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**Human Relations and Employee Engagement in Manufacturing
Firms in Kenya**



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Human Relations and Employee Engagement in Manufacturing Firms in Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examined the relationship between human relations and employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya. The human relations constructs included: autonomy, integration, involvement, supervisory support and welfare. Employee engagement was conceptualized using the constructs of vigour, dedication and absorption.

Methodology: Guided by positivism, this study adopted a cross-sectional survey using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The target population was 578 manufacturing firms in the 12 key industrial sub-sectors derived from the directory of the Kenya Association of Manufacturers. The sample size of 236 respondents was arrived at after using the Yamane sample size determination formula. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential analysis was done using SPSS and results from the data analyzed were presented in tables and graphs.

Findings: Correlation analysis results revealed a positive correlation between human relation and employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya. Results from regression analysis revealed there is a positive and significant relationship between human relations and employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: This study recommends that organizations should give import to the extent to which they give prominence to tangibly demonstrating care for its employees since demonstrating that the organization values its workers will lead to higher employee engagement. Moreover, the study recommends that management should cultivate an atmosphere of trust and cooperation.

Keywords: *Human Relations, Employee Engagement, Manufacturing Sector.*

Background of the Study

In academia as well as the business world, there has been a keen and rising interest regarding the consanguinity that exists between employees and management. There exists an overall concurrence that the manner in which employees behave does not only emanate from their individual traits but also from their work environment (Berberoglu, 2018). Moreover, the shared perceptions of processes and behavioral expectations in organizations affect how employees behave (Brock-Baskin & McKee, 2019). Importantly, it is these employees who are the key resource for organizations in their attempts to attain sustainable competitive advantage in today's dynamic business world. Hence, creating a healthy and positive organizational climate that values the welfare of the employees is indispensable if organizations are to achieve their objectives (Arya & Sainy, 2017). Patterson, *et al.*, (2005) delineate human relations as one of the variables underpinning organizational climate as conceptualized by the competing values framework by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983).

This model has been adopted in a number of countries as a measure of human relations as part of organizational climate: Italy (Ancarani, Di Mauro & Giammaco, 2018); United States of America (Lee, 2016; Floyd, 2016); Norway (Nilsen, 2018); Australia (Adams, Dawson & Foureur, 2016) and Kenya (Rintari, Gachunga & Senaji, 2019). In the recent past, researchers in the organizational domain have devoted a tremendous amount of effort to understand the construct of organizational climate in relation to employee outcomes (Willis, Reynolds & Lee, 2019). Organizational climate, of which human relations is a key variable, has been found to be an important predictor of a variety of key employee outcomes which include: academic achievement (Adu, 2015); innovation (Karanja & Ndurumo, 2016); job performance (Githinji & Gachunga, 2017); psychological empowerment (Wang'ombe, 2017); emotional intelligence (Al Ghazo, Suifan & Alnuami, 2019) and time banditry (Brock-Baskin & McKee, 2019).

However, there has been mixed results with regard to the influence that human relations, as an element of organizational climate, has on employee outcomes. Case in point, while Karanja (2016) found that there did not exist a statistically significant relationship between organizational climate and job satisfaction, Moslehpour, *et al.*, (2019) were of the considered view that an agreeable organizational climate will culminate in increased levels of job satisfaction. Consistent with this, Lee (2017) opines that employees who possess varied individual-level characteristics have varied cognizance of organizational climate. To add to this, age, education, work experience at the current work place, work position and employee status has a direct impact on the perceived organizational climate.

Employee engagement, which is considered an important concept in management theory and practice has also generated broad interest in recent years. Armstrong and Taylor (2014, page 167) defines employee engagement as a condition that is characterized by commitment by employees to their working addition to the general organization and this manifests itself through an impetus to achieve high levels of performance. Nimon, Schuck & Zigarmi (2016) define employee engagement as an active, work-related positive psychological state. According to Bakker and

Schaufeli (2015) employee engagement is usually linked with feelings of significance, keenness, gratification, motivation and is indicative of a durable emotional/inspiration state.

Importantly, Bakar (2014) proffers that it is essential to obtain a validated and accurate definition of employee engagement since, as a concept, it has various definitions conceptualized in various ways by different schools of thought with some defining it as being present at work while others have viewed it as being a concept that is opposite to burnout. This makes it important for each researcher to spell out the uniqueness of its definition, which is especially crucial, in order to avoid overlaps with other concepts that include organizational commitment, job involvement and job satisfaction. This is consistent with Shekari (2015) who notes that employee engagement in itself is not a single unitary construct rather it has many facets which means that the outcomes may vary depending on the choice of employee engagement aspects involved.

Notably, academic conceptualizations that define employee engagement in its own right have a consensus that it entails behavioural energy (vigour), an emotional component (dedication) and a cognitive component (absorption) (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2014). Consequently, this study conceptualizes employee engagement based on the definition by Schaufeli *et al* (2001) who posit that it is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption. Furthermore, vigour is explained as a condition characterized by high energy levels while dedication is described as being strongly involved in one's work. Absorption is explained a condition where one is fully concentrated and happily engrossed in work. The most important measurement instrument for employee engagement is the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli *et al*, 2001) which is reflective of all the components of engagement (Rich *et al*, 2010). Confirmatory factor analyses convincingly show that the hypothesized three-factor structure of the UWES is superior to other models (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). According to Vallieres, *et al.*, (2017) the UWES is commonly used to study engagement in employees and has been translated into 23 different languages in addition to being applied in a variety of cultural contexts that include: China (Fong, 2012); the United States of America (Mills, Culbertson & Fullagar, 2012); Finland (Hakanen, 2002) among a number of other European countries. This is consistent with Carmona-Halty, Schufeli and Salanova (2019) who propound that the UWES-9, which is an improvement of the original UWES, has been validated in industrial-organizational settings in various countries across the world: Brazil (Sinval, *et al.*, 2018); Russia (Lovakov, Agadullina & Schaufeli, 2017); Italy (Balducci *et al.*, 2010); Serbia (Petrovic, Vukelic & Cizmic, 2017); Portugal (Cadime, *et al.*, 2016); South Korea (Song, Hong & Jo, 2020) and Poland (Kulikowski, 2017).

The original UWES had 17 items in addition to the three dimensions of vigour, dedication and absorption. Subsequently, due to pragmatic reasons, the UWES was lessened and this resulted in a 9-item version (UWES-9) which also showed adequate psychometric properties according to Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006). This is consonant with Garbero, *et al.*, (2019) who submit that UWES-9 has been validated in 10 countries with a sample of almost 15000 people demonstrating satisfactory psychometric properties. Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019),

postulates that employee engagement has a positive relationship with both individual and organizational performance. In this case, individual performance is characterized by commitment and positive behavior while organizational performance is marked by customer satisfaction and financial returns. Echoing this assertion, Chelang'at, Were and Odhiambo (2019) propound that having engaged employees is highly beneficial to the organization since it leads to numerous positive outcomes that include: high employee retention, fewer complaints of unfairness, quality products and services, higher productivity and increased organizational profitability. Consequently, it behooves organizations to engage their employees in order to attain a competitive advantage.

Several studies have concluded that there exists a high correlation between employee engagement and positive outcomes that include job satisfaction and high levels of employee performance (Nimon, Schuck & Zigarmi, 2016; Koech & Cheboi, 2017). The most widely used operationalization of employee engagement and which has been validated is the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli, *et al.*, 2002) which includes several items for the three dimensions of vigour, dedication and absorption. Employees who are engaged give organizations crucial competitive advantages which include lower employee turnover and an inclination to contribute more to organizational productivity (Pratimasarangi & Nayak, 2016). This study conceptualizes employee engagement based on the definition by Schaufeli *et al* (2001) who posit that it is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption.

Manufacturing is widely viewed as a cornerstone of any thriving economy. According to Chege, Ngui and Kimuyu (2014) government policy reforms in the manufacturing sector since the year 2000 have come in the form of 4 blueprints: The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, The Economic Recovery for Wealth Creation, Kenya Vision 2030 and The Big Four Agenda. Currently, manufacturing firms in Kenya engage in production of a variety of products. There are 12 key industrial sub-sectors involved in processing and value-addition according to the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (2018) directory. They include: building, mining and construction; chemical and allied; energy, electrical and electronics; food and beverages; leather and footwear; metal and allied; motor vehicle assemblers and accessories; paper and board; pharmaceuticals and medical equipment; plastics and rubber; textiles and apparel and finally, timber, wood and furniture.

Statement of the Problem

The gravity of employee engagement cannot be overstated especially for firms seeking to flourish in a cut-throat business environment. Chelang'at (2019) posits that engaged employees lead to outcomes that positively affect organizations. These outcomes include: job satisfaction among employees, quality service, higher productivity, increased profitability and high employee retention. Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019) proffer that employee engagement is found to have a positive relationship with both individual and organizational performance. Accordingly, in

an ideal situation, when employees are engaged, they would be committed, satisfied at their workplace while being highly productive. Moreover, manufacturing firms would be thriving.

However, the World Bank (2018) reports that manufacturing in Kenya is one of the sectors that have contributed to weakness in private sector growth since the sector has been marginally deteriorating and that its contribution to Kenya's GDP in the five years preceding 2018 has been on a downward trend. Additionally, according to Kenya Association of Manufacturers (2018) the country has been experiencing premature deindustrialization which is illustrated by the GDP contribution by the manufacturing sector. Consistent with this KNBS (2020) reports that in 2019 the manufacturing sector in Kenya grew at a paltry 3.2% as compared to a revised growth of 4.3% in 2018 while the sector's volume of output expanded by only 2% in 2019 compared to 5.6% in 2018.

While this poor performance and decline in the sector can be attributed to other determinants such as innovation constraints (Mutuku, Muturi & Abuga, 2016), challenges in the operating environment (Kariithi & Kihara, 2017) or firm size (Audax & Kalunda, 2018), it is important to note that a number of studies have found a positive relationship between employee engagement and organizational performance: Otieno, Waiganjo and Njeru (2015); Dajani (2015); Osborne and Hammoud (2017); Chelang'at, Were and Odhiambo (2019); Mamula, Peric and Necak (2020). Moreover, Were (2016) submits that the manufacturing sector in Kenya faces endemic difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled employees. In other words, manufacturing firms lack the ability to entice skilled workers and there is a high turnover of those workers that join the sector. Moreover, Caroline and Kanyanjua (2019) posit that some manufacturing firms like East African Portland Cement Company frequently experience employee unrest due to a harsh working environment.

High employee turnover coupled with employee strife are incongruous with the employee engagement outcomes that Chelang'at (2019) advances and which positively affect organizations. Importantly, according to Gallup (2018) only 15% of employees globally are engaged at work. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the problem with manufacturing firms in Kenya rapidly changing focus from retaining jobs and increasing profitability, to improving cash flow at the expense of job security. This shift in strategy has led to uncertainty among employees who now experience low morale and are more disengaged than before (KPMG & KAM, 2020).

Berberoglu (2018) posits that the perceptions and attitudes of employees, which are the core concepts behind organizational climate, can influence how they deliver services. Were (2016) surmises that employees in the manufacturing sector in Kenya generally have a negative perception of their employers, which points to a poor organizational climate, owing to high-handedness by employers and a failure by the firms in the sector to learn from global management practices; this unfortunate situation is attributed to the presence of numerous large and high profile family-owned businesses in the sector. Notably, leaders have significant clout to influence the perceptions of their followers (Bonner, Greenbaum & Mayer, 2014). Furthermore, numerous studies have concluded that there is a link between positive forms of leadership and

higher levels of employee engagement with an especially positive association between transformational leadership and employee engagement (Bailey, Madden, Alfes & Fletcher, 2017).

Importantly, according to the Big Four Agenda, the manufacturing sector is expected to contribute 15% of GDP by the year 2022 with the sector also being a cornerstone of Vision 2030, Kenya's long term transformational roadmap (G.O.K, 2018). If this situation remains unaddressed, Kenya's goal of becoming the provider of choice for basic manufactured goods in Eastern and Central Africa and the country's desire to become an industrialized country will remain elusive. Moreover, if challenges persist in the manufacturing sector, workers will continue being laid off (Kipkemoi, 2017). Notably, Macharia, Gathiaka and Ngui (2022) posit that Kenya's manufacturing sector vital owing to the fact that it accommodates economic activities that are high in productivity making it key in terms of economic performance and long term growth. Moreover, as a consequence of bettering the manufacturing sector, Kenya stands to abate the quantity of goods that are imported and increment exports, resulting in exponential growth in GDP (Oduor, et al., 2021).

Numerous studies in the past have been carried out on the relationship between human relations as a variable of organizational climate and employee engagement. However, these studies have been conducted in developed countries and those that have been carried out in Kenya have ignored the manufacturing sector or have focused on performance as the criterion variable while overlooking employee engagement. Consequently, this study sought to answer the research question, by addressing the gaps evidenced in the reviewed literature, that is: what is the relationship between human relations and employee engagement in selected manufacturing firms in Kenya?

Objective of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between human relations and employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: Human relations have no significant relationship with employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory

The social exchange theory was first proposed by Homans (1961) and later furthered by Blau (1964) and Emerson (1972). It is widely considered to be a major theoretical perspective in the field of social psychology. According to Blau (1964) social exchange refers to an individual's voluntary actions which are motivated by the reciprocal returns that these voluntary actions are expected to bring from other people. The fundamental assumption of social exchange theory is

that parties engage in and maintain relationships due to the expectation that in so doing, they will be rewarded. The theory proffers that interactional exchange involves both social and economic outcomes. Lambe, Whittman and Spekman (2001) propound that over time, individuals may compare the social/economic benefits and outcomes from a particular interaction with other available interactions which can serve as an alternative.

Moreover, when the outcomes are positive, commitment and trust are enhanced. Also, when these interactions have positive outcomes over a period of time, they produce relational exchange norms which govern the exchange relationships. Blau (1964) submits that parties involved in the social exchange are motivated to remain in the relationship as long as the rewards are satisfactory. Furthermore, the concept of ‘satisfactory’ varies from one person to another with some emphasizing social outcomes while others are more concerned with economic outcomes. Nevertheless, both social and economic outcomes are considered together when being compared to other alternatives. Trust is a key tenet of social exchange since to a large extent, the concept is guided by social obligations rather than constructs (Blau, 1968). The social exchange theory is relevant to this study since it proposes that employees will become disengaged when they feel that they are dissatisfied with the organization or when their sense of benefit is not maximized (Clement & Eketu, 2019).

The theory supports the human relations variable by expounding on the importance of social psychology especially considering that variable has values that are linked to belonging, trust and cohesion where coordination is achieved through empowerment, participation, and relations which are supportive in nature (Patterson *et al*, 2005). The theory crystallizes the effect that labors practices, which form the gist of the human relations variable, have on employee engagement. These labour practices include: integration, supervisory support, employee involvement and autonomy.

Conceptual Framework

Human relations climate can be viewed to consist of the treatment and relationship people experience in a work environment (Reece & Reece, 2016). It chiefly examines the well-being, growth and consequent commitment of employees (Patterson *et al*, 2005). The human relations model was borne of the idea of improving job satisfaction and work motivation with a special consideration for workers’ strong social needs (Kelly, 2015). This implies that in order for employees to be satisfied at their places of work and to be motivated to achieve set goals, it’s vital for organizations to address their social needs. Cafferkey, Heffernan, Harney, Dundon and Townsend (2019) submits that the human relations climate has resonance with the employee champion role espoused by Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank and Ulrich (2013) as the means to elicit positive work outcomes in a mutual gains capacity and the opportunity for this mutual gains context exists when both the organization and the employees can advance their interests and concerns as complimentary, consistent and distinctive.

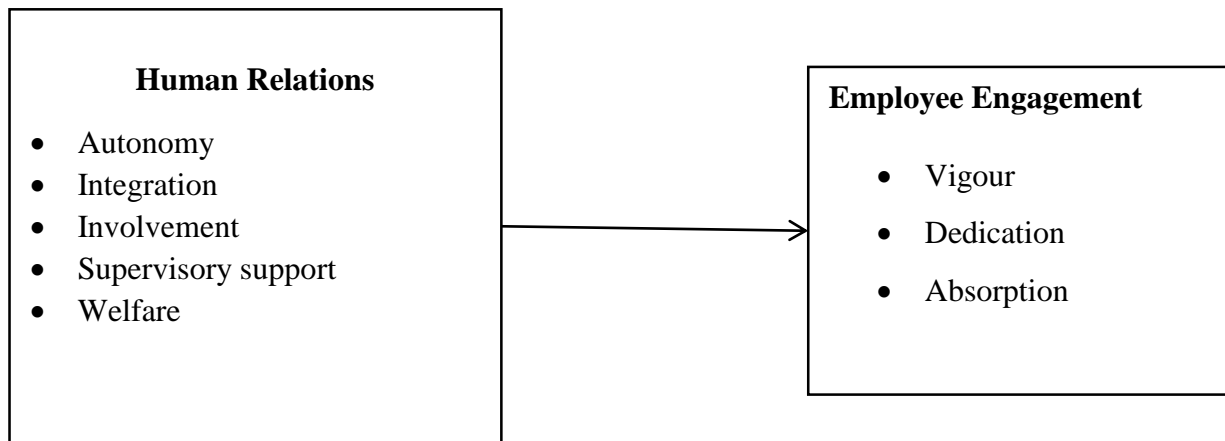
Valizade, *et al.*, (2016) confirm the assertion by proposing that these gains can exist and that human relations propositions are furthered not only to employee relationships but also to other stakeholders. Patterson *et al* (2005) posit that the human relations model has norms and values associated with belonging, trust and cohesion which are achieved through means that comprise of training and human resource development. They further identified the climate dimensions that represent the human relations quadrant as: employee welfare, job autonomy, integration, employee involvement and supervisory support.

Employee welfare can be used to indicate a structured programme carried out by companies to support employees- and at times families- so that their health risks are reduced, quality of life is improved and individual efficiency is incremented (Teti & Andriotto, 2013). Furthermore, employee welfare schemes also include any action addressed to the well-being of the staff and their enhancement, given over and above their salary. Therefore, employee welfare measures are not only measured in monetary terms but also in non-monetary ways. Li (2019) describes job autonomy as the extent to which employees can decide how and what to do in their work places and this attenuates the negative impact of some environmental and personal factors on employees' well-being. It is further observed that autonomy is perceived differently across cultures with collectivistic cultures encouraging interdependence while individualistic cultures encourage independence. Brandmo, Tiplic and Elstad (2019) propound that job autonomy helps employees feel responsible and satisfied in their jobs in addition to inducing a sense of relational trust which is linked to perception of the job autonomy. Taylor, Bradley and Nguyen (2003) remark that job autonomy is one of the main factors that influence job satisfaction and that when this happens, there is a high chance that employee engagement will increase. Patterson *et al* (2005) describe integration as the extent of interdepartmental trust and cooperation while Tekingunduz, Top, Tengilimoglu and Karabulut (2015) pose that organizational trust, which is a key element of integration is vital for organizational efficiency and increases productivity, worker morale, team performance and organizational performance.

Furthermore, it has the effect of strengthening organizational commitment and justice. Dallas (2019) opines that collaborative pluralism may be the only way to positively change the employment relations dynamic. Lleo, Viles, Jurburg and Lomas (2017) point out that people inside the organization are the main actors in continuous improvement, are the ones who create solutions therefore organizations should learn how to establish and maintain adequate systems that foster active employment participation.

Kula and Guler (2014) describe supervisory support as involving tolerance for employees who have difficult tasks, giving credit for jobs well done and providing incentives for employees to perform better. Moreover, supervisory support has a significant and positive impact on job satisfaction levels. Providing constructive feedback, giving employees more decision-making authority and increased responsibility not only increases dedication and commitment but also employee well-being. Gok, Karatuna and Karaca (2015) proffer that supervisors play a critical role in structuring the work environment and fostering satisfaction among subordinates since they

are considered agents of the organization in directing and evaluating subordinates hence they can affect subordinates' perceptions of the organization.



Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

Research Gaps

According to the literature reviewed, it is clear that employee engagement remains a challenge in many organizations (Rao 2016; Choudhury & Mohanty 2018; Latta 2020; Clement & Eketu 2019; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). However, most of the studies already carried out were done in developed countries that include: Canada, China, United States of America and Italy. The literature reviewed revealed that though several studies have been carried out on organizational climate and employee engagement, these studies were limited by failing to include a representative sample of employees (Raja, Madhavi & Sankar, 2019) and by methodological challenges in data analysis (Arya & Sainy, 2017). Since none of these studies considered the manufacturing sector in Kenya, which is a developing country, this provides a research gap. There is need to fill this conceptual and contextual gap. This study, therefore, sought to determine the relationship between organizational climate and employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The choice of research design for this study was informed by the fact that cross-sectional surveys, which are often described as snapshots of the population under study, collect data in order to make inferences about a population at one point in time (Lavrakas, 2008). The target population for this study was all the 578 manufacturing firms in the 12 key industrial sub-sectors obtained from the directory of the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (2018) and which are located in Nairobi. The target population was identified guided by the fact that 80% of all manufacturing firms in Kenya are located in Nairobi and its surroundings (KAM, 2018). This study will target all the middle-level managers, lower-level managers and operational employees of these 578

firms. The sample size for the quantitative data in this study was 236. The Yamane sample size determination formula (Yamane, 1967) was used to arrive at the sample size.

Data for this study was collected using a questionnaire which is a research instrument consisting of a set of standard questions, frequently referred to as items, that follow a certain order and whose purpose is to collect individual data on explicit topics (Lavrakas, 2008). The use of questionnaires makes it possible for descriptive, correlation and inferential statistical analysis (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). Data for this study was collected and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the use of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS Version 25.0) software. By employing descriptive statistics, data was described in terms of frequencies, percentages and standard deviation. Inferential statistics permitted the researcher to use the sample of 236 firms to make generalizations about the entire population. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to establish the direction and extent of the relationships between the independent variable (Y) and dependent variable (X). Multiple regression analysis was used to explain the relationship between the variables in the study while ANOVA was used to determine whether the regression model was reliable or not. Standard f and t tests were used to determine the significance of the coefficient.

Research Findings and Discussions

A total of 236 questionnaires were administered to 236 employees of manufacturing firms in Kenya. Out of these, 186 questionnaires were returned. However, 18 of the returned questionnaires were insufficiently filled and were hence rejected. Consequently, 168 questionnaires, which were found to be usable for this study, were analyzed. This represented a response rate of 71.18%. Mugenda and Mugenda (2009) propound that a response rate of 50% is regarded as adequate for analysis and reporting while 60% is graded as good and responses above 70% are considered excellent.

Descriptive Findings and Analysis

Descriptive Analysis of Human Relations

The descriptive analysis was done on the items in the questionnaire regarding human relations on Likert scale to establish the percentages, means, and standard deviations of the respondents. The Likert scale was: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree, and 5= strongly agree. For the purpose of interpretation, 1 and 2 were grouped together as disagreed, 4 and 5 were grouped together as agreed, and 3 was left as neutral. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Human Relations

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
Management lets employees make their own decisions most of the time.	3.80	1.08
People are trusting of other departments.	3.68	0.94
There is very little conflict between departments here.	3.44	1.03
Management involves employees when decisions which affect them are being made.	3.77	1.18
Supervisors here are really good at understanding employees' problems.	3.86	1.22
Supervisors can be relied upon to give good guidance to employees.	3.88	1.23
Employees are properly trained when there is a new machine or bit of equipment.	3.35	1.07
The company gives the maximum amount of training employees need to do their job.	3.70	1.04
This company pays a lot of attention to the interests of employees.	3.02	1.33
This company cares about its employees.	3.15	1.32

Respondents gave the extent of agreement with regard to the various statements on human relations and employee engagement. Majority of the employees agreed with the statement that “management lets employees make their own decisions most of the time”. This statement had a mean of 3.80 and a standard deviation of 1.08. The study established that a majority of employees in manufacturing firms in Kenya were of the opinion that “people are trusting of other departments” with the mean being 3.68 while the standard was deviation 0.94. The statement “there is very little conflict between departments here” had a mean of 3.44 implying that the bulk of respondents agreed with the statement. The standard deviation was 1.03. To the statement “supervisors here can be relied upon to give good guidance to employees”, majority of the respondents answered in the affirmative (mean 3.88 and standard deviation 1.23).

Descriptive Analysis of Employee Engagement

The descriptive analysis was done on the items in the questionnaire regarding employee engagement on Likert scale to establish the percentages, means, and standard deviations of the respondents. The Likert scale was: 0= never, 1= almost never, 2= rarely, 3= sometimes, 4= often and 5= very often and 6= always. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Employee Engagement

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	3.50	1.81
My job inspires me	3.51	1.67
I am immersed in my work	3.52	1.76
I am proud of what I do	3.55	1.83
I get carried away when I am working	3.56	1.87
At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy	3.57	1.60
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	3.58	1.75
I feel happy when I am working intensely	3.71	1.59
I am enthusiastic about my job	3.80	1.55

Majority of the respondents indicated “sometimes” to the statement “when I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work”. The mean was 3.50 and the standard deviation 1.81. This was interpreted to mean that a significant number of employees in manufacturing firms in Kenya lack vigour in relation to their jobs. Among the nine statements, it was this one that had the lowest mean. Two statements which represent the “dedication” construct of employee engagement are “I’m enthusiastic about my job” and “I am proud of the work I do”. They had a mean of 3.80 and 3.55 respectively. This implies that the average response for the two statements was “sometimes”. With regard to the “absorption” construct of employee engagement, the statements “I am immersed in my work” and “I get carried away when I’m working” the means and standard deviations were 3.52, 1.76 and 3.56, 1.87 respectively. In general, majority of the responses gravitated towards “rarely” and “sometimes”.

Regression Results

Regression analysis was carried out to examine whether the independent variable (human relations) could be deemed a significant determinant of employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya. Univariate regression analysis was conducted. The regression results for the relationship between human relations and employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya were provided in table 4 $R = 0.377$ indicating a significant correlation while $R^2 = 0.333$ implying that 33.3% of the variation in employee engagement can be explained by human relations. The overall significance of the regression model was shown in Table 4. The significance of 0.000 is indicative of the variables being statistically significant. F-test was

conducted to test the null hypothesis that human relations have no significant relationship with employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Table 4: Model Summary for Human Relations and Employee Engagement

R	R- Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error Of the Estimate
0.377	0.333	0.313	1.3970

The results of ANOVA test show that the F- value is 16.206 with p-value = 0.000 which is less than 0.05, meaning that null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant relationship between human relations and employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya. The regression results in table 4 show that the effect of human relations on Employee Engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya was significant (F (5, 167) =16.206, $p=0.000<0.05$).

The F test was significant with a p value = 0.000 which was less than the standard p value of 0.05 and this meant that the model was significant. From ANOVA, since p value $p = 0.000$ and was lower than $p = 0.05$ (p value $0.000 < 0.05$), then the contribution of human relations on Employee engagement was significant, and the conclusion is that human relations has a positive relationship with employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Table 5: ANOVA for Human Relations and Employee Engagement

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-statistics	p-value
Regression	137.477	5	27.495	16.206	0.000
Residual	274.857	162	1.697		
Total	412.335	167			

The coefficients for the human relations variable constructs were also significant. The coefficients for ($\beta = 1.874$, $t = 4.900$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$) were indicative of significance. The study findings are consistent with the findings of Rabiul *et al* (2023) who proffered that HR practices positively and significantly influence a myriad of psychological states that include employee engagement. Moreover, they propound that psychological states that include employee engagement are vital in ensuring positive employee outcomes. Congruently, Kavyashree *et al.* (2022) also found a positive relationship between human relations management practices and employee engagement. Moreover, they advanced that HRM practices led to empowerment of employees which in turn resulted to employee engagement.

Table 6: Coefficients for Human Relations

Variable	B	Std. Error	t-statistic	p-values	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.131	0.941	2.264	0.026		
Human relations	1.874	0.382	4.900	0.000	1.000	1.000

Based on the results from table 6, the regression model became:

$$EE = 2.131 + 1.874 HR$$

Where:

EE= Employee Engagement

HR= Human relations

H₀₁: Human relations have no significant relationship with employee engagement in manufacturing firms in

Kenya.

The null hypothesis that human relations have no significant relationship with employee engagement was therefore rejected and it was concluded that there was a statistically significant relationship between human relations and employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study found that there was a positive and significant relationship between human relations and employee engagement in manufacturing firms in Kenya. The evidence points to the fact that management allows employees to make their own decisions at times. However, employees are rarely involved in decision-making and, generally, employees perceive that the organization doesn't care about them. The competing values model proffers that the human relations variable is premised on the approach that the commitment, well-being and growth of workers within the organization is key. The findings of this study corroborate the concept that employee engagement levels will increase if the organization is mindful of the well-being and growth of the employees. Specifically, the concepts of trust, cohesion through human resource development and training, supplemented by participation, interpersonal relations and empowerment, can, as deduced from the study findings, lead to higher employee engagement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that organizations should give import to the extent that organizations prominence to tangibly demonstrating care for its employees. Demonstrating that the organization values employees will lead to higher employee engagement. Furthermore, management ought to be consistent in involving employees in decision-making and

providing a measure of freedom with regard to job design. Moreover, management should cultivate an atmosphere of cooperation and trust in addition to continuously developing employee skills through training with a view to enhancing employee engagement. Similarly, in line with the findings of this study, it is recommended that management ought to strive to attain harmony and regulation in the organization by seeking to ensure that rules and procedures are abided by without exception.

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