568, which implies a significant relationship between self-awareness and performance of employees. The coefficient of determination was 0.323, which indicates that the effect of self-awareness on performance of employees was 32.3%, while the remaining 67.7 was influenced by other factors. The significance level was 0.000, which is less than the conventional probability of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, hence the study established that there is a statistically significant relationship between self-awareness and performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya. The results are represented by the following regression model: $P = 2.163 + 0.512SA + \epsilon$, Where: P=Performance, SA= Self-awareness, ϵ =Error term.

Table 3: The Effect of Self-Awareness on Employees Performance

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.568 ^a	0.323	0.321	0.40285		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Self Awareness						
ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	30.430	1	30.430	187.507	<.001 ^b
	Residual	63.779	393	0.162		
	Total	94.210	394			
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Self Awareness						
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.163	0.166		13.000	0.000
	Self Awareness	0.512	0.037	0.568	13.693	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance						

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY, PRACTICE AND POLICY

Based on the findings of this study, several conclusions can be drawn. The current study sought to establish the effect of self-awareness on performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya. Based on the regression results, the null hypothesis was rejected, instead it was established that self-awareness has a statistically significant effect on the performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya. The findings of self-awareness descriptive analysis suggested that leaders: are aware of their core values, can describe who they really are and are aware of their own emotions and motives. This study, therefore, concludes that commercial

banks in Kenya are expected to increase the effectiveness of their leaders' self-awareness behaviour. It can also be inferred from the summary findings that self-awareness enhances employee performance because it meets their desired needs and expectations. These findings imply that self-awareness strengthens the leader-employee relationship in the commercial banks of Kenya. This relationship is likely to increase employee performance which is measured by productivity, turnover intentions, quality of work output and efficiency. The study concluded that self-awareness has a significant correlation with employee performance, where it explained 32.3% of change in productivity, turnover intentions, quality of work and efficiency. Therefore, the practice of self-awareness behaviour could improve performance of employees of commercial banks in Kenya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations can be made based on the findings of the study. Commercial banks in Kenya should deliberately encourage self-awareness behaviour as a key component of authentic leadership. Additionally, the management of commercial banks ought to emphasize self-awareness behaviour in order to have strong positive relationships between leaders and employees. The management of commercial banks ought to create a highly developed organizational climate for self-awareness behaviour to thrive. Further, commercial banks in Kenya should embark on inculcating self-awareness behaviour in their leaders by designing training programs that include values, cognitions, emotions and motives (Gardner et al., 2005). The management of commercial banks in Kenya should foster continuous, positive self-development culture that leads to veritable, sustained performance of employees. Several benefits can be drawn from self-awareness including creating employee confidence in the leaders.

AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

A similar study can be conducted in other contexts within the banking industry as well as beyond in order to establish the effect of leader self-awareness behaviour on the performance of employees. A further study can also be conducted to establish the effect of self-awareness on employee performance with a moderating variable, such as motivation. This study adopted a quantitative method and cross-sectional descriptive research design. Future research should consider alternative designs, such as longitudinal research design, which if well-planned it can help to identify cause-and-effect relationships (Saunders et al., 2019). Future research can also consider linking both quantitative and qualitative data to achieve a comprehensive understanding.

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