

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM TVET COLLEGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Dr Mphoreng Magdeline Mmako

Department of People and Management Development,
Faculty of Management Sciences,
Tshwane University of Technology,
Polokwane Campus
Tel: 015 287 0741,
E-mail: mmakomm@tut.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Employee engagement is an important issue for both practitioners and academics. The aim of this paper is to identify the factors and items that impact on the employee engagement of academic staff, based on data from the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges in South Africa. A quantitative research approach was followed and a self-administered questionnaire used. Purposive, specifically judgemental sampling was used because it allowed selection of a sample number that conformed to specific criteria (Babbie and Mouton, 2011:164). The study attracted responses from 2 054 academic staff with a response rate of 68.4%. Cronbach's alpha values were used to measure the reliability of employee engagement. The results indicated that socialisation and values, recognition and feedback and attitude towards direct manager were the main factors that could lead to academic staff engaging in their professional tasks. The paper provides a theoretical discussion of employee engagement and the practical implications of the results of the study.

INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement, which is the state of being emotionally and intellectually involved in tasks motivates employees to do their best work (Habraken, 2013:12). Engaged employees are those who take action to improve business results for their organisations (Piansoongnern, Anurit and Kulyawattananonta, 2011:1579). Engaged employees stay committed, and are more predisposed to deepen their commitment to the organisation.

Albrecht (2010:841) posits that employee engagement remains a "hot topic" in the academic and practitioner domains, and indicates that "an employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural states are directed toward organisational outcomes". These states assist engaged employees to perform activities in the workplace. The challenging economic climate requires organisations to engage with their employees more effectively than ever, and for this reason managers are always seeking ways to enhance employee engagement and generate a greater competitive advantage (Wensley, 2010:334).

This paper focuses on the literature dealing with socialisation, values, feedback, recognition and attitudes towards direct manager as the most significant factors impacting on employee engagement from the perspective of TVET colleges, which could enrich our understanding of employee engagement. A further objective of the paper is to determine the key areas that need to be addressed in order to enhance the level of engagement among academic staff. The research method is briefly discussed, empirical results are presented and discussed, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made.

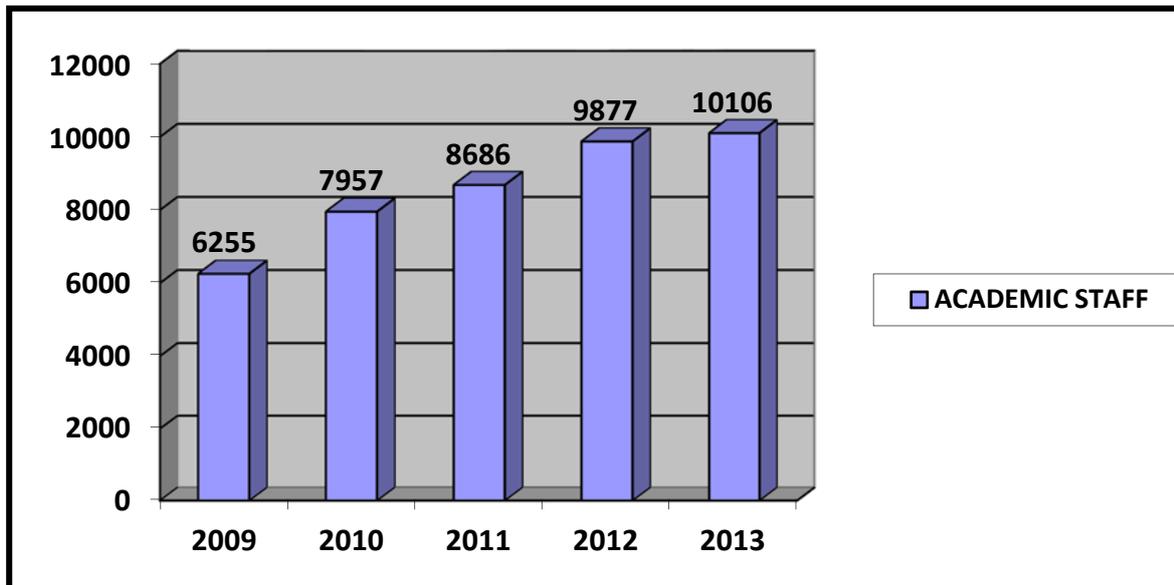
PROBLEM INVESTIGATED

South African higher learning institutions have undergone many rapid changes, and faced numerous predicaments which have contributed to high levels of stress experienced by their employees. These predicaments and changes include financial demands, insecurities, and changes in management and management styles (Mxenge, Dywill and Bazana, 2014:134). These changes have created missed opportunities for growth, development and change that could essentially affect the engagement of employees. It is undeniable that academic staff are leaving the TVET colleges to take up well-paid positions in the private sector and are being head-hunted by other higher education institutions.

An increasing level of academic staff turnover, specifically in the academic structures of the colleges, has been identified as one of the barriers to their success. Another challenge is the lecturer student ratio. There are also gaps in the capabilities of lecturers given the competence required for effective lecturing as well as coping with large classes and classes for remedial teaching and teaching mixed ability classes, and they should be competent in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the courses that they teach (DHET 2013). The TVET college sector in South Africa lacks a reliable, centralised data management system. The researcher had difficulty finding accurate statistics on education management. The 50 TVET colleges do not appear to have a uniform system for uploading statistics to a national repository and the state of information varies depending on which institutions these colleges report to. Accurate data systems which all colleges can access and feed into are a critical gap in the TVET colleges sector.

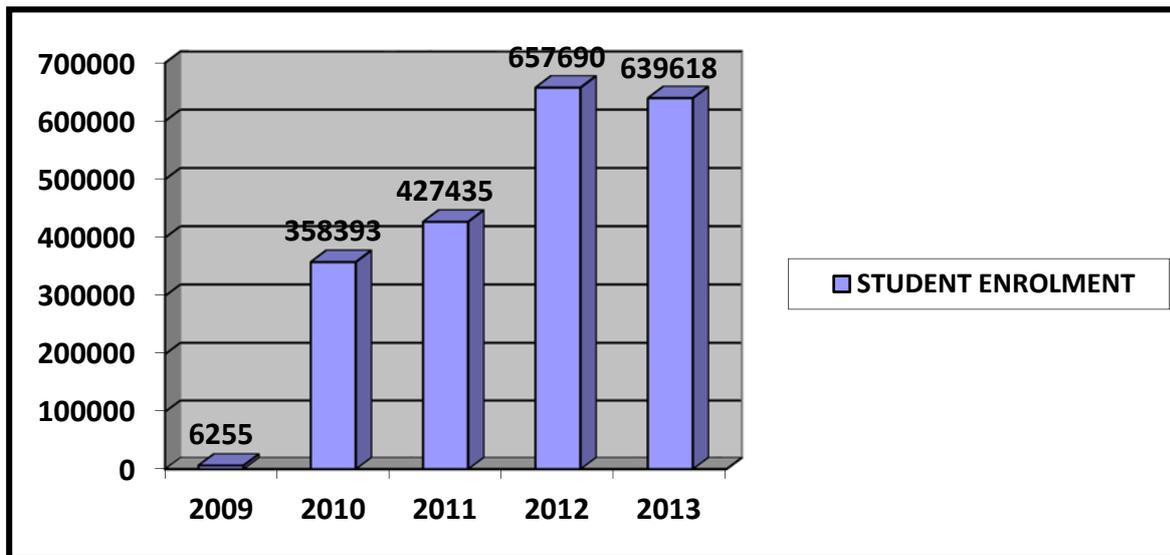
This study therefore aims to identify the factors impacting upon employee engagement of academics at these colleges.

FIGURE 1
TVET ACADEMIC STAFF
2009-2013



DHET, Statistics on post-school education and training in South Africa: 2009-2013, Annual Survey of Public TVET Colleges, 20140807

FIGURE 2
TVET STUDENT ENROLLMENT
2009-2013



DHET, Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in SA: 2009-2013, Annual survey of Public TVET colleges. 20140807

It is evident from the information in the above figures that staff numbers have not increased in proportion to the increase in the number of students.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

It is an undisputed fact that staff turnover is a huge problem in colleges. Employee engagement, with its focus on socialisation, values, attitude towards direct manager, recognition and feedback of employees, holds the promise of solutions to resolve the problem of staff turnover. The purpose of this paper is to provide a profile of employee engagement, and ascertain and identify socialisation and values practices, recognition and feedback initiatives, attitude towards direct manager and strategies that managers at the colleges could implement. The following research objectives informed this study:

- To determine which factors contribute most significantly towards a successful employee engagement for TVET colleges.
- To determine which items contribute most significantly towards successful employee engagement for TVET colleges.
- To determine the key areas that need to be addressed in order to enhance the level of engagement among academic staff at TVET colleges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review of employee engagement, organisational socialisation, organisational values, recognition, feedback and employee engagement that was investigated in the study is discussed below.

Employee engagement

Employee engagement is not an easy concept to define (Ghafoor, Qureshi, Khan and Hijazi, 2011:7395; Macey and Schneider, 2008:6). The following definition of employee engagement is the

one that enjoys widespread support in the literature “Employee engagement is an employee’s emotional, cognitive, and behavioural state directed towards organisational outcomes” (Shuck and Wollard, 2010:103).

From a different perspective, employee engagement resides in employees’ minds, hearts, and hands (Vogelsang, Minahan, Jamieson, Vogel, Viets, Royal and Valek, 2013:369). As clear as this seems, there are often measures of the probability that employees will remain with the organisation and the likelihood that they will make positive statements about the organisation, and it is sometimes even possible to determine the level of discretionary effort they expend in their work (Brown and Hawkins, 2013:44). For the purpose of this paper, cognitive engagement, behavioural engagement, and emotional engagement are considered evidence of employee engagement.

Organisational values

Organisational values have been defined in various ways by researchers. In their study, Avedisian and Bennet (2010:257) emphasise the fact that "values begin as principles, a rule or standard considered good behaviour". As these principles are repeatedly acted upon by individuals or across an organisation, they become embedded behaviours. Based on the constructive contribution, various authors are in agreement that the shared traits of values as qualities and standards that have a certain weight which decision makers in organisations attach to alternative goals when making decisions (Jaakson, 2010:796).

Lunenburg (2011:11) emphasises the fact that organisational values are “general criteria, standards that guide the organisational members’ behaviour”. They represent a form of consensus on the values that an organisation consider important for its aims and collective welfare. Yahyagil and Otken (2011:1020) postulate that values lie at the core of culture and influence norms, practices and symbols that are developed and adapted by the members of that culture. Furthermore, according to Avedisian and Bennet (2010:259) values are the major determinant of what an organisation holds to be of value.

Values in the context of work lay the basic foundations for understanding employee attitudes, motivation and perceptions of their workplaces. These organisational values matter to employee engagement levels of psychological meaningfulness and safety at work. Kahn (1990:704). The core values of the organisation begin with its management, and in turn evolve into a management style. Employees are led by these values and the behaviour of managers such that the behaviour of both should be increasingly aligned (Tsai, 2011:2). To foster a culture of engagement, employees need to consistently live by clearly stated values. According to Davies and Kourdi, (2010:150-151), employees who live by stated values achieve individual and organisational goals. Engaged employees have values that match the organisation’s values. Engaged employees’ norms and values correspond with those of their organisation (Bezuidenhout and Bezuidenhout, 2014: 326).

Organisation socialisation

Organisation socialisation can be defined as “a learning process through which individuals adjust to special roles in the organisation” (Ge, Su and Zhou, 2010:167). Similarly, Lee (2013:1048) defines organisation socialisation as “a mechanism through which new employees acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, responsibility, and behaviours obtain insiders’ support and become effective organisational members”. Organisational socialisation definitions emphasise the process as being important in helping new employees successfully adjust to the staff and organisation. Socialisation resources theory argued that organisations should design effective orientation training programmes that guide new employees regarding each aspect of stressful situations in the organisation and strategies to cope with them (Manzoor and Naeem, 2011:517). According to Govender (2011:175), the process includes *inter alia*, formal training programmes that teach employees the technical skills associated with performing their jobs, and daily interactions with employees and managers.

Recognition

Recognition refers to personal attention, conveyed verbally, emphasising interest, approval and appreciation for a job well done (Unger-Aviram, Zwikael and Restubog (2013:578). Recognition may mean monetary rewards and compensation, appreciation and direct feedback that employees receive from managers (Majernik and Patrnchak, 2014:31). Recognition programmes reduce staff turnover, providing they include an element of intrinsic motivation and are reviewed throughout the employment contract in order to sustain performance (Saile and Schlechter, 2012:2). When managers recognise employees, this help to build their self-esteem and show that their hard work is noticed and appreciated (Mmako, 2016:306).

Feedback

Alston and Mujtaba (2009:28) define feedback as “an exchange of information about the status and quality of work products”. Dobbeleae, Prins and Dongen (2013:87) explain that feedback is regarded as “providing information concerning the performance of the feedback recipient with the aim of improving performance”. Positive feedback has an impact on employee performance. It adds to the recipient’s motivation for achieving the desired standards, and offers valuable feedback to employees about work, strengths and potential improvement (Dobbeleae *et al.*, 2013:89). It affects employees’ attitudes and behaviours, and the relationship between managers and employees (Krasman, 2012:19).

Employee Engagement in Tertiary Education Institutions

Academic staff experience “change fatigue” due to the multifaceted transformation agenda in higher education (Portonoi, 2015:260). Concerns about the working environment are exacerbated in this period of profound transformation, for which academic staff may not feel adequately prepared. The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training identifies the expansion of access to TVET colleges as ‘DHET’s top priority and identifies the purpose of TVET college education as providing school leavers with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for employment in the labour market’ (DHET, 2013:11). The motivation to understand the employee engagement of academic staff and the people responsible for engagement, made me read more about TVET colleges. I did not find much information about academic staff engagement in the TVET colleges of South Africa in particular. This deemed the need for my research paper about employee engagement in the TVET colleges of South Africa. Increasingly it became clear that there is a gap in the research regarding the engagement of academic staff at TVET colleges in South Africa.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

A quantitative research approach was used in this study. Berger and Berger (2011:288) define quantitative research as “... research within the primary aim of establishing causal relationship between variables”. Quantitative research focus on gathering data that is quantifiable, and surveys are undertaken to establish information that is statistically tested to provide evidence that the findings are reliable and valid (Drummond and Ensor, 2005:56).

Population and sample

A population is the area from which the required information which provides answers for the study is obtained (Kumar, 2011:55; Ormrod and Leedy, 2010:205). The target population was the academic staff members from the 18 TVET colleges located in the nine provinces of South Africa. All levels of the academic staff were included namely, deputy chief education specialists, senior education specialists, education specialists, senior lecturers, lecturers and junior lecturers. A non-probability

sampling technique namely, purposive, specifically judgmental sampling was used to solicit responses from a sample of approximately 3 000 academic staff. A total of 2 054 (68.4%) questionnaires were returned.

Data collection Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was used. This is an economical method of conducting a survey and is consequently effective when the number of people to be surveyed is large (Lamb, Hair and McDaniel, 2009:248). A structured questionnaire was compiled from the information obtained in the literature study. The first section of the questionnaire collected data on the participants' biographical characteristics, namely their age, gender, designation, province, department of employment, years of service and educational qualification. The second section of the questionnaire collected data on participants' opinions and attitudes towards employee engagement in their academic roles. The participants responded on a four-point Likert's scale to measure their engagement as academic staff members (1 = strongly agreed, 2 = agreed, 3 = disagreed, 4 = strongly disagreed). The questions posed in the questionnaire were derived from a thorough literature review.

Validity

In this paper, it was accepted that assessing the validity and reliability of measuring instruments is integral to validating an instrument's usefulness (Alumran, Hou and Hurst, 2012:230).

Validity refers to how well a measurement strategy validates what it intends to measure (Adler and Clark, 2011:148). In this study, the content and face validity of the instrument were ascertained through pilot testing of the questionnaire with a sample of 25 academic staff. This procedure was conducted to validate the content of the questionnaire in terms of relevance, wording, accuracy and practicality. In addition, the questionnaire was also reviewed by a statistician and the researcher's supervisor who are experts in the field of organisational behaviour.

Reliability

Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013:222) emphasise that researchers evaluate the measures they use. A measurement strategy is reliable if its application yields consistent results time after time. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was used as a way of estimating the internal consistency of the items. A Cronbach alpha coefficient of greater than 0.70 was used to indicate a reliable factor.

Research procedure

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Department of Higher Education and the Training Research Directorate before the measuring instrument was distributed. Distribution was done using the contact information list of CEOs and campus managers. The researcher obtained a list of college campus managers' contacts from the college CEO. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to various campuses via courier services assisted by campus managers. The mailed questionnaires were accompanied by the covering letter outlining the topic of the research, a description of the questionnaire and how to complete it. A consent form outlining the purpose and objectives of the research and pertinent information relating to the rights and expectations of the participants also accompanied the questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained and it was emphasised that participation in the study was voluntary, anonymous and confidential. The participants were asked to return the completed questionnaire to the address provided. The respondents were given two weeks to complete the questionnaires. The researcher made weekly contact with campus managers to elicit information on the response rate of the questionnaires. The results were sent to the researcher via courier services after two weeks and were downloaded on to the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) program for analysis.

Statistical analysis

A principal factor analysis was used to determine how the construct influence the responses to the measured variables. This method of factor analysis was to summarise the data making it more manageable without losing any of the important information therefore making it easier to test theories (Huck, 2012:482). Factor analysis was used to determine the Cronbach alpha scores of the research construct. The statistics that were used for interval data included internal consistency coefficients and correlations.

FINDINGS

Sample composition

Of the respondents, 63.4% (N=1300) were males whilst 36.6% (N=750) were females. The majority of the respondents were aged between 31 and 51 years. With regard to years of service, the majority of the respondents (26.7%) had been with the colleges for period ranging between 5 and 10 years. In terms of the department of employment, the majority of the respondents were employed by engineering studies (40.5%) followed by general studies (37.4%), while business studies (19.0%) had the lowest number of respondents. In terms of provincial distribution, 18.4% were from Gauteng, 14.4% from KwaZulu-Natal, 13.7% from the Eastern Cape, 13.1% from Limpopo, 12.8% from the Free State, 9.8% from the Western Cape, 8.3% from Mpumalanga, 5.0% from the Northern Cape and the smallest number were from North West. In terms of designation, the majority of the respondents were lecturers (53.7%), the second largest were senior lecturers (19.7%) followed by education specialists (19.4%), while the minority were deputy chief specialists (4.4%). With regard to educational qualification, the majority of the respondents (44.48%) had a four-year degree qualification, the second largest number of respondents (31.12%) had an honours degree, followed by respondents (19.21%) with a three-year diploma qualification.

Factorial structure of the questionnaire

A principal axis factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation was performed on the initial 25 closed-question items to investigate the groupings of items and their correspondence to the original theoretical scales. As shown in Table 1, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of adequacy should be 0.5 or higher, with a desirable value of 0.8 or higher (Field, 2009:647). The table below indicates that the KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.934. In Bartlett's test of sphericity, the significance was 0.000, which indicates sampling adequacy. Hence the data were suitable for factor analysis. Before factor analysis was performed, the theoretical investigation identified five factors. The original factors were as follows: factor 1: organisational culture; factor 2: organisational strategy; factor 3: leadership; factor 4: performance management; and factor 5: discretionary effort. Through the factor analysis process, the study arrived at four meaningful scales which are as follows:

Factor 1: recognition and feedback; factor 2: attitudes towards direct manager; factor 3: commitment to institution; and factor 4: socialisation and values.

TABLE 1
RESULTS OF THE KMO MEASURE OF SAMPLING ADEQUACY AND BARTLETT'S TEST OF SPHERICITY

KMO and Bartlett's test		
KMO measure of sampling adequacy		0.934
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	21191.691
	df	300
	Sig.	0.000

Descriptive statistics

Table 2 depicts the descriptive statistics per statement in the questionnaire in terms of mean score and standard deviation. Descriptive statistics by item are reported below in descending order of means.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS PER ITEM

Descriptive statistics per item (descending means)			
Item	N	Mean	Std deviation
In this institution mentoring programmes assist me to be more effective in my job.	2051	3.08	0.740
This institution has a clear set of values that underpin continuous employee involvement.	2050	3.07	0.811
This institution provides its employees with socialisation activities to adjust to a new organisational setting.	2051	3.07	0.761
The way in which my performance is evaluated is effective.	2051	3.01	0.805
Training offered in this institution enables me to extend my professional development.	2051	2.96	0.737
I plan to continue my career with this institution for at least two more years.	2051	2.85	0.954
The image of this institution is positive.	2050	2.81	0.749
I am hopeful of my long-term career opportunities in my institution.	2050	2.79	0.785
I am proud of this institution's identity.	2052	2.78	0.842
I receive constructive feedback to improve my job performance.	2050	2.77	0.701
My direct manager pays attention to my job-related needs.	2052	2.77	0.760
My direct manager creates an atmosphere of mutual trust.	2052	2.74	0.806
I have received recognition for my accomplishments, which enhances my commitment to doing the job.	2051	2.71	0.710

Descriptive statistics per item (descending means)			
Item	N	Mean	Std deviation
My direct manager inspires me to exchange work-related knowledge with my colleagues.	2052	2.70	0.785
I voluntarily do more than the job requires so that I contribute to the efficient operation of the institution.	2053	2.70	0.861
My direct manager motivates me to work at my best.	2051	2.69	0.808
I am satisfied with my job.	2051	2.69	0.734
My direct manager supports me in doing my job well.	2052	2.62	0.763
My institution supports me in performing my duties.	2053	2.61	0.712
The achievement of my goals is aligned with the goals of this institution.	2053	2.43	0.749
I understand how my work directly contributes to the overall vision of the institution.	2053	2.25	0.711
I am more committed to perform to the best of my ability.	2053	2.24	0.708
I am committed to the mission statement of this institution.	2053	2.14	0.687
I am allowed to perform my tasks independently.	2053	2.00	0.508
I contribute significantly towards institutional objectives.	2053	1.85	0.479
Valid N (listwise)	2037		

A low mean sample indicates a positive test results while a high mean sample value indicates negative test results. According to the mean of each of the items in descending order in table 2, the statement with the highest mean of 3.08 was “In this institution mentoring programmes assist me to be more effective in my job”, which indicates that employees were not satisfied with mentoring programmes at the colleges. The response to this question leans towards the negative. On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 was strongly agree and 4 strongly disagree, a mean score of 3.08 indicates that the institutions’ mentoring programmes did not assist employees to be more effective in their jobs. Furthermore, the second highest mean score was 3.07 for two statements. ”The institution has a clear set of values that underpin continuous employee involvement” and “This institution provides its employees with socialisation activities to adjust to a new organisational setting”. The highest negative scores were predominantly, for factor 4 (socialisation and values). That a specific portion of respondents disagree means that the institution do not follow mentoring programmes, and they do not follow socialisation activities. Most of the respondents were dissatisfied with socialisation. This means that socialisation in the institution is weak.

The range of the mean scores was mostly negative. Employees seemed to disagree with most of the statements made in the survey. This is an indication of negative attitudes and the importance of these elements of employee engagement to the respondents. The findings suggest that the TVET colleges need to pay greater attention to mentoring programmes to assist employees to be more effective in their jobs, need to have clear set of values that underpin continuous employee involvement and provide their employees with socialisation activities to adjust to new college settings.

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE SUBSCALES FOR THE WHOLE SAMPLE

Descriptive subscales: – whole sample						
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std deviation	Coefficient alpha
Recognition and feedback	2 053	1.00	4.00	2.7286	.49664	0.817
Attitude towards direct manager	2 052	1.00	4.00	2.7024	.62060	0.850
Commitment to institution	2 053	1.00	4.00	2.2853	.47835	0.766
Socialisation and values	2 053	1.00	4.00	2.9055	.58251	0.819
Valid N	2 054					

Table 3 reveals that the mean score rankings were computed with a view to providing a rating of the factors in terms of the level of importance. The minimum and the maximum values are based on the lowest and the highest values on a four-point Likert scale. The means were calculated by summing the response values of variables that comprised each factor, divided by the number of variables in each factor.

The findings of the study revealed that attitude towards direct manager was rated the most important factor (2.7024; SD = .62060) followed by the socialisation and values factor (2.9055; SD = .58251), and then by the recognition and feedback factor (2.7286; SD= .49664). The mean for the facets of employee engagement also indicated a moderately engaged group with commitment to institution with a mean score of (2.2853; SD = .47835). Ironically, the findings suggest that the TVET colleges appears to not be paying enough attention to attitude towards direct manager, recognition and feedback, and socialisation and values. In practical terms, this does not result in the engagement of academic staff. One could thus conclude that as a group, this sample was moderately disengaged.

Reliability analysis

The four factors identified by the principal factor analysis and all individual items contributed well to the overall reliability of the instrument. The recognition and feedback factor had an acceptable Cronbach alpha score of 0.817, the attitude towards direct manager factor 0.850, commitment to institution factor 0.766 and socialisation and values factor 0.819. The factors were deemed appropriate since each of them exhibited a result above the 0.05 Cronbach alpha coefficient point. This means that the internal level of consistency of the measurement instrument was acceptable for these items.

The key areas to enhance employee engagement

Organisational and supervisor support

While concern was raised by the academic staff regarding attitude towards direct manager, it is the responsibility of the line manager to ensure that a positive attitude towards direct manager exists from organisational and supervisory support. According to *et al.* (2014:135) openness and supportiveness promotes employee engagement. In this regard, attention and care shown by a supportive leader can trigger feelings of safety for employees which, in turn, may encourage them to pay back by showing loyalty and strong engagement with the organisation. Employee engagement can be enhanced through supervisor support. Line managers should be visibly supportive of followers' efforts to strengthen their relationship with staff members by inspiring trust, showing respect for and credit to others and responding to ideas. Managers need to provide support to employees by assisting them to complete college activities effectively. Taking care of employees' well-being, results in encouraging employees to develop better affective reactions to their work and to their direct managers.

Recognition for work well done

Employee recognition can be a communication tool that reinforces the most important outcomes that academic staff created for the colleges. Most of the academic staff felt that they contribute most significantly towards institutional objectives, and should thus be eligible for recognition. The positive score on the factor relating to commitment to institution indicates that managers need to keep on acknowledging and praising employees for good work done. Recognition essentially comes from the manager through vocal appreciation and initiating meaningful career-pathing dialogues.

In addition to the foregoing, the TVET colleges' management need to devote time to their relationships with employees and make an effort to connect with employees at all levels. This would benefit the college by enhancing innovation, and fostering and retaining employees. In an attempt to retain the colleges' critical talent, efforts should be put to place to grow talent from within, recognising work well done and coaching and mentoring academic staff (critical talent) to occupy future roles and enhance employee engagement.

Mentoring and coaching

The study provided evidence to support the socialisation and values initiatives. The data from this study further suggest that socialisation activities should be revised. The colleges should also provide their employees with socialisation activities that adjust them to a new college setting. Managers could use the findings of this study to defend the proposition that positive attitudes can develop with employees when TVET colleges commit to socialisation programmes. Managers could implement socialisation programmes that increase employee interaction. The process includes formal training programmes that teach academic staff the technical skills associated with performing their jobs and daily interactions with their managers,

Another issue of concern was the negative response to the item of mentoring the programmes of the institutions, which indicate that some of the academic staff believes that mentoring programmes do not assist them to be more effective in their jobs. In this regard, mentors should enable mentees to make the most of their strengths in their professional and personal lives, encouraging and inspiring them to enhance their potential. Such mentoring programmes could be vital tools for reducing the likelihood of costly underperformance and turnover.

Employee communication

In an attempt to create a common view, in terms of values, objectives and goals of the organisation, good employee communication would help employee to understand their role and hence contribute to the colleges success. Managers need to give academic staff the opportunity to communicate upwards while keeping them well-informed about what is happening in the colleges. It is the responsibility of line managers to be open and transparent, working to build trust through positive communication efforts, demonstrating respect for employees and acting with integrity in all employee relations. Managers need to communicate competence by establishing effective guiding questions and a process

that affords everyone an opportunity to listen, reflect and speak, and provide them with information and knowledge.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the employee engagement of academics with regard to their views on the factors that were most significant were examined. The four factors that were used during the factors analysis were “socialisation and values”, “attitudes towards direct manager”, “recognition and feedback” and “commitment to institution”. Owing to the fact that the mean values for the four factors differ in the empirical study, it can be said that the respondents did not experience all the factors in an equal way, that employee engagement in the TVET colleges was not managed appropriately and that employees would like to be fully engaged.

The study revealed that socialisation and values, recognition and feedback and attitude towards direct manager are important factors among the academics who took part in this study. From these results, it can be deduced that no higher education institution can afford to overlook the importance of employee engagement, socialisation activities and significance of values, and recognition and feedback for academics in their employment. Increasing employee engagement is highly dependent on attitude towards direct manager factor that promotes two-way communication and transparency between managers and the followers. Successful managers lead by example, which generates enthusiasm and inspires employees to work harder. In addition, employees want their work to be appreciated and respected. Making employees feel recognised and appreciated for their contribution works best in achieving higher engagement levels, but a suitable reward system being in place is equally necessary (Kohli and Kohli 2015:466). Muthuveloo, Basbous, Ping and Long (2013:1547) found that higher rewards and recognition result in higher levels of employee engagement.

Socialisation and values are also a major contributor to the employee engagement experienced by academic staff. As indicated in the literature and empirical findings, this factor has a profound influence on the loyalty of academic staff towards their institution. Colleges could consider arranging comprehensive socialisation activities for their employees to facilitate learning about various aspects of their environments.

CONCLUSIONS

This research should be of great value to departments of employment, authorities and management at academic institutions.

Academic staff in TVET colleges would benefit from knowing which factors affect their jobs and colleges’ engagement levels. The identified factors can be probed to analyse empirically their actual effects.

The factors and items thus identified can be explored with respect to colleges teaching in professional and technical institutions, as academic staff may be more engaged towards the factors.

The study elaborated on the best practices implemented by colleges to enhance the engagement of TVET academics. This could help South African TVET colleges to implement and execute practices, which would result in low staff turnover, better work performance and various other positive organisational outcomes.

The study had several limitations: the main limitation being the reliance on quantitative research. In future research, it would be better if the study include a qualitative research approach.

A view of the factors impacting on employee engagement of academic staff was considered. Future research study into different institutional layers could gauge whether or not different employee engagement factors can be applied in each layer.

Future research should continue to explain the relationship between the factors.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study recommends that human resource management and college management consider socialisation and values practices, and recognition initiatives, and that attitude towards direct manager and constructive feedback be given to employees in order to enhance the employee engagement of academic staff.

- *Socialisation and values*: Firstly, the line managers should make it possible for academics to contribute adequately to socialisation practices, to improve commitment, engagement and satisfaction among subordinates. This could be done by providing academics with more autonomy in their functional areas regarding every-day decisions. It is also necessary to make HR policies clear to the academics, especially to new recruits. Secondly, management should encourage personal relationships in the workplace. Group activities for the academics should be planned to facilitate socialisation, through social occasions at the workplace, which are of cultural and emotional significance to them. Thirdly, it is essential for organisations to manage engaged employees in order to maintain a competitive advantage and save on turnover costs.
- *Attitude towards direct manager*: Having trust in employees' capabilities and valuing their input, developing inclusive employee voice mechanisms, modelling personal experience and creating mutual trust, facilitating connections between employees, encouraging individuals to help and seek advice from one another and building a stronger and more productive connections would enhance this factor. Managers should also make an effort to properly develop employees' skills so that they can work effectively, by maintaining training, as the level of engagement plateaus after three to five years of employment. A positive attitude and relationship with managers would reduce staff turnover.
- *Recognition and feedback*: Academic staff members have a severe need for recognition and feedback. At the TVET colleges academic staff need a sense of belonging and pride in their jobs. Managers need to appreciate their employees through recognition of their good work, value employee's work and motivate them to maintain and improve their good work, and they should demonstrate to their employees how their feedback is being used. When managers keep employees informed they tend to feel a greater sense of worth.

It is concluded that an implementation of the key areas to enhance employee engagement in the colleges would enable human resources practitioners to foster key values such as respect, mutual trust and fairness among the academics and management of the colleges.

REFERENCES

- Adler, E.S. and Clark, R. 2011. An invitation of social research: How It's done. 4th ed. U.S.A: Wardworth.
- Albrecht, S.L. 2010. The influence of job, team and organizational level resources on employee well-being, engagement, commitment and extra-role performance: Test of a model. *International Journal of Manpower*, 33(7):840-853.
- Alston, B.A. and Mujtaba, B.G. 2009. Performance management for effective and continuous for employee appraisals. *Journal of Business and Economic Research*, 7(9):25-34.
- Alumran, A, Hou, X. and Hurst, C. 2012. Validity and reliability of instruments designed to measure factors influencing the overuse of antibiotics. *Journal of Infection and Public Health*, 223-232. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jph.2012.03.003>.
- Avedisian, J. and Bennet, A. 2010. Values as knowledge: A new frame of reference for a new generation of knowledge workers. *On the horizon*, 18(3):255-265.
- Babbie, E. and Mouton, J. 2011. *The practice of social research*. South African edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Berger, L.A. and Berger, D.R. 2011. *The talent management handbook*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Bless, C., Higson-Smith, C. and Sithole, S.L. 2013. *Fundamentals of social research methods: an African perspective*. 5th ed. Cape Town: Juta.
- Brown, D. and Hawkins, B. 2013. *Bring out the best in every employee*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Bezuidenhout, A. and Bezuidenhout, G. 2014. Work engagement in female academics at an Open Distance Learning and a contact university in South Africa- A Review and critique. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(7):324-332.
- Davies, J. and Kourdi, J. 2010. *The Truth about Talent: A guide to building a dynamic workforce, realising potential, and helping leaders succeed*. Francisco, CA: Wiley.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. 2013. *Statistics on post-school education and training in South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Dobbelaer, M.J, Prins, F.J. and Van Dongen, D. 2013. The impact of feedback training for inspectors. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 37(1):86-104.
- Drummond, G. and Ensor, J. 2005. *Introduction to marketing concepts*. Burlington, MA: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Field, A. 2009. *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS*. 3rd ed. London: Sage.
- Ge, J., Su, X. and Zhou, Y. 2010. Organizational socialization, organizational identification and organizational citizenship behaviour: An empirical research of Chinese high-tech manufacturing enterprises. *Nankai Business Review International*, 1(2):166-179.
- Ghafoor, A., Qureshi, T.M. and Hijazi, S.T. 2011. Transformational leadership, employee engagement and performance: Mediating effect of psychological ownership. *African Journal of Business Management*, 5 (17):7391-7403.
- Govender, K. 2011. Conceptualising the postgraduate research (service) experience. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 3(11):170-178.
- Habraken, M.M.P. 2013. *Establishing employee engagement within a Dutch hotel*. MSc Thesis, University of Twente, Netherlands.
- Huck, S.W. 2012. *Reading Statistics and Research*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle: Pearson.
- Jaakson, K. 2010. Management by values: Are some values better than others? *Journal of Management Development*, 29(9):795-806.
- Kahn, W.A. 1990. Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4):692-724.
- Kohli, S.S. and Kohli, K. 2015. Linking employee engagement as an antecedent to enhanced organisational performance and organisational success. *International Journal of Science Technology and Management*, 4(11):463-470.
- Krasman, J. 2012. The feedback-seeking personality: Big five and feedback seeking behavior. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 17(1):18-32.
- Kumar, R. 2011. *Research methodology*. 3rd ed. New Delhi: Sage.
- Lamb, C.W., Hair, F.J. and McDaniel, C. 2009. *Essentials of marketing*. Mason: South-Western Cengage Learning.
- Lee, H. 2013. Locus of control, socialization and organizational identification. *Management Decision*, 51(5):1047-1055.
- Louw, D.A. and Edwards, D.J.A. 2005. *Psychology: An introduction for students in Southern Africa*. 2nd ed. Johannesburg: Heinemann.

- Lunenburg, F.C. 2011. Understanding organizational culture: A key leadership asset. *National Forum of Education, Administration and Supervision Journal*, 29(4):1-12.
- Macey, W.H. and Schneider, B. 2008. "The meaning of the employee engagement", *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, 1 (1):3-30.
- Majernik, M.E. and Patrnczak, J. 2014. Rewards, recognition, and caregiver engagement at Cleveland Clinic. *Journal of Healthcare Leadership*, (6)29-37.
- Manzoor, M. and Naeem, H. 2011. Relationship of Organization Socialization with Organizational Commitment and Turnover Intention: Moderating role of perceived organizational support. *Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, 3(8):515-529.
- Mmako, M.M. 2016. An employee engagement framework of Further Education and Training colleges. Thesis, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa.
- Muthaveloo, P., Basbous, O., Ping, T. and Long, C. 2013. Antecedents of employee engagement in the manufacturing sector. *American Journal of Applied Science*, 10(12):1546-1552.
- Mxenge, S.V., Dywill, M. and Bazana, S. 2014. Job engagement and Employee support: intention to quit among administrative personnel at the University of Fort Hare in South Africa. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 4(5):129-144.
- Ormrod, J.E. and Leedy, P.D. 2010. *Practical research, planning and design*. 9th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Piasoongnern, O., Anurit, P. and Kulyawattananonta, S. 2011. Talent management in Thai cements companies: A study of strategies and factors influencing employee engagement. *African Journal of Business Management*, 5(5):1578-1563.
- Portonoi, L.M. 2015. Pushing a stone up a hill: a case study of the working environment of South African academics. *Research in Comparative & International Education*, 10(2):257-274.
- Saile, S. and Schlechter, A. 2012. A formative evaluation of a staff reward and recognition programmes. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*, 10(3):1-11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v10i3.422>.
- Shuck, B. and Wollard, K. 2010. Employee Engagement and Human Resources Development: A Seminal Review of the Literature Review of the Foundations. *Human Resources Development Review*, 9(1):89-110.
- Tsai, Y. 2011. Relationship between organisational culture, leadership behaviour and job satisfaction. *BMC Health Services Research*, 11(98):1-9.
- Unger-Aviram, E., Zwikael, O. and Restubog, S.L.D. 2013. Revisiting goals, feedback, recognition, and performance success: The case of project teams. *Group & Organisation Management*, 38(5):570-600.
- Vogelsang, J., Townsend, M., Minahan, M., Jamieson, D., Vogel, J., Viets, A., Royal, C. and Valek, L. 2013. *Handbook for strategic HR: best practices in organization development from the OD Network*. New York: AMACOM.
- Wensley, R. 2010. Employee engagement: Communication matters forum, University of London's Senate House, UK, 27 May. *Strategic HR Review*, 9(6):334-346.
- Yahyagil, M.Y. and Otken, A.B. 2011. Cultural values from managers' and academicians' perspectives: The case of Turkey. *Management Research Review*, 34(9):1018-1041.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author declares that this research paper extends previous work submitted as a dissertation.