



The antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on public sector service delivery: The case study of government departments in Harare



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Orientation: Employee engagement has become an impetus behind business success and a deciding factor for service delivery, especially in the Zimbabwean public sector.

Research purpose: This study sought to investigate the antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on public sector service delivery with reference to selected government departments in Harare.

Motivation for the study: The government departments in Harare have witnessed gross employee disengagement as indicated by reduced employee commitment and high absenteeism.

Research approach/design and method: A quantitative research design was adopted for this study. A structured questionnaire was developed, validated and distributed to 260 employees and management working in five selected government departments.

Main findings: This study showed that the antecedents of employee engagement such as effective leadership, training and career development, compensation and incentive programmes, and organisational policies and procedures greatly influenced employee engagement in the public sector. The study also noted that employee engagement positively impacted service delivery in the public sector.

Practical/managerial implications: An important implication of this study is the need for the public sector management to understand the significance of the social exchange for employee engagement and to provide employees with resources and benefits that would oblige them to perform productively.

Contribution/value-add: This study is expected to enrich the empirical evidence on the antecedents of employee engagement and also provide recommendations for practitioners in investigating the influence of employee engagement on service delivery in the public sector.

Keywords: effective leadership; employee engagement; policies and procedures; public sector; service delivery; training and career development.

Introduction

Orientation

The current operating business environment has been compelling both public and private sector organisations to come up with new strategies to adapt to fast-changing circumstances in terms of the workforce. The public sector organisations had been facing employee turnovers as they look for greener pastures and new responsibilities and challenges. Lack of engagement because of poor compensation and incentive programmes, lack of training and career development opportunities, and ineffective leadership had also tended to result in withdrawal and defensive behaviours by employees (Koodamara, 2017). Moreover, disengaged employees are more unlikely to stay with their current organisation and commit to their organisation (Ramsay & Finney, 2006). Apparently, employees who are not engaged will affect the organisational service delivery through higher absenteeism, higher turnover and lower productivity, recruitment and training cost (Crawford, Rich, Buckman, & Bergeron, 2013; Meutia, Tubagus, & Ahmad, 2017). Nevertheless, high-performing employees have become the most important asset that organisations have at a time when production economy has been shifting towards service economy (AbuKhalifeh & Ahmad, 2013; Ortiz, Cernas, Lau, & Qin, 2013). In particular, engaged employees have become true impetus behind business success through efficient service delivery and three times more sincere towards their jobs in comparison to actively disengaged employees (Basbous, 2011; Mangundjaya,

2012). Thus, employee engagement can be a deciding factor for service delivery, especially in the public sector, and has the potential to significantly affect employee productivity, loyalty and overall stakeholder value. Having highly engaged employees is important for increasing innovation, productivity and performance, while reducing costs related to workforce hiring and retention (Kazimoto, 2016).

The public sector in both developing and developed countries had been experiencing increasing pressure to identify ways of managing demographic changes while drastically reducing costs. In Zimbabwe, there had been unprecedented decline in public sector employee disengagement with the work force merely showing up at work without contributing much more (Ncube & Jerie, 2012). Indeed, the government had been facing people management challenges in engaging employees against a backdrop of poor remunerations, recruitment freezes and job cuts (Daily News, 2017). In addition, the government had been operating on tight budget, which resulted in lack of investment in employee training and development programmes. Basically, most government departments had been experiencing employee engagement problems, most of which significantly affected service delivery. Moreover, the government had been witnessing gross employee disengagement as indicated by high absenteeism and reduced operating and reduced employee commitment (Ncube & Jerie, 2012). These unengaged employees had been creating a vacuum between employees' efforts and good service delivery. Consequently, employee engagement had been slipping with most employees contemplating not to remain with their current respective departments if comparable jobs were available elsewhere. Most troubling had been that although the employees had been physically 'present' at the offices, they would have mentally checked out, thereby creating a vacuum between employees' effort and successful service delivery. Apparently, disengaged employees had been affecting service delivery through higher absenteeism, higher turnover and lower productivity and recurrent training costs. With employee engagement to the periphery and becoming the government's Achilles Heel, there had been increased employee disenchantment with their jobs resulting in poor service delivery.

From a theoretical perspective, studies on the antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on public sector service delivery have remained quite rudimentary, in the Zimbabwean context. In particular, little research had been conducted on employees in the public. Given the void in public sector human resources management literature, this study would seek to initiate theoretical enquiry into the antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on service delivery using the public sector service in Harare as the research context.

Research purpose and objectives

Given the potential contribution engaged employees can make to the public sector, this study sought to determine the antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on

service delivery. In particular, the study was premised to achieve the following research objectives:

- determine the effect of effective leadership on employee engagement
- establish the impact of training and career development on employee engagement
- determine the influence of compensation and incentive programmes on employee engagement
- determine the effect of organisational policies and procedures on employee engagement
- determine the impact of employee engagement on service delivery
- determine the mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between the antecedent variables and service delivery.

Literature review

Social exchange theory

The social exchange theory has been accepted as the most and widely used theory in the employee engagement research (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Kazimoto, 2016; Truss, Alfes, Delbridge, Shantz, & Soane, 2013). The theory provides a theoretical basis for explaining why employees opt to become more engaged or less engaged in an organisation. The main principles of the theory are that employees make social decisions based on perceived costs and mutual benefits. Moreover, the theory proposes that there are obligations that are made through interactions between various parties in a state of reciprocal interdependence. According to the theory, employees are motivated to engage in their jobs when they believe there is a fair and balanced system of exchange (Bwire, Ssekabuko, & Lwanga, 2014). Thus, the social exchange theory involves various obligations created on one independent party on the actions of another party that has the capability of producing high-quality relationships.

The social exchange theory also argues that in the exchange rules, both parties will have a reciprocal relationship that will result in the establishment of trust, loyalty and commitment. According to the theory, the relationship between the parties grows over time, and this may mature into trust, loyalty and mutual understanding (Saks, 2006). For instance, employees make full involvement towards their works by dedicating higher amount of cognitive and emotional and physical resources to respond to organisational actions (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). Thus, employee engagement consists of psychological and emotional connections between employees and organisation that lead to positive or negative performance at work (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). Furthermore, the social exchange theory argues that individuals possessing strong exchange ideology will be more inclined to feel obliged to return the benefits that they receive from an organisation. This is consistent with Marie, Ibrahim and Al Naseer's (2014) argument that engagement should be viewed as a two-way relationship between the employees and employers. In other words, individuals would continue to engage each other because of the continuation of reciprocation. The social

exchange theory was used as the basis for developing the study's research framework because it provided a theoretical basis for explaining the relationship between employee engagement and improved service delivery in organisations. Thus, employees are more likely to exchange their engagement for resources and benefits, and this explains why employees choose to become more or less engaged in their work and organisation.

Concept of employee engagement

There are different definitions for the term 'employee engagement' in the academic literature that varies greatly according to the organisations. Although employee engagement and work engagement have been used interchangeably, this study prefers the latter because it is more specific. Employee engagement can be looked at from both individual and organisational perspectives. According to Kwon, Farndale and Park (2016), employee engagement comprises how employees feel about their organisation. Nahrgang, Morgeson and Hofmann (2011) explain further by stating that employee engagement involves the level of commitment and involvement of employees towards an organisation and its values. In the same vein, Ortiz et al. (2013) define employee engagement as a psychological state where employees feel they do have a vested interest in the organisation's success and perform to high standards that exceed the stated job requirements. Another definition by AbuKhalifeh and Som (2013) describes employee engagement as comprising positive attitude, passion and commitment to the organisation, its values and willingness to help other colleagues. Although each of the above definitions represents unique perspectives, it can be broadly stated that employee engagement involves the level of commitment and involvement by employees towards their respective organisations.

For Saks (2006), the antecedents of employee engagement include rewards and recognition, job characteristics, perceived supervisor support and procedural justice. As pointed out by Keenoy (2014), these antecedents provide the means to indicate whether or not employees have become engaged. Saks (2006) also proposed that employee engagement consists of antecedents such as organisational policies and support, job characteristics, rewards and compensation, supervisor support, distributive justice and procedural justice. When employees perceived these antecedents, employee engagement would result at organisational levels, resulting in job satisfaction, organisational commitment, low turnover and improved service delivery (Crawford et al., 2013). The other antecedents that have been suggested by Kim, Kolb and Kim (2012) include task significance, organisational care, employee autonomy, feedback from the job, organisational support and psychological safety. Results of Rana, Ardichvili and Tkachenko (2014) have indicated that there is a significant correlation between the antecedents and employee engagement, as well as positively related to job satisfaction and service delivery.

Effective leadership and employee engagement

Effective leadership can be described as the ability to handle the organisation's challenges, genuine commitment to

providing high-quality products and services, ability to give employees a clear picture of company direction and ability to inspire confidence in employees (Hansen, Byrne, & Kiersch, 2014; Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014). As postulated by Converso, Loera, Viotti and Martini (2015), the effective leaders have charismatic characteristics. Kovjanic, Schuh and Jonas (2013) also corroborate that effective leadership should be able to inspire trust and confidence among employees. Chandani, Mehta, Mall and Khokhar (2016) argue that effective leadership is very important for the smooth functioning of any organisation. It is the duty of leadership to actively demonstrate the organisation's values and goals as well as create an open and fair work environment for employees. From engagement literature, leaders should provide meaning and intellectual stimulation whereby they support employees' creativity in blame-free contexts. Wallace and Trinko (2009) argue that the three leadership competencies that can be funnelled to have positive impact on employee engagement are efficient coaching, interest in developing follower's careers and effective communication on individual performances.

An exploratory study by Daraei and Vahidi (2014) concluded that effective leadership positively affected employee engagement as it addressed key drivers of engagement such as recognition, personal development and respect. In their empirical study, Jiang and Men (2017) examined the relationship between effective leadership and employee engagement, and the results reported a direct effect between the variables. Similarly, Krishnaveni and Monica (2016) believe that the most reliable way of increasing employee satisfaction and commitment is to provide them with more effective leaders and managers. Studies by Carasco-Saul, Kim and Kim (2015) also tied effective leadership to employee engagement with the clear purpose of increasing organisational results. From the preceding discussion, it can be argued that effective leadership positively affects employee engagement. Thus, the following hypothesis is made:

Hypothesis 1: Effective leadership has a positive effect on employee engagement.

Training and career development and employee engagement

Furthermore, organisations with high levels of engagement provide their employees with opportunities to develop their abilities, learn new skills, acquire new knowledge and realise their potential. According to Rana and Chhabra (2011), training and career development programmes in an organisation influence engagement for employees by providing opportunities for personal development. Thus, training and career development opportunities play a catalytic role in the engagement of employees in the organisation.

As suggested by Bakar (2013), it is of profound importance for organisations to check that the tasks provided to employees match with their career goals as this increases satisfaction and engagement. This is also echoed by Eldor and Harpaz (2016), who argue that organisations with high levels of employee engagement provide career development

opportunities for employees to learn new skills and realise their potential. In this regard, training and career development are an important antecedent, which is to be considered in the process of engaging employees because it helps the employees to concentrate on a focused work dimension. More so, redundancy of skills has been cited by Robbins, Judge, Millett and Boyle (2013) as one of the reasons for employee turnover, thereby indicating the necessity for training, re-training and multi-skill training. Through training and career development, employees will improve service accuracy, and acquire the knowledge and skills needed to perform their jobs, thereby impacting service performance and employee engagement. When employees undergo training and development programmes, their confidence build up and they become more engaged in their job. Thus, we can formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Training and career development have a positive effect on employee engagement.

Compensation and incentive programmes and employee engagement

Compensation and incentive programmes are also said to have a major influence on the employees' conceptions of their employment relationship. These programmes consist of financial and non-financial elements such as on-site day care, employee assistance programmes, bonuses, retirement plans, health insurance and company shares, travel discounts and company picnics (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Other psychological incentives include rewarding superior performance of an employee in front of an audience; mentoring, assuring job security; granting promotions and increasing insurance cover (Mangundjaya, 2012). It is therefore important for organisations to have a proper compensation management system so that the employees are motivated to work in the organisation. As elucidated by Ortiz et al. (2013), compensation and reward programmes immensely contribute to organisational effectiveness through influencing both individual and group behaviours. This is corroborated by Kwon et al. (2016), who stated that sound compensation policies help in motivating employees towards their job and that also have a major influence on employee engagement. As noted by Krishnaveni and Monica (2016), an effective compensation policy would reduce the problems of attrition and cost of recruitment in an organisation. Similarly, Jiang and Men (2017) also highlight that compensation and benefits increase the level of employee engagement. Thus, compensation and incentive programmes are indispensable attributes to employee engagement that motivate employees to achieve more and focus more on work and personal development.

A quantitative study by Agyemang and Ofei (2013) on public sector organisations in Ghana revealed that recognition and rewards are significant antecedents of employee engagement. Another study by Ncube and Jerie (2012) on hotels in Zimbabwe concluded that compensation and incentive programmes have a positive effect on employee engagement and commitment. In the same vein, Kelliher, Hope-Hailey and Farndale (2013) found that compensation and incentive

programmes resulted in employees providing extra effort to meet their target and also wanted to know the effect of their effort in the next year financial statement. Thus, on the basis of the preceding discussion, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 3: Compensation and incentive programmes have a positive effect on employee engagement.

Organisational policies and procedures and employee engagement

Organisational policies and procedures decide the extent to which employees are engaged in an organisation. Evidence from past studies show that amiable organisational policies and procedures are extremely important for the employee engagement and achievement of business goals (Keenoy, 2013; Purcell, 2013). According to Townsend, Wilkinson and Burgess (2013), the most common policies and procedures used by organisations include fair recruitment and selection, flexi-timing, aid in balancing work and life, and fair promotional policies.

As indicated by Bwire et al. (2014), recruitment and selection policy of an organisation have a direct impact on future employee commitment and engagement. Similarly, Marie et al. (2014) expound that an organisation's flexible work-life policies have a notable positive impact on employee engagement. Likewise, other studies such as Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny (2013) have emphasised the significance of organisational policies and procedures that best support flexible work arrangements, balancing employee work and home environments because such arrangements result in engaged employees. Thus, we can formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Organisational policies and procedures have a positive effect on employee engagement.

Employee engagement and service delivery

A plethora of studies in the literature have sought to determine the relationship between employee engagement and service delivery. For instance, Bakar's (2013) study on the Malaysian financial sector revealed that employee engagement was a critical ingredient of organisational success and service delivery because it predicted financial performance. Another quantitative study by Swarnalatha and Sureshkrishna (2013) on Indian industries found a significant positive correlation between employee engagement and service delivery performance. Furthermore, AbuKhalifeh and Som (2013) also proved an effective connection between employee engagement and essential performance outcomes such as financial performance and profitability, customer loyalty, productivity, turnover, safety incidents, absenteeism, shrinkages and quality. In a study of 22 companies across five business sectors, Huang et al. (2016) determined that several key drivers for employee engagement, including recognition and rewards, career advancement, and management leadership, had a noticeable relationship with performance outcomes such as service delivery.

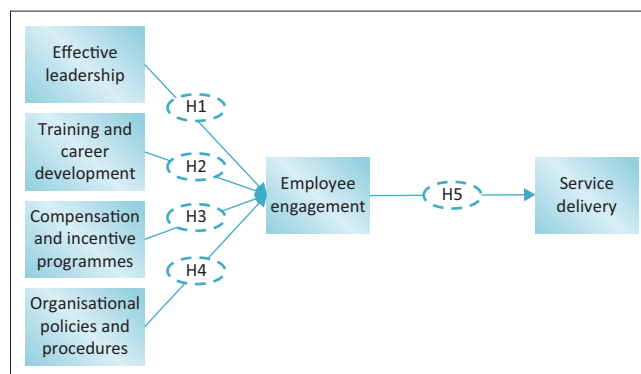
Furthermore, quantitative studies by Song, Kolb, Lee and Kim (2012) on 17 multinational companies in South Korea showed that more than 75% of engaged employees were both productive and likely to stay in the company for the long term. The finding is further buttressed by Baumruk and Gorman (2016), who opine that engaged employees are productive and more likely to stay in the organisations when compared with disengaged employees. In the same vein, Converso et al. (2015) noted that employee engagement can act as a critical tool for organisations to fortify their competitiveness and also enhance organisational service delivery. It has also been noted that high levels of employee engagement promote talent retention and improve stakeholder value (Robbins et al., 2013). Thus, employee engagement can act as a deciding factor for organisational effectiveness and efficiency. Thus, the linkage between engagement and performance is consistent with engagement models, theory and research. Based on the above analysis, it can be argued that there is a connection between employee engagement and organisational service delivery in terms of productivity and efficiency. More so, the literature also indicated that employee engagement is significant to employee loyalty, retention and job satisfaction. It is of paramount importance for the public sector to be aware of employee needs and policies that would have implications on employee engagement.

For most government departments, Cole (2014) and Siddiqi (2015) concur that high level of employee engagement would result in improved service delivery. This is because the engaged employees would be highly committed towards the job. Other noted advantages of employee engagement include positive attitudes among the employees towards their job, enthusiasm to get the job done, and commitment and alignment with organisational goals and objectives (Ortiz et al., 2013). Moreover, Daraei and Vahidi (2014) also elude that engaged employees are less likely to feel exhausted, have higher confidence levels, focused towards their work and have greater level of customer satisfaction. In addition, other consequences of employee engagement include job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour and lower turnover intention (Abraham, 2012; Tejaswi & Raya, 2014). Thus, we can formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Employee engagement has a positive impact on service delivery.

Conceptual framework

In light of the preceding literature discussion, the following conceptual framework is relevant in the wider perspective of knowledge sharing and understanding the study's variables. The study sought to examine the antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on public sector service delivery. Thus, the conceptual framework first focused on the antecedents of employee engagement and their impact on service delivery. The antecedents of employee engagement are measured as a multidimensional construct and are taken as proxy for service delivery. The variables making up the conceptual framework for the study are illustrated in Figure 1.



H, Hypothesis.

FIGURE 1: Conceptual framework.

Methodology

Research approach

From the study's ontological position of objectivism, a quantitative research method was found as appropriate for inquiring into the research problem based on testing theory and analysing with statistical procedures. Moreover, a quantitative research design was adopted for the study because it could use structured tools to generate numerical data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Moreover, a quantitative research design sought to measure variables and expresses any relationships using inferential statistics such as Pearson's correlation and regression analysis (Draper & Smith, 2014).

Research participants

The target population for this study consisted of employees and management from the selected government departments in Harare. Figures from Zimstats indicate that there are more than 800 employees in various government departments within the central business district of Harare (Zimstats, 2017). Because it was not possible to cover all government departments in Harare, it was of profound importance to determine a sample size for the study. In selecting the sample size for the study, it was important to achieve maximum precision. Thus, the determination of a sample size was an important step in conducting the empirical study. The study's sample size was calculated using the sample determination table by Jankowicz (2005). Using the table, the targeted population of 800 government employees and management statically required at least 260 participants at 5% level of significance. After ascertaining the sample size, the researchers picked the exact number of participants using the appropriate sampling techniques. In particular, probability sampling techniques were used for the study. Firstly, stratified sampling was used to select from the five different government departments. These were obtained from the classification list supplied by Public Service Commission. The selected government departments were found to have clear and consistent organisational structures that would allow generalisation of results without a lot of errors (Yin, 2014). The allocation of each stratum is indicated in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Proportional sampling.

Sample	Stratified sampling $n_i = n * N_i/N$
Government Department A	50
Government Department B	51
Government Department C	57
Government Department D	51
Government Department E	51
Total	260

n_i = Number of members in the sample from strata; N_i = Number of members in the population from strata; N = Number of members in the entire population; n = Sample size.

Measuring instruments

Structured questionnaires were used as the study's main research instrument. The questions were made using 5-point Likert scale. Researchers such as Newman, Lim and Pineda (2013) recommend the use of 5-point Likert-type scale because of their easiness in analysing data statistically. Accordingly, the lowest rating of 1 implied strong disagreement by the respondents, while the highest rating of 5 would imply strongest agreement with the statement provided. The study used the composite version of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) short version developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) and included engagement sub-scales such as dedication, vigour and absorption at work. These were then analysed unidimensionally. On the contrary, the SERVQUAL instrument developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1991) was used to measure the service delivery. In particular, service delivery dimensions, such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, were utilised for the study.

The questionnaires were administered personally by the researcher to the respondents. A pilot study was done to check if all the questions made sense and the respondents were able to understand them and answer in a meaningful way as it was intended. Thus, the questionnaire was pilot tested on 10 participants (5 managers and 5 employees) for relevance, comprehension and logic. These respondents were drawn from the sample study of government employees in Harare. As recommended by Scandura and Williams (2013), questionnaires must be pretested to observe reactions and attitudes of the respondents. These questionnaires were handed directly to the respondents by the researcher and that gave him the privilege to introduce the topic and encouragement in answering the questionnaire. The feedback obtained from the pilot study was then used to revise the questionnaire before the commencement of the fieldwork.

Research procedure

Primary data were collected through the use of a survey research strategy. By implication, the use of a survey research strategy allowed the researcher to collect quantitative data and use inferential statistics (Jankowicz, 2005). The questionnaires were administered through the use of drop and pick method. The advantage of pick and drop was that the respondents were given enough time to answer the questionnaire because the researcher would come later to pick them up. Furthermore, the pick and drop method allowed the researchers to collect data from a large

representative sample at relatively low cost per datum. The distribution of questionnaires began from 20 November 2017 to 04 January 2018.

Statistical analysis

Prior to data analysis, it was first sorted for completeness, reliability and consistency, and this was done through analysis of internal reliability and internal consistency. The data cleaning ensured that errors during data entry could be detected before final analysis (Root, Fellows, & Hancock, 2013). This study used IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The data were analysed using both inferential and descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were performed to run the basic statistical measures such as the mean, median and standard deviation. Inferential statistics were used to test the research hypotheses as well as to infer whether relationships between variables were significant or not. In particular, Pearson's correlation was used to measure linear dependence between two variables. To establish the nature and magnitude of the relationships between the variables and to test the hypothesised relationships, the study applied multiple regression analysis.

Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations conserved in this study included anonymity of respondents, confidentiality of primary data as well as seeking permission to conduct research from relevant authorities such as the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare as well as the management of the respective public hospitals.

Ethicality of the research methodology was highly important in ensuring that research participants did not feel that they have been mistreated. As such, the researchers took various steps to ensure that this study adhered to research ethical standards. The researchers explained the exact nature of the study and any reasons why they might not want to take part to all the participants. Participants were asked to consent to participate in the research through filling a consent form. Participants were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point. More so, participation in the study was purely voluntary and all participants were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential.

Results

Participants for this study included 260 employees and managers working in five selected government departments in Harare. From the distributed questionnaires, the researchers managed to collect 206 filled questionnaires representing a response rate of 79.2%. Thus, the study's response rate was huge enough to make meaningful conclusions and recommendations. More so, the response rate was in line with Root et al.'s (2013) stipulations that a response rate of 70% and over can be regarded as excellent to make adequate statistical analysis. With regard to demographic characteristics of the respondents, it was

revealed that majority of the participants were males (67%), while 64% of them were aged less than 40 years old. In addition, the study revealed that more than 80% of the participants had at least university degree and at least 65% of them had been with their respective government departments for a period of at least 6 years. Table 2 illustrates the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Before applying any statistical tools to the collected data, it was important to first test reliability of the scales on the extent to which the measurement scales would produce consistent results if done repeatedly. In this regard, Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability. In management research, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient that is greater than 0.70 is usually preferred and considered 'good reliability' (Zikmund, 2012). As suggested by Field (2005), the generally accepted range of the Cronbach's alpha measure in management research is 0.7–0.8. Table 3 shows the Cronbach's alpha for all the study's variables.

From Table 3, it can be seen that the reliability values for the study's items such as effective leadership (0.86), training and career development (0.82), compensation and incentive programmes (0.84), organisational policies and procedures (0.86), employee engagement (0.77) and service delivery (0.89) were all above 0.7, which signifies acceptable reliability. This invariably implies that the suggested study constructs would give the same results when the same test is applied under the same condition again and again. Thus, the items were included because they provided meaningful data to the research.

TABLE 2: Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Below 20 years	14	6.8
	20–29 years	27	13.1
	30–39 years	89	43.2
	40–49 years	56	27.2
	50–59 years	12	5.8
	60 years and above	8	3.9
Gender	Male	138	67.0
	Female	68	33.0
Academic qualifications	Diploma	27	13.1
	Undergraduate degree	136	66.0
	Master's degree	43	20.9
	Doctorate degree	-	-
Length of service	1–5 years	72	35.0
	6–10 years	85	41.3
	11–15 years	33	16.0
	16 years and above	16	7.7

TABLE 3: Cronbach's alpha reliability test.

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Effective leadership	7	0.86
Training and career development	7	0.82
Compensation and incentive programs	7	0.84
Organisational policies and procedures	7	0.86
Employee engagement	8	0.77
Service delivery	8	0.89

This study conducted correlation analysis to test the strength of association or relationship between the variables. Correlation measures the relationship or association between two continuous numeric variables and indicates both the direction and degree to which they vary with one another (Scandura & Williams, 2013). The findings are presented in Table 4.

Results from Table 4 reveal that there is a significant positive relationship between effective leadership and employee engagement ($r = 0.55, p < 0.05$). This implies that effective leadership as an antecedent is positively related to employee engagement in the public sector departments under study. Thus, at 5% level of significance we accept the hypothesis that effective leadership has a positive effect on employee engagement on the basis of sampled data. In addition, the correlation analysis also showed that both effective leadership and service delivery were also positively related ($r = 0.49, p < 0.05$).

The findings also disclosed a significant positive relationship between training and career development and employee engagement ($r = 0.66, p < 0.05$), thus implying that training and career development have a positive and significant association with employee engagement in the public sector departments under study. Thus, at 5% level of significance we accept the hypothesis that training and career development have a positive effect on employee engagement on the basis of sampled data. This study also showed that training and career development also had an indirect positive association with service delivery in the public sector ($r = 0.53, p < 0.05$).

The findings also revealed a positive correlation between compensation and incentive programmes and employee engagement ($r = 0.52, p < 0.05$). This indicates that compensation and incentive programmes have a positive and significant relationship with employee engagement in the public sector departments under study. Thus, at 5% level of significance we accept the hypothesis that compensation and incentive programmes have a positive effect on employee engagement on the basis of sampled data. The findings also showed a positive association between compensation and incentive programmes and service delivery in the public sector ($r = 0.67, p < 0.05$).

The Pearson's correlation matrix also showed that organisational policies and procedures have a positive and significant relationship with employee engagement with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.48, p < 0.05$. This invariably means that improved organisational policies and procedures

TABLE 4: Correlation analysis.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
Effective leadership	1.00	-	-	-	-	-
Training and career development	0.10*	1.00	-	-	-	-
Compensation and incentive programs	0.14**	0.16*	1.00	-	-	-
Organisational policies and procedures	0.36*	0.48**	0.08*	1.00	-	-
Employee engagement	0.55*	0.66*	0.52*	0.48*	1.00	-
Service delivery	0.49**	0.53*	0.67*	0.39*	0.58*	1.00

*, Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$; **, correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$.

by the government departments can have a positive correlation with increased employee engagement. Thus, at 5% level of significance we accept the hypothesis that organisational policies and procedures have a positive effect on employee engagement. In addition, it was also revealed that organisational policies and procedures had a positive relationship with service delivery ($r = 0.39, p < 0.05$). Furthermore, employee engagement showed a positive and significant relationship with service delivery with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.865, p < 0.05$. These findings do indicate that employee engagement has a positive association with service delivery for the government departments under study. Thus, at 5% level of significance we accept the hypothesis that employee engagement has a positive effect on service delivery.

To determine the predictability of job engagement using antecedent variables and the predictability of service delivery using job engagement, series of simple regression analysis was conducted. The results of the regression analysis are illustrated in Table 5.

From Table 5, it can be inferred that compensation and incentive programmes have the highest predictive power of employee engagement as it can explain 67% of the total variance of employee engagement. Training and career development were the second important predictor of employee engagement, and it can explain 62% of its total variance. In addition, effective leadership also seems to have similar predictive power of 51% and organisational policies and procedures explained 21%. In addition, employee engagement seems to be a better predictor for service delivery, where it can explain 13% of its total variance. This study used the bootstrapping method to test the significance of mediation effect of employee engagement on the relationship between antecedent variables and service delivery at 95% confidence intervals. The results of the study are summarised diagrammatically in Figure 2.

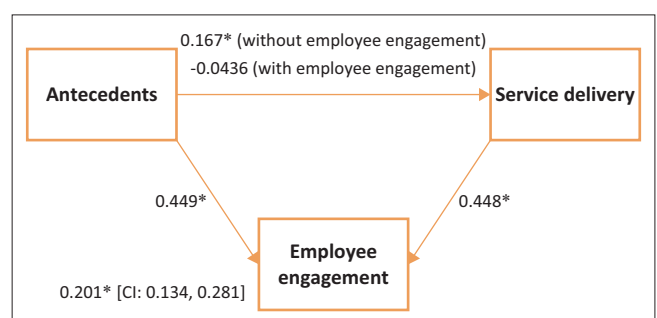
The results of this study suggest that employee engagement mediates the relationship between the four antecedent variables and service delivery.

Discussion of results

This study showed that employee engagement mediated the antecedents such as effective leadership, training and career development, compensation and incentive programmes, and organisational policies and procedures. Based on the test results, it was revealed that training and career development

($r = 0.66$) had the highest positive and significant relationship with employee engagement. As such, the higher the amount of training and development programmes initiated by the government departments, the higher the employee engagement in various organisational activities that would in the end improve service delivery. In the same vein, effective leadership ($r = 0.55$) and compensation and incentive programmes ($r = 0.52$) also showed a positive and significant relationship with employee engagement. This confirmed the social exchange theory in explaining the influence of training and development as well as remunerations and rewards on employee engagement. Moreover, these findings supported the empirical study of AbuKhalifeh and Ahmad (2013), Daraei and Vahidi (2014) and Koodamara (2017). Hakanen and Schaufeli (2012) also stated that training and career development were related to the technological and social development in work environments.

This study also showed that employee engagement had a positive association with service delivery in the public sector ($r = 0.55$). It was revealed that employee engagement could act as a mediating variable for the relationship between the four antecedents and work outcomes such as improved service delivery through higher performance, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. According to Swarnalatha and Sureshkrishna (2013), the experience of employee engagement can be a fulfilling and positive work-related experience, which is positively related with work productivity. These positive experiences and emotions can result in service delivery. As indicated by Takawira, Coetzee and Schreuder (2014), there is a connection between employee engagement and business results in both public and private organisations. Like several other studies (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Tejaswi & Raya, 2014), the results of the study suggest that employee engagement mediates the relationship between the four antecedent variables and service delivery.



CI, confidence interval.

*, 0.05% significance level.

FIGURE 2: Mediation model.

TABLE 5: Regression analysis.

Predictor	Outcome variable	R ²	F	Regression coefficient	t
Effective leadership	Employee engagement	0.51	17.81**	1.38	5.25**
Training and career development	Employee engagement	0.62	5.36*	0.99	3.51*
Compensation and incentive programs	Employee engagement	0.67	311.2**	0.28	19.34**
Organisational policies and procedures	Employee engagement	0.21	4.36*	0.51	2.60*
Employee engagement	Service delivery	0.13	9.33	0.26	3.01*

*, Regression coefficient is significant $p < 0.05$; **, regression coefficient is significant $p < 0.01$.

Practical implications

The findings of this study provide various managerial implications to the public sector human resources practices. The study also found that both effective leadership and training and career development were the most important determinants of employee engagement that would result in improved service delivery. Thus, effective leadership and training and career development should be retained by the management in the public sector if they want higher levels of employee engagement. Furthermore, to increase employee engagement, the government departments should boost employees' self-esteem through providing training and development opportunities. Moreover, job enrichment may cause employees to show high levels of engagement at work (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013; Kazimoto, 2016). At the same time, the government departments can improve employee engagement by striving to build policies and procedures that foster trust and support. The study also highlighted the critical role of compensation and incentive programmes in determining employee engagement in the workplace. Therefore, management should strive to develop compensation and incentive programmes that will act as incentives for employee retention and engagement.

The results amplify the antedating role of employee engagement on improved service delivery in the workplace. Notably, employee engagement is an important area for the public sector in Zimbabwe to nurture creative behaviour in employees and hence increased service delivery. This may be because employees' training programme makes them feel they are cared for. (Townsend et al., 2013). Management should involve and consult employees on matters of importance as this may make them feel their opinions and suggestions are listened to.

Limitations and recommendations

It is important for the government departments to foster engagement through good staff management, providing well-structured appraisals and working in well-structured teams. It should be noted that these factors are linked to employee health, which is also important for engagement. Other factors that can be considered include creation of positive work environment in which all employees feel valued, respected and supported. The results indicated that effective leadership was the most contributor factor to employee engagement. Thus, it is very useful for the government departments that seek to increase employee engagement levels. It is also important for the government to spend more on programmes that develop employee skills and carry out suitable workshops and career development that enhance their skills and abilities.

This study on the antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on public sector service delivery was largely limited to government departments in Harare, Zimbabwe. As such, the findings from the study may not be generalisable to a large proportion of public senior employees across

Zimbabwe as a whole. Therefore, further studies may be required to include larger and more diverse sample of public sector employees in the country.

Conclusion

The results from this study provide a vivid message about the profound importance of employee engagement in the public sector. The study showed that the antecedents of employee engagement greatly influenced employee engagement and had significant impact on the level of engagement among the employees in the public sector. Indeed, the study revealed that employee engagement has many significant associations with antecedents such as effective leadership, training and career development, compensation and incentive programmes, and organisational policies and procedures. The study also concluded that employee engagement positively impacted service delivery in the public sector. The more engaged the employees are, the better the outcomes for service delivery generally.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

The researchers have been working very closely during the course of this study. To make the research more productive and efficient, J.S. formulated the research problem and synthesised relevant literature review. He was also involved in the distribution and collection of questionnaires from targeted respondents. T.W., on the contrary, was instrumental in providing the research methodology section as well as the construction of research instrument. He also sought permission to conduct the study on government premises. Both authors were involved in data collation, editing and analysis. The researchers also agreed on conclusions and recommendation. After completion of the research, T.W. was involved in proofreading of the article.

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Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

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