



Career Mentoring and Employee Commitment in Manufacturing Firms in Kenya: The Moderating Effect of Rewards System

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Abstract

This study seeks to explore the moderating effect of rewards system on the nexus between career mentoring and commitment of employees in the manufacturing firms in Kenya. The study used the explanatory research design and a usable sample size of 435 employees to obtain quantitative data in the Kenyan manufacturing firms. A Self-administered questionnaire was used to aid in data collection. The data was analyzed using SPSS vs 23 and hypotheses tested using Hayes PROCESS Macro tools. The results reveal that career mentoring significantly and positively have a direct effect on employee commitment. The results further reveal that rewards system have a positive and significant direct effect on employee commitment. Importantly, the findings reveal that there is a conditional effect of reward system on the link between career mentoring and employee commitment. The findings of the study provide an impetus whereby the management of manufacturing firms and other organizations stand to benefit when designing career mentoring programme. Moreover, integrating rewards system within career mentoring designs is bound to maximize employee commitment and by extension, organizational commitment.

Keywords: Career Mentoring, Rewards System, Employee Commitment

INTRODUCTION

The manufacturing sector in Kenya is recognized as the main driver of the country's economic growth, and has been granted top priority in investment. According to Mutahi who is the chairlady of the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM), long lasting economic frameworks are founded in strong manufacturing bases (KAM, 2018). Consequently, the sector has targeted a contribution of 15% to the country's GDP by 2025 from the current 9.2% (Manufacturing Priority Agenda, 2018). Mutahi argues that it is only through manufacturing that, decent jobs can be guaranteed. It is on this premise that none other than H.E President Uhuru Kenyatta leveraged creation and expansion of jobs in Kenya on manufacturing under the 'Big Four Agenda'.

Evidence shows that Kenya has undertaken several initiatives to boost its manufacturing sector. The government has for instance, shown the eagerness of reclaiming the country's status of the top producer of textiles in the East African region (Signe & Johnson, 2018). To this end, three new Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have been established at the Mombasa Port, Lamu Port and Kisumu. As an incentive, global apparels and textiles companies investing in these SEZs have been allowed duty free imports as well as being given deferment on value-added tax (VAT) (Signe & Johnson, 2018). Moreover, the Kenyan government has partnered with the United Nation's Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) to launch a programme aimed

at the strengthening of the pharmaceutical industry (UNIDO, 2015). Under this programme, the pharmaceutical industry is facilitated with resources that can make it attain production that meets expectations of the World Health Organization (WHO). Kenya has also set up Export Processing Zones (EPZs) which have majored in processing of food and consumer goods such as Sugar refining, meat canning, soft drink and beer production and, flour and maize meal (Mirugi, 2017).

Nevertheless, competitiveness in manufacturing firms in Kenya is dependent on the commitment shown by the workforce. Evidence shows that commitment in the form of normative, affective and continuance domains acts as a force that binds the workforce to tasks (Boxal & Macky, 2014). When employees are for instance, given the opportunity to be involved in operations undertaken in the organization, they become emotionally attached to tasks assigned (Turner, 2019). Moreover, a committed workforce becomes obligated to the organization and is bound to enjoy long tenures in their jobs (Fard & Karimi, 2015). Evidence also demonstrates that employee commitment raises the level of performance among manufacturing firms (Moshood et al., 2019; Tolera, 2018).

Although manufacturing firms are investing in employee commitment (Stites & Michael, 2011) the role played by career development in organizational performance cannot be ignored. Evidence has shown that career development among employees, which manifests in the form of mentorship and job enrichment, is a determinant of employee commitment (Dialoke & Nkechi, 2017). Li, Tong and Wong (2014) have documented the significant positive effect that, value of career development in terms of mentorship has on commitment among employees. Other scholars have also demonstrated the positive influence of career mentorship on commitment among employees in diverse sectors (Agba, Festus & Ushie, 2010; Cigdem & Belgin, 2014).

This having been said, career mentorship among employees is not all that is required to nurture commitment among them. Motivation by way of rewards systems has also been found to foster commitment among employees. According to Katuma and Kwasira (2015), an effective system of rewarding employees acts as the catalyst or incentive that firms majoring in manufacturing can use to improve employees' job satisfaction and, in turn raise their levels of commitment. A number of studies demonstrate the potential of rewards to moderate various relationships.

Ming (2015) for instance documents the fact that reward moderates the bond between job performance and work engagement. Kowo et al. (2018) examines the potential of reward system used in organization to moderate in relationships targeting employee performance. Wei and Atuahene-Gima (2009) demonstrate the capacity of reward system to moderate the linkage between performance of products and market orientation in the Chinese context.

Despite manufacturing firms in Kenya investing in employee commitment by putting in place mechanisms for employee mentorship, it has been noted that employees still elicit low levels of commitment (KNBS, 2010). In the event that no evidence exists showing how reward systems can be employed to moderate in the enhancement of employee commitment, this study seeks to investigate the nexus that exists between career mentoring, reward system and commitment among employees in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Formulation

The current study was grounded on the five-phase model proposed by Greenhaus et al. (2010). The model posits that career progression encompasses identification of an appropriate career, setting achievable targets, scoping strategies and techniques that can lead to achievement of set targets, and progressing. This in essence implies that career progression is mainly individual driven, and the organization is left to play a peripheral role. On the basis of this model an individual is therefore expected to progress through five phases, including: preparing for work, entry into the organization, self establishment and aiming for high achievement, aiming to make achievements more tangible and solid, and preparing for retirement (Greenhaus et al., 2010).

Choice of the model developed by Greenhaus to underpin the current study was informed by the logic that career mentoring being a facet of career development, is fully in the individual employees' control. The employee is able to control when to seek mentorship, whom to seek it from and what nature of mentorship is needed. In this way, the five stages are deemed useful in the context of career mentoring and employee commitment. This is consistent with arguments that career patterns are becoming ever diverse such that individuals have the onus to be in control of decisions about their own career preferences.

Employee Commitment

The concept of employee commitment has attracted a lot of interest which has seen various attempts to define it. One such attempt perceives employee commitment from a multidimensional approach which recognizes the need for an employee to be emotionally attached, and involved in undertakings within the organization (affective). Besides, an employee ought to be conscious of the cost the organization incurs when he/she quits it (Continuance commitment), and the need to remain and be supportive of the organization (Normative commitment) (Meyer, Stanley & Parfyonova, 2012).

Different scholars underscore the importance of employee commitment in among others, improved service quality and continuous improvement initiatives due to enhanced levels of satisfaction, responsibility and loyalty (Lam, O'Donnell, & Robertson, 2015); taking on extra roles including creativity or innovation which maintains the organizations competitiveness (Pork, Christie & Skye, 2014); fostering innovative behaviour (Xerri & Brunetto, 2013); acceptance of change in the organization (Visagie & Steyn, 2011); and enhanced sharing of knowledge among employees (Demirel & Goc, 2013).

We therefore argue that employee commitment measured via affective, continuance and normative domains offers manufacturing firms in Kenya an opportunity to remain productive and sustainable, especially in these difficult times occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. We postulate that career mentoring has a role to play in employee commitment under appropriate reward systems.

Career Mentoring and Employee Commitment

Mentoring has been conceptualized variously among different scholars. According to Fletcher & Mullen (2012), mentoring involves a mentor who is often a person with more experience teaching and scaffolding the mentee /protégé who has less experience. Ramalho (2014) perceives mentoring at the work place as an act of guiding, empowering, caring, and educating workers to enhance their career progression. The Council of University Teaching Hospital on the other hand defines mentoring as an advisory role through which an experienced professional offers guidance to other individuals in order to achieve professional development (Mangione, 2018). Other

scholars have conceptualized mentoring as an interpersonal relationship between an older person and a younger one where the older person supports, guides and counsels the younger one (Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013).

The role of career mentoring in commitment and turn over intentions features significantly in existing literature. Kizil, Cetin and Zengin (2012) for instance, chose the Turkish context to analyze the impact that mentoring has on turnover intentions and commitment among Accounting–Finance academicians. Using a sample of 90 respondents, and analyzing data using both correlation and regression analyses, Kizil et al. (2012) affirmed that career development correlated positively with both affective and normative commitments. Moreover, career development statistically and significantly predicted normative commitment.

Hyung Park et al. (2016) examined the effect that mentoring functions have on turnover intentions under the mediation of employees' perceptions of the support they receive from the organization. They used data gathered from 176 employees drawn from three Chinese banks to establish that the link between employee turnover intentions and mentoring functions was partially mediated by perceived support from the organization. Hyung Park et al. (2016) in essence affirmed the need for other factors in relationships involving mentorship and turnover intentions thus justifying the aim of the current study.

Yang et al. (2019) probed how career mentoring affects turnover among employees of hotels across three Chinese provinces, under the mediation of organizational and occupation embeddedness. However, their study did not divulge any information with regards to the role of the rewards system. Hall and Smith (2009) meanwhile used firms specializing in public accounts to analyze the impact of mentoring on turn over intentions. Using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and partial least squares regression, they went on to show that career progression impacts directly on psychological empowerment and by extension on turnover intentions.

Onyia et al. (2019) used the Nigerian context to examine the need to re-think the role of mentorship in employee commitment in academia. Using a cross-sectional survey that involved 12 in-depth interviews, they revealed existence of a weak positive link between organizational commitment and mentoring. Nyamori (2015) focused on the SOS children's villages in the Kenyan context to analyze the effectiveness of workplace mentoring to impact on employee performance. Using the descriptive design, Nyamori concluded that mentorship encourages entrants into the job to set goals which they go on to meet. Other scholars have also explored the potential of mentorship to spur commitment (e.g Akpan, Owbor & Nsikan, 2017; Baxter, 2015).

It is apparent that the question of mentoring and organizational commitment has raised global interest. However, most studies concentrate more on the concept of mentoring in totality. There is little or no evidence to show how the various dimensions of mentoring such as career mentoring impacts on employee commitment. Moreover, there is a scarcity of studies examining career mentoring and commitment in the Kenyan context. Basing on this scenario, we question how career mentoring could impact on commitment among employees in manufacturing firms in Kenya. We postulate that;

H₀₁. Career mentoring has no statistically significant effect on employee commitment in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Rewards Systems as Moderators

Rewards systems have been identified as critical facets of the Human management function (Franco-Santos & Gomez- Mejia, 2015). According to Schulz as referenced by Strydom (2011), rewards are returns often in form of objects, money or events which an employee enjoys in return to an exemplary piece of work. The importance of rewards system has been documented through studies which show its impact on employee performance. Murphy (2015) for example established that rewards systems were perceived positively by employees but their success was pegged on the way they are designed. Muuo (2013) established that rewards system influenced the performance of primary teacher colleges located in Nairobi zone. Newman and Sheikh (2012) affirmed that rewards system was a driver to employee commitment in the Chinese airline context. Oyoo (2015) confirmed existence of a positive link between rewards system and commitment among employees of faith-based health organizations located in Kakamega County. Korir and Kipkebut (2016) attested that reward management was critical to employee commitment in the University context.

Several studies have also highlighted the moderating potential of rewards system in diverse relationships Kirwan, C. (2016) for example argued that reward systems albeit, based on the hierarchical format, moderate the organizational learning–management accounting link. Kowo et al. (2018) affirmed that reward system employed in the organization moderated the performance of employees. Wei and Atuahene-Gima as mentioned in Xie and Gao (2018) asserted that reward system moderated the link between new product performance and market orientation in the Chinese Context. Ming (2015) documented the moderating potential of reward in the bond involving engagement at work and performance on the job. From the array of studies highlighting the moderation potential of rewards system, it is clear that there is a scarcity of evidence on the capacity of reward systems to moderate relations involving employee commitment and particularly in the Kenyan context. We therefore presuppose that;

H₀₂: Reward Systems do not statistically and significantly moderate the bond between career mentoring and commitment among employees' working in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

In view of the hypotheses formulated, we adopted the following conceptual model.

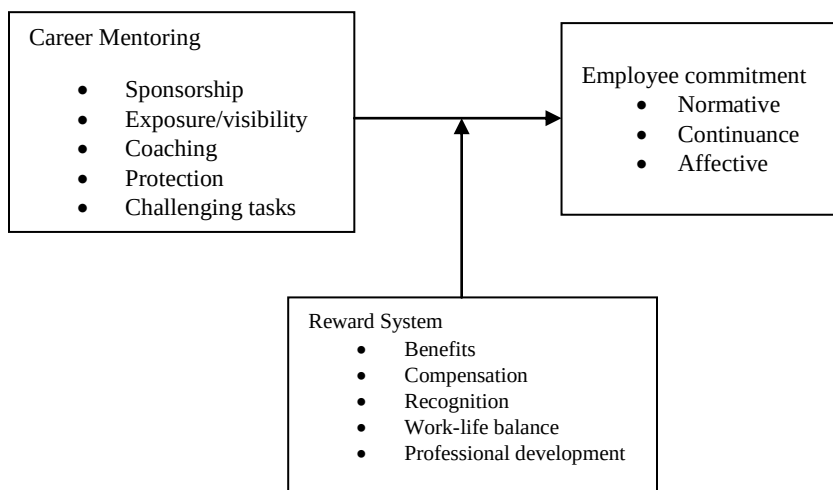


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study employed the explanatory design which has been identified as a suitable design for studies which involve cause-and-effect relationships (Niehaves& Ortbach, 2016). Choice of this design was based on the understanding that the link between career mentoring and employee commitment was a cause-effect one. Similarly, the moderating link was also deemed to be in the cause – effect realm.

Study Sample

The study targeted employees drawn from four manufacturing firms. Firms were sampled purposively basing on the criterion that they were specializing on manufacturing. Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgmental sampling has been found ideal in making deliberate choice of study sampling units or study units possessing qualities required for a study (Etikan, Abubakar &Alkassim, 2016). Stratified sampling, done across six critical departments including; Production, R&D, Purchasing, Marketing, Human Resource Management and Accounting and Finance; together with simple random sampling were used to select a study sample of 435 employees determined by Cochran's 1975 formula cited in Singh and Masuku (2014). The sampling units were the manufacturing firms while the study units were the selected employees. Data collection was conducted via a structured questionnaire consisting of three sections in line with the three constructs under study. This questionnaire was pilot tested on fifteen employees drawn from two manufacturing firms in Eldoret which were not part of the final study sample.

Variable Definition and Measurement

Three variables were conceptualized for the study (Table1). Employee commitment, conceptualized as the dependent variable was measured using normative, affective and continuance domains. A total of 24 items adopted from the scale by Meyer et al. as cited by Özdem (2012) were used to measure the three domains. Career mentoring was conceptualized as the independent variable and was measured using five domains including sponsorship, exposure/visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging tasks. A twelve-item scale developed by the John Hopkins University school of Nursing was adopted to measure the mentoring dimensions. The third variable, rewards system was conceptualized as the moderating variable and was measured using five elements including benefits, compensation, recognition, work-life balance, and professional development. A total of eight items were developed to measure rewards system

Table 1: Variable Definition and Measurement

Variable	Nature	Indicator	Scale/source
Career Mentoring	Independent	Sponsorship Exposure/visibility Coaching	Ordinal Van Vianen, Rosenauer, Homan, Horstmeier, & Voelpel (2018)
Rewards System	Moderator	Protection Challenging tasks Benefits Compensation Recognition Work-life balance Professional development	Ordinal Nnaji-Ihedinmah & Egbunike, (2015)
Employee Commitment	Dependent	Affective Normative Continuance	Ordinal Anitha (2016)

Source: Author, 2021

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. More specifically, means and standard deviations were used to show typical values of study variables; skewness and kurtosis statistics were used to examine normality of data distributions; frequencies and percentages were used to examine respondents' background statistics; regressions generated using Hayes' model 1 were used to test the direct effects of predictor variables; and the test of highest order unconditional interaction was used to test the moderating effect.

The study employed Hayes' Macro PROCESS approach for all the analyses performed. According to Hayes (2018), besides giving direct effects, PROCESS also generates conditional effects at varying levels of the moderator. Conditional values were customized at minus one standard deviation, at the mean, and at plus one standard deviation levels as lower, average, and high levels of rewards system respectively. All interactions were tested at the 0.05 level. Before conducting the analyses, data were tested for normality, multi-collinearity and serial correlation.

RESULTS

A response rate of 92.4% was registered from the sampled participants, and was deemed suitable on the basis of recommendations by Ramshaw (2018). Normality test results revealed skewness values in the range [-0.313, 0.058] and Kurtosis values in the range [-0.271, 0.100] indicating non-violation of the assumption of normality. There were no issues of multi-collinearity as depicted by variance inflation factors (VIF) of 1. Lack of serial correlation was affirmed by Durbin-Watson (DW) statistics of 1.876 and 1.754 respectively for the independent and moderating variables. The small values of standard deviation indicate that respondents were consistent in their response to the variable items.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
Career Mentoring	3.58	.717	-.118	.122	-.213	.243
Reward System	3.55	.716	.058	.122	-.271	.243
Employee Commitment	4.09	.656	-.313	.122	.100	.243

Source: Author, 2021

The analysis of background characteristics revealed that a majority of the respondents were male (71.9%) with most of them (43.5%) aged between 31 years and 40 years; and a more or less even distribution in terms of tenure whereby 29.6% had a tenure of below 10 years; 35.8% a tenure of between 11 to 20 years; and 29.9% a tenure of between 21-30 years. These results imply that most employees in manufacturing firms in Kenya were males, and that the firms are able to retain their employees for a longer period.

Table 3: Background Characteristics

		n	%
Gender	Female	113	28.1
	Male	289	71.9
	Total	402	100.0
Age	Below 20	11	2.7
	21-30	107	26.6
	31-40	175	43.5
	41-50	101	25.1
	Above 51	8	2.0
	Total	402	100.0
Tenure	Less than 10	119	29.6
	11-20	144	35.8
	21-30	120	29.9
	More than 30	19	4.7
	Total	402	100.0

Source: Author, 2021

The Hayes moderation output (Table 4) revealed the following; the conceptualized moderation model was a good fit to the data, $F(3, 398) = 34.090$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = .204$. Career mentoring had a positive and significant direct effect on employee commitment; $b = 0.138$, $t(398) = 3.246$, $p < 0.05$; a unit increase in career mentoring resulted in 0.138 units increase in employee commitment. Similarly, if rewards system was to be linked directly to employee commitment, it would have a positive and significant direct effect on employee commitment, $b = 0.305$, $t(398) = 7.222$, $p < 0.05$. Thus, a unit increase in rewards system would result in 0.305 units increase in employee commitment.

Table 4: Moderation for Career Mentoring and Employee Commitment
Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.452	.204	.345	34.090	3.00	398.00	.000
Model						
		Coeff	SE	t	p	LLCI
Constant		4.121	.030	137.395	.000	4.062
Career Mentoring		.138	.043	3.246	.001	.055
Rewards System		.305	.042	7.222	.000	.222
Interaction		-.204	.051	-4.017	.000	-.303

Source: Author, 2021

Results of the test of highest order unconditional interaction confirmed that rewards system moderated the relationship between career mentoring and employee commitment, $\Delta R^2 = 0.0323$, $p < 0.05$. The output for the conditional effects of career mentoring on employee commitment at various levels of rewards system as displayed in Table 5 reveals the following: for low rewards system, every unit of career mentoring yielded 0.029 units of employee commitment; $b = 0.029$, $t(398) = .440$, $p > 0.05$. The increase was however non significant; for average rewards system, each unit of career mentoring yielded 0.150 units of employee commitment; $b = .150$, $t(398) = 3.244$, $p < 0.05$; and for high rewards system, each unit of career mentoring yielded 0.271 units of employee commitment; $b = .271$, $t(398) = 5.228$, $p < .001$.

Table 5: Slopes for Career Mentoring predicting Employee Commitment at each level of rewards system

Rewards System	Effect (Career Mentoring)	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Low	.029	.066	.440	.660	-.101	.160
Average	.150	.046	3.244	.001	.059	.241
High	.271	.052	5.228	.000	.169	.373

Source: Author, 2021

The results clearly show that career mentoring significantly impacts on employee commitment in manufacturing firms in Kenya when rewards system is high. In summary, the hypothesis alluding that career mentoring has no statistically significant effect on employee commitment in manufacturing firms in Kenya was rejected. Similarly, the hypothesis claiming that reward Systems do not statistically and significantly moderate the bond between career mentoring and commitment among employees' working in manufacturing firms in Kenya was also rejected.

DISCUSSIONS

The study affirmed that career mentoring has a positive and significant effect on employee commitment in manufacturing firms in Kenya. Perhaps the main contribution of this study was to show that rewards system moderates the link between career mentoring and employee commitment where upon, average and high rewards system increase the effects of career mentoring on employee commitment.

In doing so, the study highlights important implications for the theory and practice of employee commitment. Theoretically, the study reinforces Greenhous et al. (2010) five phase model by showing, that besides identifying appropriate careers, setting achievable targets, scoping strategies, and aiming to progress, employees also require rewards system that among others, takes care of their work-life balance, recognition and professional development. Consequently, future discourse on the model by Greenhous et al. (2010) may consider a phase that focuses on anticipated rewards.

Moreover, by finding that rewards system moderates the bond between career mentoring and employee commitment in manufacturing firms in Kenya, the study adds to existing literature on moderating potential of rewards system albeit, from a Kenyan manufacturing firm context. Previous studies have explored contexts such as teacher education (Muuo, 2013); Chinese airline context (Newman & Sheikh, 2012); and management accounting context (Shuhui, & Soon Yau, 2004).

Managerial-wise, the study findings underscore the importance of rewards system in employee commitment even, in situations where elaborate career mentoring systems are in place. This information stands to benefit management of manufacturing firms and other business stakeholders when designing career mentoring programmes. Integrating rewards system within career mentoring designs is bound to maximize employee empowerment and by extension, organizational performance. The moderation results give the basis on which to invest in rewards system given that average and high rewards system are likely to enhance the slope of the direct effect of career mentoring on employee commitment. Indeed, it has been documented that rewards system are critical in human management (Franco-Santos & Gomez-Mejia, 2015).

Limitations

The main limitation of the current study is the reliance on questionnaires in data collection. Questionnaires have been known to lose reliability when for instance, respondents fail to provide accurate and honest answers; or may not feel comfortable responding to some items. Moreover, closed-ended questions often lower validity (DeFranzo, 2012). The second limitation is the fact that the study relied only on employees' views, and did not consider inputs of the firm's management and the views of other manufacturing stakeholder like Kenya Association of manufacturers (KAM).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although career mentoring has a positive and significant influence on the commitment of employees in manufacturing firms in Kenya, such influence can be enhanced by integrating rewards system when developing career mentoring programmes. Investing in compensating and rewarding employees, as well as, in recognizing their efforts, allowing them to balance their work-life and taking care of their professional development are components of a rewards system that strengthens the effect of career mentoring on employee commitment. However, future studies should aim to triangulate data collection techniques to improve reliability and validity of the findings. Moreover, opinions of firms' management and that of other manufacturing stakeholders need to be taken into consideration.

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