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WORK ENGAGEMENT: THE PREDICTIVE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AMONG NIGERIAN BANKERS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of psychological empowerment in predicting work engagement among Nigerian bankers. One hundred and eighty-three (183) bankers (87 males and 96 females) participated in the study. They were drawn from six (6) banks: First Bank, Access Bank, Fidelity Bank, Zenith Bank Plc, Union Bank Plc, and United Bank of Africa Plc (UBA). Two instruments were used for the collection of data which includes: Psychological Empowerment Scale and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9). A convenience sampling technique was used to select the participants. Data collected were analyzed using regression analysis and the hypothesis tested. The result showed that Psychological empowerment significantly predicted work engagement among Nigerian bankers ($\beta = 64$, $p<.001$). Findings and implications for managerial practices in the study were discussed and put forward. Limitations of the study were stated and suggestions made for further research.

Keywords: Work Engagement; Predictive Role; Psychological Empowerment; Bankers.

Introduction

Engagement refers to a situation whereby serious attention, including time and energy is given to perform specific tasks or roles. Engagement as an organizational construct was first defined by an ethnographic researcher; Kahn as cited in Men (2015) refers to engagement as an act of harnessing organizational members potentials to execute their work roles. In this regard, Rothbard (2001) defined engagement as a psychological state composed of attention, which refers to "cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role," and absorption, which refers to "being engrossed in a role and…to the intensity of one's focus on a role" (p. 656). Engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, efficacy, vigor, dedication and a positive state, as opposed to cynicism and inefficacy (Saks, 2006). Beyond the psychological aspect, Haven as cited in Men (2015) defined engagement as the level of involvement, interaction, intimacy, and influence an individual has with an organization or product over time. Similarly, Macey and Schneider (2008) defined engagement in three levels: trait engagement (disposition and cognition), physiological state

engagement (affection and emotions), and behavioural engagement (behaviours). Gallup (2006) also defined employees in three levels of engagement: Engaged (employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward) Not-Engaged (employees are essentially 'checked out'. They're sleepwalking through their workday, putting time – but not energy or passion – into their work), and the Actively Disengaged (employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish

In Nigeria, Employee engagement affects the quality of service in banks with a consequent effect on customer satisfaction and ultimate performance. Therefore, many firms strive to create high engagement amongst their employees. Engaged employees demonstrate attributes such as loyalty, trust and commitment to the organization. When employees are satisfied and engaged with their work, they are more creative and innovative and offer advances that allow companies to evolve positively over time with changes in market conditions. It means organizations (banks) that desire to improve their performance must be concerned about internal issues related to employee engagement and view their employees as customers too.

It makes sense that the enthusiasm and interest which fully engaged employees bring to their work each day would be directly tied to both a more unified workplace culture and the extra efforts, better ideas and innovations that make organizations thrive. Many banks have limited their hiring in recent years due to a slow economic recovery and uncertain economic conditions, making employee engagement even more important as staff try to do more. Keeping this in mind it is essential to understand the factors that influence employee engagement among the Nigerian banks.

In recent times, many organizations in the Nigerian banking industry, have recorded cases of immoral and unethical banking practices, gratifications, high labour turnover, inability to meet basic required obligations, and incessant financial distress syndrome, which has led to many banks being merged and acquired (Egwuonwu, 2015; Ojokuku, Odetayo, & Sajuyigbe, 2012). Nonetheless, due to the changing nature of the economy, the banking sector is expected to play a vital role in the Nigerian business economy, but the system has experienced many short falls due to fraud, employee disengagement, selfish interests of employees, mismanagement, inexperience and the initial absence of regulatory laws and authorities (Ojedokun, 2008). This may be as a result of poor psychological empowerment. Previous research has also shown that some of the problems highlighted above correlate with employees' disengagement within their jobs (Ojedokun, 2008, Ogungbamila, 2010; Essien, 2017). Therefore, it becomes very important for the banks to have an engaged workforce if they are to survive. The prime motive of many organizations is to achieve its stated objectives which includes efficiency, engagement and achievement of set goals, hence the need to effectively coordinate and

motivate the workers by proper empowerment.

Recently, empowerment has received much attention from researchers due to its importance in enhancing practices of management. For example, almost 70% of organizations especially banks have implemented empowerment to their work due to its main role in affecting management practices and engagement (Abdulrab, Zumrah, Almaamar & Altahitah, 2017; Ebrahimi & Khodaverdi, 2015; Lawler, Mohrman, & Benson, 2001). Previous research suggest that empowerment is a common condition which has considerable impact on work engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, service quality, performance, effectiveness and productivity(Abdulrab, Zumrah , Almaamar & Altahitah 2017; Chang, Shih, & Lin, 2010; Dewettinck & van Ameijde, 2011; Joo & Shim, 2010; Najafi, Noruzy, Azar, Nazari-Shirkouhi, & Dalvand, 2011; Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011; Short & Johnson, 1994). Therefore research accounting for the predictive role of psychological empowerment among Nigerian bankers is worthwhile. Findings from such a study can be of immense value in understanding employee engagement within the banking industry of Nigeria. Therefore, the central aim of this study is to examine the role of psychological empowerment in predicting work engagement among Nigerian bankers. We hypothesised that Psychological empowerment will predict work engagement among Nigerian bankers.

Research Method

A total of one hundred and eighty three (183) bank employees participated in the study. These participants were drawn from six (6) banks in Enugu State which include First Bank (32), Access Bank, Fidelity Bank and Zenith Bank Plc, Union Bank Plc, and United Bank of Africa (UBA). The researchers employed a convenience sampling technique because every available and willing banker in these six banks was sampled. These banks have of their branches located in Nsukka and Enugu urban centers. The participants age range from 25 to 54 years (M=41.85, SD=6.47). Eighty-seven (87) (47.5%) were males while ninety-six (96) (52.5%) were females. Among the participants, 46(25.14%) had NCE/OND, 58(31.70%) had HND, 14(7.65%) had PGD/PGDE, 37(20.22%) had BSc, 22(12.02%) had MSc, 6(3.28%) had PHD, 18(9.86%) are Managers, 35(19.13%) are Assistant Managers, 12(6.56%) are Business Focus, 28(15.30%) are Operations and Compliance, 69(37.70%) are Teller, and 21(11.48%) are Customer Service. Their duration of service ranged from 1-30 years. The distribution is as follows: (1-10(63.4%), 11-20(33.9%), and 21-30 (2.7%).

The two instruments (psychological empowerment scale and employee work engagement scale) were administered by the researchers to the participants during their work days/hours. A letter of identification obtained from Department of Psychology was attached to the instruments. The research respondents were assured of high level of confidentiality in treating their responses. This was to help establish rapport and enable them freely express their view on each of the

items on the questionnaire. With the assistance of two research assistants (bank staff) in these banks copies of this questionnaire were distributed to the bankers. The copies of the questionnaire were shared to the bankers during their rest period by research assistants in their units. Every available and willing banker was given a copy of the questionnaire. The participants were encouraged to fill the questionnaire within two days as the researchers would be available to collect them within the specified period. However, it took up to two weeks for most of these copies of the questionnaire to be collected through the help of the assistants in each of these banks visited. The researcher later returned to the banks and collected the returned copies from the research assistants. Out of the 220 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 197 were completed and returned. This represents a percentage return of 89.54%. Fourteen (14) copies (7.49%) of this number were also discarded as a result of improper completion, leaving 183 (92.89%) properly filled. The 183 returned and properly filled copies were used for the study.

Measures

Two instruments were used in this study. They include: Psychological Empowerment Scale (Spreitzer, 1993), and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Psychological Empowerment Scale (PES)

The Psychological Empowerment Scale (PES) is a 12-item instrument that was developed by Spreitzer (1993, 1995) to measure the four dimensions of psychological empowerment as conceptualized by Spreitzer (1993, 1995), Thomas and Velthouse (1990). According to Spreitzer, (1993), psychological empowerment represents a second-order construct consisting of four factors or dimensions, namely; meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. You may use the sub-dimensions individually (taking the mean of the 3 items measuring one dimension) or take the mean of those sub-dimension means to create an overall empowerment score. The instrument has been used successfully in more than 50 different studies in contexts ranging from nurses to low wage service workers to manufacturing workers. The validity of the instrument was obtained using construct, predictive and content validity measures, which were good. Test retest-reliability has been shown to be strong and validity estimates for the dimensions are typically around .80(Spritzer, 1995). Each item loaded strongly on the appropriate factor with loading ranging from .66 to .90, a goodness of fit was obtained (AGFI= .925, RMSEA= .044). As expected, the four factors were moderately correlated with each other, ranging from .35 to .64, suggesting that the dimensions were indeed related, yet distinct from unity (i.e., four distinct factors). In addition, the composite reliability of each scale exceeded acceptable standard of .60, ranging from .79 for competence to .88 to impact. (Spritzer, 1995). The instrument's response options are as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Undecided (U), 2 = Agree (A), to 5 = Strongly Agree (SA). Sample items are: **"**I have significant autonomy in determining

how I do my job" and "The work I do is meaningful to me".

In Nigeria, the psychological empowerment scale was also subjected to reliability test. A total of 76 bankers drawn from Key Stone Bank and Stanbic IBTC Bank branches in Nsukka and Enugu, Nigeria participated in the pilot study for re-validation of the instrument. The inter–item correlation of the 12 items ranged from .61 to .93, with internal consistency reliability estimate of Cronbach alpha = .96. To obtain the validity properties of the Psychological Empowerment Scale (Spreitzer, 1993), for Nigerian sample, the instruments were subjected to face validity. The scales were presented to seven judges in the field of psychology. These are lecturers in the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The judges were asked to go through the items and indicate the extent to which they measure the construct. Afterwards, the judges responded that the instrument is a standard tools for measuring the variable

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9)

The employee work engagement was measured using the shortened version of 9 items (the UWES-9) adopted from the UWES-17 developed by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002) to assess a worker's level of psychological and emotional fatigue as a result of the day's work. The shortened version of 9 items (UWES-9) Schaufeli et al. (2006) was grouped into three subscales that reflect the underlying dimensions of engagement: Vigour(3 items), Dedication(3 items), and Absorption(3 items). Vigour is characterized by high energy levels and mental resilience while working. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and challenge. Absorption entails being fully concentrated and happily engulfed in one's work, whereby time quickly and one has difficulties with separating oneself work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). It is a measure of how motivated people are to put in extra effort for their organization, and a sign of how committed they are to staying there. The validity of the UWES-9 was demonstrated using confirmatory factor analysis, and the three subscale scores have good internal consistency and test-test reliability across countries. (Schaufeli et al., 2006) which was also confirmed by Seppala, et al., (2008) utilizing five divergent occupational samples (N= 11,959). Model ($\chi 2$= 4894.11, df = 72, GFI= .88, AGFI= .72, RMSEA= .08, NFI= .84, NNFI= .74, CFI= .85). All items are scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0(Never), 6(Always). Sample items include: "At my work, I feel bursting with energy", and "I feel happy when I am working intensely".

Ugwu (2013) adapted the UWES-9 for Nigerian samples by subjecting it to reliability test using 268 respondents. The result showed that item-total correlations ranged from .41 to .66. For the individual scales, vigour dimension has α of .76, dedication has .79, and absorption has .74. The 9 items yielded alpha of .91. A test-retest reliability coefficient of .87 after three weeks interval was also obtained.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from participants were analysed using the Statistical for the Package Social Sciences (SPSS) 23.0 .Pearson's correlation was conducted to establish the relationship of the variables in the study. We used hierarchical multiple regression to predict employee work engagement from psychological empowerment. The hierarchical multiple regression analysis allowed us to determine the unique contribution of predictor to work engagement.

Presentation of Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 1 while results of the hierarchical multiple regressions are displayed in Table 2.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of the relationship among the demographic variables (gender, marital status, age, educational qualification, job position and years of service in banking), psychological empowerment and work engagement among bankers.

S/N	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Age	2.23	.683	-						
2	Gender	-	-	-.37***	-					
3	Yrser	-	-	.36***	.03	-				
4	Qual	-	-	.19*	-.04	.40***	-			
5	Ms	-	-	.50***	-.36***	.17*	.15*	-		
6	Jobpo	-	-	.23**	-.13	.16*	.30***	.50***	-	
7	WKE	40.58	12.11	.29***	-.14	.03	-.00	.11	.22**	-
8	PEM	48.25	10.09	.43***	-.24**	.32***	.09	.40***	.42***	.62***

Note* *P*< .05, ***P* < .01, ****P* < .001

WkE=Work Engagement, Gen=gender (male=1, female=2), ms=marital status (single=1, married=2), qual=Educational qualification (SSCE=1, NCE/OND=2, HND/DEDREE=3, PGD/PGDE=4, Maters=5, Ph. D=6, others specify=7), Jobpo= Job position, Yrser= Years of service in banking, PEM= Psychological empowerment.

The result on the correlation table showed that older age was associated with being a male (r = 37, p < .001), more years of service (r = .36, p < .001), higher educational qualification (r = .19, p < .05), married couples(r = .50, p < .001), higher job position(r = .23, p < .01). Furthermore, Female was associated with being unmarried people (r = - .36, p < .001) and less psychologically empowered (r = -.24, p < .01).Again, more years of service correlated with higher educational qualification (r = .40, p < .001), married couples (r = .17, p < .05) higher job position(r = .16, p < .05) and higher work engagement(r = 32, p < .001). Also, Higher educational qualification was associated with married couples (r = .15,p < .05) and higher job position (r = .30,p < .001) .Moreover, married couples correlated with higher job position (r = .50,p < .001) and higher work engagement(r= .40,p < .001).Higher job position was associated with

more work engagement(r = .22,p < .01) and higher psychological empowerment(r = .42,p < .001).Above all, work engagement was positively associated with psychological empowerment(r = .62, p < .001).

Table 2: Hierarchical Multiple Regression table showing the demographics (gender, marital status, age, job position, and years of service), psychological empowerment and work engagement among bankers.

Predictors	**Step 1**			**Step2**		
	B	**β**	**T**	**B**	**B**	**t**
PEM	.74	.62	10.56***	.64	.54	10.18***
Gen				-2.24	-.07	-1.32
Ms				5.17	.19	2.82
Age				.56	.03	.48
Jobpo				.83	.15	2.60*
Yrser				5.41	.24	4.51***
R^2	.38			.58		
ΔR^2	.38			.20		
F	111.53(1,181)***			40.29(6,176)***		
ΔF^2	111.53(1,181)***			16.50(5,176) ***		

Note: **p < .01; ***p < .001; $^{\Delta}$**R^2 =** Change in R^2; ΔF = Change in F; B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; β = Standardized regression coefficient. Gen=gender; MS=marital status; Jobpo= Job position, Yrser= Years of service in banking, PEM= Psychological empowerment. Educational qualification did not correlate with the working variable and was not included in regression analysis.

Results of the hierarchical multiple regressions is shown in Table 2 Age, gender, marital status, job position and years of service were included in step 2 of the regression analysis as control variables due to their significant relationship with work engagement and psychological empowerment in the correlation table.

In step 1,psychological empowerment significantly predicted work engagement (β=.62,p < .001).The contribution of psychological empowerment in explaining the variance in work engagement was 38% (R^2 = .38) and the model was significant(1,181) = 111.53, p < .001,R^2= .38 In step 2, control variables gender, marital status and age did not significantly predict work engagement respectively (β =-. 07, t = -1.32; β = .19, t = 2.82; β = .03,t = .48). Job position and years of service were significant positive predictor of work engagement respectively (β =.15,p < .05;β =.24, p < .001).The contribution of control variables (gender, marital status, age, job position and years of service) in explaining the variance in work engagement was 20% ($\Delta R2$ .20) and the entire model was significant overall, F(5,176) = 16.50,p < .001)$R2$ = .58.

Discussion of Findings

Banking sector in Nigeria is facing numerous challenges along with mergers and acquisitions, which lead to issues of job insecurity, increased job uncertainty which aggravate the quality of working conditions. Again, despite employee engagement being an important ingredient to employee productivity, there is limited empirical research that has been conducted on the subject matter in relation to commercial banks in Nigeria. Thus, the need to investigate the predictive roles of psychological empowerment on employee engagement among Nigerian bank workers.

We tested whether Psychological empowerment would predict work engagement among Nigerian bank workers in Enugu State. The result shows that psychological empowerment predicted work engagement among bankers (β = .64, $p<.001$). The result of the present study collaborates the separate findings of Arogundade, and Odoh, (2017), Stander and Rothmann (2010), De Villiers and Stander, (2011) Mendes and Stander, (2011) which established a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement. This supports the assertion that psychological empowerment improves positive work outcomes such as work engagement. Researchers look at psychological empowerment as an intrinsic task motivation which reflective of the person–environment fit (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Bankers whose behaviours are characterized by increased levels of activation and intrinsic motivation as they perform their tasks manifest psychological empowerment. When workers are empowered through supportive supervisors and supervision, they believe that their organization offers opportunities for growth, or feel positively about themselves and their capabilities, they become more likely to perceive that their work aligns with their personal beliefs and values, which, in turn, makes them become more engaged in their work. Specifically, employees who feel positive about themselves and their capabilities become more psychologically empowered, which led them to become more engaged in their work. It is reasonable to assume that if employees think their organization offers opportunities for growth, they become engaged.

The implications of the present study are that employers should focus more on developing psychological empowerment to their employees to have engaged workforce. The management should understand the values of engagement and thereby develop their employees to experience empowerment through understanding meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. The study focuses on work engagement as it is believed that employees would be engaged both on their work and organization.Furthermore, in order to create engaged and productive workforces organizations should conduct interventions focused on the meaning (empowerment) of job resources because these have been found to promote personal resources and (consequently) work engagement. The results of the current study indicate that empowerment seems to be an important mechanism of employees becoming engaged, given that they have job and personal

resources in their work. Because of the numerous positive outcomes associated with employee engagement, and based on the results of the current study, organizations may want to place their employees into positions where the work is aligned with their personal value set in order to create meaning. Organizations may want to assess job candidates' beliefs and values, and use this information to place them in a position or create tasks or assignments that provide meaning. Employees who are engaged with high psychological empowerment are more trustworthy; demonstrate a positive attitude towards their work and organization which eventually improve their working life. Empowered employees are more likely to agree with changes if they participate in decision making.

However, the study has some limitations, including its cross-sectional design, use of self –report measures, and our inability to cover 36 states in Nigeria. The study covered only one state. Future studies are encouraged to cover more states and geo-political zones. The sample size, among others factors, may affect sizes and the power of the results. The challenges involved in getting a large sample of bankers considering their tight schedules and nonchalant attitude towards responding to questionnaire is huge. Our inability to use random sampling technique is another limitation.

In conclusion, despite these limitations, this study examined the possible relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement and this study was undertaken because today's jobs require more creative thinking and organizations especially banking sector require more engaged and committed employees to succeed. This study also provides a great value to knowledge of psychological empowerment as one of the key variables that define work engagement among bankers. Showing the strength of the result, human resource managers have to recognize the centrality importance in adopting an empowerment strategy, and its important antecedents that can be realized for the interest of the organization. Banks should apply and adopt empowerment as one of the new approaches in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM), giving insights to the strategic role that such strategies of the HRM can plays in boosting banks performance. Finally, employee engagement can be utilized as a mediator to enhance the behaviour, intention and attitudes of employees towards a better work performance. This will help to retain talented employees, who are happier and healthier, as well as potentially better performing (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004); positioning them to compete more effectively in the 21st Century work environment. An engaged employee would be a valuable organizational asset and serve as an important resource to improve employees' reputability so as to sustain work engagement.

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