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The Alignment of Employee Engagement with Human Relations School of Thought

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ABSTRACT: Humans are the most valued assets of any organization. The management of these individuals and keeping them engaged in the organization has become a very sensitive topic in the field of management. Thus, an organization's challenge is not on how to retain talented employees, but how to fully engage them in their jobs and the organization; because engagement promotes employee retention among other benefits. This study examines the relevance of employee engagement to human relations approach. The emphasis is that management of an organization should treat employees with respect and high regard, and have close collaboration and relationships with the workers. Related journals, textbooks and other online publications written by renowned authorities in Management, Psychology and other relevant fields were reviewed. Our findings showed that Employee engagement has strong alignment with human relations management theory. It is the application and practice of human relations management theory that brings about employee engagement at work. A company that applies the human relations theory will have a higher level of employee engagement; this will then improve the firm's productivity and give positive bottom-line results (profitability). It is therefore recommended that top echelon management should fully practice the theory of human relations management; this will birth worker engagement in the workplace.

Keywords: Management, Organization, Engagement, Productivity, Collaboration.

I.　　　　INTRODUCTION
The focus of every organization in society is to meet the expectations of all stakeholders; the employees, customers, suppliers/distributors, shareholders including the public. For the firm to meet its objectives, various kinds of management theories are put into practice by top echelon management, especially the theories that most align with the engagement of the firm's stakeholders (Stoner, Freeman & Gilbert, 2013). Hence, the sustenance of the engagement of the organization's stakeholders is largely dependent on the relative management theories being practiced by the organization. Employees are a key element of every organization;they occupy a dominant position at work,being the most important asset of the organization, the way they are managed is crucial to the survival and growth of the organization.I align with the school of thought which asserts that the adoption of management theories in organizational practice will propel positive and productive employee engagement with the workplace. Leaders of organizations put into practice the best management theories which they thought will drive positive employee engagement in the workplace (Ugwalashi & Archibong, 2012).

There are a myriad of management theories which are practiced by organizations. These theories are concepts surrounding recommended management strategies. For a long time, theorists have been looking for the most ideal form of management style tailored towards relative work settings. This is where management theories become prominent and come into play in human organization. Some of these theories evolve through the ages, but they are still viable in managing and running the workplace (Corporate Finance Institute, 2019). Thus, management theories advanced by scholars areFredrick Taylor's Scientific Management school of thought, Henri Fayol's Principle of administrative management, Max Weber's bureaucratic management, Elton Mayo's human relations theory and Douglas McGregor's theory X and Y (Stoner *et al*., 2013), amongst others. Each of these theories has their advantages and limitations in practice with regards to worker relative engagement and productivity in the organization. The thrust of this paper is to look at the nexus between employee engagement and human relations school of thought. That is, the alignment of these two constructs in the improvement of productivity and organizational success.

Employee engagement is the extent to which workers feel happy and passionate about their jobs and are committed to the company and put discretionary effort into their roles and responsibilities at work. It encompasses motivation, involvement and emotional attachment with the organization (Stoner*et al*., 2013). Employee engagement is beyond mere activities, drive, productivity and performance at work. Engaged employees look at the whole organization and have understanding of the purpose, where and how they fit in. This leads to positive decision making. Organizations with engaged employees usually outperform the closest competition in the industry, their earnings per share is always high and these organizations always do well in periods of economic recession (Allen, 2014). However, human relations school of thought pioneered by Professor Elton Mayo perfectly align with employee engagement as the conceptualization of this theory prescribedan enabling environment for employees to be seen as the most important asset at work (Ugwulashi & Archibong, 2012).

The construct of human relations school of thought was developed by Professor Elton Mayo (1880-1949), his work helped to lay the foundation for the human relations movement, this theory which became popular in the 1940s and early 1950s, posits the importance of human factor at work and sees the employee as the most valued asset in the organization, thus, employees are human beings, who should be respected and treated as such; also that managers should be aware of the role played by individuals in determining the success or failure of the firm (Indabawa & Uba, 2014). His work focuses on the building of collaborative relationships between management and subordinates, emphasizing that when special attention is given to employees by management, work productivity is likely to increase irrespective of actual changes in working conditions.
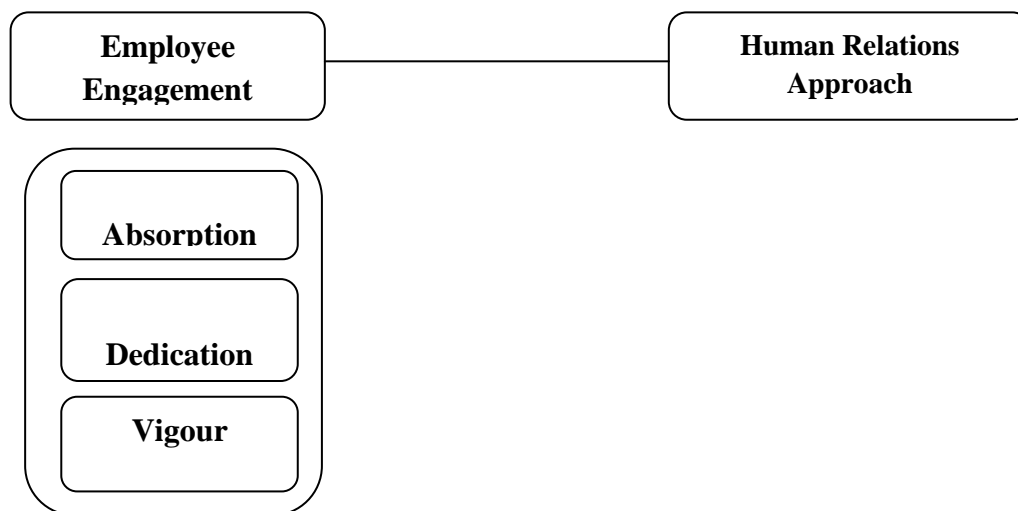
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1   Conceptual framework of the relationship between employee engagement and human relations approach.

Source: Dimensionsas adopted from Schaufeli *et al* (2001).

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Employee Engagement

The construct of employee engagement is the extent to which workers feel passionate about their job and are committed to the organization and put discretionary efforts into their roles and responsibilities at work. Employee engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). The employees who are engaged are always motivated and emotionally attached with the organization (Stoner*et al*., 2013). They make extra effort by always seeking the good performance, image and reputation of the organization. They become the agent of change and transformation of employees at work (Knight, 2014). According to Khan, (2013), the success or failure of the organization is largely dependent on employees working in it. Hence,employee engagement is the emotional commitment employees feel towards their job, organization and

the actions they take to ensure the organization's success; engaged employees demonstrate care, dedication, enthusiasm, accountability and result focus.

Employee Engagement clearly explains the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in the organization and how long they stay as a result of their commitment. Thus, employee engagement is the bringing together of workers, where they express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally to the positive performance of their job roles. It is important to note that, employees that are not engaged usually exit the organization, "they float through their work day, putting time not energy or passion into their work" (Knight, 2011; Stoner*et al*., 2013).

Macey and Schneider (2008), articulated that the construct of employee engagement is ambiguous among scholars and practitioners alike who use it in conversation with clients. Research has shown that employee engagement brings about organizational performance as workers improve productivity due to personal commitment and positive emotional drive towards the organization. It contributes to positive bottom-line results by translating the organization to profitability (Macey &Schneider, 2008).Some researchers believe that improving employee engagement directly associates with improved performance, which eventually leads to organizational goal realization (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Truss *et al*., 2013; Byrne, 2014). Furthermore, employee engagement has been argued to contribute extensively to organizational performance, leading to improvements in quality of service, customer satisfaction and long-term financial results (Mercer, 2007; Bulent *et al*., 2013).

Employee engagement has made significant contributions to management and the entire organization. It has been discovered that employee engagement brings about a firm's profitability through the mediating role of higher productivity, sales, customer satisfaction and employee retention. Thus, a workforce that is positively engaged will strive to work in collaboration and in teams to serve their customers better, this will in turn improve sales and positively impact bottom-line results (profitability).Thus, employees are driven through involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused spirit and dedication to serve the workplace (Parker, 2003; Organ, Podsakoff & Mackenzie, 2006).

It is important to note that engagement of employees at work must be driven by certain factors; the absence of such factors will lead to disengagement. Management must evolve strategies on how to win the commitment of employees; this is now the focus of most enlightened management (Storey, Ulrich, Welbourne & Wright, 2008). Hence, the way staff members are treated at work will largely drive relative engagement on the part of employees. The extent to which employees are committed and the desire to stay in an organization also depends on how top echelon management or supervisors and managers manages the affairs of the workers (Stoner*et al*., 2013). It is imperative for organizational leaders to administer the right management style in order to drive laudable commitment from the workforce.

Employee engagement and commitment at work can be studied by management in order to have understanding so that leaders of an organization can measure and increase engagement with workers in the organization (Vance, 2014). The question is how do managers increase engagement at work? Engagement of employees can be achieved through the application of relative managerial theories and processes. When these employees are engaged and committed to the organizations. It will give rise to competitive advantages, higher workplace productivity and lower turnover rate of employees. It is expected that managers invest in policies and practices that will drive engagement and commitment on the part of employees.

The culture of the organization together with the structure should create the environment for committed employees. Organizations must have values and belief systems that are in tandem with the individual values of the organization and see themselves as part of the firm, they will automatically be engaged and work for the progress of the company (Abbott, 2006). The company should apply the right management theory in order to create the right environment and culture for employee engagement at work.

III.   DIMENSIONS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Absorption

Absorption means total concentration and being engrossed in your work, to the extent that time elapses quickly (Schaufeli, Baker & Salanova 2006). The individual is immersed in his or her work to the point that he or she is reluctant to stop working. This usually occurs when a person enjoys what he/she does. It is psychological (cognitive) attachment to work (Schaufeli *et al*., 2002). Absorption also indicates an employee's full attention embedded in his or her tasks (Saks &Gruman, 2014). It refers to a sense of detachment from your

surroundings, a high degree of concentration on your job, and a general lack of conscious awareness of the amount of time spent on the job (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). An engaged employee, while completing their work, experiences a clear state of mind with effortless concentration and a sense of complete control.

Dedication

Dedication is about being inspired, enthusiastic and highly involved in your job (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). Dedication is characterized by being deeply involved in one's work, and experiencing feelings of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration and challenge. It also involves emotional attachment to work. Dedication is an individual's deriving sense of significance from work, feeling enthusiastic, and proud about the given job, and feeling inspired and challenged by the job (Song, Kolb, Lee & Kim, 2012). Dedication refers to an employee's allegiance to his or her work (Saks & Gruman, 2014). This also connotes individuals' commitment, devotion and becoming happily engulfed in their work and feeling that their work is important, meaningful and challenging.

Vigor

Vigor refers to energy, mental resilience, determination and investing consistent effort in your job (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). Vigor is one of the aspects of employee engagement that implies high levels of energy and mental resilience while working. There is also a determined investment in the actual work, together with high levels of persistence even when faced with difficulties, it requires motivation. Strength and resistance are addressed as aspects of employee engagement and their concept is consistent with popular definitions of motivation (Latham & Pinder, 2005). It takes an employee who is interested and passionate about his/her job to be absorbed, dedicated and exerts vigour in it.

IV. DRIVERS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

This includes Job characteristics (demands and resources) that may influence employee health, well-being, and motivation. Many researchers have tried to identify factors leading to employee engagement and developed models to draw implications for managers. Their diagnosis aims to determine the drivers that will increase employee engagement level. Driver of engagement as identified by these authors (Robinson, Perryman & Hayday, 2004; Schaufeli &Taris,2014) will be used in this study.

According to Robinson *et al*, (2004), feeling valued and involved is the strongest driver of engagement. They stated that the components of feeling valued and involved have all the indicators related to several features that have been identified as relevant to engagement. These include: employees autonomy on their job, involvement in decision-making, good communication process between managers and their subordinates, the extent to which the organization cares about employees' health and well-being. While Schaufeli and Taris, (2014) examined engagement drivers from job characteristics which are job demand and job resources.

Job Resource

These include autonomy, performance feedback, social support and supervisory coaching etc. Schaufeli and Taris, (2014), defined Job resources as positively valued physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reducing job demands, or stimulating personal growth and development.

Job Demand

Job demands are work pressure, emotional demands, mental demands, physical demands etc. Job demands are negatively valued physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or psychological effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs. (Schaufeli& Taris, 2014). It is pertinent to note that most drivers that are found to lead to employee engagement are non-financial in their nature. Thus, an organization that has committed leadership can achieve the desired level of engagement with reduced cost. This does not imply that management should ignore the financial aspect of their employees.

V. IMPLICATION OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The implication for corporations and managers is that engaged employees are more likely to view the organization and job as a healthy environment and therefore more likely to support the organization and its value. High engagement levels have been found to have a strong impact on the business growth, employee retention and financial return. Cost on safety incidents will be saved as well as increased in operating margin and net profit margins.

VI. HUMAN RELATIONS SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

The term human relations mostly refers to relations between employees and employers which are not regulated by legal norms. These relations are concerned with moral and psychological rather than legal factors.When an excellent working relationship exists between management and employees, and better working conditions, it will lead to good human relations in the organization.Human relations school of thought was propounded by Professor Elton Mayo (1880 – 1949), the pioneering works for the human relations movement. In contrast to Taylor's scientificschool of management that sees individuals as machines and over emphasis on productivity. Elton Mayo's prescription is seeing the worker as a human being and should be treated as one.Human relations is the process by which management collaborates and interacts with subordinates. When management and employees corporate and creates good working conditions, good human relations crops up in an organization (Indabawa & Uba, 2014). The thrust of this theory is that employees are the most important asset at work and should be treated with respect and high regards (Abbott, 2006). Hence, when employees are given special attention by management work productivity is likely to increase irrespective of actual changes in working conditions. This has been confirmed by Elton Mayo's experiment at Western Electric Company that is popularly called Hawthorne experiment or studies.

Hawthorne Experiment

Elton Mayo conducted studies at the Hawthorne, Illinois plant of Chicago Western Electric Company, Chicago in collaboration with his colleagues F.J. Roethlisberger and William J Dickson. They believed that organizations always involve interrelationships among members and that it is the manager's role to see that relationships are as conflict free as possible, in order to accomplish the organization's objectives. They believed that the human aspects of business organizations had been largely ignored. They felt that satisfaction of psychological needs should be the primary concern of the management. Ismail, (2016). Mayo and his colleagues through Hawthorne experiment examined the effects of social relation, motivation, attitudes and reactions of workers to their jobs and their environment on productivity. They felt that if the best work environment could be determined, employees would be more efficient and less tired. They attempted through four experiments Illumination, Relay Assembly, Group Interview and Bank Wiring to determine the relationship between working conditions and productivity. They set up experimental groups, for which changes were made in lighting, frequency of rest periods and working hours and control groups, for which no changes were made.

Mayo and his colleagues in their previous experiment came to the conclusion that there are factors other than light responsible for increased productivity. When a follow up interview was conducted on employees, they realized that people come to work alongside their emotions, attitudes, and those employees were not working basically for economic benefit. But other dimensions also affected their performance. In a final experiment which was the bank wire observation room; the employees were paid using a piece work incentive system, in which their pay depended on the amount of work they were able to accomplish in a day. The result of this study was different from what the researchers expected. The groups establish a daily benchmark for individual output. To be socially accepted by the group, each employee must stay within the accepted standards set by that group. Throughout the test period, the production averages were surprisingly close to those dictated by the group. The researchers concluded that respect for productivity levels, and social acceptance was more important than monetary rewards. (Reothlisberger & Dickson 1939 as cited by Jaja, 2003).

Mayo and his colleagues were able to reach two important conclusions: (i) they identified that employees' behaviour at work is affected by non-economic factors. (ii) the existence of strong informal groups. They exposed some inadequacies of the cogent and structured approaches of classical theory and the misleading notion of viewing all employees as rational and economic beings. Consequently, Hawthorne studies evolved the view of employees as a social person. They established that employees are more responsive to the social forces of peer groups than to incentives and controls of management.The social person view of human relations school prompted managerial strategies for improving the human skills of the supervisors, replacing individual incentive plans by group incentive plans, focusing on employees' emotions, feelings and attitudes and their effect on productivity rather than managerial functions. Some organizations now have social manager positions; the social manager assumes the role of coach, helper and carries out human relations programs avoiding a stern and aloof attitude. Human relation theory practically looked beyond organizational factors such as environmental factors and aimed at accomplishing interrelationships that are conflict free among members of the organization. Drawing greatly from individual psychology and social psychology this theory expected the manager to be a tolerant leader and supervisor (democratic and participative) type and considered every employee to be a unique socio-psychological being.

The lesson of Hawthorne experiments was that psychological needs of individuals have a significant impact on group performance and that one should not miss the human aspects of organization while emphasizing technical and economic aspects. It was also established that when employees are given special attention, output is likely to increase regardless of the actual changes in the working conditions (Hawthorne effect). In other words, the result supported the view that reasonable satisfaction of the needs and desires of employees will lead to engagement.

Another great contributor to Human relations thought was Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933). She was the first to define management as getting work done through and with people. She felt that it's the responsibility of managers to motivate their employees to pursue organizational goals enthusiastically, rather than issuing orders that must be obeyed to the employees. She disagreed with the notion that managers should be trained to give orders, she believed instead that managers should be trained to work with employees toward the attainment of organizational objectives. Follett laid the foundations for studies in group dynamics, conflict management and political processes in organizations.

The emergence of the human relations school of thought in modern organization management brought about changes in organization management structure where there is a high authority and subordination relationship. The application of human relations approach has driven many firms to survive in times of economic crisis and lean budgets. This is largely due to the commitment of staff toward productivity and organizational success (Ugwulashi & Archibong, 2012).Human relations management school has the following characteristics; informal organization, participatory management, interfunctional coordination, employee involvement etc (Tirintetaake, 2017).

Implication ofHuman Relations School of Thought
One of the implications of the human relations school of thought is that it helps us to place proper value in the most important asset of the organization which is human beings. No wonder in the economic world reduced emphasis has been placed on GDP as a measure of nation growth, rather interest is now geared towards human capital development.

The Relevance of Employee Engagement to Human Relations School of Thought
Employee engagement refers to determination, commitment and willingness of an employee to invest both physically and psychologically to the attainment of common organizational goals; irrespective of any challenges that might arise in the course of executing his organizational responsibilities. Some researchers have stressed that employee engagement is beyond simple satisfaction with the employment arrangement or loyalty to the employer (Blessing, 2008; Erickson, 2005; Macey & Schnieder, 2008). Thus the full engagement equation is obtained by aligning maximum job satisfaction and maximum job contribution of an employee. Purcell, (2014) opined that disengaged employees who have lowered productivity since the 2008 financial meltdown, have affected the financial performances of many U.S organizations. No wonder Lockwood, (2007) states that organization challenge is not on how to retain talented employees, but how to fully engage them, getting their minds and hearts focused at each stage of their work life. This brings us to human relations school and how the concept of employee engagement can be aligned with human relations school.

Employee engagement has a strong nexus with the human relations school of thought. Employee engagement which is about the commitment of employees towards the organization and their contribution to the productivity and success of the firm (Stoner*et al*., 2013). This can be made possible with the practice of human relations school management. The prescription of human relations schools which focus on seeing the employee as human being and should be treated with respect and high regard, in practice predicts worker engagement and brings about high productivity at work (Indabawa & Uba, 2014).

The application of human relations at work improves employee commitment. This had been empirically validated by studies (Abbott, 2006; Vance, 2014). Any organization that wants to experience employee engagement should put into practice the elements or fundamentals of the human relations school of thought. This quite contrasts with the prescription of Taylor's scientific school of management (Nikolas, 2005). Human relations theory and its practices is a laudable factor to improve employee engagement at work. Tirintetaake, (2017). The human relations theory focuses on treating the employee properly by the managers and this will improve productivity of the organization.

VII.   CONCLUSION

Employee engagement which is the emotional commitment workers feel towards their job roles, organization and the actions they take to ensure the success of the workplace has a strong nexus or alignment with human relations management theory which focus on seeing and treating the employee as the most valuable asset at work. The thrust of this theory is that management should stop seeing humans as machines, but see them as people with the most laudable skills, recognizing them, being kind and fair to them. The practice of this theory in modern organization drives employee engagement and brings about worker commitment at work.This paper examined the alignment of employee engagement with human relations management theory. Employee engagement has both attitudinal and behavioural components, and it is lately measured as a significant technique that is commonly used in the corporate world. Engaged employees will lead to organization's success, while disengaged employees are a failure to an organization. Hence, the concept of employee engagement has become a trending topic in the field of management. This concept contributed extensively to organizational performance, improvement in quality of service, customer satisfaction as well as long term financial results.

We also looked at drivers of employee engagement which includeJob characteristics (job resources and job demand) feeling valued and involved. Some implications of employee engagement for corporations and managers is that engaged employees see the organization as a healthy environment, employee retention and financial return, and a strong impact on business growth.

Human relations approach advocates the training of people in behavioural sciences, such as individual and social psychology to encourage collaborative and cooperative relationship between supervisors and employees. The two key aspects of this approach are motivation and leadership style. Hawthorne studies created awareness to the existence of informal groups in organization and that psychological needs of individuals have a significant impact on group performance. Human relations approach is of the opinion that reasonable satisfaction of the needs and desires of employees will lead to engagement. Employee engagement has strong alignment with human relations management theory. It is the application and practice of human relations management theory that brings about employee engagement at work. A company that applies the human relations theory will have a higher level of employee engagement. This worker will then improve the firm's productivity and result in positive bottom-line results (profitability). It is therefore recommended that top echelon management should fully practice the theory of human relations management; this will birth worker engagement in the workplace.

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