

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract: *Employee engagement has become an area of interest among scholars and corporates alike. Employees who are not engaged do not perform at their maximum and this effect productivity. Hence, it is important for organisations to establish factors influencing levels of engagement. This study assesses the impact of selected HRM practices in the Gauteng Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Department. This study employed the quantitative approach using a survey in the form of a questionnaire. A systematic sampling method was used, from the population (N=376). The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of (n=188) respondents and 157 questionnaires were valid. The results indicated a weak positive correlation between (HRM practices) recruitment, appointment and selection; compensation, rewards and benefits, performance appraisal; and employee engagement with p-values of (r=.07, n=157, p=.38); (r=.23, n=157, p=.00); and (r=.20, n=157, p=.01) respectively. The former was not statistically significant, while the latter two were statistically significant. Collinearity between variables was found to be ($\beta=.07$, $t(.87) = .38$, $p < .05$); ($B=.21$, $t(2.9) = .04$, $p > 0.05$); and ($B=.18$, $t(2.58) = 0.11$, $p > 0.05$). Recruitment, selection and appointment practices did not predict employee engagement whereas compensation, rewards and benefits practices, and performance appraisal practices predicted employee engagement. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) model was statistically significant ($F(3,154) = 4.183$, $p = .01$). The R-Squared (R^2) was 8% and the Durbin-Watson statistic 1.93. The results contributed to the available literature on employee engagement.*

Keywords: *Human resource management, engagement, recruitment, selection, compensation, rewards, appraisal, engagement*

Introduction

Gauteng province, in executing its constitutional mandate, has various departments, which focus on matters of service delivery. One of these departments is the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA). The mandate of CoGTA is to support and mobilise resources for municipalities to facilitate service delivery to the communities. In mobilising the resources, the Department (CoGTA) employs a number of employees who perform a variety of functions. These employees are expected to carry out their functions fully. Hence, it is important that they are engaged in their jobs. CoGTA, particularly the human resource management (HRM) unit, has a duty to keep employees engaged through the implementation of HRM practices. However, a number of challenges, such as changes in leadership, both politically and administratively, have had an effect on the consistent implementation of HRM practices. Inconsistencies in the implementation of these practices have unintended consequences. These consequences may include but are not limited to a decline in engagement levels. Engagement is briefly defined as the

emotional state of mind, when employees are willing to work for the organisation, and achieve both personal and organisational goals (Khodakarami, Dirani & Rezaei, 2018). It is significant to note that employees who are not engaged are likely to leave the organisation. CoGTA has seen some employees leaving the Department, and some of the reasons provided in the exit interviews was that the Department was not applying HRM policies consistently, and the lack of programmes intended to keep employees engaged, to name a few, thus leaving employees feeling uncertain about their future. Therefore, employees were left feeling unsettled and always looking for jobs in other organisations. A number of internal studies have been conducted to diagnose the problem properly, especially the reasons for employees' leaving the organisation.

However, the internal study conducted in 2016 focused mostly on departmental strategic issues (Gauteng Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. Annual Report, 2017). The study recommended, for future research, that variables such as HRM practices in relation to engagement should be studied. Another internal study conducted in the Department focused on the relationship between HRM practices and employee satisfaction. The findings of this study showed that satisfaction in the Department was very low. In instances where engagement is mentioned in these studies, it is only a small section, and not a comprehensive study of engagement.

It is evident that levels of employee engagement in CoGTA is low in spite of the absence of a focused study on engagement. The findings of these studies, although they were done on a small scale, provided a glimpse into the problems in respect of engagement levels in the Department. The challenge attached to less engaged employees is that they are likely to feel neglected, and to a great degree feel that the employer is not concerned with their emotional and physical welfare. Employees in such a situation will probably not be innovative when performing their work and may execute their tasks only for compliance purposes. It should be noted that engaged employees are likely to be productive and have been proven to be more willing to work and stay longer in an organisation. Whereas those who are less engaged are likely to be less productive. Less engaged employees affect the morale of other employees who are willing to work for the organisation. Low levels of engagement in the long run affect work processes. Therefore, it is CoGTA's role as the employer to maintain employee engagement at acceptable levels at all times.

In addition, to justify the need for this study, it is relevant to note that most studies conducted in various organisations globally focused on other phenomena such as motivation and satisfaction to the exclusion or lesser inclusion of employee engagement as a stand-alone phenomenon. As evident in the study of Abbas, Khan and Hussain (2017), this study is also based on determining the relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement.

Research purpose and objectives

The main purpose of this study is to assess the impact of HRM practices on employee engagement within Gauteng CoGTA, and to recommend engagement programmes that can be applied in CoGTA to improve employee engagement levels through the application of HRM practices. To further determine whether relationships exist between HRM practices such as recruitment, selection and appointment, compensation, rewards and benefits, performance appraisal and employee engagement

Literature review

Background to Human resource management

Human resource management is a concept that evolved from personnel management (PM) (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin & Cardy, 2012). This means that there is a close link between HRM and PM. The close link between the PM and HRM does exclude different interpretations. However, these concepts operate more or less the same (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2012). Irrespective of the differences in the interpretation, conceptualisation, origin and history of HRM, the academic fraternity has accepted the existence and the importance of HRM in the modern workplace (Antwi, Opoku, Seth & Margaret, 2016). It is for this reason that a number of academics, among others Christie (2010), Fitzgerald and Mills (2012) and Gomez-Mejia et al. (2012) have researched the concept of HRM extensively.

Human resource management definition

Human resource management is defined in many ways. It must be said though that irrespective of the non-existence of a universal definition of HRM, it does not mean that these various definitions are not accurate (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Kaufman, 2015; Noe & Hollenbeck, 2010; Price, 2011; Sharabi & Harpaz, 2010). The definitions of HRM provided here give the viewpoints of this concept from different approaches. Watson (2010) provides a comprehensive definition and defines HRM as “the managerial utilisation of the efforts, knowledge, capabilities and committed behaviours, which people contribute to an authoritatively coordinated human enterprise as a part of an employment exchange to carry out work tasks in way which enables the enterprise to continue into the future”. In addition, according to Armstrong and Taylor (2014) HRM is a rational and planned approach to managing an organisation’s most valuable asset, the employees, who are able to contribute individually and collectively to achieving the strategic objectives of the organisation.

In brief, the definitions emphasise the crucial role played by HRM in the success of an organisation and, therefore, it is imperative that HRM should be integrated with core business of an organisation. Given that its prime focus is on the organisation’s greatest asset, its human capital, as alluded to in research by Armstrong and Taylor (2014), HRM is not operating in isolation, but as an important business partner and strategic tool in an organisation.

Human resource management practices

In the HRM space, if particular functions are considered to be less significant than others, they attract less budget or resources, and this renders them less effective compared to other organisational functions (Guest, 2017). Therefore, coordination and balancing of the various human resource practices will enhance the HR practices of an organisation if greater emphasis is placed on these HR-related strategies and practices. Many human resource management practices abound in different organisations. However, for the purposes of this study, the focus was on recruitment, selection and appointment and compensation, rewards and benefits as well as performance appraisal as independent variables.

Recruitment, selection and appointment

The purpose of the recruitment process is to provide an organisation with clear procedures to be followed in respect of filling vacant positions (Usmani, 2020). It is important to manage this process properly because if this is not the case unsuitable candidates might be recommended (KA, 2020). It must be noted that the organisation might incur costs that could have been avoided if proper recruitment processes had been followed (Hardini, Setyarini & Harto, 2019). When an organisation embarks on a recruitment drive, it must be mindful that the recruited employees are likely to stay longer, and therefore candidates who fit in with the organisation's culture should be identified for appointment (KA, 2020). However, on the contrary, if an organisation hires an employee who leaves within a short period of time, it means that the organisation must once again spend money to fill the position that had recently been filled (Hardini et al., 2019). Recruitment, selection, and appointment is commonly defined as the process of identifying the human capital needs of an organisation over a period of time (Antwi et al., 2016). These actions are followed to ensure that the organisation is to achieve its strategic goals and to acquire skills that may be required in the future. Recruitment is therefore based on the needs of the organisation. Hence, the human capital that has been identified as required should meet specific requirements relating to qualifications and experience, and so forth.

Compensation, rewards, and benefits

Reward strategy, as defined by Armstrong and Taylor (2014:332) is: The deliberate utilisation of the pay system as a significant integrating mechanism through which the efforts of various sub-units and individuals are directed toward the achievement of an organisation's strategic objectives. Compensation, rewards and benefits are a central a component of an organisation, with various parties entering into a contractual agreement (Gooderham, Fenton-O'Creevy, Croucher & Brookes, 2018). The contract entered into between the employer and employee stipulates the duties of the employer and also the responsibilities of the worker (Abbas et al., 2017). In the same vein, Abbas et al. (2017) and Gooderham et al. (2018) highlight that the employer must compensate the worker, and thus the worker must perform, needless to mention, in line with the requirements stipulated in the contract. Therefore, it is important to note that compensation, rewards and benefits play a pivotal role in employee motivation and job satisfaction (Ugwu & Okojie, 2016).

Performance appraisal

Performance appraisal is considered to be one of the predictors in the management practices, and performance feedback should be provided consistently. Ugwu and Okojie (2016) stated that favourable performance feedback can create a favourable psychological climate which will improve the level of employee engagement. Similarly, Rao and Rao (2017) posit that providing constant and honest feedback enables employees to improve their performance. Ugwu and Okojie (2016) found a positive and significant relationship between feedback-oriented performance appraisal and employee engagement among the employees in the banking sector of Nigeria. The researchers Ugwu and Okojie (2016) confirm that there is a positive relationship between performance appraisal and engagement. Some studies (Ahmed, Ahmad & Raihan-Joarder, 2016; Nazir & Islam, 2017) indicate that there is an insignificant relationship between performance appraisal feedback and engagement. Therefore, the outcomes of the relationship will differ from organisation

to organisation depending on how organisations implement their performance appraisal system and how consistently employees receive performance feedback (Rao & Rao).

Employee engagement

Literature proposes that employee engagement comprises three dimensions. For instance, Kulikowski (2017) argues that the concept of 'employee engagement' is used to describe employees who are cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally engaged in the workplace. Engagement therefore refers to the degree to which employees are focused on their tasks, are mentally immersed and absorbed in performing their expected tasks (Joo, Zigarmi, Nimon & Shuck, 2017). Employee engagement is defined as a state of employees feeling involved, passionate, committed, and empowered while demonstrating those feelings in their behaviour towards their jobs (Gallup, 2009; Reina, Rogers, Peterson, Byron & Hom 2018). Therefore, it indicates the level of involvement in and employee commitment to their organisation and its values (Presbitero, 2017; Shanker, Bhanugopan, Van der Heijden & Farrell, 2017).

Research methodology and design

Research approach

This paper follows a quantitative approach wherein a questionnaire was used. This approach allows the researcher to collect data using a questionnaire wherein numerical data is collected and when analysed in generalize across groups in explaining the phenomenon under research (Babbie, 2013). Descriptive studies are aimed at finding out "what is" and are designed to provide a bigger picture of a situation as it happens naturally (Babbie, 2013).

Research participants

A population is the sum of all units of analysis from which the sample is drawn (Babbie, 2013). Population includes all the people or items that has specific characteristic the researcher intends understanding. This study is undertaken in Gauteng in the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, South Africa. The target population for the study is N=376 comprising of senior managers, middle management, supervisors, and junior employees. The sample in this study is (n=188). However, 157 questionnaires are valid and 31 discarded due to various discrepancies and. The response rate from the sample is at least 80%. Table 1 below reflects the demographic profile of respondents:

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Dimension	Valid percent
Gender	
Female	56
Male	44
Age	
18-30 years	24
31-40 years	32
41-50 years	33
51-60 years	10
61 years and above	1

Level of employment	
Chief Director	8
Director	13
Deputy Director	31
Assistant Director	24
Administrator	14
Personal Assistant	10
Education	
Below Matric	1
Matric	1
Certificate/Higher Certificate	4
National Diploma	19
Degree	45
Honours/BTech/Postgraduate Diploma	18
Masters	10
PhD/DTech	1
Years of employment	
Below 1 year	8
1-5 years	36
6-10 years	45
11-15 years	10
16 years and above	1

Research instrument

A Likert scale is used in the questionnaire. Respondents chose from five options, wherein a five-point rating scale is used. The scale divided as follows for HRM practices Recruitment, selection and appointment, Compensation, rewards and benefits, Performance appraisal, 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Neutral and 5=Strongly agree. The same rating is used for employee engagement. The reason for using the five-point Likert scale is that it provides a wide range of responses which allows the researcher to receive fair responses from respondents. Cronbach's alpha is used to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 22 is used for this purpose. The constructs met the adequate reliability level of above 0.6 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results of the Therefore, the instrument met both validity and reliability requirements.

Table 2: Cronbach Alpha coefficients

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Recruitment, appointment, and selection	0.7	11
Compensation, rewards and benefits	0.8	10
Performance appraisal	0.8	9
Employee engagement	0.7	12

Table 3: Summary of descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Mean		Std. Dev
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Err.	Statistic
Recruitment, selection and appointment	157	3.27	.033	.416
Compensation, rewards and benefits	157	3.05	.034	.430
Performance appraisal	157	3.23	.036	.456
Employee engagement	157	3.06	.031	.397

Valid N (listwise)	157			
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Research procedure and ethical considerations

For the main purpose and hypotheses of this study, a questionnaire was used to collect data. According to Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) deemed that a questionnaire is a simple yet effective research tool and is cost effective. Furthermore, a questionnaire guarantees respondents' confidentiality. Questionnaires were sent to respondents via emails for pilot purposes. After pilot the questionnaire was amended. The questionnaire was distributed physically, in compliance with Covid-19 protocols to respondents. After completion respondents placed the questionnaires in a designated box for collection.

Data was captured into an MS Excel spreadsheet from the questionnaires that were returned. The data was then transferred from the MS Excel to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22, where it was cleaned up and validated to ensure that all the responses were properly captured according to the statements or questions in the questionnaire. After the data was validated, the process of analysing was executed.

There was no respondents' personal information shared and as such, respect privacy and ensure confidentiality (De Vos, Strydom, Schulze & Patel, 2011). In addition, there were no ethical guidelines that were breached. Throughout the process of the study the researcher ensured that human dignity was always maintained without any infringements (De Vos et al., 2011). The Ethics Committee from Management College of Southern Africa granted the researcher permission to continue with the study

Statistical analysis

The demographics (gender, age group, years of experience, academic qualifications, level of employment and directorate of respondents) of the sample and descriptive statistics are analysed using percentages, frequencies, mean and standard deviation through MS Excel and SPSS version 22. In establishing whether correlation existed between variables, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to determine the strength of relationships, for instance strong to weak or positive to negative for HRM practices (recruitment, selection and appointment; compensation, rewards and benefits; performance appraisal) and employee engagement.

The significance value was tested at a 95% confidence level ($p \leq 0.05$). Data was presented using tables to indicate the strength of the relationships for each independent variable (HRM practices) and dependent variable (employee engagement). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) in this study was used to test whether there was a significant regression between the independent variables (HRM practices) and the dependent variable (employee engagement). In addition, R-Squared was used to measure how close the data was to the fitted regression line (Dhakal, 2018). Generally, the higher the R-Squared, the better the model fits the data. The R-Squared values of between 0.13 to 0.25 indicated medium effect, and therefore the study was considered to be significant (Frost, 2017).

Results

Descriptive results indicate that the sample represented in Table 1: gender representation comprised 88 (56%) female and 69 (44%) male respondents, Age category showed that most employees were in the age category 41-50 (33%), level of employment most

employees are located in positions of Deputy Directors (31%), most employees have undergraduate degrees (45%). In respect of years of employment most employees have between 6-10 (45%) years. Table 4 indicate the results after testing the relationships of the variables in line with the hypotheses. There are three hypotheses.

Table 4: Relationships between HRM Practices and employee engagement

		Recruitment, selection and appointment	Engagement
Recruitment, selection and appointment	Pearson correlation	1	.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.384
	N	157	157
		Compensation rewards and benefits	Engagement
Compensation, rewards and benefits	Pearson correlation	1	.228**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	157	157
		Performance appraisal	Engagement
Performance appraisal	Pearson correlation	1	.202*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.011
	N	157	157

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: Analysis of variance

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	1.871	3	.624	4.183	.007a
Residual	22.804	154	.149		
Total	24.675	157			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Performance appraisal; Recruitment, selection and appointment; Compensation, rewards and benefits

b. Dependent variable: Employee engagement

Table 6: Analysis of variance

Model	R	R-Squared	Adjusted R-Squared	Std. Error of the estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.275a	.076	.058	.38607	1.931

a. Predictors: (Constant), Performance appraisal, Recruitment, selection and appointment, Compensation, rewards and benefits

Discussion

Outline of results

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of HRM practices on employee engagement in Gauteng Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. There are three hypotheses. Findings of the results in Table 4, Ho1: There is a positive relationship between HRM recruitment, selection and appointment practices and employee engagement. The results produced ($r=.07$, $n=157$, $p=.38$), which indicate that there is a weak positive relationship between HRM recruitment, selection and appointment practices and employee engagement, meaning that it was not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was supported, indicating that there is no statistically significant

relationship between HRM recruitment, selection and appointment practices, and employee engagement.

Findings of the results in Table 4 Ho2: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between HRM compensation, rewards and benefits practices and employee engagement within Gauteng Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. The results produced ($r=.23$, $n=157$, $p=.00$), which indicate a weak positive linear correlation, which is statistically significant, between HRM compensation, rewards and benefits practices and employee engagement. Therefore, null hypothesis is not supported. Furthermore, the results are in concurrence with the results of a study conducted by Indriyani and Heruwasto (2017), which showed that employees' remuneration influenced their levels of engagement.

Findings of the results in Table 4 Ho3: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between HRM performance appraisal practices and employee engagement within Gauteng Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. The results produced ($r=.20$, $n=157$, $p=.01$), which indicate ($r=.20$, $n=157$, $p=.01$), between HRM performance appraisal practices and employee engagement. Therefore, null hypothesis is not supported. The results of the study are in line with a study conducted in IT companies in Chennai city in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu (Sivapragasam & Raya, 2017) found a statistically significant relationship between HRM practices (performance) and employee engagement in cases where employee well-being played a mediating role. Analysis of variance is used to determine how well the regression equation fitted the data. The results are $F(3.154) = 4.183$, $p=.01$. This means that the model is statistically significant and as such predicted the outcome variable. Lastly, the R-Squared (R^2) produced .08, which is equal to 8% and the Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.932, which is not less than 1 or greater than 3. This means that the model falls within the acceptable norm.

Practical implications

The study makes contribution to the body of knowledge in respect of the HRM practices and their impact on employee engagement. The knowledge generated by this study can be used as an example by other departments or to a greater extent other sectors in conducting similar studies in their spaces, when they can compare the findings of this research against their own findings. The study furthermore contributes to the Department of Gauteng CoGTA by making recommendations that the Department can apply to improve levels of employee engagement through HRM practices. The researcher believes that a better and clearer understanding of variables that were part of this study will assist the Department successfully to have engaged employees. Lastly, the understanding of the existing relationships between the selected HRM practices variables and employee engagement contribute to the field of HRM in general.

Limitations and recommendations

The study focused only on Gauteng CoGTA and not any other department in the province. National departments and Gauteng provincial entities, including those of municipalities in the Gauteng province, were not included in the study. The study focused on the selected

employees in the Department. The Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) and the Head of Department (HOD) of Corporative Governance and Traditional Affairs were not part of the study. However, the HOD, as the Accounting Officer of the Department, granted permission for the study to be conducted in the Department. Only the selected directorates, albeit not exhaustive, featured in the study, and employees below the salary level of Grade 7 were not part of the study.

The study focused only on the impact of the selected HRM practices (recruitment, selection and appointment; compensation, rewards and benefits; performance appraisal) on employee engagement. Other HRM practices were not included in the study, which might have had an effect on employee engagement. The HRM practices used in the study were chosen in order to be able to manage the research process. It would not have been feasible to consider using all possible HRM variables as part of the study.

Conclusion

This research focused on establishing the impact of HRM practices (recruitment, selection and appointment; compensation, rewards and benefits; performance appraisal) on employee engagement. The results indicate that recruitment, selection and appointment have a weak positive relationship with employee engagement, therefore this relationship is not statistically significant. This means that the relationship between recruitment, selection and appointment and employee engagement occurs by chance. However, the findings of the relationship between HRM compensation, rewards and benefits practices and employee engagement is that there is a weak positive relationship, which is statistically significant. The relationship between HRM performance appraisal practices and employee engagement was found to be a weak positive relationship, which is also statistically significant.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they do not have any financial or personal interest that may compromise the publishing of the article or that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing and publishing this article.

Author's contribution

AJ Mokoena is the primary researcher of this paper, and this article was drawn from his Master of Commerce completed at Management College of Southern Africa (Mancosa). He is solely responsible for conceptualisation of the research, collection of data, analysis, and interpretation of data.

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Data availability statement

New data was collected and as such there are no previous studies that used the data in this paper. Data was made available as per the permission granted to conduct the study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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