

Leadership, Employee Engagement and Employee Performance in the Public Sector of Ghana

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Abstract Organisations are developing interest in the effective management of their employees' performance in today's competitive environment. Effective leadership has become increasingly necessary for organisations who are interested in improving employee performance. Extant literature confirms the role leaders play in the management of employee performance as well as ensuring high levels of employee engagement. This paper seeks to identify the relationship between leadership style, employee engagement and performance in public sector organisations. Adopting a mixed method approach, the study employed convenience sampling and data was obtained from questionnaire and interviews. Using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and content analysis the results showed that motivation and quality play an important mediating effect on the effect of leadership on employee performance. It was also found that fairness, flexibility, involvement in decision making and creating an environment where an employee feels valued and respected made employees engaged. Results also showed that engaged employees perform to their maximum best.

Keywords: *leadership, employee engagement, performance*

Cite This Article: Emelia Amoako-Asiedu, and Theresa Obuobisa-Darko, "Leadership, Employee Engagement and Employee Performance in the Public Sector of Ghana." *Journal of Business and Management Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2017): 27-34. doi: 10.12691/jbms-5-2-1.

1. Introduction

Employee engagement has gained significant attention in the recent years, with some studies confirming the significant roles they play towards organizational performance. These studies seem to point to the fact that engaged employees are more committed to their organization [22] and perform better at work [8,44]. Again, it is believed that high levels of engaged employees may lead to higher performance [6,23], Increase performance [20], and lower turnover intention [2,19]. When an employee is engaged, he is aware of his responsibility in the business goals and motivates his colleagues alongside, for the success of the organisational goals. Schaufeli, et al. ([40]: p.74) conceptualized employee engagement as "a positive fulfilling work-related state of mind which is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption." Thus engaged employees go beyond the call of duty to perform their role in excellence. Engagement at the individual level according to Bakker and Demerouti [7] is influenced primarily by job resources availability (support, autonomy, feedback, etc.) and personal resources (resilience, self-efficacy, optimism, etc.), and negatively influenced by the level of job demands (work pressure, emotional, mental and physical demands).

Studies have confirmed the relationship between leadership and employee engagement in several developed countries [17,34]. Employees who have a good

relationship with their employers turn to be engaged. In spite of these there exists limited literature in this area in developing countries like Ghana, thus forming the main motivation of this study. In this paper, the focuses is on how leadership impact on employee engagement and in turn their performance. Specifically the study focuses on leadership and employee engagement and how it affects performance of public sector employees.

The paper is structured in four parts; the first part deals with the introduction and the second considers existing literature on leadership, engagement and employee performance. The third section looks at the methodology and the fourth part deals with data analysis discussion and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

This part of the study aims at a systematic review of literature on leadership, employee engagement, and employee performance. As there is a vast literature available on these subjects, and we do not believe we are able do justice to all preceding studies in such a review, we therefore attempt to briefly explain these concepts. The study focuses more on conceptual clarification of leadership, followed by employee engagement and then employee performance.

There has been immense research on leadership due to the impact it has on individual and organisational performance [29]. Scholars from different fields of study

have looked, and continue to look at the concept and its relationship with employee and organisational performance [37]. Conceptualising leadership has however been problematic and as a result scholars are yet to come to a universally acceptable definition of the concept. Consequently, there have been a plethora of definitions, which sometimes create confusion in the mind of all those interested in the subject [4,9].

Leadership, according to Robbins and Judge (2009), can be defined as the ability to influence a group towards the achievement of a vision or set of goals (p. 419). Yulk (2006) on his part defined leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (p. 8). Kreitner and Kinicki (2004) defined leadership as "a social process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organisational goals (p. 595).

These definitions suggest certain components essential to the phenomenon of leadership. These include a) Leadership as a process b) Leadership happens within a group c) Leadership involves influencing others and lastly d) Leadership aims at the attainment of set goals. Defining leadership as a process shows that leadership is a transactional event which takes place between leaders and their followers. Also leadership as a way of influencing others means it is a two-way interactive experience between leaders and followers rather than a one-way event in which the leader influences the followers and not vice versa. We therefore deduce that Leadership is a dynamic process of influencing people with the aim of meeting set objective.

3. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement as a concept began to surface in the organizational and business literature about two decades ago [41] and there continue to be considerable debate about what engagement is and how best to define it [31]. Scholars agree that employee engagement includes both an energy dimension and an identification dimension [7]. Common to many of the definitions by researchers of employee engagement is the fact that engagement has a psychological state as well as an emotional state which reflect in their willingness to give off their best and give a sustained discretionary effort to ensure the organisation achieves its goals and succeed.

In his work on personal engagement, Kahn (1990) defined engagement as "the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). In contrast, disengagement involves an extrication of organizational members' selves from their work roles. To be engaged is not just being cognitively attentive to the job or feeling and expressing positive emotions or doing work for doing sake, but rather it reflects investment of one's cognitive, emotional and physical energies simultaneously in the performance of a role assigned [35].

Employee engagement is perceived as a cognitive and affective participation in the work one does and as such when complications arise in the task assigned, it is viewed either positively which promotes engagement and improve performance or negatively which results in dissatisfaction and distress and therefore obstruct performance [43]. Cook ([12], pg. 3) for example argued that engagement is best summed up by how positive the employee thinks and feels about the organisation and also how he is proactive in relation to achieving organisational goals for customers, colleagues and other stakeholders. Employee engagement is thus a critical non-financial incentive that has a significant impact on work harmony [31] which should be ensured. Such employees are enthusiastic about their work and have affective and energetic connection to it rather than finding it unduly stressful and demanding [7].

4. Employee Performance

Employee performance has been used interchangeably with job performance in the literature thus creating a difficulty in the definition of the concept in that it is "an abstract and latent construct" (Viswesvaran, 2005: 122). Campbell et al. (1993) defines job performance as "observable things people do that are relevant for the goals of the organization" (314), whereas Viswesvaran and Ones (2000: 216) assert that job performance is the "scalable actions, behavior and outcomes that employees engage in or bring about that are linked with and contribute to organizational goals." Motowidlo (2003) defines job performance "as the total expected value to the organization of the discrete behavioral episodes that an individual carries out over a standard period of time" (39). Conway (n.d.) however combines employee and job performance, and defines it "as the extent to which an individual completes the duties that are required in order to occupy a given position, which s/he assumes within an organization"; while Armstrong (2006: 498) says it is "the accomplishment, execution, carrying out, working out of anything ordered or undertaken.

Employee performance is then seen in terms of employee productivity and output, which affects or helps the organization to be efficient and effective in achieving its goals: or, as Motowidlo et al. (1997) argue, "the degree to which an individual helps the organization reach its goals" (72).

5. Leadership and Employee Performance

The research on leadership-subordinate performance is not a new phenomenon as argued by Fleishman and Harris, [15]. The measurement of relationship between leadership and subordinates and their outcomes has been the source of considerable discussion. Some scholars contend that the level of relationship between leader and subordinate does have an effect on the way employee behave, based on the assumption that leaders vary their behavior across subordinates [13,18]. According to Mehra, et al. [30] when an organisation seeks efficient ways to

make it possible to outperform its competitors, an approach is to focus on leadership.

In every organization interpersonal relationship becomes the thing that binds people of all levels together. This interpersonal relationship is determined by the regularity and manner in which interactions occur between managers and their subordinates [1]. According to Jaatinen and Lavikka, (2008), the main challenge for leaders in coordinating their organizations is the task of harmonization through effective interaction of the partners. Thus according to the relationship management perspective, an organization's work is affected by its ability to develop mutually satisfying relationships between managers and employees (Ledingham, 2003). Extant literature have also linked relationships between managers and employees with employee commitment, employee retention and customer retention (Wilson, 2000; Yang and Mallabo, 2003).

As Rosenbloom (1998) puts it, to attain a coherent way toward a preferred common purpose in organizations, managers must communicate with subordinates in a manner which communicates expectations clearly. This interaction is important for the overall success of the organization in that they lead to a greater commitment on the part of the workforce, thereby enhancing motivation, employee trust that would foster good corporate citizenship and performance of employees [1].

6. Research Methodology, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

The paper adopted a mixed method design. The data was collected through the administration of a questionnaire and interviewing of current MPA and PhD students from the Universities of Ghana (UG) and University of Professional Studies (UPS), respectively, and students of the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), who have worked and/or are working in the public service. The study focused on these students/practitioners because they understand the importance of research and within the university settings they are away from the vagaries of the work environment and from their supervisors, a circumstance we felt might enhance the accuracy of their responses.

Convenience sampling technique was used to choose the institutions as this technique allowed easy access (Creswell, 2005). For a number of reasons, these institutions were the most convenient for us. The University of Ghana is the premier university in the country, and has a well-established public administration program to which many students want to be admitted. The GIMPA was specifically established to train public servants, although in recent years it has become a fully-fledged university open to all. It nevertheless maintains its training for public servants. UPSA attained fully-fledged university status within the past couple of years, and initiated non-professional courses. Apart from these factors, the three institutions are near each other in Accra, making them easily accessible to the researchers. A self-designed questionnaire was used to gather data on leadership.

Using a non-probability technique of purposive sampling, the questionnaire was hand delivered to representatives in the three institutions. Purposive sampling involves careful selection of the people from whom to collect data (Phillips, 2014). It was appropriate here because it enables researchers to use their judgment in choosing cases that will best be able to answer the research question, and thereby achieve the set objective (Saunders et al. 2009). A total of 230 questionnaires were distributed to current and former employees of the public service drawn from among first, second, and third year MPA and PhD students and 142 were received. The University of Ghana received 60, of which 45 were retrieved, while the UPSA received 40, with 30 returned. The GIMPA received 130, of these, 67 were retrieved. Some of these people were interviewed and data saturation was reached, thus no new information was being gathered. Content analysis was carried out on the data received from the interviews and themes developed.

7. Results and Discussions

The effect of leadership on employee performance in the public sector in Ghana was examined using Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). This modeling approach is different from the traditional covariance-based parametric SEM approaches using AMOS and LISREL, because it is non-parametric and allows for soft-modelling with few modelling assumptions which is more practical in real world studies [26]. Additionally, it does well even with small sample sizes [24]. In this study, SmartPLS version 2.0 by Ringle, Wende and Will [36] is used for all path modeling.

The PLS-SEM modelling approach requires two main components- assessment of the measurement model and an assessment of the structural model [24]. Whereas the measurement model shows the unidirectional relationship between a particular latent variable and its sub-indicators, the structural modeling looks at the relationships between different latent variables. i.e endogenous and exogenous variables. In other words, whereas the measurement model is the factor analysis stage of the assessment, the structural model is the regression analysis stage of the model.

Since all indicators are measured reflectively, each latent variable is assessed based on its convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity measures the internal consistency of the constructs ensuring that the items measure what they are expected to measure [33]. It is assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE), which should be greater than 0.5 [21,25]; the factor loadings, which is expected to be at least 0.60 [27,45]; and composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, which are expected to exceed 0.70 [16,25]. Discriminant validity looks at the extent to which a particular construct is different from other constructs. Here, the Fornell and Larcker [16] criterion, which requires that the AVE's are greater than the squared correlations, is used. Results of these validity checks are presented as follows:

Table 1. Convergent Validity Statistics

Variable	AVE (>0.50)	Factor Loadings (>0.60)	Composite Reliability (>0.70)	Cronbachs Alpha (>0.70)	No. of Items ^a
Attitude	0.6033	0.74 – 0.83	0.8586	0.7808	4(6)
Leader Motivation	0.5310	0.62 – 0.79	0.9001	0.8730	8(13)
Leader Quality	0.5817	0.73 – 0.81	0.8474	0.7604	4(5)
Leadership	0.4495	0.61 – 0.73	0.9242	0.9120	15(22)
Team Performance	0.7102	0.79 – 0.87	0.8800	0.7956	3(3)

^a Final items(initial items).

Table 2. Discriminant Validity Statistics

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Attitude	0.7767				
Leader Motivation	0.5444	0.7287			
Leader Quality	0.4721	0.7160	0.7627		
Leadership	0.4614	0.6377	0.6445	0.6704	
Team Performance	0.4327	0.3781	0.3299	0.3745	0.8427

^a Diagonals are square roots of the AVEs.

From **Table 1**, factor loadings are met with the minimum acceptable guidelines since all factor loadings are 0.6 or more. Additionally, both the composite reliability statistic and Cronbach’s alphas are greater than 0.7. The construct with the least reliability even has a Cronbach alpha of 0.7604 which is reasonably higher than the minimum acceptable level. The only problem with the convergent validity statistics seem to come from the AVEs. Although most AVEs meet the minimum benchmark of 0.50, the AVE score of leadership (0.4495) is slightly lower than the acceptable level. This means that, the latent variable is able to

explain about 45% of the variances of its manifest variables. Although the minimum criteria is not met for the AVE, the factor loadings, composite reliability and Cronbach alpha all meet their targets. There is therefore basis to believe that the latent variable has reasonable convergent validity.

The convergent validity of the leadership variable is further supported since the leadership variable does not suffer from issues of discriminant validity. Just like all other constructs, the square roots of the AVEs exceed the inter-item correlations. The final path model is present in the **Figure 1**.

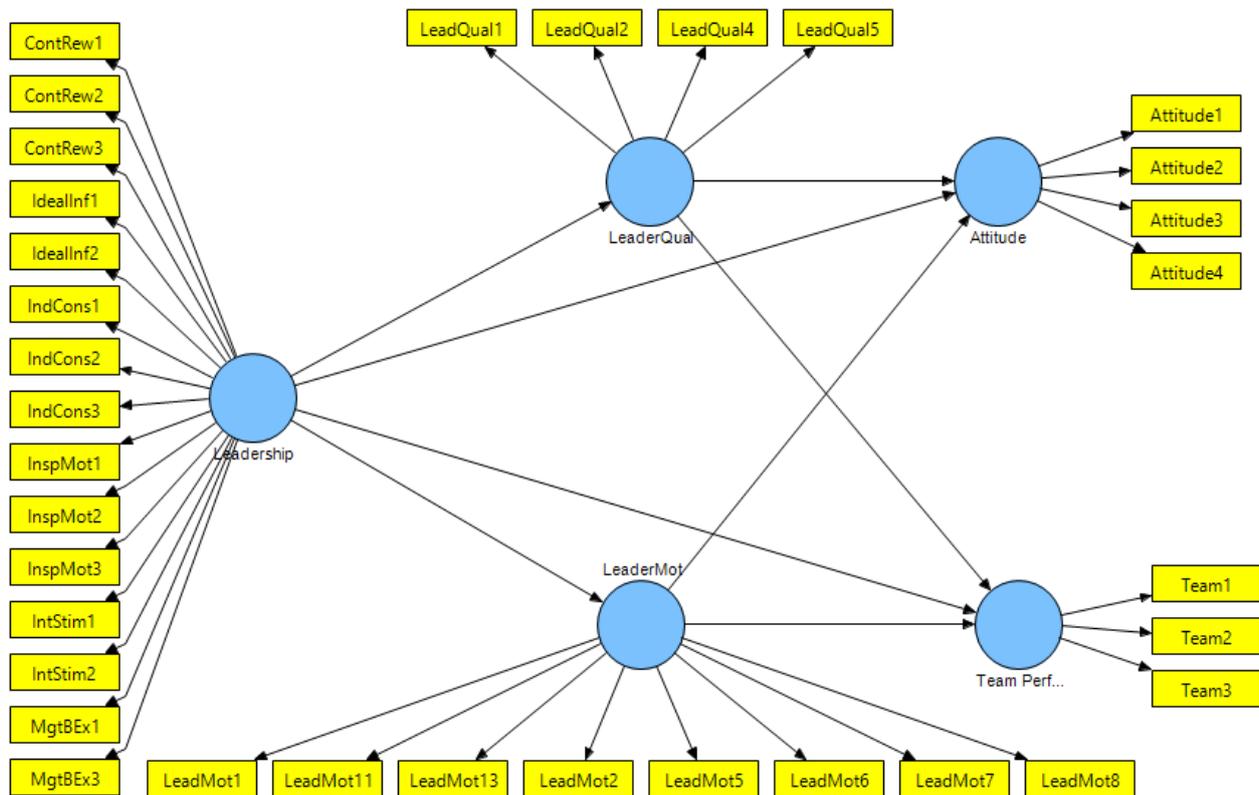


Figure 1.

Since the requirements of the measurement model has been satisfied, the assessment of structural model can be done. This is where the actual examination of the effect of leadership on employee performance is undertaken. Employee performance is measured under two circumstances. First, their attitude towards work is used as a proxy for their individual performance. Next, team performance proxies their performance when given tasks they must perform with others. For the leadership dimension, leader's quality and leader's motivational abilities are also assessed together with the main proxy for leadership effectiveness.

Table 3 shows the Path coefficients, showing the direct effect, of leadership on employee attitudes are shown in the next table.

Some questions asked to determine the variables measured are, My supervisor inspires me to perform my duty, my supervisor allows me to demonstrate creativity in my job. These were asked to show how employees perceive that their leaders motivate them to perform. To begin with, the r squares for each of the models under assessment are also presented in Table 3. The r-squares for the models with leader motivation and leader quality as the endogenous variable are above 0.4. For the models with attitude and team performance as the endogenous variables, their r-squares are 32.30% and 17.36% respectively. These r-squares for leader motivation, leader quality, attitude and team performance are substantial and qualify for further path modelling according to the criteria by Cohen [11] and Rahman, Memon and Karim [33].

From Table 3, effective leadership is seen to have significant and positive relationship with leader

motivation ($B = 0.6377, p < 0.001$) and leader quality ($B = 0.6445, p < 0.001$). This shows that more effective leaders are better able to motivate employees and ensure quality relationship with employees. However, leadership does not seem to play any significant direct effect on employee attitude and team performance. However, a leader's ability to motivate employees is seen to significantly and positively influence employees' attitude ($B = 0.3662, p < 0.01$).

Although leadership is seen not to significantly affect employee attitude and team performance, it is possible that the motivational and quality relational abilities of leaders can lead to an indirect effect on employee performance. This is because of the significant direct effect of leadership on motivation and quality. Therefore, to assess whether leader motivation and leader quality improves the effect of leadership on employee performance, the total effects are presented in Table 4.

Here, the effect of leadership on attitude and team performance is of concern. It is clearly evident that unlike the direct effects in Table 3 where leadership does not significantly affect employee attitude and team performance, the total effects of leadership on employee attitude and team performance are statistically significant. In both circumstances the coefficients are positive. This shows that, although leadership does not directly lead to better employee attitude and team performance, indirectly and through leader's motivational and relational abilities, leadership indirectly leads to higher attitudes and team performance. This also means that motivation and quality plays an important mediation effect on the effect of leadership on employee performance.

Table 3. Effects of Leadership on Performance (Direct Effect)

	Leader Motivation	Leader Quality	Attitude	Team Performance
Leadership	0.6377*** (11.1114)	0.6445*** (12.5524)	0.1584 (1.1977)	0.2122 (1.3973)
Leader Motivation			0.3662** (2.7958)	0.2145 (1.1651)
Leader Quality			0.1078 (0.8523)	0.0396 (0.2629)
R-squared	0.4066	0.4153	0.3230	0.1736

t statistics are reported in parenthesis

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4. Effects of Leadership on Performance (Total Effect)

	Leader Motivation	Leader Quality	Attitude	Team Performance
Leadership	0.6377*** (11.1114)	0.6445*** (12.5524)	0.4614*** (5.7662)	0.3745*** (4.2826)
Leader Motivation			0.3662** (2.7958)	0.2145 (1.1651)
Leader Quality			0.1078 (0.8523)	0.0396 (0.2629)

t statistics are reported in parenthesis

* $p < 0.1$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$.

The study also sought to gain insights and thoughts from some students through three focus group discussions from the three institutions about how leadership and employee engagement influences performance in the public sector and the following responses were gathered. An interview guide was used to ascertain the information. The main themes of the interviews are grouped into three namely leadership and subordinate relationship; employee perception of engagement and employee performance and the effects of disengaged employee on performance.

8. Leadership and Subordinate Relationship

Extant literature shows that improving manager-employee relationships and communication has a profound effect on how they engage in the performance management process and the outcomes they experience because the quality of the relationships and communication between managers and employees causes employees to be engaged on their jobs [32]. Some of the respondents indicated that, employees behave in a particular way because of things that motivates them and how the leader relates with them. Leaders are to identify the things that motivate employees from the perspectives of the employees so as to adequately provide them. Motivating employees in organisations has become a daunting task and many leaders and for that matter superiors have had difficulty expressing what has been learned in theory when it comes to practice. Daniels (1985) posits that, many managers have been frustrated by the fuzzy motivational concepts taught in business schools and thus have put their faith in "common sense" or their "instinct" regarding how to motivate their subordinates. A leader therefore has to create a cordial relationship among their subordinates to help them communicate well thereby enabling them to freely express to their superiors or leaders what motivates them so that the leader can provide them.

Employees in one of the groups stated that fairness, flexibility, involvement in decision making and creating an environment where an employee feels valued and respected could make employees engaged. Performance is associated with incentives to engage and the perception that one is receiving a return-on-investment of one's 'self-in-role' therefore, people strive to achieve when they feel worthwhile, valuable, and that they matter [39].

9. Employee Perception of Engagement and Performance

Markos and Sridevi [28] indicated that when employees are engaged they get attached emotionally to and get involved in the work assigned with high eagerness to ensure the success of the organisation through their performance and therefore ready to go beyond employment contractual agreement. In other words, engagement allows people to simultaneously express their preferred selves and completely satisfy their role requirements. When asked the question 'How will you describe employees who are dedicated, go the extra mile

to ensure their work is done, very attached to their work, and organisational performance?', the employees were of the view that an engaged worker is that one who exhibits the following attributes:

'he is happy to come to work, meets his targets, is punctual and stays at post to complete tasks, follows the rules and believes in the philosophy of the work, ready to draw management attention to 'gray' areas, he is innovative, projects and defends the organization'

Thus according to Simons, (2000) people want to contribute to organisations they are proud of. They also strive to achieve something even in the absence of inducements and they want to do competent work; thus a job well done allows them to exercise their skills and receive satisfaction from their competence. This implies when employees exhibit these characteristics of an engaged employee, they put in their all and ensure the organisation achieves its goals. This confirms the results arrived at that engaged employees positively affect performance of the individual and organisation as a whole.

10. Disengaged Employee and Performance

O'leary et. al, (2016) acknowledge that, bounded rationality and cognitive limitations that citizens have and use psychological insights to encourage desired behavior. Thus an employee's performance is founded on the principle that behavior is a function of its consequences; that is a person's job performance can be altered by changing what happens to that person as a result of his or her performance. Thus, if these consequences are favorable, the employee will continue to perform at the same level, or better; if the consequences are unfavorable, he or she will decrease the effort, or cease it altogether. Thus when employees are disengaged it affects their performance. It is believed that if employees are not happy or do not agree or not aware with new changes, they are likely to be unwilling to take an active part in the process, as they will not see any value in it [10]. Respondents indicated that employees who are disengaged are reluctant to put in all effort, are involved in rumor mongering, do not follow orders and are not concerned about what others do. The disengaged worker is one who is

'lackadaisical, reluctant, indifferent, has bad influence on his colleagues, always in conflict with others, attempts to ruin and bring others workers down, involved, does not go the extra mile, is distracted and unable to complete tasks assigned'.

When an employee is disengaged he is indifferent and likely to leave. This confirms the assertion by Saks [38] and Sundaray [42] who showed that disengaged employees are likely not to stay longer with their current employer since high level of staff disengagement is related to high turnover.

11. Conclusion

The study sort to identify the relationship between leadership, employee engagement and performance in the

public sector organisation using mixed method. Using Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to carry out the quantitative analysis. Results showed that, effective leadership have significant and positive relationship with leader motivation ($B = 0.6377, p < 0.001$) and leader quality ($B = 0.6445, p < 0.001$). This shows that more effective leaders are better able to motivate employees and ensure quality relationship with employees. However, leadership does not seem to play any significant direct effect on employee attitude and team performance. However, a leader's ability to motivate employees is seen to significantly and positively influence employees' attitude ($B = 0.3662, p < 0.01$). The results from the qualitative analysis corroborate the quantitative results. It was found that, employees behave in a particular way because of things that motivates them. It was suggested that leaders should identify the things that motivate employees from the perspectives of the employees so as to adequately provide them. Again, results confirm that engaged employees put in their best to ensure performance and disengagement results in non-performance. The sample for the study was open to different people from different parts of the public sector; these were students who worked in various public sector organisations. It is recommended that future studies is carried out with focus on specific organisations within the public sector to find out if the results are the same or different. Again a comparative study between the public and private sector could be carried out. In addition to these, another research could focus on identifying the behavioural factors that result in employee's performance.

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