

Communication Direction And Employee Engagement In Technical Training Institutions In Kenya

Margaret Njoki Ngugi¹, Helen Mberia², Kyalo Wa Ngula³

¹Ngugi School of communication and developmental studies, Jomo Kenyatta University, P. O. Box 62000-00200 ,Nairobi, Kenya.

²School of communication and Developmental Studies, Jomo Kenyatta University, P. O. Box 62000-00200 ,Nairobi, Kenya.

³Department of Mass communication, Chuka University, P.O. Box 109-60400, Chuka, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the effect of the communication direction on employee engagement in technical training institutions in Kenya. The study was conducted using survey research design. Study population was all the 3780 trainers in the 102 public technical institutions in Kenya out of which a sample of 360 respondents was used. Stratified random sampling, random sampling and stratified proportionate random sampling technique design were employed. Data was collected using a questionnaire which had both closed and open-ended (Likert type scale 1-5) questions. Questionnaires were distributed to 360 respondents out of which 322 completed the questionnaires giving a response rate of 89.4%. Cronbach's alpha was used to test for internal reliability of each variable used in the study. Data analysis was done by use of descriptive and inferential statistics. The study supports that communication direction has a significant effect on employee engagement and hence, it is a predictor of employee engagement among the trainers of technical training institutions in Kenya

KEY WORDS: *Communication direction, employee engagement, grapevine, lateral communication, vertical communication*

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication ought to flow successfully in all levels of the organization. This will make the employees to comprehend their roles, appreciate their duties and responsibilities and serve customers appropriately. Effective information flow helps in building a sense of corporate identity, productivity, teamwork, participation, job performance and improves retention (Neves & Eisenberger 2012). All stakeholders in organization require information in order to promote mutual understanding and proper coordination. The manager should ensure that important information is shared to and by employees and departments so as to make them understand the organization's operations and deliver their duties appropriately

Beyerlein, McGee, Klei, Nemiro and Broedling (2003) assert that, it is the management duty to give support systems in the strategic design so that employees can communicate their needs and frustrations, as this will keep an organization functioning smoothly and successfully. Effective

communication begins with the acknowledgment of the critical role internal communication plays as an important method for advancing information sharing across all directions of an organization: upward, downward and horizontal. Moorcroft (2003) posits that clarifying to the employees the strategy and business development plans, make them more engaged as they understand that their unique roles play an essential part in the organization's success. On the whole, employees are the face of an organization and have a powerful influence on organizational success. Employees are interested in knowing where their organization is headed and how they contribute to achieving the vision (Moorcroft, 2003). Alfes et al (2010) maintained that engaged employees perform better, are more innovative than others, and are more likely to want to stay with their employers, enjoy greater levels of their personal well-being and perceive their workload to be more sustainable than others.

Apparently, employee engagement is one of the greatest challenges in today's workplace. With complexness and strict regulations in many organizations, employee engagement will continue to challenge organizations in the future (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014). Engagement remains a challenge to the management since it is an indispensable element in maintaining the organization's vitality, survival, and profitability (Farndale & Murrer, 2015).

Pandita and Bedarkar (2014) opine that one of the most demanding challenges facing managers of many organizations is to ensure that when their employees report to work every day, they do not only do it physically but also mentally and emotionally. This means that organization must ensure that their employees are engaged so that they are able to contribute positively towards achieving the organizational outcomes. Providing more avenues for participation in decision making, regular communication and providing effective channels of communication will enable the staff to contribute towards organizational goal.

Globally, the environment of technical education is facing relentless and rapid change. These circumstances underscore the pertinent role of leadership and management in maintaining morale, enhancing productivity, and helping staff at all



institutional levels to cope with momentous and rapid change. Hence, the management in technical training institutes must possess an array of leadership skills to be effective. Hargie, Tourish, and Wilson, (2000) suggest that managers need to assess whether their communication channels are currently functioning in support of the organizational success.

Technical and Vocational and Education and Training (TVET) must play significant roles in implementing and promoting sustainable development. It is worth noting that in Kenya, In the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 8: is to Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for all. Again, TVET institutions are the main providers of the workforce who will spearhead sustainable issues.

The performance of these institutions will either speed up or slow down the realization of Vision 2030 in that they are predicted to play a pertinent role in creating a human resource base that will help meet the requirements of a fast industrializing economy. According to the Ministry of Education (2012), human capital is one of the key resources needed for social-economic development of an organization. Successful nations and individual organizations invest heavily on human resource capacity development. In order to breed and maintain a competent and motivated team of workers there has to be effective communication. Since managers have the greatest impact on employee engagement; they must be encouraged to develop meaningful relationships with the workforce and recognize good performance. The purpose of this study is therefore, to explore the effect of communication direction on employee engagement in technical training institutions in Kenya.

A. Statement of the problem

Communication process assumes a critical role in the progress of any organization. Every organization and in particular educational institutions at the tertiary level needs effective internal communication to succeed. However, management of many organizations appears not to reckon with the significance of communication in their systems. Bua (2014) opined that the success or failure of the teaching and learning process depends largely on the way and manner in which the communication process is initiated, developed and maintained in educational institutions. In Kenya engaging and enthusing the trainers has been a challenge. According to Koome (2014), there has been high academic staff turnover in technical institutions in Kenya. High turnover is generally associated with poor or lack of effective internal communication (Ashfaq et al. , 2012).

Technical expertise forms the basis for the actualization of industrial transformation and a meaningful pursuit for Kenya's Vision 2030. In spite of this, technical education has been given "casual" treatment since independence to date (Oroni, 2012). Research in these institutions has mainly concentrated on students' issues like choice of courses, enrolment, gender disparity, training, physical facilities, learning facilities and students discipline among others (Njoroge, 2015). Simiyu (2009) in a study of Kaiboi Technical Institute noted that the managers of technical institutions ought to apply

contemporary approaches in personnel management such as open house discussions and feedback mechanism so as motivate their staff and in turn affect the quality of teaching. Management and communication within these institutions which are charged with a great responsibility of transforming the country have not been given due attention.

In spite of the importance accorded to communication flow and employee engagement within the practitioner literature, there is paucity of empirical academic research testing and supporting an association between the constructs. It has not received much scholarly attention in a single study especially in Kenya. The understanding of the effect communication direction on employee engagement would be helpful in advancement of technical training institutions in realization of the Vision 2030 and more specifically in the achievement of the SDGS. Based on this backdrop then, the main task of this study was to focus on the effect of communication direction on employee engagement in technical training institutions in Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Communication Direction

Smith and Mounter (2015) describe internal communication as an organization's two-way communication, needed to ensure day-to-day smooth running of operations. They added that collective goals have to be shared, as well as information delivered to the workforce regarding what is expected from them. A strong link needs to exist between the leaders and the workforce and that link could be provided by communication. Goals, values, mission and vision are often expressed carefully to the employees, who are internal stakeholders.

According to Johlke and Duhan (2000), communication can flow two-way (bidirectional) or one-way (unidirectional), unidirectional communication occurs when organizations and supervisors provide employees with information and do not encourage them to respond with feedback and ideas and bidirectional communication employees given information and then are encouraged to respond with feedback . Therefore, managers who use this method provide employees with information and then solicit the employees' input (Cornelissen, 2011).

According to Marques (2010), communication takes place in three levels: lateral, upward, and downward. In lateral communication information flows horizontally from colleagues at the same level in the organization to other colleagues at the same level (Wilcox & Cameron, 2011). Lateral communication creates links among divisions, job units and related tasks within the organization. It takes place between equals (one level) personnel and organizations subdivisions (Wilcox & Cameron, 2011). One of the ways to motivate employees through peer to peer communication is through creation of a good work environment. This type of communication flow frequently creates and sustains staff fulfillment and employee morale. The staffs habitually talk freely and openly about their feelings relating to the system and deliberate their problems with those who are able to relate together. Additionally, socialization inside the official organization usually takes place over

horizontal communication. Again, this communication flow facilitates teamwork and thus increasing the efficiency with which tasks in the organization are performed (Dolphin, 2015).

Downward communication is where the leadership of the organization shares information, directives or orders with employees at the lower levels (Kalla, 2015). Downward communication is usually one way and it rarely elicits responses. However, there are instances when downward communication will invite responses from lower level employees. This pattern of communication is used by managers to provide job guidelines, assign objectives, point difficulties that require attention, explain policy directions and methods and provide feedback about performance. Downward communication hence provides the leaders with an avenue to clarify and explain the deeper meaning of strategies, directives, policies and procedures so that employees can internalize them (Orpen, 2012). It also enables management to establish discipline, law and order in the organization.

Upward communication involves information flowing from the lower levels of a hierarchy to the upper levels (Mumby, 2013). It serves as a control system for the organization and it assists the top management to receive feedback from their juniors for decision making. It is also used to inform them about progress towards goals and also keeps the managers aware of how employees feel about their jobs. Upward communication is important in ensuring that staffs pass information to management about their job, their understanding of the roles, their likes and dislikes (Herbst, 2012). Furthermore, upward communication system acts as a motivator to employees (Drafke, 2013). This is because it allows workforce to express their outlook or attitude to management. Tsai and Chuang, (2009) observed that the sum total of an individual's satisfaction with information flow and relationship variables has correlation with key variables such as job performance, engagement and commitment. Similarly, upward communication enables easy access of superiors by employees which enables them to pass on suggestions, innovations or misgivings. This facilitates corporate decision making (Ledingham, 2011). Assigning great attention directly to company's upward communication, can lead to increase in employees' dedication and improve overall work performance and engagement (Mumby, 2013).

B. Communication Direction and employee engagement

In his study of Chinese corporations, on Internal/employee communication and organizational effectiveness: Chen (2008) found out that two-way channel of communication, although not typical of Chinese organizations, help organizations reach a higher level of employee trust. A qualitative study by Dolphin (2005) found similar results that two-way communication develops trust and further commitment during times of stress or change. Both studies support the concept that future communication strategies need to focus less on disseminating information and more on developing relationships with employees.

Taylor, & Elsey, (2005) conducted a research on move from one way to two way communication channels effects on engagement, communication satisfaction and performance and

found out that increased two way communications had improved engagement from 75%-81%, improved communication satisfaction from 52% to 81%, had new business acquisitions and new search products improving organizational performance.

In an effort to study the effects of communication on engagement, researchers Reissner and Pagan conducted a case study with a United Kingdom company in 2013. In their qualitative study, 24 individuals and three group interviews were conducted with both frontline managers. The company had recently implemented new communication activities to help enhance employee engagement, including organization-wide events to increase shared understanding, a newsletter, and team meetings. Managers were also encouraged to communicate more strategic messages that included business outcomes, and communicate through their actions. To determine if the new communication activities were improving engagement, employees were asked questions about their engagement relationship with their managers and the executed engagement activities. The data revealed that employees appreciated the increased opportunities for interaction that the company and managers had implemented. In addition, the increase in discussion and discursive communication seemed to help employees better understand the involved and engaged in the organization (Reissner & Pagan, 2013). Reissner and Pagan confirmed that the study further emphasized the importance of organizational communication activities and its link to engagement organization (Reissner & Pagan, 2013). The increase in two-way communication also allowed employees to feel more.

A research by Robbins, Judge and Campbell (2010) disclosed that, downward communication can be crucial to the success of an organization. They went on to explain that it would be advantageous to clarify the rationale behind a manager communicating downward to the subordinate. In most cases, management within an organization ignores these aspects of when communicating. It could be that they are either preoccupied to make information known to the employees. They also might have seen as "machines" following orders (Robbins et al., 2010).

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Survey research design adopted in this study provides a quantitative description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population. The design entails the collection of data on more than one case and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative data in connection with two or more variables which are examined to detect patterns of association (Bryman, 2008; Fowler, 2009).

The survey research design was found to be appropriate in the study since the researcher was studying a sample in order to make generalizations about the target population. Moreover, the design was suitable because it enabled the researcher to make quantitative descriptions of the opinions of the population. The independent variable was communication direction while the dependent variable was employee engagement. The study was conducted in public technical training institutions in Kenya. The selection criterion for the study was because all Government Institutions share the same

organization structure. In addition, the Government employs trainers which clearly show harmony in all the Government institution.

The study population was all the 3780 trainers in 102 public technical institutions in Kenya (Teachers Service Commission, 2018). The respondents were both male and female trainers. Trainers were chosen for the study since they are the main employees expected to provide information out of experience and understanding. They are also a suitable population of study due to their accessibility in different counties. Technical training institutions were chosen in this research because of the key role they are expected to play in the realization of vision 2030. In this study, the sample population was derived from the 102 public technical institutions in Kenya. Gay (1992) recommends a minimum sample of 20% in this study the researcher used 30%, and as such, the researcher used 30 institutions.

This study adopted stratified random sampling technique where the researcher used the eight administrative regions (strata) in Kenya. Simple random technique was then used so as to draw samples from each stratum. Simple random technique ensured that all the institutions had an equal and independent chance of being selected. Stratified proportionate random sampling technique was then used so as to ensure there is proportional allocation where each stratum (region) contributes to the sample a number of TVETS institutions that is proportional to the number of the institutions in that region.

A sample size of 360 respondents (trainers) was obtained using Slovin's formula of an infinite population which in this case is 3780 the total population of trainers in public technical institutions in Kenya. A self-administered structured questionnaire was used, to ensure the researcher maximizes on response rate. Gillham (2013) noted that the use of questionnaires is advantageous in a number of ways including efficiency, standardized responses and ease of analysis of the data there in. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was the major instrument of data collection for the study. Likert-scales are prevalent in social science research as they gain more statistically significant results (Cooper & Schindler, 2008).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Descriptive analysis of communication direction

According to Marques (2010), communication takes place in three levels: lateral, upward, and downward. In this study communication direction was conceptualized into three components: lateral, upward, and downward. The study participants were first asked to indicate the communication patterns used in their institutions. The responses are shown in Table 4:1.

Table 4: 1 Types of communication patterns common in technical institutions

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Vertical	225	70.8	70.8
Horizontal	51	16.0	86.8
Lateral	25	7.9	94.7
Grapevine	17	5.3	100.0
Total	318	100.0	

Vertical communication (71%) pattern was the most common pattern used to communicate in the technical training institutions in Kenya. Vertical communication means upward and downward communication. This implies that the management is aware of what is happening throughout the institution and the trainers also receive directives from their superiors. Other communication patterns outlined were horizontal (16%), lateral communication (8%) and grapevine communication pattern (5%). Horizontal and lateral communications patterns are related as they refer to an interdepartmental flow of communication whereby employees of the same status communicate. These two patterns ought to be the most frequent patterns of communication as workers exchange information often whether work related or personal. This encourages team or group work. However, in the current study horizontal / lateral takes 21%. It seems that only a few of the trainers from different departments communicate by using these patterns. The results indicate that horizontal and lateral communication was poor. Through horizontal communication the staffs talk freely and openly about their feelings relating to the system and personal concerns. Hence, crippling horizontal communication would imply lack of efficiency and team spirit. Dolphin, (2015) stipulated that horizontal communication flow facilitates teamwork and thus increasing the efficiency with which tasks in the organization are performed

4.2 Descriptive statistic on the effect of communication patterns on engagement

Respondents were asked to indicate how the patterns of communication affected their engagements. The responses are shown in Table 4:2

Table 4.2: Effect of communication patterns on employee engagement in the Kenyan technical institutions

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
	%	%	%	%	%		
The staff in my institution are dedicated because they are involved in decision making	10.9	15.6	18.4	44.2	10.9	3.29	1.180

At work, the staffs are engaged in their work because they can freely communicate with their immediate supervisor	5.3	8.7	13.4	55.5	17.1	3.70	1.023	My commitment greatly comes from the constructive teamwork in our institution	7.8	8.1	11.5	47.7	24.9	3.74	1.151
The staff are attached to their work because the leaders share information with them	7.2	8.4	13.7	54.8	15.9	3.64	1.072	Trainers in my institution always share information with each other	5.6	7.8	11.2	51.1	24.3	3.81	1.067
I feel encouraged to come up with new innovations and better ways of doing things when am listened to	7.8	5.6	8.1	46.4	32.1	3.89	1.149								
When I receive feedback about the way I perform my work I get more committed	6.2	3.4	7.8	48.9	33.6	4.00	1.056								
I receive most of the information from my colleagues	5.9	15.9	13.7	48.6	15.9	3.53	1.115								

The study respondents agreed moderately to the claim that staff in their institutions were dedicated because they are involved in decision making (M=3.29, SD=1.80). Their responses were moderately dispersed meaning the employees responded fairly different. However, participants agreed that at their work places, the staffs were engaged in their work because they could freely communicate with their immediate supervisors (M=3.70, SD=1.023). Additionally, the participants agreed that the staff were attached to their work because the leaders shared information with them (M=3.64, SD=1.072). They also felt encouraged to come up with new innovations and better ways of doing things when they were listened to (M=3.89, SD=1.149) and said that they got more committed at work when they received a feedback about their work performance (M=4.00, SD=1.056). In addition, the employees indicated that they received most of the information from their colleagues (M=3.53, SD=1.115) and that their commitment greatly came from the constructive teamwork in their institution (M=3.74, SD=1.151). Lastly, the respondents agreed that trainers in their institution always shared information with each other (M=3.81, SD=1.067). These results indicate that various patterns of communication are evident in technical training institutions and that they affected their engagement.

Table 4: 3 Flow of communication in the institution

	No	Somewh	Neutr	Somewh	We	Mea	SD
	at	at not	al	at well	ll	n	
	well	well	al	at well	ll	n	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
How well do you feel information flows from your employer to your work area	11.2	45.8	38.9	3.4	.6	2.36	.751

How well do you feel information flows among the coworkers and leaders within your work area	7.5	49.8	39.3	2.5	.9	2.40	.70	4
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From the results in Table 4.3, most respondents felt that information did not flow well from their employer to their work area (M=2.36, 0.751) with most of the respondents (57%) indicating not well and 38.9% not being quite sure. They also felt the same on how information flowed among the co-workers and leaders within their work area (M=2.4, SD=0.704). The results indicate that there was poor communication flow in technical institutions in Kenya.

B. INFERENCE STATISTICS

a) Correlation analysis

From the results, it was observed that there was a positive significant moderate linear relationship between communication direction and employee engagement, $r = 0.438$, $p < 0.001$. This was signposted by significant probability values found to be less than 0.05 at 95% confidence level. Therefore, from the results, all the independent variable of communication direction was considered to be a significant factor to be considered for employee engagement.

b) Effect of Communication direction on employee engagement

A simple logistic regression was performed where employee engagement was used as the response variable while communication direction was taken to be the explanatory variable. To assess the effect of communication direction on employee engagement the following hypothesis was tested:

H03: There is no significant effect of communication direction on employee engagement in technical training institutions in Kenya

Logistic Regression Analysis was used to find out if there is a relationship between communication direction and the dependent variable (employee engagement) by evaluating the contribution of the independent variable in explaining the dependent variable, when the other variables are controlled. The results in Table 4.2.2 show a Nagelkerke R² value of 0.290. This means that communication direction was found to

explain 29% of the variation or change in employee engagement in the technical institutions.

Table 4.2.2 : Logistic regression model of communication direction and employee engagement

	B	S.E	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Communication direction	1.325	.207	40.950	1	.000	3.762	2.507	5.645
Constant	-2.142	.652	10.772	1	.001	.117		
Number of Observations								321
Nagelkerke R ²								0.290
Wald Chi (1)								40.950
F statistic								
Prob>chi=								0.000
-2 Log likelihood								156.846

The logistic model equation is as follows:

$$LN \left(\frac{p}{1-p} \right) = -2.142 + 1.325 X_3$$

Where:

$LN \left(\frac{p}{1-p} \right)$ is the natural log of the odds of employee engagement (the dependent variable)

X_3 is the communication direction (independent variable)

The analysis of the variance (ANOVA) results is showed by Wald Chi (1) statistic, which indicated a test statistic value of 40.95 and a probability value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$). The reported p value ($p < 0.01$) was found to be less than the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). Therefore, there was sufficient evidence to reject the claim that the overall model was not statistically significant. Thus, the model with communication direction as the independent variable was found to be statistically significant in predicting employee engagement. Further, the logistic regression coefficients show that communication direction influenced employee engagement and in a significant and a positive way ($\beta = 1.325$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that communication direction is a significant predictor of employee engagement. In addition, the results from the regression model imply that an additional unit of communication direction increases the log of odds of employment engagement by 1.325 points holding other factors constant. Further, a scatter diagram was plotted to show how communication mode and employee engagement related.

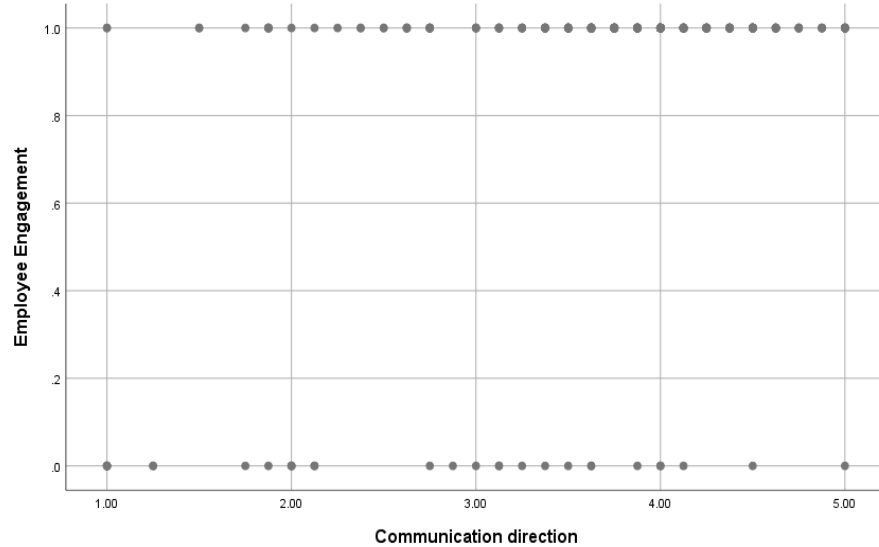


Figure 4.: 2 A scatter diagram for the relationship between communication direction and employee engagement

Therefore, from the results, it can be concluded that there was sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there was a significant effect of communication direction on employee engagement in technical training institutions in Kenya. In line with the above result, Tsai and Chuang, (2009) observed that the sum total of an individual's satisfaction with information flow and relationship variables has correlation with key variables such as job performance, engagement and turnover rates.

V. A. SUMMARY

Communication direction had Nagelkerke R^2 value of 0.290. This means that communication direction was found to explain 29% of the variation or change in employee engagement in the technical institutions. The analysis of the variance (ANOVA) results is showed by Wald Chi (1) statistic, which indicated a test statistic value of 40.95 and a probability value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$). The reported p value ($p < 0.01$) was found to be less than the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). Therefore, there was sufficient evidence to reject the claim that the overall model was not statistically significant. Thus the model with communication direction as the independent variable was found to be statistically significant in predicting employee engagement.

Further, the logistic regression coefficients show that communication direction influenced employee engagement and in a significant and a positive way ($\beta = 1.325$, $p = < 0.01$). In addition, the results from the regression model imply that an additional unit of communication direction increases the log of odds of employment engagement by 1.325 points holding other factors constant.

B. CONCLUSIONS

Communication direction as the independent variable was found to be statistically significant in predicting employee engagement. Further, the logistic regression coefficients show that communication direction influenced employee engagement and in a significant and a positive way ($\beta = 1.325$, $p = < 0.01$). This implies that communication direction is a significant

predictor of employee engagement. In addition, the results from the regression model imply that an additional unit of communication direction increases the log of odds of employment engagement by 1.325 points holding other factors constant. Therefore, from the results, it was concluded that there was a significant effect of communication direction on employee engagement in technical training institutions in Kenya. In line with the above result, Tsai and Chuang, (2009) observed that the sum total of an individual's satisfaction with information flow and relationship variables has correlation with key variables such as job performance, engagement and commitment. Again, The results are agree with the findings of Neves & Eisenberger, 2012, that effective communication flow helps build sense of corporate identity, teamwork, productivity, participation, improve retention and work engagement. Moreover, vertical communication (downward) was frequently used showing that the trainers were mostly receiving orders. This led to the conclusion that communication flow is poor and need to be improved. The study recommends that technical institutions should enhance its horizontal communication practices to enable it play its rightful role in improving employee engagement.

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