

Drivers of Employee Engagement: A Case Study of Private Banks in Ethiopia

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This study aims to show the drivers of employee engagement in private banks in Ethiopia. The study is quantitative in its approach and explanatory in its design. Cross-sectional survey research method was employed to collect data from 245 employees of private banks in Ethiopia. The correlation analysis based on Pearson correlation coefficient portrayed that there are strong significant relationships between factors considered as drivers and employee engagement. The regression result as shown by adjusted R square revealed that 82.2% of variations in employee engagement is explained by job importance, job expectation, communication, employee relationship and organizational culture.

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Background

Engagement is about being excited over the task at hand and exerting best on doing it. Employee engagement is more than job satisfaction and retention. As defined by Armstrong (2009), employee engagement takes place when people at work are interested in and positive, even excited, about their jobs and are prepared to go the extra mile to get them done to the best of their ability. Loehr and Schwartz (2003) confirmed that fully engaged workers are those who are physically energized, emotionally connected, mentally focused and feel aligned with the purpose of the organization.

The challenge for organizations is not only retaining their employees, but fully engaging them, capturing their minds and hearts at each stage of their work lives. Employee engagement was first introduced by Kahn (1990). He stated that in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance. Engaged employees can stay with their company longer, thus reducing turnover and saving companies costs in recruitment and retaining employees. Engaged

employees positively affect the experiences of customers and coworkers. Further, employees who are engaged tend to trust management and are more focused on mission statement, strategic direction and organizational outcomes. On the other hand those who are not engaged express their unhappiness and distrust toward management often sharing their poor experiences with their colleagues.

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The main reason for assessing employee engagement factors is to know how much employees are committed to their organizations that actually drive employees to perform their best. Organizations conduct employee engagement surveys from time to time so that they can design or redesign the policies and implement key changes in order to increase the productivity and efficiency of employees. In Ethiopia, banking industry is among the rapidly growing and more competitive industry which attracts investors. In order to remain competitive in the industry private banks should pay prime attention to their human by looking into the extent of employee engagement. The main purpose of this study is to identify the extent of employee engagement in private banks in Ethiopia and show the factors that contribute for task engagement.

Statement of the Problem

Employee engagement is about what people do and how they behave

in their roles and what makes them act in ways that further the achievement of the objectives of both the organization and themselves (Armstrong, 2009). Kahn (1990) identified three psychological conditions as a framework for the study of employee engagement, viz. meaningfulness, safety and availability. Harter et al (2002) stated that engagement has a positive influence on customer satisfaction, productivity and profit. Disengaged employees can be a serious liability for the organizations. Disengagement can be related to underpayment, non-conducive work environment, misplacement, poor management style; poor communication etc. Disengagement might result in turnover, absenteeism, fraud, embezzlement etc. As shown by Kahn (1990) when employees become disengaged, they withdraw and defend themselves, promoting a lack of connectedness, emotional absence and passive behavior. Having engaged employees in the human resource management field is important because researchers in this field identified that engaged employees come to work every day feeling a connection to their organization, have a high level of enthusiasm for their work, and consistently produce at high levels (Buhler, 2006). Though engagement has a significant impact on the performance of organizations, there is little research conducted on its drivers particularly in the context of African organizations. Saks (2006) and Maslach et al (2001) identified a number of potential drivers of employee engagement though the model is unclear as to which variables are the strongest predictors. The pre-

liminary document reviews as well as discussions with human resource managers of the private banks suggest that there is high employee turnover, disengagement and burnout. Therefore it is of paramount importance for the academicians and practitioners in the field of human resource management to identify drivers of employee engagement to facilitate evidence based decisions as well as expanding the frontiers of the field of employee engagement.

Meaning of Employee Engagement

Kahn (1990) first provided formal definition of the term personnel engagement as “the harnessing of organization members to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances”. Rothbard (2001) defines engagement as psychological presence but goes further to state that it involves two critical components: attention refers to cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role while absorption means being engrossed in a role and refers to the intensity of one’s focus on a role. Schaufeli et al (2002) defined engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Employee engagement therefore refers to the extent that employees are satisfied, committed to and prepared to support what is important to the organization.

Human resource management practices such as performance man-

agement, training, career development, work design and employee relations are important for creating employee engagement. Jobs must be designed to give employee the necessary latitude for making a variety of decisions. Employees must be properly trained to exert their wider authority and use information resources such as internet as well as tools for communicating information. Employees also need feedback to help them evaluate their success. Pay and other rewards should reflect employees’ authority and be related to successful handling of their responsibility. In addition, for engagement to occur, managers must be trained to link employees to resource within and outside the organization such as customers, coworkers in other departments.

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As stated by Catlette and Hadden (2001) engaged employees are energized and passionate about the work they do. With passion come excitement, enthusiasm and productivity. Engaged employees are committed, motivated and enthusiastic about problem solving. They are absorbed in their work, put their heart into their jobs, are excited about doing a good job, exert energy in their work and are a source of competitive advantage for their employees.

Drivers of Employee Engagement

Over the years, employee engagement has been the subject of numerous research studies. However, very few academic studies have explored the drivers of employee engagement. Among them include Kahn (1990), Lockwood (2007), Watson (2009), Saks (2006), Langelaan et al. (2006), Mauno et al (2007), Mani (2011), IES (2005), Seijit (2006), Britt et al (2001), and Hewitt (2004). Captioned below are the main drivers of employee engagement as being identified by these authors.

Perceptions of Job Importance

Lockwood (2007) suggested organizations that build a culture of work meaningfulness are more likely to have engaged employees. Meaningfulness means exerting efforts and energies in to a job and developing a feeling of making differences. When the task is important and challenging, it has some influence and ownership over the work. Employees need to feel that the work they are doing is important for themselves and for others. When the employees develop their work and are engaged in their tasks they develop a feeling of loyalty to their organizations. Regardless of the industry that an employee engaged, people will always need inspiration at job they work in. Inspiration means being motivated at the workplace. Watson (2009) and IES (2005) also identified the employees' perceived job importance and motivation to their respective works as one of the drivers of employee engagement.

Job Clarity

Seijit (2006) identified that job clarity as one of the drivers of employee engagement. Supervisors who inspire confidence in individuals, letting them autonomous and deciding with clear goals and accountability are perceived as engaging. On the other hand if expectations are not clear and basic materials and equipment are not provided, negative emotions such as boredom or resentment may result. By being transparent and educating employees, they will understand and even work harder to prove the expectations of the job demand.

Career Development Opportunities

The importance of career advancement opportunities in enabling engagement is a view upheld by many studies. For example Gallup studies in four organizations showed the link between employee development and high engagement. Levinson (2007) and Robison (2004) identified that employees who have a 'personal development plan and are satisfied with access to development opportunities have high engagement levels. Mani (2011) and Seijit (2006) also identified career advancement opportunities as one of the factors contributing to employee engagement at the workplace. When employers continuously invest both time and money on their employees' development at the workplace, employees will realize that their organizations are also interested in the progress of their careers.

Communication & Cooperation

As shown by Wiley et al, (2010) and Kahn (1992) communication plays an important role in ensuring employee engagement. Employees demand clear communication from superiors to relate their role with organizational vision. Internal communication is a vehicle used to convey the organizational values to all employees and obtain their support in reaching organizational goals. Papalexandris and Galanaki (2009) stated that internal communication is crucial in engaging employees.

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Feed back and proper communication is the key to giving employees a sense of where they are going. As identified by the study conducted by IES (2005) employees who feel they have a positive personal rapport with their management are more likely to be engaged. Employees would feel appreciated when they or their works get noticed and this encourages constructive employee engagement. Bhatla (2011) also identified organizational communication as the prominent driver of employee engagement.

Interpersonal Relationships

Sejrit (2006); IES (2005); Bhatla (2011) identified interpersonal relationships as one of the drivers of employee

engagement. Building good relationships between co-workers is important, especially the relationship between employee and manager. This critical relationship needs to be a reciprocal one of making time for, and listening to one another. This is potentially achieved by rewarding achievement, and demonstrating trust by allowing autonomy. Developing mutual respect and trust between colleagues and managers is seen as key to enabling employees to engage with the organization.

As it is indicated by many studies employee engagement is a direct reflection of how employees feel about their relationship with the boss. If employees' relationship with their managers is fractured, then no amount of perks will persuade the employees to perform at top levels. Managers have important role in fostering employees' sense of involvement and value and point to the critical importance of the employee manager relationship. Employees need freedom to make their own decisions and get back to them to find out the solution they decide on.

Organizational Culture

Many models such as of Bhatla (2011) show that organizational culture is among the most important drivers of employee engagement. One of the factors contributing to employee engagement is by creating a company culture that encourages employees to keep on learning and acquiring new knowledge all the time. When organizations recruit a diverse pool of people, it brings about

different benefits to the company as well as its employees.

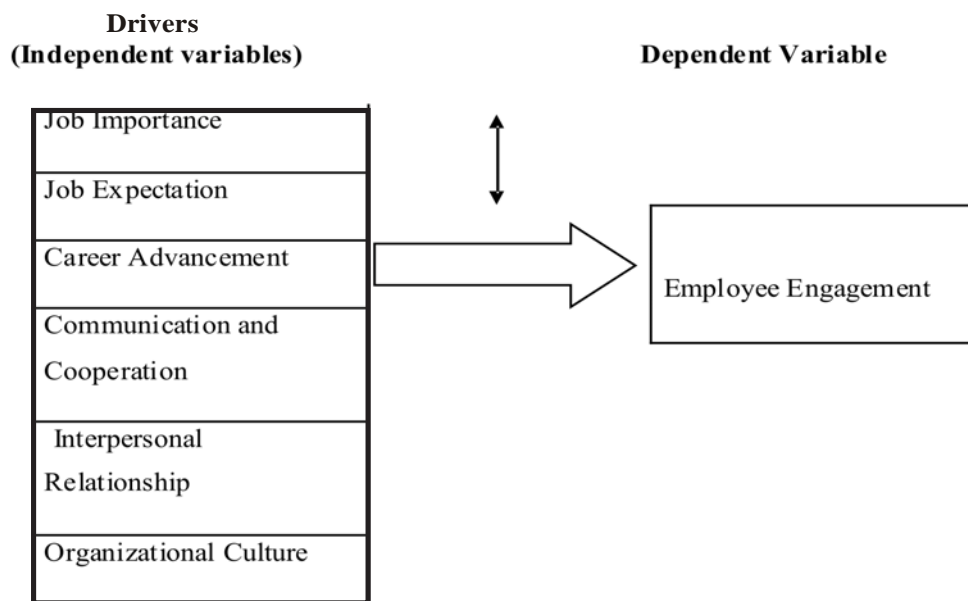
Workplace culture may be the key to setting the tone for engagement (Lockwood, 2007; Glen, 2006). Organizations considered an ‘employer of choice’ are more likely to have higher levels of employee engagement as they create workplace environments in which employees feel respected and valued, and the connection they feel with the organization is such that they are willing to exert discretionary effort in the pursuit of its suc-

cess (Leary Joyce, 2004). Accordingly, Glen (2006) suggests that the work environment may play a key role in predicting engagement along with organizational processes, role challenge, values, work life balance, information, reward/recognition, management and product service.

Conceptual Frame Work

Based on the literatures discussed in the above section, the study developed a conceptual frame work of the study as shown in Fig.1.

Fig. 1 Conceptual Frame work



The study also targeted to test the following hypotheses

H1: Employees perceived job importance is a driver of employee engagement.

H2: Employees perceived job expectation is a driver of employee engagement.

H3: Employees positive feeling about career development is a driver for employee engagement

H4: Smooth communication among employees is a driver of employee engagement.

H5: Smooth interpersonal relationship is a driver of employee engagement.

H6: Good organizational culture is a driver of employee engagement.

Study Area

Ethiopia, with total area of 1,103,609 square meters located at the horn of Africa, its plateau covers 2/3 of the country. Ethiopia's is a federal government and has nine regional administrations and two city regions. Ethiopia is a country in which more than 80 ethno cultural as well as linguistic groups live. There are currently sixteen private banks in Ethiopia. The present study selected headquarters of private banks located in Addis Ababa as sample location of the study.

Research Approach & Design

The study is quantitative in its approach. Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people or to explain a particular phenomenon. As explained by Miles & Huberman (1994) in quantitative research, the researcher tends to remain objectively separated from the subject matter. As the study targeted to show the drivers of employee engagement, it is explanatory in its design. Explanatory research is useful for studying relations between causes and effects (Kothari, 2004).

Target Population the Sample

A population can be defined as all people or items (unit of analysis) with the characteristics that one wishes to study (Kothari, 2004). The target population of this study was professional employees of the private banks in Ethiopia. Malhorta and Peterson (2006) stated that, the larger the sample size of a research, the more accurate the data generated though the sample size may vary due to different situations. For this study the researcher has taken samples from the head quarters of private banks located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. According to Malhorta's (2007) sample size determination table, if a population size is in between 3000 and 10,000, the maximum sample size to be considered is about 315. Since the population size for the current study was 3329 (HR data as of January 2019) a sample size of 300 was considered. Two hundred and forty five of them properly filled the questionnaire and returned which make 81.7% return rate. In order to provide equal chance for the heterogeneous groups of employees of the banks, questionnaires were distributed in the head quarters of the private banks using proportionate stratified sampling method.

Data Collection & Procedures

Questionnaires were constructed in line with relevant literature in the area of the study. The reliability of the questionnaires was tested using Cronbach Alpha test the overall value of which at the pilot study was .92 that shows all the scales were reliable as their reliabil-

ity values exceeded the prescribed threshold of 0.7 (Pallant, 2005). The collected data were processed using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics like mean, standard deviation, kurtosis and skewness were employed. Inferential statistics like Pearson partial correlations and linear regression were employed to show their relationship and effect engagement driving factors.

Model Development

The study considered Gallup's 12 questions developed for measuring the level of employee engagement. Additionally the drivers of employee engagement identified by the following authors were considered to develop the questionnaire: Seijit (2006); Wallace et al (2006); Britt et al (2001); Hewitt (2004); Watson (2009); Bhatla (2011). The reliability of the instrument was checked using Cronbach Alpha test which was found to be 0.92. This is higher in standard than the minimum threshold identified for this type of study, 0.7.

The following model was considered to show the effect of the driving factors on employee engagement.

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \varepsilon$$

where

Y = Dependant variable (employee engagement)

α = Smoothing constant

β = Coefficient of independent variables

$X_1 \dots X_5$ = Independent variables (drivers)

ε = Standard error

Demographic Statistics

The purpose of assessing the demographics in terms of age and sex is to show the heterogeneity of the respondents. Other aspects like the work experience and educational level of the respondents were considered to show the respondents' extent of exposure to the subject of study as well as their level of understanding about the case considered. The profile of the respondents is summarized in Table 1.

The sampled respondents were professional employees from the banks considered for present study. As shown in Table 1, the number of male respondents slightly outweighs the female respondents (55.6 and 44.4 percent respectively). Age wise the majority (66.9%) of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 25-34 years. The level of education of respondents shows that 74.2% are holding bachelor's degree. Referring to their service years, the majority (47.6%) of them were working for 1 to 5 years in their respective organizations. The demographic profile of the respondents revealed that they had adequate exposure to the subject of the study which justifies the reliability of the source of information considered for the purpose of present study.

Table 1 Profile of the Respondents

	Category	No.	%
Gender	Male	138	55.6
	Female	110	44.4
Age	18-24	34	13.7
	25-34	166	66.9
	35-44	37	14.9
	45-44	11	4.4
Service Years	1 – 5	118	47.6
	6 -10	102	41.1
	11 – 15	18	7.3
	16- 20	7	2.8
	Over 20	118	47.6
Education	Diploma	31	12.5
	First degree	184	74.2
	Masters degree	29	11.7
	Doctorate degree	1	.4

Source: Questionnaire

Drivers & Level of Employee Engagement

The descriptive statistics report on drivers and level of employee engagement are shown in Table 2. The following reference statistics were employed in order to interpret the result of the findings of the study: 1.00 – 1.80 strong disagreements. 1.81 – 2.60 disagreement., 2.61 – 3.40 moderate agreement, 3.41 – 4.20 agreement and 4.21 – 5.00 strong agreement (Kothari, 2004)

Respondents were asked to rate 30 items of the questionnaire divided into sub sections in terms of factors considered as drivers of employee engagement. The level of employee’s perceived engagement was measured based on Gallup’s 12 items questions on employee

engagement. The results of standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis portrayed the normality of the distribution of the responses as all are within the normal range as shown in Table 2.

As shown in the same Table, the mean average of respondents’ perception as related to job importance is 3.5704 with a standard deviation of .77545. This result revealed the respondents’ agreement on importance of their jobs to their respective organizations. Respondents were asked to rate four questions as related to expected job demand to play their role in their respected organizations. As shown in Table 2 the mean average of the items was found to be 3.3421 with standard deviation of .76616 implying they can meet the job demand on average level.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics on Drivers and Level of Employee Engagement

	N	Mean	Std.	Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Deviation					
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Job Importance	245	3.5704	.77545	-.655	.156	-.255	.310
Job Expectation	241	3.6649	.76616	-.253	.157	-.281	.312
Career Advancement	245	3.3551	.91236	-.426	.156	-.484	.310
Communication	247	3.3421	.96686	-.267	.155	-.857	.309
Relationships	244	3.5143	.83012	-.426	.156	-.048	.310
Culture	241	3.4957	.89470	-.579	.157	-.325	.312
Engagement	245	4.3576	.89653	-.497	.156	.142	.310
Valid N (list wise)	229						

Source: Questionnaire

The third item shows the perception of employees towards opportunities related to the career advancement in their respective organizations. They were requested to rate 4 items related to career advancement opportunities available in their respective organizations. The mean average of the items as shown in Table 2 was found to be 3.3551 with standard deviation of .91236 implying the respondents' satisfaction on career advancement opportunities available in their respective organizations.

The fourth item in Table 2 shows the level of employees' satisfaction on organizations communication practices. A mean average result of (3.3421) with standard deviation of (.96686) was obtained implying employees' satisfaction on the smoothness of communication practices that are prevailing in their respective organizations. The employees perceived level of interpersonal relationships were assessed based on four items targeted to assess the same issue on the questionnaire. The group average mean of the variable was 3.5143 with a stan-

dard deviation of .83012 implying respondents' satisfaction on smoothness of interpersonal relationship in the organization. The magnitude of conduciveness of the prevailing organizational culture was assessed based on four items from the questionnaire. A mean average point of 3.4957 with a standard deviation of .89470 was obtained implying their satisfaction on the prevailing organizational culture. The level of perceived engagement was assessed on Gallup 12 items question as shown on (www.gallup.com) An average mean point of 4.3576 with standard deviation of .89653 was obtained implying that the employees are at high levels of employees engagement in the organizations considered for present study.

Relationships between Driving Factors & Employee Engagement

In order to show the extent to which perceived employee engagement is related to driving factors, analysis was made based on Pearson's correlation coefficients. The results were analyzed based on correlation analysis formula shown as

follows: -1 to -0.5 or 1.0 to 0.5 strong, -0.1 or 0.1 to 0.3 weak, and -0.1 to 0.1 to 0.5 moderate, -0.3 to none or very weak (Kothari, 2004).

Table 3 Relationships Among Factors Driving Employee Engagement

Control Variables	Variables	JI	JE	CA	COM	REL	CUL	ENG
Gender,	JI	1.000	.611**	.642**	.660**	.704**	.635**	.678**
Age,	JE	.611**	1.000	.610**	.669**	.596**	.589**	.682**
service	CA	.642**	.610**	1.000	.799**	.641**	.757**	.865**
& education	COM	.660**	.669**	.799**	1.000	.736**	.764**	.803**
	REL	.704**	.596**	.641**	.736**	1.000	.683**	.719**
	CUL	.635**	.589**	.757**	.764**	.683**	1.000	.784**
	ENG	.678**	.682**	.865**	.803**	.719**	.784**	1.000

** . Correlation is significant at 0.01 level. Key: JI: Job importance, JE: Job expectation, CA: Career Advancement, Com: Communication, Rel: Relationships, Cul: Culture Eng: Engagement

The results of the coefficients of variables obtained were summarized in matrix form as shown in Table 3. The effect that might arise as a result of demographic characteristics such as gender, age, service years and education of the employees were made a controlled factor for the purpose of this study. As shown in Table 3, all the factors considered as a driving factor of employee engagement are strongly related to employee engagement (above .5). Employees’ perceived career advancement and communication have strong relationship with employee engagement .865 and .803 respectively. As depicted in Table 3, all the variables considered for the present study have a result of more than 0.5 implying strong relationship between the driving

factors and employee engagement. The extent to which the factors considered for present study explains employee engagement is depicted in regression model results given below.

Effect of the Driving Factors on Perceived Employee Engagement

Before considering the model, test of model fit was made based on key assumptions of multiple regressions proposed by many standard research methodology text book authors like Kothari (2004). The results on test of the model fit show that all the key assumptions of multivariate linear regression were met. Accordingly, the model summary of the driving factors identified on employee’s engagement is shown in Table 4.

All the variables considered for the present study have a result of more than 0.5 implying strong relationship between the driving factors and employee engagement.

Table 5 shows the cumulative effect of employees perceived job importance, job expectation, career advancement, organizational communication, interpersonal relationships and organizational

Table 4 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.909 ^a	.827	.822	.38470

a. Predictors: (Job importance, Job expectation, Career Advancement, Communication, Relationships, Organizational Culture)

b. Dependent Variable: Engagement

culture on employee’s engagement. As shown in Table 4, the adjusted R square result is .822. This indicates that 82.2% of the employees’ perceived em-

ployee engagement would be explained by the factors considered as its drivers by the present study.

Table 5 Coefficients of the Independent Variables

Model	Un standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error				Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.655	.141		4.659	.000		
JI	.051	.051	.043	.998	.319	.415	2.411
JE	.155	.048	.131	3.259	.001	.479	2.086
CA	.491	.052	.493	9.514	.000	.291	3.437
COM	.066	.053	.071	1.234	.218	.237	4.226
REL	.145	.049	.135	2.949	.004	.375	2.668
CUL	.162	.049	.161	3.310	.001	.329	3.037

a. Predictors: (JI: Job importance, JE: Job expectation, CA: Career Advancement, Com: Communication, REL: Relationships, CUL: Organizational Culture)

b. Dependent Variable: Engagement

Table 5 presents the standardized coefficients (Beta value) of the independent variables, i.e., job importance, job expectation, career advancement, communication, interpersonal relationship and organizational culture. It is targeted to reveal the independent variables relative

Career advancement has relatively a high weight beta (.493) as compared to other factors implying high level effect on employee engagement.

weight on employees’ perceived engagement. Career advancement has relatively a high weight beta (.493) as compared to other factors implying high level effect on employee engagement. Organizational culture, employee relationship and job expectations have relatively weak driving effect on employee engagement; .161, .135 and .131 respectively. Therefore, the hypotheses related to career advancement, organizational culture, employee’s relationship and job expectations were accepted. On the other hand employee’s perceived job importance and organizational communication have insig-

nificant relationship with employees perceived level of engagement. Therefore, the hypotheses related to job importance and employee interpersonal relationship were rejected.

Summary of the Hypotheses

The decisions relating to the hypotheses testing are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6 Summary of the Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Decision
H1: Employees perceived job importance is a driver for employee engagement	REJECTED
H2: Employees perceived job expectations is a driver for employee engagement	ACCEPTED
H3: Employees positive feeling about career development is a driver for employee engagement	ACCEPTED
H4: Smooth communication among employees is a driver for employee engagement	REJECTED
H5: Smooth interpersonal relationship among employees is a driver for employee engagement.	ACCEPTED
H6: Good organizational culture is a driver for employee engagement	ACCEPTED

This study has considered the factors that drive employee engagement. Perceived job importance, job expectations, organizational communication, interpersonal relationship and organizational culture were considered as drivers of employee engagement and related hypotheses were tested. It can be concluded that the driving factors have significant strong relationship with employee engagement and jointly 82% variation in employee engagement can be explained as driving factors considered by the present study.

Limitations

This study is quantitative in its approach therefore it lacks the qualitative dimension to have a comprehensive picture on making inferences about diversity management. As the sample of the study were drawn from the head quarters of the banks considered for the present study, results of the study can-

not be inferred for the rest of establishments in the country.

Implications

The findings of the study indicate that the factors considered for present study have strong driving force on employee engagement. Therefore, organizational leaders should properly identify drivers of employee engagement and accommodate them in their policies as well as in their day to day managerial practices.

Contribution of the study

Most of the researches in employee engagement were conducted in western countries. As the cultural background of employees is varying from country to country, contextual analysis need to be shown for specific country. The present study targeted to fill a research gap in the area of employee engagement in African organizations like in Ethiopia.

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