Relationship between Manager's Empathy and Leadership Performance in Kenya

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Abstract: *There is a need to help managers at the South Eastern Kenya University to attain higher levels of empathy. This is because empathy is known to have a strong influence on leadership performance. This study focused on the relationship between manager's empathy and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya. The study was conducted in South Eastern Kenya University. It targeted all the 75 managers in the 75 Departments at South Eastern Kenya University. Each of these departments is headed by one manager.4 out of the 75 managers were used for pilot study leaving the researcher with a sample of 71. The researcher employed purposive and census sampling techniques in selecting a sample of 71 respondents. It employed an ex post facto research design. The researcher tried to relate this after - the - fact treatment to an outcome. The target population included all the 75 managers in South Eastern Kenya University. Data was collected through administration of structured questionnaires with the selected respondents. The questionnaire used a five - point range Likert scale to assess strategic managers' empathy and leadership performance. The collected data was then processed and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) version 28.0 for windows. The findings of the study showed that there is a strong positive (r = 0.831, p=0.000) relationship between empathy and leadership performance. The findings of this study could help universities to boost the level of manager's empathy and this in turn may lead to the improvement in leadership performance. The study recommends that: the University administration should continually train their staff on the relationship between the managers' empathy and leadership Performance; they should employ personnel with high degree of empathy skills through conducting interviews with questionnaires that assess these attributes and invest heavily in teamwork activities so that they may have employees who have high degree of empathy.*

Keywords: Empathy, Managers, Leadership Performance

1. Introduction

Leadership performance is said to be the leader's potential to positively influence subordinates and the rest of the stakeholders to achieve the targets of the entity (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2005) while empathy is defined as the potential to identify and react to a person's unspoken feelings (Goleman, 1998). Leadership performance is becoming very essential due to competitive working environment and globalization of the firms. The international presence of the firms creates pressure to the employees to perform and sustain it. Managers are required to meet clients' expectations and retain the employee's performance (Dobre, 2013). These managers are required to manage and solve conflicts. They should be able to identify problems, conflicts and to identify skill to resolve it (MindTools, 2020). To sustain a good environment within the organization, managers are expected to be in a position to come up with proper skills of handling their emotions and ensure harmony among employees' character and their own reactions (Barsade & O'Neill, 2016). Research has shown that good leadership has continued to be important for quickly changing entities (Yukl, 2002). This has caused concerted research efforts on leadership gaining speed of which empathy of managers has been identified as a critical potential thing required for effective leadership to be achieved.

Many researchers have not attached importance to emotions in the past study of organizational management in the working environment. The workplace was seen as a acceptable environment where emotions would prevent the art of sound judgment. For this reason, emotions were not even seen as explanation for workplace phenomenon (Grandey, 2000). Effective managers also have a high level of emotional intelligence forces, among them empathy. It has now become recognized as an important part of management (Mwania, Mwakhamah &Nyamboga).

Goleman (1998) argues that a person can possess the best education in the globe but still will not make an effective manager. Empathy is one of the attributes that form emotional intelligence force. Poor empathy is one of the key issues of the dark part of management (Austin et al., 2007). For example, it is known that in a number of occasions for managers to show high sense of urgency to realize pressing targets, but, when juniors' expectations are not taken into account, the intended purpose may not be effectively realized. This is commonly found in settings where there is need for working together and inputs across the entity (Watkins et al., 2017). Research has established that empathy is very important in realizing organizational targets and excelling in dynamic settings (Eby, Adams, Russell, et al.2000). Empathy has become recognized as an important part of management. Several researchers have asserted that this force is a very important attribute that influence leadership performance (Jasleen & Anupam, 2019).

Several studies have been conducted globally on the relationship between empathy and leadership performance. Findings indicate that there are many research gaps that need to be addressed. In the United States of America, they have been able to see a relationship between empathy and effective leadership performance. O'Boyle and colleagues (2011) established that a strong relationship between work performance and empathy.

A study done in South Africa on empathy and transformation leadership and which used Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire on 314 associates, leaders, peers and subordinates revealed positive correlation between empathy and transformation leadership style (Vrba, 2007). In the developing economy setting like Africa, matters of leadership performance and empathy have not attracted reasonable research attention (Mushtaq & Aashiq, 2018), and the few studies done in the African setting, Kenya included are not in the university sector.

Kenya has not lagged behind in the desire to have effective leaders with the expected qualities and attributes of good managers (CoK, 2010). The Kenyan Constitution places leadership and integrity framework in chapter six to make sure that leaders meet the expected attributes. The clause says that all state officers are servants and not rulers and that those who misuse their offices will be disqualified from ever occupying public office any other time, over and above other punishment. There is little literature available in Kenya on the relationship between empathy and leadership performance. Empirical studies conducted so far are on empathy and leadership styles. Mwangi, Mukulu, and Kabare (2011) argue that the use of empathy is animportant part of transformational leadership in Public Universities. These authors found that there is a significant link between empathy and transformational leadership.

For an organization to succeed in this transformation period, managers in all areas of employment should be emotionally stable to coordinate and manage dynamic employees and to promote both personal and leadership performance (Mwania, Mwakhamah & Nyamboga). This study is expected to improve the body of knowledge on leadership performance and empathy. The findings may enable university leaders to improve their strategic empathy which would perhaps improve performance and bring change in the area of leadership performance. Leadership performance and empathy are becoming very important factors in leadership performance in that they give a competitive advantage to leaders in providing an environment where all the stakeholders are satisfied. This study focuses on the assessment of the relationship between managers' empathy and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University.

2. Literature Review

To remain competitive it is necessary that strategic managers acquire empathy skills to enable them to relate effectively to different groups of workers, in order to attain good outcomes needed in the current global market (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002). Goleman (1995) argues that empathy is a compulsory attribute for managers for it can encourage, motivate, create vision, and propel others to greater leadership performance. Further, Goleman (1995) pointed out that empathy has a crucial role in leadership performance for empathy enables managers to link with their people. Empathy promotes connections between employees so that each one is included and no one feels excluded. This means that an empathic strategic manager is seen as a productive leader (Cockerell, 2009). An effective strategic manager increases worker's optimism, motivation, and dedication, as well as entity's

vision (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). McCuddy and Cavin (2008) point out that in the fast growing world market there are more strategic managers who are working in different parts of the world with different distances and cultural boundaries. They may be required to understand multicultural differences, have unique knowledge of organizational operations, have good time management strategies, and be in a position to work and reason beyond traditional boundaries.

This implies that strategic managers should be in a position to see the world through the lens of others. Thus, strategic managers should gain empathy to provide characteristics that are required for effective global leadership performance. Empathy is said to be a skill of getting to understand other people's feelings, predicaments, and obstacles better.

Marques (2010) argues that empathy skills enable strategic managers to perceive better other peoples' arguments and ideas, making the context of work more exciting and highly productive. He continues to argue that, to attain leadership performance effectiveness, strategic managers should develop empathy techniques to the highest level for empathy promotes a sense of leadership performance by enabling strategic managers with the awareness to listen to others, serve them, and have good understanding of relationships within the unit. For this reason, subordinates may be more likely to put effort and commitment in their performance to the unit. According to Gardner and Stough (2002), by putting themselves in the similar position as their subordinates, strategic managers are employing empathy to promote motivation of their subordinates by gaining their trust. Goleman et al. (2002) point out that empathy enables strategic managers to increase their potential and desire to understand circumstances, and accept suggested changes and ideas of other people. Empathy helps strategic managers to be sensitive to other people so that they may encourage an atmosphere of freedom, making these strategic managers more dynamic and open to new opinions and ideas that promote effective leadership performance (Goleman, 2001). Empathy is increasingly becoming critical to the productive leadership performance since empathic strategic managers are more expected to portray an appropriate level of openness about diverse opinions and the differences in cultures (Atwater & Waldman, 2008). Martinovski, Traum, and Marsella (2007) point out that empathy plays a critical purpose in building trust in strategic manager - subordinate relationships. Further, Gardner and Stough (2002) argue that strategic managers can also utilize positive emotions to promote trust from their subordinates and promote bonding through their skills of understanding others. Adaptability gives strategic managers an upper hand in cross - cultural situations and bars them from annoying employees (Stull, 1986). Mahsud, Yukl, and Prussia (2010) argue that empathy helps strategic managers to gain an important knowledge of new social contexts, and enables them to quickly learn and adapt to new contexts. In the same way, empathy skills also enable strategic managers to have a positive attitude towards adapting to new contexts and trends which promote a collaborative environment.

Cicero, Pierro, and Van Knippenberg (2010) point out that leadership performance is defined by a strategic manager's

ability to bring together and influence subordinates. In the past two decades, significant research addressing the relationship between empathy and leadership success has been conducted (Choi, 2006). For instance, Rosete and Ciarrochi (2005) show that empathy plays a critical role in effective leadership performance. This is so because empathy promotes dynamic interpersonal skills, which encourage workers and increase the leader's effectiveness (Undung & Guzman, 2009). Empathy enables strategic managers to gain power to read between the lines; thus, make them able to come up with good decisions. From the study we also establish that higher empathy skills promote higher leadership performance effectiveness as well as good organizational performance.

3. Theoretical Framework

This research study was guided by Goleman's (1998) emotional intelligence theory. The model has five key components of emotional intelligence forces of which empathy is one of them. According to this theory, an emotional intelligence force is applied to achieve goals and targets, as well as bring about a happier and healthier working environment and culture. Emotions influence strategic manager's team. A good example is when a strategic manager experiencing mood swing, lacking empathy, makes negative and biased choices. A strategic manager, experiencing bad mood, with heightened empathy recognizes and sets apart negativity, refocusing on the work at hand. If a strategic manager has good empathy skills, they know and feel well and satisfied with themselves. They are able to understand their strengths and weaknesses, how they respond in certain contexts and to specific individuals. This kind of information provides them with the ability to meet targets and create a fair and all inclusive culture.

Research Design
The study utilized *ex - post –facto* research design. This is a design in which the researcher, rather than creating the treatment, examines the effects of a naturalistically occurring treatment after that treatment has occurred (Kathuri & Pals, 1993). The researcher attempted to relate this after - the - fact treatment to an outcome or dependent measure. In this kind of a research, the treatment was included by selection rather than manipulation. For this reason, it is not always possible to assume a simple causative relation between independent and dependent variables. If the relation fails to be obtained, then it is likely that no causative relationship holds. But if the predicted relationship is obtained, this does not necessarily mean that the variables studied are causally related. This research design was adopted because empathy would be obtained after a questionnaire is administered to the respondents. Leadership performance was obtained from the managers' questionnaires. In the study, empathy is a phenomenon in existence. Leadership performance was also in existence and so there is no manipulation of variables. Therefore, an assessment of what is already in existence was done and the cause and effect inferred.

Population and Sample Size
The target population for this study included all the managers in the 75 departments at the South Eastern Kenya University. The study targeted all the 75 managers in the 75 Departments at South Eastern Kenya University. Each of these departments is headed by one manager.4 out of the 75 managers were used for pilot study leaving the researcher with a sample of 71. In order to ensure their different categories of the sample population are represented, the researcher employed purposive and census sampling techniques in selecting a sample of 71 respondents. A census is a study of every unit, everyone or everything, in a population (Cantwell, 2008). It is known as a complete enumeration, which means a complete count. Census method is the method of statistical enumeration where all members of the population are studied. The advantages of census are that it provides a true measure of the population (no sampling error) and that detailed information about small sub - groups within the population is more likely to be available. The study sampled all the 75 respondents where 4 were used for pilot study.

Table 1: Sample Size

Respondents	Target population	Sample population
University Managers	71	71
Total	71	71

Source: Researcher

Instrumentation
Data was collected through administration of structured questionnaires with the selected respondents. The questionnaire used a five - point range Likert scale to assess managers' empathy and leadership performance. The scale sought to measure the managers' levels of agreement or disagreement with 10 statements related to their empathy and 30 on leadership performance.

Data Analysis
Data collected was processed, coded and analyzed to facilitate answering the research objective and hypothesis. This was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analyses (percentages, frequencies, tables and cross - tabulations) were used to summarize and organize data and to describe the characteristics of the sample population. Inferential statistics was used in making deductions and generalizations about the whole population. Inferring sample results to the population is necessary since this research deals with a sample. The more representative a sample is, the more generalizable the results are expected to be in a population. Pearson's correlation coefficient (Aronson *et al.,* 1990) was used in testing the null hypotheses. Pearson's correlation coefficient was tested at µ = 0.05 significance level. This was done with the aid of a computer programme - Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0 for windows.

Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, an introductory letter was obtained from the University. On the production of introductory letter, permission to carry out research was sought from the National Commission of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). After getting permission letter the researcher further sought permission from the University. The researcher ensured that confidentiality is honored and information obtained used only for the purpose of this study. Informed consent was sought in acquiring participants for the study, and all participants were expected to participate willingly, and were not required to include their names in the questionnaires for confidentiality purposes. The dignity, privacy and interests of participants was respected and protected. Data obtained remained confidential and participants remained anonymous.

4. Results

The objective for this study was to establish the relationship between empathy and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya. To achieve this objective, the respondents were requested to indicate the way they feel concerning the statements given in table 2 using a 5 - point Likert Scale, with Strongly Agree (S. A), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The responses were presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Empathy and Leadership Performance

S/N	Empathy	SA F %	A F %	U F %	D F %	SD F %	Total F %
31	I usually show a genuine interest in people	28 39.4	38 53.5	5 7.0	0 0.0	0 0.0	**71 100.0**
32	I am unable to find the time to listen to people	2 2.8	4 5.6	45 63.4	20 28.2	0 0.0	**71 100.0**
33	I always want to be left alone	4 5.6	9 12.7	1 15.5	32 45.1	15 21.1	**71 100.0**
34	I usually neglect other people's feelings	4 5.6	2 2.8	41 57.7	24 33.8	0 0.0	**71 100.0**
35	I always share the credit for my successes	15 21.1	43 60.6	2 2.8	10 14.1	1 1.4	**71 100.0**
36	I usually let people know that I was available to help out	23 32.4	40 56.3	6 8.5	1 1.4	1 1.4	**71 100.0**
37	I usually sense people's feelings and perspectives	14 19.7	50 70.4	2 2.8	3 4.3	2 2.8	**71 100.0**
38	I usually feel embarrassed when people express their feelings	2 2.8	11 15.5	6 8.5	40 56.5	12 16.9	**71 100.0**
39	I always go out of my way to help people	29 40.8	29 40.8	2 2.8	5 7.0	6 8.5	**71 100.0**
40	I am usually reluctant to get involved in other people's problems	5 7.0	10 14.1	1 1.4	45 63.4	10 14.1	**71 100.0**

Source: Research Data

Table 2 shows that, majority (70.4%) of the respondents agreed that they usually sense people's feelings and perspectives. This was followed by (60.6%) who agreed that they always share the credit for their successes and 56.3% who agreed that they usually let people know that they were available to help out. However 63.4% disagreed that they are usually reluctant to get involved in other people's problems. The researcher further sought to establish the relationship between empathy and leadership performance by testing Ho below using Pearson Correlation.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between empathy and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya.

The results were presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Relationship between empathy and leadership performance

		Empathy	Leadership performance
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	1	.831
	Sig. (2 - tailed)		.000
	N	71	71
Leadership performance	Pearson Correlation	.831	1
	Sig. (2 - tailed)	.831	
	N	71	71

Source: Research Data

Table 3 shows that there is a strong positive (r = 0.831, p=0.000) relationship between empathy and leadership performance. Therefore we fail to accept the hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant relationship between empathy and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya

Table 4: Multiple regression for empathy Indicators and leadership performance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.235	.170		1.382	.002
	Ability to understand what others are going through (x_1)	.090	.036	.214	2.500	.000
	Ability to share in success and failures with others (x_2)	.081	.067	.104	1.212	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Leadership Performance						

Source: Research Data

$y = 0.235 + 0.090x_1 + 0.081x_2$
y = Leadership performance
x_1 = Ability to understand what others are going through

x_2 = Ability to share in success and failures with others
All the sig. are less than 0.05, therefore hypothesis H_0 is rejected implying that there is a significant association

between empathy and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya

ANOVA Test Results
The ANOVA test was used to determine whether any of the differences between the means responses are statistically significant. This was done by comparing the p - value to the significance level to assess the null hypothesis. If the p - value level is less than the significance level of 0.05 the hypothesis is rejected.

Table 5: ANOVA for Empathy

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.814	2	3.407	.991	.000
Within Groups	233.778	68	3.438		
Total	240.592	70			

Source: Research Data

It can be observed that the P - value is less than 0.05 hence the hypothesis is rejected.

5. Discussion of the Findings

The study established that there is a strong positive association between empathy and leadership performance. These results agree with Choi (2006) who argued that empathy plays an important role in effective leadership. This is because empathy creates dynamic interpersonal skills, which motivate employees and improve the effectiveness of leaders. Empathy gives leaders the power to read between the lines; thus, they are able to make appropriate decisions. The study also showed that higher empathy skills lead to higher leadership effectiveness as well as to higher organizational performance. Majority of the respondents agreed that they usually sense people's feelings and perspectives, they always share the credit for their successes, they usually let people know that they were available to help out and that that they are not usually reluctant to get involved in other people's problems. This agrees with Marques (2010) who argued that empathy skills allow leaders to understand better other peoples' perspectives and opinions, making the work environment more enjoyable and productive. He further stated that, to achieve leadership effectiveness, leaders must develop empathy skills to their fullest potential since empathy enhances a sense of leadership by providing leaders with the awareness to listen, serve their followers, and have greater understanding of interrelationships within the group. The implication here is that leaders who acquire empathy skills relate well with different groups of employees, and attain the desired results.

6. Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings of this study the researcher recommends that University administration should continually train their staff on the relationship between managers' empathy and leadership Performance. Such training must touch on various aspects of empathy which influence leadership performance. They should provide training on improvement of empathy among the staff so as to have managers that possess a high level of this skill to improve on work productivity, team work, and good problem - solving techniques among others. This will in turn

bring about a positive effect on employees'performance so that universities may gain a sustainable competitive advantage in the market. The study recommends that sincethere is a strong positive relationship between empathy and leadership performance, universities should form strong and functional staff welfare. This will help them to know when employees face difficulties and help them. This is because employees will be able to sense their colleagues' feelings and perspectives. They will also be able to share the credit for their successes and be able to let people know that they were available to help out.

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