

Antecedents of Employees Work Engagement: A Study on an Ethiopian Universities in Case of Amhara Regional State

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the antecedents influencing employees' engagement at universities in Amhar Reginal state Ethiopia. The study used descriptive and explanatory research designs. A total of 320 academics staffs were taken from ten Amhara Reginal State public Universities as a sample and 282 valid questionnaires collected. Convenience and snowball sampling were used to select the employees from each University. Also, cross sectional survey method applied to collect data via Likert scale questionnaire. Correlation and multiple regression modeling were used to appraisal association and predict the relationships. Initially, a pilot test was a sampled of 30 instructors to check data scale reliability. The study found that all the independent variables (work environment, leadership, reward, organizational support, work motivation) variables had statistically significant correlation with employees' engagement. Morover the study founded that all the studied variables were predictors of workers engagement ($R^2 = 0.662$); but the predictors that had foremost influence were working environment, leadership and work motivation. Remarkable emphasis and devotion is required particularly on variables such as working environment, leadership and work motivation as they have reveled significantly greater influence on employees engagement. Universities shall focus on creating better work environment, working on instructors motivating factors and more work is required to improve the leadership to boost work engagement.

Key-words: Engagement, Work Environment, Leadership, Reward, Organizational Support, Work Motivation, Universities, Amhara.

1. Introduction

Employees work engagement is a notion given substantial concern in recent years . In today's organizations engaged employees are taken as an instrument for competitive advantage in their

success. Because, according to Bakker, Albercht and Leiter (2011) in a contemporary world, having highly talented employees is not enough organizations should also enthuse and aid the workers to dedicate their utmost competences to their job. Work engagement is a notion which comprises three dimensions: vigor, dedication and absorption. Employees which are highly engaged are characterized by high level of effort, dedication and vigor. Employees' engagement involves the logical and emotional connection of employees with its firms (Nagesh, Kulenur & Shetty, 2019).

Employees' job engagement is positively and significantly correlated to employees' productivity, creativity, commitment, willingness, innovativeness and customer services and I role and extra role behavior (Belay & Lehal, 2019). As mentioned in the work of Bakker, Albercht and Leiter (2011) workers which are greatly engaged robust, effective person who use impact on actions that influence their endeavors. As a result of their energy level and positive assertiveness, engaged workers create their own positive attitude, recognition and be successful. On the other hand, disengaged workers have a huge loss on organizations. For instance, as mentioned in the work of Osborne and Hammoud (2017) disengaged workers generally caused to incur \$ 350 in United States Companies annually. Engaged workers are more probably devoted with increased level of continual energy than those who are disengaged (Arnold. 2011).

Firms across sectors struggle to persist and beat today's fierce competition, mental and physical health of the workers is one of the critical concerns that a human resource managers should focus on. Therefore, workers' engagement is today considered as an influential foundation of competitive advantage in disruptive times (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). A review by Robertson-Smith & Markwick, (2009) reveled that engagement is positively associated with productivity, group and organizational success and can lessen absenteeism and turnover levels.

Organizations know that engaged workers are more productive and therefore every employers needs to analyze the antecedents of employees engagement. As the work of Arnold (2011), AbuKhalifeh & Som (2013), Bedarkar & Pandita (2014), Zainol, Hussin, & binti Othman (2016), Wuttaphan (2016) Fazna Mansoor (2016), Nagesh, Kulenur, & Shetty (2019), there are many antecedents factors influencing employee engagement, namely teamwork, and collaboration, company management, supervisor and coworker relationship, communication, the image of the organization, job role work-life balance, environment, leadership, decision making and policies and procedures, incentives and pay, training and development. The most critical asset which is available to an organization is its workers; hence, having engaged worker is very decisive for any organization (Ngethe, Iravo, & Namusonge, 2012). Employees engagement is becoming a vital issue in the recent

body of research as engaged workers not only accomplish better in their jobs but also more satisfied in the workplace and feel happier (MacDongh & Orla. 2017).

As per the finding of Arnold (2011), engaged employees are enthusiastic in their work, bursting with energy and deep in their work activities. Workers who are engaged in their job are completely attached to their job and they will not have the intention to quit their job, performs better, and has a positive emotion and high energy towards their duty (Wuttaphan, 2016; Arnold, 2011).

Ethiopia has a young and quickly expanding higher education system. Ethiopia has been noticeably expanding its higher education institutions over the past two decades simultaneously the number of faculty also increased. According to Alemayehu & Woldemariam (2020) the faculty's willingness to stay in its respective institution is depending upon the presence of impartial human resource, rules, regulation , policies and practices, the existence of fair reward scheme which is reasonable, better working conditions, academic freedom, and career path. When employees leave their jobs, it is often a sign of disengagement or there is something going wrong.

Ethiopian Universities expect their faculties to show high initiative, to be proactive, and take responsibility for their own professional development. Moreover, they need staffs who engaged with their work: that feels energetic and dedicated, physically, and emotionally attached to his/her institution. Furthermore, the public at large expects that higher education contributes a lot to a nation's development; but this development is contingent upon competent faculties of the higher education institutions. Nowadays, getting competent and qualified academic staff is becoming tough for higher educational institutions since the potential candidates are choosing for banks, political organizations, and other sectors that are offering better salaries and benefits. Consequently, this would have a negating consequence on country's overall education system.

As far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned, there are not academic research studies which had not been conducted on the antecedents of employee engagement in Ethiopia in general in Amhara regional state in particular. Therefore, the current study tried to investigate antecedents that influenced the work engagement of employees at public universities in Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Underpinnings

Kahn (1990) was one of the pioneer thinker theorized work engagement. Kahn considered engaged workers as being wholly connected with their work roles cognitively, emotionally, and

physically (Anitha, 2014; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Arnold, 2011). Employees' engagement is a vital paradigm in a body of research as an engaged workers are not only rendering better services but also they are motivated, satisfied, and happier in the work environment. Worldwide, many companies struggle to be the winner of today's stiff competition to this end, the healthiness of the workers is one of the paramount factors that the leaders should know and give due attention. Henceforth, a worker engagement is considered as an influential weapon to gain a competitive advantage in today's competitive era (Bedarkar, & Pandita, 2014). Work engagement denotes a job related psychological state that comprises absorption, vigor, and dedication to the task and organization (Kahan, 1990; Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Arnold, 2011). Today's implication of job engagement is involvement, commitment, enthusiasm, passion, energy, absorption and focused effort (Bakker & Leiter, 2010).

There are three types of workers in organizations; actively disengaged workers, not engaged workers, and engaged workers. Actively disengaged workers are very dangerous worker who are not only do not execute well but also depress the higher performer in the organization. Engaged employees are builders who persistently struggle to give excellence within their roles. They do what they are told to do. An employee engaged is aware of his or her responsibility and inspires his co-workers for the organizational goals. The general idea on the concept is that engaged employees give more of what they have to offer and as a result an engaged staff is simply a more productive one.

Empirical Studies

Significant consideration has been given to association of worker engagement to rewards of organizations. Studies founded that for attracting candidates' compensation and reward package increasingly becomes important factor. Workers expect acknowledgement for their offerings and contribution. Many organizations often offer formal rewards and recognition packages in exchange for workers contributions. In addition to this, many workers still expect day-to-day informal praise. The absence of adequate reward has been identified as a key factor for work engagement (Anitha, 2014 & Abu Khalifeh & Som, 2013). Indemnification is a compulsory feature workers engagement that inspires workers to accomplish more and hence focus more on task. Compensation embraces financial and non-financial indemnifications (Anitha, 2014). To have a benefit in attracting and retaining talented employees, organizations should focus on their employee's value. As noted by the research findings of Despoina, Arnold, Evangelia, & Wilma (2009), Jane, Mike, & Namusonge (2012), Anitha (2014), Zainol, Hussin, & Bintiothman, (2016) adequate compensation enables the workers to be more engaged, satisfied, and happier in the work environment.

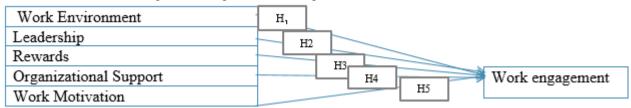
As noted by the research findings of Bedakar Pandita (2014), Anitha (2014), Wuttaphan (2016), Zainol, Hussin, & Binti Othman, (2016) there is a positive e correlation between leader behaviors and follower job engagement. According to Anitha (2014), leadership is one the fundamental factor that influences employee engagement. The contribution of leadership in enlightening workers could not be separated with work engagement (Sugianingrat et al, 2019) Leaders are responsible to a pay a major role in utilizing the workers efforts for overall organization success. When the workers job is considered meaningful and important, it leads obviously to their interest and engagement.

Besides affecting work motivation, work engagement, can also be influenced by interpersonal relationship. Workers felt safer in working environment characterized by supportiveness and openness. Co-worker is one of important elements of working environment variables that focuses explicitly on the interpersonal harmony aspect of employees' engagement According to Kahn (1990) supportive and trusting interpersonal relationship as well as a supportive team promotes employees engagement by creative conducive work environment.

One of the factors affecting the work engagement is work motivation. There must be a motive for workers to wholly invest their vigor during work time. To have this kind of devotion the degree that works are high on intrinsic motivation that they inspire engagement. Engaged workers are most likely to prefer to stay with the institution and perform 25% better than their co-workers and act as an advocators of the organization. According to Kahn (1990) engagement could lead to intrinsic stimulation, creativity, attentiveness, authenticity and ethical behavior. Engagement helps to have better effort and more productive and happy workers Engagement could empower the workers to exert themselves wholly in their work, with improved self-efficacy and a positive influence upon the workers' wellbeing which in turn induces better employees support for the organization (Gemma & Carl, 2009) engaged workers are most likely to work better through strengthen level of effort than those who are disconnected.

Empirical studies have found that work engagement and organizational support as a key job resource that enables employees to be adaptable with their job demand (Mac Donagh & Orla, 2017). Alike supportive interpersonal relationships organizational support allows the workers to try and to fail without fear of the consequence. Workers also engaged when they had some control over their work. A study conducted by Dai and Qin (2016) shows that there was a positive association between organizational support and work engagement. According to Arnold (2011), organizational feedback, skill variety, autonomy given by the organization and social support from co-workers and supervisors, leads to more work engagement and consequently to higher performance.

Figure 1 - Adopted from Conceptual Framework of the Research



3. Methods

Research Design: A blend of descriptive and explanatory research designs had been used.

Population and Samples: Population of the study was all academic staffs working in the Amhara regional sate public universities of Ethiopia. There are 10 public Universities in Amhara regional state. To this end, all public Universities were targeted in the current study. A total of 320 survey questionnaires distributed, 282 questionnaires were returned and used for the data analysis purpose representing a response rate of 88%.

Survey Instruments: an online survey questionnaire was developed to this study to investigate the influence of variables such as organizational support, work motivation, leadership, rewards, and work environment on work environment. Work engagement of academic staffs measured by using a standardized questionnaire, called Utrecht work engagement scale. The elements of workers engagement used in this study were dedication (3 questions), vigor (3 questions), and absorption (3 questions). Moreover, the respondents were asked to rate each item on five point likert scale question ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (50 in relation to the five variables influencing academic staffs work engagement.

Statistical methods for data analysis: to analyze the collected data both descriptive and inferential statistical tools have been used. To test the hypotheses, Pearson correlation analysis used. Regression was also used to analyze the level of influence made by independent variables (organizational support, leadership, work motivation, rewards, and work environment) on dependent variable (work engagement). All the data analysis was done by using Statistical Package for Social Science version 24 (SPSS24).

Reliability Test: Cronbach's alpha is the most commonly used tool for measuring the effeteness of instrument (Zikmund & Babin, 2010). According to Zikmund & Babin, (2010) the range of reliability test that is above 0.7 is Good. Accordingly, the internal consistency of the survey instruments used in this study was reliable in the given population as shown in table 1.

Item-Total Statistics							
Variable	Cronbach's Alpha						
Engagement	.753						
Work Environment	.683						
Leadership	.701						
Reward	.768						
Organizational support	.743						
Work motivation	.796						
Overall	.778						

Table 1 - Cronbach's Alpa Result

Source: Own survey, 2021

4. Discussion and Result

Table 2 - Education Level									
What is the highest educational degree you earned?									
Educational level	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent					
Bachelor's degree	12	4.3	4.3	4.3					
Master's degree	265	94.0	94.0	98.2					
Doctorate	5	1.8	1.8	100.0					
Total	282	100.0	100.0						

Source: Own survey, 2021

Considering the respondents education level (4.3%) of the respondents are bachelor's degree holder, 265(94%) are master's degree holder and the remaining 5 (1.8%) are hold doctor of philosophy. This implies that almost all respondents are master's degree holder.

Table 3 - Universities								
University	At which university you are working in?							
	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent				
Bahir Dar University	38	13.5	13.5	13.5				
University of Gondar	40	14.2	14.2	27.7				
Debre Markos University	51	18.1	18.1	45.7				
Debre Berhan University	22	7.8	7.8	53.5				
Wollo University	21	7.4	7.4	61.0				
Debre Tabor University	51	18.1	18.1	79.1				
Woldia University	22	7.8	7.8	86.9				
Debark University	20	7.1	7.1	94.0				
Injibara University	12	4.3	4.3	98.2				
Mekdela Amba University	5	1.8	1.8	100.0				
Total	282	100.0	100.0					

Source: Own survey, 2021

Regarding participants of the study 51 (18.1%) were from Debre Tabor and similar number of respondents were taken from Debre Markos University. 40 (14.2%) from University of Gondar, 38 (13.5%) Bahir Dar University, and 22 (7.8%) were from Debre Berhan University and similar number of respondents were taken from Woldia University. 21 (7.4%), 20 (7.1%), 12 (4.3%) respondents were from Wollo University, Debark University, Injibara University respectively. Small number of respondents 5 (1.8%) were from Mekdela Amba University.

Year of service at university									
	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent					
Less than 1 year	11	3.9	3.9	3.9					
1-3 years	85	30.1	30.1	34.0					
4-6 years	81	28.7	28.7	62.8					
7-10 years	83	29.4	29.4	92.2					
Above 10 years	22	7.8	7.8	100.0					
Total	282	100.0	100.0						

Table 4 - Year of Service

Source: Own survey, 2021

Considering the year of experience of the total respondents 85(30.1%) has 1-3 years of experience at a higher institution. 83 (29.4%) of the respondents has 7-10 years of experience at University. 81(28.7%) of the respondents has 4-6 years of experience a higher institution. 22(7.8%) of the respondents have more than 10 years' work experience and the remaining11 (3.9%) of the respondents have less than 1 year work experience.

As depicted in Table 5 all independent variables such as working environment, leadership, reward, organizational support, and work motivation are positively related to the dependent variable instructors work engagement. Pearson product Correlation of working environment and engagement was found to be statistically significant (r=0.719, p=0.01). Hence, H₁ was supported. This implies when the work environment improved the instructors work engagement also increase. The work of Arnold (2011), Anitha (2014) and Brad, Kobena, Drea, & Kim, (2017) evidenced the significance correlation between working environment and engagement.

Correlations								
		Engagement	Working Environment	Leadership	Reward	Organizational	Work Motivation	
Engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.719**	.241**	.185**	.428**	.743**	
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	.002	0.000	0.000	
Working	Pearson Correlation	.719**	1	050	.032	.326**	.848**	
Environment	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000		.402	.592	0.000	0.000	
Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.241**	050	1	010	.215**	.060	
-	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	.402		.863	0.000	.315	
Reward	Pearson Correlation	.185**	.032	010	1	.108	.163**	
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.002	.592	.863		.071	.006	
Organizational	Pearson Correlation	.428**	.326**	.215**	.108	1	.269**	
support	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	.071		0.000	
Work Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.743**	.848**	.060	.163**	.269**	1	
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	.315	.006	0.000		
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)								

Table 5 - Pearson Correlations

Source: Own survey, 2021

Pearson product Correlation engagement and leadership was found to be statistically (r=0.241,

p=0.01). Hence, H₂ was supported. This implies when the leadership practice is good, the instructor's work engagement also increase. In this regard, the current finding is in line with the finding of Bedarkar & Pandita, (2014) and Emiko, Reiko, & Kazutomo (2017) that provide evidence for correlation between leadership and instructors work engagement. Pearson product Correlation of reward and engagement was found to be statistically significant (r=0.185, p=0.01). Hence, H₃ was supported. This implies if the reward given to instructors increase, the instructor's work engagement also increase. Studies done by Arnold (2011), Ala'a Nimer & Ahmad, (2013), Anitha (2014) and Sange (2015), and show that rewarded workers are motivated to be engaged at work.

Pearson product Correlation of organizational support and engagement was found to be statistically significant (r= 0.241, 0.01). Hence, H₄ was supported. This implies if the organizational support increase, the instructor's work engagement also increase. The present finding is in line the Kahn, (1990), Kailiang & Xinyu (2016), Ida Ayu Putu, et al (2019) finding which states that a significant correlation between engagement and organizational support. Pearson product Correlation of work motivation and engagement was found to be statistically significant (r=0. .428, p=0.01). Hence, H5 was supported. This implies if the work motivation increase, the instructor's work engagement also increase. In this regard as the findings of Orla & Joe, (2017) shown that engaged workers not only accomplish better in their works but also more motivated in the workplace.

Table 0 - Model Summary										
Model Summary b										
Model	ModelRR SquareAdjusted RStd. Error of theDurbin Watson									
Widdei	Square Estimate Durbin Watson									
1 .817 ^a .668 .662 4.75524 1.768										
a. Predictors: (Constant), Work motivation, Leadership, Reward, Organizational										
support, Working environment										
b. Deper	b. Dependent Variable: Engagement									

Table	6 -	Model	Summary
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Source: Own survey, 2021

Multiple regressions was carried out, it was found all the variables studied were identified as a predictors of employees engagement with an adjusted R^2 value of 66.2% of the variation as depicted in table 6 which is statistically significant. Therefore, 66.2% of the variation in employees' engagement can be explained by five independent variables such as working environment, leadership, reward, organizational support, work motivation in the model. Thus, it can be concluded that the above-mentioned independent variables share 66.2 % of the influence on employee engagement. This means that 33.8% of the influencing factors of employee engagement cannot be explained by this study variable, which may require further investigations by other researches.

AN	ANOVA ^a										
Mo	Model Sum of Squares df Mean Square F Sig.										
	Regression 12547.406 5 2509.481 110.979 .000 ^b										
1	1 Residual 6240.995 276 22.612										
	Total 18788.401 281										
a.	a. Dependent variable: Engagement										
b.	b. Predictors: (Constant), Work motivation, Leadership, Reward, Organizational										
sup	support, Working environment										

Table 7 - ANOVA^a Result

Source: Own survey, 2021.

Table 7, reveals the ANOVA result, that revelled a statistically significant probability value (p= 0.000) and shows that all the variables of leadership, working environment, reward, organizational support, work motivation explain significantly employee engagement.

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized coefficients		standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		В	Std. Error	Beta		-	Tolerance	VIF
	(Constant)	13.922	2.140		6.505	.000		
	Working Environment	.727	.138	.372	5.264	.000	.241	4.151
1	Leadership	.437	.078	.206	5.599	.000	.891	1.122
1	Reward	.165	.060	.100	2.754	.006	.914	1.094
	Organizational Support	.236	.058	.156	4.076	.000	.822	1.216
	Work motivation	.733	.142	.357	5.143	.000	.249	4.009
a. Dependent Variable: Engagement								

Table 8 - Coefficients^a

Source: Own survey, 2021

As shown in table 8 the t-values indicates that leadership (t =5.599), working environment (t =5.264), and work motivation (5.143) are the most influential factors on workers engagement as they're statistically significant at 0.01 level of significance. B values also tells that the working environment effects up to 37.2 percent as determinants of workers work engagement and work motivation as about 35.7 percent influence on instructors work engagement. Leadership, reward, organizational supports have 20.6 per cent, 10.0 per cent, 15.6 per cent influence on instructors work engagement.

5. Conclusion and Implication

This study focused on examining the antecedents of employees work engagement and also it detects five antecedents that have a significant effect on it. Moreover, this study also discloses all the independent variables have statistically significant correlation with employees work engagement. The multiple regression analysis result predicts that out of several statistically significant factors that have an influence on employees work engagement were working environment and work motivations. Working environment and work motivations were found to have significant *t* value in relation with employees' engagement. This implies that creating a healthy working atmosphere for instructors could help the Universities to have engaged employees. This replicates job motivation that could be leads to vigor, dedication and absorption. Employees would be highly engaged in their work when the Universities give considerable support attention in terms of the determinants being addressed. Therefore, universities are advised to give considerable emphasis on creating sound work place environment, employees' motivation and they have to work to create better leadership.

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