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LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP STYLE AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to establish the effect of laissez-faire leadership style on organizational commitment as moderated by employee participation in technical institutions in Kenya. The study population was all the 3114 lecturers in the 47 technical institutions in Kenya. Both stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques were adopted to get the sample institutions and twenty-two gender-based members from each institution to be included in the study. Questionnaires were administered to a sample of 343 respondents with 278 completing and returning the questionnaires. Data analysis was done by use of descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. In addition, multiple regression was applied in order to analyze the effect of laissez-faire leadership style on organizational commitment as moderated by employee participation. The study findings revealed that laissez-faire leadership style had a significant effect on organizational commitment. The findings further showed that there was no moderating effect of employee participation on the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and organizational commitment and its dimensions.

KEYWORDS

employee participation, laissez-faire leadership and organizational commitment.

INTRODUCTION

The survival and success of any organization today depends on the availability of a committed workforce. Human resource gives an organization competitive advantage and edge over the others in the volatile market. As a result of this, organizations are keen to pay particular attention to the organizational commitment of employees (Dairush *et al.*, 2016). According to Davenport (2010), committed employees are less likely to be sluggish and report fewer cases of absenteeism.

Another key factor determining an organization's success is the manager's leadership style. Leadership refers to a dynamic process in a group whereby one individual influences other group members to commit themselves freely to the achievement of group goals (Cole, 2002). There are various forms of leadership styles. However, for the sake of this study, only laissez-faire leadership style was used.

Laissez-faire leadership comes from a French term meaning "non-interference" (Cole, 2002). Laissez-faire leadership style is a passive kind of leadership style. It is a hands-off approach to leadership (Northouse, 2004). Laissez-faire is the absence of effective leadership (Yulk, 2010). Employees interact with each other to get the work done.

OBJECTIVES

The general objective was to determine the effect of laissez-faire leadership style on organizational commitment as moderated by employee participation. The study specifically endeavored to: find out the effect of laissez-faire leadership style on affective commitment, find out the effect of laissez-faire leadership style on continuance commitment, find out the effect of laissez-faire leadership style on normative commitment and establish the moderating effect of employee participation on the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and organizational commitment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP

Laissez-faire leadership refers to leadership that avoids decision making, disregards problems, does not follow up, and refuses to intervene (Gill, 2006). A laissez-faire leader believes in freedom of choice for the employees where they left alone to do as they want. Laissez-faire leadership is an avoidance of leadership behaviors, when a leader avoids making decisions and demonstrates a passive indifference to both tasks and followers. no transactions are carried out between a leader and the followers and leadership behaviors are ignored (Dairush, Choobdar, Valadkhani & Mehrali, 2016).

Laissez-faire leadership is caused by two reasons. The first one is that there is a strong belief that the employees know their jobs best so leave them alone to do their jobs. Secondly, the leader may not desire to exert power and control for fear of not being re-elected if he were in a political, election-based position. In such a scenario, the leader provides basic but minimal information and resources and there is virtually no participation, involvement or communication within the workforce. Laissez-faire leadership is considered as a passive form of leadership and the least effective form of leader behavior (Khan, Ramzan, Ahmed & Nawaz, 2011).

laissez-faire approach is effective for some subordinates. This approach works where there are highly skilled professionals in any area (Cole, 2002). Management controls must be established to monitor subordinate performance other than frequency of contact. According to Plunkett (1992), the disadvantage of laissez-faire leadership style is that subordinates may become insecure without continual reassurance and contact with their leader.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Organizational commitment represents the strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in an organization (Armstrong, 2012). It refers to attachment and loyalty and is associated with one’s feelings about the organization (Luthans, 2007). Commitment is an important variable in understanding the work behavior of employees in organizations (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Organizational commitment is known to have positive effects (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Organizational commitment is critical in retaining and attracting well qualified workers (Nagar, 2012). Organizational commitment is linked directly to employees’ performance (Jaramillo, Mulki & Marshal, 2005).

Three types of commitment of have been identified. These are: affective, continuance and normative (Greenberg, 2005). Affective commitment deals with the attachment of an employee with his organization and the organizational goals. Continuance commitment deals with the commitment to pursue working in an organization because of the inter-employee relations and other non-transferable investments like retirement benefits etc. Normative commitment refers to a sort of an obligation on the part of an employee, due to which he is willing to stay in an organization (Alam & Ramay, 2011).

LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

According to Jackson *et al.* (2013), no much attention has been paid to examining the relationship between commitment and laissez-faire styles of leadership. In a meta-analysis, Jackson *et al.* (2013) found that laissez faire leadership was negatively related to affective commitment. In a Turkish study, teachers’ affective commitment was positively correlated with principals using laissez-faire leadership styles (Cemaloglu *et al.*, 2012). Teachers’ continuance and normative commitment were negatively related to laissez-faire leadership styles. Laissez-faire leadership was found to predict normative commitment.

The above literature led to the formation of the following **HYPOTHESES**:

H₀₁: There is no significant effect of laissez-faire leadership style on organizational commitment in technical institutions in Kenya.

H_{01a}: There is no significant effect of laissez-faire leadership style on affective commitment in technical institutions in Kenya.

H_{01b}: There is no significant effect of laissez-faire leadership style on continuance commitment in technical institutions in Kenya.

H_{01c}: There is no significant effect of laissez-faire leadership style on normative commitment in technical institutions in Kenya

EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION

Modern organizations have come to the realization that employee participation is both valuable and indispensable. As a result of this, great attention is being paid to this important subject. Employee participation refers to the participation of non-managerial employees in decision making processes of an organization (Cole, 2002). According to Gupta (2011), employee participation has immense benefits. These include: developing mutual understanding between employees and employers, higher productivity, fostering industrial harmony and democracy, less resistance to change and encouraging creativity and innovation. Busck *et al.* (2010) observed that increased participation brings about an increase in employees’ control at work. Singh (2009) supported the view that employees must be involved if they are to understand the need for creativity and if they are to be committed.

Gupta (2011) identified four degrees of participation. These are communication, consultation, co-determination and self-management. Communication is concerned with sharing information on management decisions with employees. Under consultation, employees are given an opportunity to express their views on work related issues. Co-determination refers to managers and workers taking decisions jointly whereas in self-management employees have complete autonomy from decision making to execution. Mahapatro (2010) identified the following forms of employee participation: collective bargaining, joint decision making, consultation and information sharing.

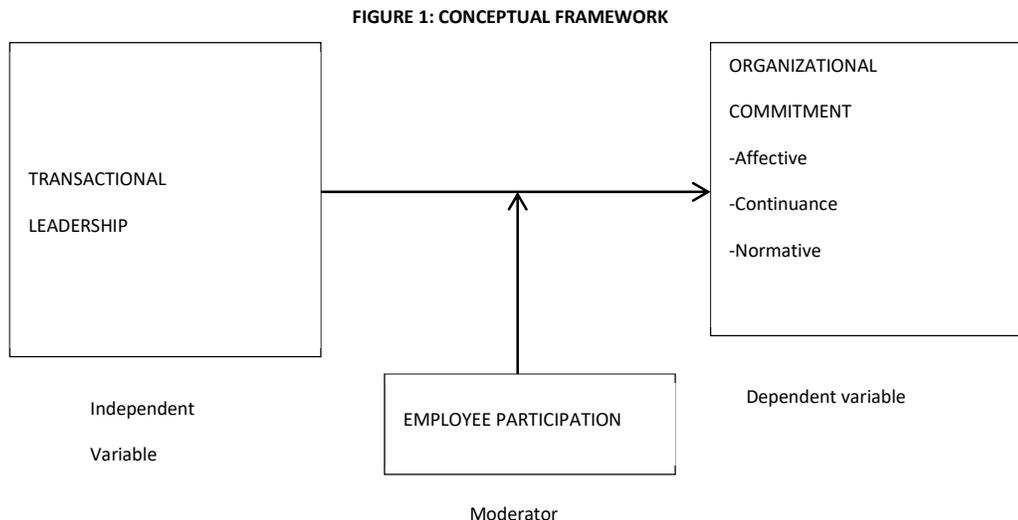
According to Marchington (1980), the behavior and attitudes of leaders have a great bearing on success of participation. Buciniene and Skudiene (2008) in support of this reminisced that employee participation within an organization is affected by leader’s behavior. In a study by Moynihan and Pandey (2007), a moderate positive correlation was found between job involvement and organizational commitment. Uygur and Kilic (2009) carried out a study in Turkey and found a significant positive correlation between organizational commitment and job involvement.

Drawing on the research discussed above, employee participation is hypothesized to moderate the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and organizational commitment. The following hypothesis is formulated:

H₀₂: There is no moderating effect of employee participation on the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and organizational commitment in technical institutions in Kenya.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The various variables under study are conceptualized to be related as shown below:



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3114 lecturers in the 47 technical institutions in Kenya formed the population of the study. Technical institutions were chosen because of the critical role they are expected to play in the realization of vision 2030 and no much research has been done in these institutions. Survey research design was adopted in the study. 343 respondents made up the sample. 278 respondents completed the questionnaires giving a response rate of 81.05%. The following sampling techniques were employed: multistage, stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Multistage sampling design was employed to assist in getting the clusters from which to sample from while stratified sampling was used to group the lecturers into two so that each gender is included in the sample. Simple random sampling was adopted because the population constitutes a homogeneous group (Kothari, 2004). Twenty-two members from each of the selected sixteen institutions formed the sample.

The main instrument of data collection for the study was a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. The questionnaire used had three sections. Section one sought information on the name of institution, demographic data on gender, religion, marital status, age bracket, family size, education, job title, job group and number of years of service in the institution and under current supervisor. Section two asked for information on laissez-faire leadership style. To generate data on leadership style, a modified and improved version of Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) by Bass (1985) was used.

Section three was aimed at gathering information on organizational commitment and its three dimensions. An instrument by Meyer and Allen (1997) was modified to obtain data on organizational commitment. Section four asked for information on employee participation. A modified questionnaire by Barringer and Bluedorn (1999) was used.

The instrument’s reliability was tested through Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The reliability coefficients for the variables were: laissez-faire leadership (0.585), employee participation (0.883) and organizational commitment (0.880). All the variables met the minimum threshold.

Data analysis was done through use of descriptive analysis, correlation analysis and multiple regression. Multiple regression was used to analyze the effect of laissez-faire leadership style on organizational commitment as moderated by employee participation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

The model to be tested was

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$$

Where:

- Y = Organizational commitment
- β_0 = level of organizational commitment in the absence of laissez-faire leadership
- β_1 = intercept for the independent variable
- X_1 = Laissez-faire leadership
- ϵ = Error term

The model was found to be valid ($F(1,274) = 5.391$, $p\text{-value} = 0.021$) as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: REGRESSION RESULTS OF LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	1.884	1	1.884	5.391	.021 ^a
Residual	95.775	274	.350		
Total	97.659	275			
R=0.139 R ² =0.019 Δ R ² =0.016					

The fitted model equation is $Y = -0.139X_1$ with the predictor explaining 1.9% of the variation in organizational commitment. Details of the model are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS OF LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	3.225	.098			33.003	.000
Laissez-faire leadership	-.092	.039	-.139		-2.322	.021

The model equation shows that standardized organizational commitment (OC) will decrease by 0.139 units with one unit increase in standardized laissez-faire leadership style. The use of laissez-faire leadership style leads to a decrease in organizational commitment. As such, its use should be discouraged. Koech and Namusonge (2012) in their Kenyan study also recommended that laissez-faire leadership should be discarded so as to improve organizational performance.

The model indicates that laissez-faire leadership is significantly explaining the variation in the dependent variable (organizational commitment). Therefore, hypothesis H_{01} : there is no significant effect of laissez-faire leadership style on organizational commitment is rejected and conclude that laissez-faire leadership style has a significant effect on organizational commitment.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP AND AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

The model to be tested was

$$Y_1 = \beta_0 + \beta_3 X_1 + \epsilon$$

Where:

- Y₁ = Affective commitment
- β_0 = level of affective commitment in the absence of laissez-faire leadership
- β_3 = intercept for the independent variable
- X_1 = Laissez-faire leadership
- ϵ = Error term

The model was found to be valid ($F(1,274) = 24.941$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$) as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: REGRESSION RESULTS OF LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP ON THE DIMENSIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Dimension	F	Sig.	Beta	R	R ²	Δ R ²
Affective commitment	24.941	.000	-0.289	0.289	0.083	0.080
Continuance commitment	0.133	.715	0.022	0.022	0.020	0.003
Normative commitment	2.423	.121	-	0.094	0.009	0.005

The fitted model equation is $Y_1 = -0.289X_1$. The model equation shows that standardized affective commitment (AC) will decrease by 0.289 units with one unit increase in standardized laissez-faire leadership style. The use of laissez-faire leadership style leads to a decrease in affective commitment. As such, its use should be discouraged. The model indicates that laissez-faire leadership is significantly explaining the variation in the dependent variable (affective commitment). Therefore, hypothesis H_{01a} : there is no significant effect of laissez-faire leadership style on affective commitment is rejected and conclude that laissez-faire leadership style has a significant effect on affective commitment. Dariush *et al.* (2016) found a significant but negative correlation between laissez-faire leadership and affective commitment.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP AND CONTINUANCE COMMITMENT

The model to be tested was

$$Y_2 = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$$

Where:

- Y₂ = Continuance commitment
- β_0 = level of continuance commitment in the absence of laissez-faire leadership
- β_1 = intercept for the independent variable

X_1 = Laissez-faire leadership
 ϵ = Error term

The model was found not to be valid ($F(1,274)=0.133$, $p\text{-value}=0.715$) as shown in Table 3.

The fitted model equation is $Y_2=0.022X_3$ with the predictor explaining no variation in continuance commitment.

The model indicates that laissez-faire leadership is not significantly explaining the variation in the dependent variable (continuance commitment). Therefore, hypothesis H_{01b} : there is no significant effect of laissez-faire leadership style on continuance commitment is not rejected and conclude that laissez-faire leadership style does not have a significant effect on continuance commitment. Similar findings were reported by Limsila and Ogunlana (2008) and Lo *et al.* (2010) who observed that laissez-faire leadership does not have any statistically significant correlation with continuance commitment.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP AND NORMATIVE COMMITMENT

The model to be tested was

$$Y_3 = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$$

Where:

Y_3 = Normative commitment
 β_0 = level of normative commitment in the absence of laissez-faire leadership
 β_1 = intercept for the independent variable
 X_1 = Laissez-faire leadership
 ϵ = Error term

The model was found not to be valid ($F(1,274)=2.423$, $p\text{-value}=0.121$). The model indicates that laissez-faire leadership is not significantly explaining the variation in the dependent variable (normative commitment). Therefore, hypothesis H_{01c} : there is no significant effect of laissez-faire leadership style on normative commitment is not rejected and conclude that laissez-faire leadership style does not have a significant effect on normative commitment. In Central Europe and Lithuania, Clinebell *et al.* (2013) found passive/avoidant leadership style does not have any statistically significant correlation with normative commitment. Dariush *et al.* (2016) found a significant but negative correlation between laissez-faire leadership and normative commitment.

The use of laissez-faire leadership style actually leads to a decrease in normative commitment. As such, its use should be discouraged.

THE MODERATING EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP STYLE AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

The findings showed that there was no moderating effect of employee participation on the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and organizational commitment and its dimensions.

CONCLUSION

Laissez-faire leadership style has a significant effect on organizational commitment and affective commitment. Laissez-faire leadership style does not have a significant effect on continuance commitment and normative commitment. It is further concluded that there is no moderating effect of employee participation on the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and organizational commitment and its dimensions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that less of laissez-faire leadership style should be embraced as it has a negative impact on organizational commitment.

FUTURE RESEARCH AREAS

There would be need to replicate this study in other areas. In addition, more studies should be carried out on laissez-faire leadership as not many studies have been carried out.

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