

Are Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) Gearing Towards Employee Engagement or Not? Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

Employee engagement, also known as '*worker engagement*', is a profession that has grown in strategic importance over the past two decades. As the profession has grown, so too has the requirement on all organizational leaders to strengthen their knowledge and skills in this area. Just as every administrator needs a basic understanding of financial management, every practitioner needs a basic understanding of worker engagement. The proposed study intends to determine how employee engagement is being undertaken among non-profit organizations (NPOs) working in Africa, and the challenges faced by leaders in NPOs. There is an inherent difference in the manner the workforce is motivated in the conventional business organization, from that in NPOs. The former is operated to realize economic gain, which is likewise reflected in the personal goals and incentives the business offers its employees. NPOs, on the other hand, do not usually provide for substantial monetary compensation, since most, if not all, of its work force are volunteers. As such, workers are motivated more by their love and dedication to the mission of the organization and the cause for which it stands. Because of this fundamental difference, workers in NPOs cannot be persuaded to remain with the organization and contribute their best by the usual means of increasing pay and monetary incentives. Although employees are drawn to the job because of the psychic income, such may not be sufficient to sustain the commitment of these workers in the long term, without the necessary and appropriate support and action by the leaders of the organization. The threats posed by the social and physical environment on the continued commitment of an NPO's staff will remain a source of challenge to its organizational leaders, programs and services in Africa, which this study will aim to explore.

Keywords: Employee Engagement in NPOs, Non-Profit Organizations, Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

Africa in the closing years of the 20th Century and beginning of the 21st century is remembered for three historic events. One was the rise of the popular movements that led to the end of the colonial empire and the downfall of apartheid in South Africa; the other two, the human catastrophe of immense proportions involving the massacre of millions people in Rwanda in 1994 and Darfur Sudan in 2003 to presence (Manji & O'Coill 2002). To most of people in the developed world, disaster, emergency relief and development aid are integral understanding of the global South. Mention crisis in the world and someone will tell you Africa. Timeless though it seems, the NPOs work is a relatively new construct in the 21st century. The NPOs works began

in Africa just over forty years ago in West Africa on June 12, 1968, when Independent Television Authority (ITV), the major commercial public service TV network in the United Kingdom, the oldest commercial network in the UK, and the sole competitor of the BBC, broadcast a series of heart-breaking scenes from civil war-torn eastern Nigeria, renamed Biafra by the secessionists (*O'Sullivan 2012*). Among the over-crowded masses of refugees it showed starving children close to death, lying on rickety hospital beds, with little or no access to food and medicine. To today's viewer the images are sadly familiar whether in Sudan, Nigeria or anywhere in Africa; but in the history of aid and emergency relief, Biafra, Sudan and the massive media coverage it spawned mark an important turning point in the history of international NPOs, Africa and the world at large. NPOs are indispensable agents in spearheading the economic advancement of developing nations (Nikkah & Redzuan 2010). While governments are held primarily responsible for spurring development, seldom do governments have the resources, manpower and expertise necessary to carry out socio-economic programs at the grassroots level. Effective implementation requires partnership with a private counterpart that links efforts between communities and the bureaucracy (UNICEF 2010). This role is undertaken by the various NPOs which specialize in particular issues for which they are particularly equipped in resources and know-how (Ulleberg 2009). The African states are those developing countries which tend to benefit most from the activities and programs of NPOs — from healthcare, employment to national development. Studies have shown that the long-term commitment of NPOs in Africa is critical to the social and economic progress of the peoples living there (Abdel-Kader et al. 2010). It is therefore imperative to determine whether the long-term capacity of NPOs to retain skilled and experienced staff are concerned, is sufficient to assure continuity of service for years to come.

Not too long ago, there was a clear dichotomy of organizations according to their nature and purpose. The common taxonomy of organizations distinguished them according to whether they were business corporations, organizations supporting philanthropic causes or social development purposes, or public administrative organizations. Business organizations worked to maximize profit (Denhardt et al. 2009; Watson et al. 1999), public administrative organizations advanced the goals of the government (Veronesi 2009; Warr 1999), and the social cause-oriented organizations worked towards the development of marginalized sectors of society (Watson & Tellegen 1999). Recently, there has emerged a changing trend in how organizations are expected to operate (Wellins & Concelman 2005a; Weiss 2002). Business organizations can no longer be motivated by the single goal of realizing profits; it must actively pursue a corporate social responsibility program and sustainability program integrally with its main operations (Denhardt et al. 2009; Wellins & Concelman 2005b), in order to return to society a portion of its profits for the benefits it enjoys as corporate citizen.

Non-profit organizations, on the other hand, are compelled to face the necessity of operating on a self-sustaining basis; it can no longer rely on its previous sponsors and donors who had so generously supported it during more prosperous times, because of the deep financial crisis that will continue to defy recovery efforts for some time to come (Robinson et al. 2004). Even as many business organizations have been forced to close, NPOs, because of their less financially tenable position, are forced to face economic realities and find ways and means to become financially self-sustaining (Little & Little 2006). There are implications to the obscuring delineations between the types of organizations. Business organizations are becoming increasingly socially oriented (Sahoo et al. 2010), while NPOs are assuming activities that are

increasingly economic (Craze 2008; Crabtree 2005). These affect the manner in which human resources are expected to perform and how they are engaged. Regardless of evidence on how destructive staff turnover can be, studies from the not-profit sectors field on the engagement of workers are limited. Surprisingly little academic and empirical research has been conducted overall and a large portion of it comes from the physiological, business and social work community (Wilson 2009; Saks 2006; Berk & Berk 2000). Additionally, studies do not differentiate non-profit or private sectors staff from workers in other industries. To address this problem, more research that focuses specifically on the engagement of workers in the NPO sector is necessary. Empirical data are needed so professionals can better understand key factors influencing to employee engagement and use what they learn about it to develop managerial interventions and alternative strategies that foster engagement and retention of workers in non-profit sectors (Heathfield 2010).

Research Objectives and Questions

The research objective is to determine to what extent the drivers of employee engagement are present in non-governmental organizations operating in Africa. The purpose in pursuing this objective is to provide an assessment of whether or not these NPOs provide a working environment conducive to worker engagement so as to encourage the retention of valuable employees in their service. In support of this objective the study aims to answer the following research questions.

- How do the facts support a finding that the NPOs are geared towards worker engagement?
- How do employees of NPOs perceive their organizations' support of the enhancement of drivers for worker engagement in their operations?
- What are the implications of worker engagement for organizations and how can organizational leaders' best mitigate the negative impacts and exploit the positive ones?
- To what extents are people working for the NPOs in Africa are engaged?
- To what extents are there reports of people working in the NPOs in Africa having been engaged?

Methodology

Methodology is of high significance in any research because it explains the method of the research, which enhances follow up, and a detailed understanding of the research (Patel et al 2003). Following is a brief scan of the relevant academic literature on employee engagement theory and the application of employee engagement and motivation in non-profit organizations like NPOs. The purpose of this review is to find out the existing theories that have been established by earlier studies, in order that this research may be properly guided in new though well-founded directions. The studies reviewed have been drawn from the EBSCO search facility for academic and professional journals and publications.

Literature Review

Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement is a business management concept. An “engaged employee” is one who is fully involved in, and enthusiastic about his or her work, and this will act in a way that furthers their organization’s interests (Veronesi 2009). According to Scarlett (2007, p. 15), “employee engagement is a measurable degree of an employee’s positive or negative emotional attachment to their jobs, colleagues, and organization which profoundly influences their willingness to learn and perform at work.” This engagement is distinctively different from satisfaction, motivation, culture, climate and opinion and very difficult to measure. According to Malinowski (2007), employee engagement is the extent to which workforce commitment, both emotional and intellectual, exists relative to accomplishing the work, mission, and vision of the organization. In turn, engagement can be seen as a heightened level of ownership where each employee wants to do whatever they can for the success of the organization as a whole (Meyer & Allen 2001). According to Schmidt (2003), the primary behaviors of engaged employees are speaking positively about the organization to co-workers, potential employees and customers, having a strong desire to be a member of the organization, and exerting extra effort to contribute to the organization’s success.

Literally, the term engagement is not an “academic” concept, but one that has been marketed as practical (Mancheno-Smoak & Endress 2008; Little & Little 2006). This raises a question as to whether workforce engagement is a meaningful idea to management knowledge or if it is a concept that is redundant within existing research. Researchers feel that the term engagement is most likely popular due to the wish of most practicing professionals and employers for the “answer” to the sticky and most complicated problems of motivation and performance. This, however, brought us to a conclusion that a recognized approach and methods should be applied to the existing literature to determine if and how workforce engagement is related to and augments existing knowledge. If engagement behaves like well-established constructs such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment or job involvement and results in the same outcomes, another construct as engagement is not needed. If, however, on the other hand, workforce engagement does not capture some aspects of employee motivation that has eluded previous researchers, practitioners and Academics should welcome it alike (Riesling & Harvey 2005; Lovelock 2004). Only by understanding the nature of the construct and its relationship to attitudes, behavioral intention and behaviors can it be applied to the benefit of organization and their employees (Patel et al. 2003).

Coffman and Gonzalez-Molina (2002) state that there are three mutually exclusive groups identified by the Gallup Engagement Index: the engaged group, the non-engaged group, and the actively disengaged group. Two problems exist with the description of these groups. First, their profiles are a disturbing combination of attitudes and behaviors, for example, the engaged employee uses talents every day, has consistent levels of high performance and is emotionally committed to what they do. Second, the engaged and the actively disengaged groups have collective effects on corporate profitability and performance. However, the non-engaged group is not considered to have group effect; thereby making them as highly individuals. In other studies, Crabtree (2005) and Craze (2008) report that the employees in the three categories of engaged, non-engaged, and actively disengaged, report different levels of positive and negative influences on their psychological well-being, notwithstanding of the type of work performed. Similarly,

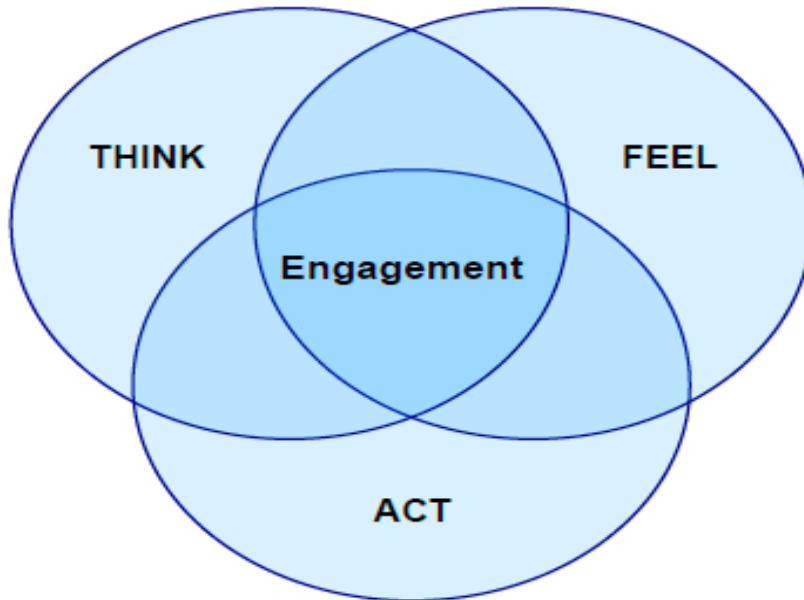
Gallup's Human Sigma website (2005) reports that work groups whose members are positively engaged have higher productivity, profitability, safety records, attendance, and better retention. So, the question is, is workforce engagement a group level phenomenon, an individual phenomenon or both? The third problem is that workforce engagement relates to existing constructs, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior and job involvement, but how workforce engagement relates is not explained. Fernandez (2007) states that employee satisfaction is not the same as workforce engagement and since managers cannot rely on employee satisfaction to help retain the best and the brightest, workforce engagement becomes an essential, perhaps, a critical concept. The most significant factor for workforce engagement according Fernandez (2007) is senior management's interest in the overall employee's well-being.

Engaged employees have come to be recognized as assets to organizations, whether profit or non-profit. They are known for their optimism and upbeat attitude towards both their work and the organization they work for. They are emotionally attached to their jobs and their organization, are highly enthusiastic at their work, and will willingly perform above and beyond the mandate of their job description (Markos & Sridevi 2010, p. 89). While many independent authors and HR practitioners generally agree on what an engaged employee is and does, a strict definition of "employee engagement" continues to elude human resource managers and academics. Employee engagement is described in many ways. It has been defined in terms of resources used, as "the extra time, brainpower, and energy that employees put toward their work that results in discretionary effort" (Johnson, 2011, p. 13). It is "the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards their organization and its values" (Sarkar 2011, p. 62). Perrin's Global Workforce Study (Witts & Poirier 2008) presents the following illustration in support of its own definition of engagement. In this framework, employee engagement is circumscribed by three actions: (1) Think, referring to rational items, such as when employees believe strongly in the company's goals and objectives; (2) Feel, which involves the emotional items, such as the feeling and inspiration engendered in the employees to do their best work for the sake of the organization; and (3) Act, or the motivation items, including the willingness of the individual employee to "put in a great deal of effort beyond what is normally expected to help his organization succeed (Witts & Poirier 2008, p. 17). Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below show frameworks for understanding employee engagement and employee engagement driver spectrum.

Aside from the way employees feel and act, workplace commitment, organizational commitment and outcomes, innovation in the workplace, employee participation, creation of a stress free and hassle free environment, hygienic environment, employee motivation, team work, employee accountability, adaptability to changes, and free flow of information, and employee engagement have likewise been closely linked to personal and organizational performance (Sahoo et al. 2010). How employees are pre-disposed to work is of no moment unless such sentiments bear results in the form of the advancement of organizational goals (Lakshmi 2012). Rashid and Ashraf (2011) proved that a net positive relationship exists between organizational productivity, particularly with the presence of significant factors including delegation of decision making, performance reward systems, performance appraisals, co-ordination training and career development (p. 104). Markos et al. (2010) identified the drivers of employee engagement as including the following: in the lower levels these include pay and benefits, then a bit higher there are the opportunities for development, the possibilities of promotion, and leadership style; near

the top are meaning at work, a shared and common purpose, and sense of connection, which are capable of bringing together employees in a sense of community (Markos et al. 2010, p. 91). In an earlier study, Robinson & Hayday (2004) found that the key driver of engagement is “a sense of feeling valued and involved,” which is fostered by involvement in decision making, the extent to which employees feel able to voice their ideas, the opportunities employees are extended to develop their jobs, and the extent of organizational concern for employees’ health and well-being.

Figure 1.1 Frameworks for Understanding Employee Engagement



Source: Wits & Poirier (2008, p. 17).

Figure 1.2 the Employee Engagement Driver Spectrum



Source: Lakshmi (2012, p. 65).

As also seen in figure 1.2 above, there are several foregoing drivers of employee engagement. These include: Innovation in the work place, employee participation, creation of a stress free

and hassle free environment, hygienic environment, employee motivation, encourage team work, employee accountability, adaptability to changes, and free flow of information. Innovation in the work place – Held by many to be not only the key to success, but also the key to employee engagement and retention. Organizations employing the transformational leadership style encourage their employees to introduce and adopt innovations within the sphere of their work responsibilities. When employees are intellectually stimulated to exercise their creativity, they are challenged to realize their intellectual potential, a principal component in employee engagement (Ulhaq & Azeem 2010). At the same time, the company is better able to attain its desired outcomes in terms of quality, productivity and profitability (Lakshmi 2012). Employee participation – When employees are encouraged to participate meaningfully in the decision-making functions of the organization forges a stronger bond between the employees and the firm (Cummings & Worley 2009). Employee participation strengthens the feeling of connectivity with the organization; this connectivity is employee engagement (Lakshmi 2012).

Creation of a stress free and hassle free environment – The first and second drivers above, considered the requisites of employee engagement, can only be attained if employees feel free from intimidation and undue constraints, in order to venture into creative innovations and openly express their ideas and comments when participating in decision-making (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2012). A stress-free and hassle-free environment engenders workers' best efforts and allows them to take the kinds of risks that further performance excellence (Lakshmi, 2012). Hygienic environment – The phrase “hygienic environment” connotes a healthy employee-employer relationship, characterized by dynamic information interchange and the absence of barriers between them (Lakshmi, 2012). Hygiene factors include compensation, benefits, and the physical aspects of the working environment (McKeown 2002); thus a hygienic relationship indicates a transparency and amiability in the dealings and collaboration between workers and managers. Employee motivation – Achievement of the above-mentioned drivers – i.e., risk-free and hygienic environment, a culture towards innovation, and participative management – contribute towards employee motivation (Lakshmi, 2012). Another important contributor would be the alignment of the organization's goals with those of the employees, such that they perceive that exerting effort to achieve organizations' objectives redounds to the achievement of their own objectives. The firms' goals are more likely to be achieved if employees' and managers' efforts are focused towards them (Daft & Lane 2010).

Encourage team work – Working in teams has the advantage of allowing a tightly coordinated group of people to work at their own initiative to complete a project or job quickly, efficiently, and with a high level of quality (Maddux & Wingfield 2003). Usually, the level of commitment is high, communication is open, and problem-solving is fast and effective, which provides a strong foundation for engaging employees (Lakshmi 2012). Employee accountability – Employee accountability does not imply imposing unnecessary burdens on the employee, but conveys to people that they are entrusted with the accomplishment of their jobs (Lakshmi 2012). It necessarily entails the free flow of information about the job, allowing the employee to participate with full exercise of discretion in the performance of his/her job (Coens & Jenkins 2010). Ability to face challenges – Cultivating a culture that enables and supports employees to face new challenges enhances the creativity and innovative capacity of the organization, which in turn reinforces the organization's chances for success (Lakshmi 2012). At the same time, addressing and ultimately surmounting challenges boosts employees' self-esteem and facilitates employee engagement (Karsan & Kruse 2011). Adaptability to changes – an organization

attuned to continuous innovation is also adapted towards constant change, which however goes against people's natural resistance to change (Belker & Topchik 2012). Change is imminent due to globalization and technical innovations, thus constant change will have a tendency to demoralize and demotivate people who are not prepared to deal with it. For people to be engaged, they must be prepared for change (Lakshmi 2012). Free flow of information – It sometimes goes against traditional management to allow for the free flow of information, which probably springs from the fear that company secrets may be leaked to competitors. Modern management, however, espouses the need to share information with employees to enable them to make informed decisions at their level, thereby serving participative decision-making (Cooper & Klimoski 2007), and allowing employees to feel they are trusted and that they have a personal equity in the organization (enhancing engagement) (Lakshmi 2012).

Employee Engagement in Non-Profit Sectors

In the earlier mentioned studies of employee engagement (Mancheno-Smoak & Endress 2008; Little & Little 2006), it was mentioned that pay, benefits and promotion were crucial factors that must first be fulfilled before the higher aspirations of belongingness and sense of community may begin. These studies were directed at organizations that were in business, the principal motive of which was to realize profits. There is likely to be a difference, therefore, in non-profit organizations which are not intensely concerned with making profits. Most of these organizations are manned by volunteers and persons who are more attached to the cause of the organization than the advancement of their careers. There is therefore the possibility of a difference in employee engagement in non-profit vis-à-vis profit-oriented organizations. Kesler (2011) explored these comparisons and contrasts between profit and non-profit organizations. The article was anchored on Peter Drucker's argument that the two types of organizations could learn from each other – business can learn from the passion of non-profit organizations for their mission, while non-profit organizations may find more effective outcomes to their efforts if they learn from the discipline of business. In Kesler's interview with Tim Shriver, the CEO and chairman of Special Olympics International or SOI, they focused on the leadership style which best allowed for employee engagement and involvement in the Special Olympics "movement". Special Olympics Movement, founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, a member of the Kennedy family, sister to President John F. Kennedy and Senators Robert F. Kennedy and Edward Kennedy, is the world's largest sports organization for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, providing year-round training and competitions to more than 3.7 million athletes in more than 170 countries. Special Olympics competitions are held every day, all over the world—including local, national and regional competitions, adding up to about 50,000 events a year worldwide (Britannica 2012). Shiver observed that non-profit organizations such as NPOs needed to cultivate the qualities found in business – the intellectual drive, operational skill, and commitment to the attainment of the desired results – and combine these with the intangibles of the workplace and the gratification compensation which NPOs already possessed. The old dichotomy of separating economic value from personal value, or distinguishing profit from purpose, is no longer relevant in present-day NPOs (Kesler 2011, p. 40).

There are several crucial attributes which volunteers in NPOs possess which would be advantageous for workers in businesses to similarly imbibe. According to Drucker, volunteers worked for psychic rewards, for which they are internally compelled to give their best in their work. A culture which is built around volunteer behavior is rooted in the love for and dedication to the mission. "People act because they believe something good will happen for others as a

result of their effort” (Kesler 2011, p. 44). Hardina and Montana (2011) conducted a national survey of social service managers. The survey respondents were polled on the management theories and models which greatly influenced their administrative styles and actions. The study found that many social services managers utilized management approaches oriented towards employee empowerment, and actively initiated management activities which were directed at engaging and empowering staff, and tended to downplay or at least pay relatively less attention to increase client involvement in the process of organizational or political decision-making.

Discussions and Conclusion

The objective of the research is to explore the implications of employee engagement in non-performing organizations, and where hindrances exist, to suggest possible courses of action the non-profit organization or organizations may take in order to address the problems and make more effective the use of employee engagement in these organizations. The research questions are designed to specifically target those aspects and relationships among the factors which, if existing to a satisfactory degree in non-profit organizations, may lead to the desired outcomes, and where they are found not to exist sufficiently in the NPO, to discover those reasons why they are lacking. In making this discovery, the research would have answered what challenges face the NPO’s HR management that may hinder the effective implementation of employee engagement, and recommend steps which may be taken to resolve these issues. The research is significant because it applies a conceptual framework designed for business organizations, in the setting of non-profit organizations, which is the first validation of the theory in a non-profit environment. The innovation introduced in the research is that it is one of only a relative few secondary data studies in the field of social research (which usually favors the use of the primary data approach), and probably one of the first attempts to apply the Sahoo et al.’s framework on non-profit organizations. The research is expected to provide, as a result, a set of factors which are deemed to be sufficiently present in NPOs, and which are not in business settings. It’s also expected to determine what the resulting levels and types of commitment have been engendered in the NPOs’ work force, and the outcomes that are evident as the fruits of employee engagement. The discussion here aims to present a cogent explanation for the relevance of the use of employee engagement in NPOs in terms of organizational and individual factors that combine to create a more comprehensive understanding of employee engagement in NPOs.

As global competition intensifies and organizations seek to attract and retain talent, engaging employees becomes an issue of increasingly high significance (Cook 2008, p. 12). The issues this research seeks to explore are significant, given the well established link between employee engagement, the productivity and performance of the employees and employers, HR functions and organizational success. No other African or international studies have used a comprehensive mixed methods approach to identify the range of employees and employers behaviors in our society and places of work, how motivation and job satisfactions led to productivity, longevity and organizational success. This research is innovative in a number of ways. First, this research will provide evidence on which to base engagement decisions related to the nature and causes of unproductive employee behaviors in the Australian workforces. Second, it will employ an innovative methodology that will involve three linked phases which has not been used previously in the field in Sub-Saharan Africa or internationally. Third, the research is innovative at a theoretical level because it will interrupt dominant traditional discourses about positive attitudes, including trust, organizational commitment and intrinsic enjoyment of the work, by linking employee behaviors to other factors that promote employee engagement in the workforce.

Finally, this is a cross-institutional and a whole continental research which will have major ramifications for other countries and influence policy and program development in Africa and internationally.

The results of this study will provide an understanding of this kind and information for administrators, HR practitioners, and researchers about employee engagement in the nonprofit organizations field. Organizational leaders from the organization that was evaluated may benefit from the survey feedback, and could implement strategies for change that address participant responses. Leaders in other organizations may also benefit by understanding how critical workforce engagement is, and that engaged workers, yield positive results for an organization. According to The Conference Board, a prestigious nonprofit business membership and research organization located in the U.S., and an organization that provides top executive and industry leaders from the most respected corporation in the United States and around the world with vital business intelligence and forward-looking best practices, “employee engagement is a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organization, that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work” (The Conference Board, 2012. P. 18).

Organizational leaders and practitioners who function in a managerial positions may also benefit by understanding that staff usually adopt the characteristics and attitudes of their leaders, making it paradoxical and difficult for staff to be engaged unless the manager are willing (Wilson 2009; Kerfoot 2008). As the business world and in particular the HR community becomes more aware of the benefits of engagement, researchers predicts that employee engagement will become a key measure of organizational success. Already, employee engagement is replacing employee satisfaction in the majority of organization as a key success and will continue to grow in importance in the future (Cook 2008, p.24). Additionally, researchers can use the information from this research to conduct similar studies that will contribute to the knowledge base about employee engagement in the nonprofit sectors workers. Despite the consensus recognition that employee engagement matters, the enormity of its impact on the organization’s bottom-line and its capacity for innovation still appears to be misunderstood by most organizational leaders today (Soldati, 2007). Future researchers must attempt to further determine what similarities in engagement levels may exist across occupations in the field, what factors may predict engagement, and what the specific benefits of engagement are for nonprofit organizations. Given, the public and political interest in workforce engagement and work-life-balance management policies and practices, it is not surprising that this issue has been identified by our industry partners as a priority area for further research and policy development.

The term employee engagement may immediately be considered a misnomer in the sense that NPO workers are mostly volunteers rather than employees. As such, they are normally not bound by an employment contract where they commit to discharge a particular set of duties in exchange for a predefined monetary compensation. NPO workers perform their duties of their own accord and volition, and correspondingly excel in these duties out of a sense of dedication to further the cause of the organization (Markos et al. 2010; Little & Little 2006). Granted that there exists already a greater affinity and identity between the personal goals of the NPO volunteer and the NPO, in comparison to the employee and the business corporation, there is still a need to further intensify this incipient engagement particularly for volunteers who, by virtue of their exceptional skills and knowledge, have much to offer to the NPO’s success. For this reason, this study resorts to a conceptual framework arrived at by Sahoo et al. (2010) which treats on the drivers of engagement, in terms of drivers of empowerment and drivers of employee (worker) involvement.

The framework also takes into account the evident results of employee engagement; in terms of workplace commitment (resolved into two components, organizational and individual commitment).

In the conceptual frameworks presented above, there are two principal sets of factors: the antecedent factors in terms of drivers of empowerment, the intermediate factors in terms of drivers of employee involvement, and the resultant factors in terms of workplace commitment, which are distinguished as organizational and individual commitment. Under drivers of empowerment, the factors therein named do not appear to be all applicable to NPOs in the same way they are in business organizations. One would note this particularly in the case of “reward and recognition” and “upward performance appraisal.” While these convey a different sense for the employee in a profit organization, they are not necessarily entirely inapplicable to the case of volunteers in an NPO setting. “Reward” may be taken to mean non-monetary, intrinsic, or psychic reward, while “recognition” may come in likewise gratuitous forms (Markos et al. 2010, p. 98). Likewise, “upward performance appraisal” need not necessarily imply a promotion to a higher level with greater power and higher pay (Kesler 2011, p. 50). It may be taken to connote a positive regard for one’s performance, for which that person may be asked to do work with greater responsibility and challenge. In the same manner, under drivers of employee involvement, “job enrichment” may be taken to mean task or work enrichment (as against paid jobs), “collective bargaining” may mean the practice of discussing work arrangements between managerial and rank-and-file groups, and “employee suggestions” would be volunteers’ suggestions. As a result of workplace commitment, the desired outcomes of engagement should be discernible, namely emotional attachment, team performance, group cohesiveness, better individual performance, higher satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation. Finally, this research will provide a platform from which to develop a robust measure of engagement, and will be helpful to human resource practitioners interested in understanding the directional process of engagement and the importance of affective leadership as an antecedent to engagement of workers in the NPOs.

Research Contributions

Concerning the need for this study, improving retention in today’s NPOs working professionals is quite daunting (African AID 2011). While turnover is inevitable and unavoidable in the organizations doing the humanitarian and development works in Africa, much can be done to reduce the attraction of other competing organizations and the impact of operational realities on NPOs staff. Africa is a context where considerable turnover has been initiated by employers (governments and NPOs alike), and there are examples of good practice that can be applied to improve retention before change processes, including: worker engagement, talent development, good management and workforce planning (African AID 2011). The study of the application of worker engagement in the International NPOs has become an important area of study. It is a novel twist to the traditional study of worker engagement in business corporations and non-profit organizations. For businesses, it is undoubtedly important to seek to engage, motivate, and retain workers because of the market for employment which tend to attract the talented, skilled, knowledgeable, and exceptional employees to competitor firms or jobs. The need to forge a common identity with the firm is vital in the case of businesses, because normally the worker remain in his/her job until another one comes along that offers better pay, opportunities, and career or professional growth for him/her. In short, workers in businesses are quite fluid. On the other hand, traditionally when a worker joins an NPO it is almost always because he/she has

found an affinity with the cause represented by an organization. The shared identity is already forged from the start, for which reason he/she offers his/her services, sometime, with his/her emotion attached to it, just for the love of the work. One may say, a worker is already engaged in the NPO in so far as the cause it stands for is concerned. However, the long-term stay of the worker is an issue which should be addressed by the NPOs leaders, especially in the non-profit sector where there is always a shortage of skilled workers (Vasugi et al. 2011). The NPO has ceased to be a local community service or group. There are NPOs which have spanned the globe, such as the CARE International, World Vision International, Samaritans' Purse, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and those associations targeting people with special conditions such as the Special Olympics Movement, Mercy Corps, Rockefeller Foundations, and the Bill and Malinda Gates Foundation. Affiliate groups in other countries band together, not for the purposes of creating profit and economies of scale, but in order to share expertise and spread the benefits to those persons similarly disadvantaged in other countries. Because of the need to sustain these NPOs which have grown and expanded, and because of the more complex demands of self-sustainability in a challenging economy, the NPOs, like the business organization, must maintain and retain its most vital resource – its manpower – particularly the good workers with the work ethic, skills and knowledge to best discharge the work. “Worker” engagement has become a vital tool in keeping good people, even for the NPOs. This study seeks to address the problem: How NPOs working in Sub-Saharan Africa are presently handling retention and worker engagement issues? Or what are the challenges faced by the NPOs working in both developed and developing countries, with respect to worker engagement? This presupposes two things: that staff turnover in the NPOs sector is a critical ongoing concern for the NPOs leaders and HR specialists across the sector; and that unless managed effectively, persistent and frequent turnover of staff will have significant tangible and intangible costs to organizations and their activities, the projects being implemented, and to their entire workforces. With regards to significance and innovation of this study, the outcome of the study will have policy ramifications, not only at the Australian level but also at the international level. The research is significant because it applies a conceptual framework designed for business organizations, in the setting of the non-profit organizations, which, if successful, will probably be the first validation of the theory in the NPOs environment. The innovation introduced in the research is that it is one of only a relative few qualitative studies in the field of social research (which usually favors the use of the quantitative approach), and probably one of the first attempts to apply the Sahoo framework on the non-profit organizations. In the end, this study will equip international agencies involved in the humanitarian and development work in Sub-Saharan Africa with strategies, tools and techniques for enhancing retention and addressing staff turnover, with the ultimate goal of improving worker engagement among consortia members and organizations in the region.

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