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Original Article

Linking Work Engagement to Employee Performance in Selected Manufacturing Firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement influences employees' attitudes towards their jobs and towards the organisation at large. Due to the poor institutional framework in manufacturing firms in SSA, employees are less inclined to be engaged in their work, leading to low employee productivity. Employee engagement results in motivated work behaviour and increases levels of effectiveness, innovation, and competitiveness. The study examined the state of work engagement in manufacturing firms and its impacts on employee performance of selected manufacturing firms in Kenya. The study was underpinned by the Job Demands-Resources theory, and adopted an explanatory research design with a target population of 6,254 employees of the selected manufacturing firms, with a sample size of 361 employees who were sampled through a proportionate stratified random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used, and the data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and the output was presented in tabular and pictorial formats. Data was transformed before hierarchical multiple regression models based on the Hayes (2018) Process 4.2 macro to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significance levels. Diagnostic tests were carried out before regression analysis, and the assumptions were not violated. The study revealed that demographic characteristics (work experience, $\beta = -0.187$, $p < 0.05$ and job designation, $\beta = 0.140$, $p < 0.05$) and employee engagement ($\beta = 0.700$, $p < 0.05$) significantly and positively predicted employee performance. The study concludes that employee engagement positively influences performance. The study implication is that employee engagement practices are readily adoptable and contribute to the overall employee wellbeing while augmenting employee performance. Because of its collective benefits, manufacturing firms can improve work behaviour by revitalising formal employee engagement procedures. The JD-R theory provides a foundation for which the work engagement practices can be contextually applied to accentuate employee performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Employee work engagement has emerged as a central construct has profound implications for individual well-being and organisational effectiveness (Buil et al., 2019). It is conceptualised not merely as a transient emotional state but as a sustained, positive, and fulfilling affective-motivational condition that reflects an employee's deep involvement and commitment to their work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This state of mind is characterised by three core dimensions: vigour, defined as high levels of energy and resilience during work; dedication, reflecting a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and inspiration toward one's job; and absorption, which refers to being fully concentrated and engrossed in tasks (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Jones, 2019). Together, these components create a dynamic psychological state where employees are not only motivated but also emotionally invested in their roles, leading to heightened effort, focus, and perseverance.

Employee engagement represents a pivotal psychological construct that reflects the degree to which employees are emotionally invested, committed, and enthusiastic about their work roles (Ngwenya & Pelser, 2020). It is not merely a passive state of job satisfaction but rather an active, energised involvement characterised by dedication, vigour, and absorption in one's tasks (Schaufeli et al., 2002). As such, employee engagement can be conceptualised as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing both psychological and behavioural dimensions, including emotional bonding with the organisation, cognitive investment in work processes, and observable behaviours that reflect commitment and initiative (Cooke et al., 2019). This dual nature positions engagement as a critical mediator between individual motivation and organisational outcomes. Specifically, it functions as a high-commitment practice that fosters continuous development of work-related competencies, enhances role clarity, and promotes proactive behaviour, all of which contribute significantly to overall performance (Hu et al., 2019).

At its core, employee engagement is rooted in the emotional bond employees form with their organisation and work environment. This affective connection influences job attitudes, levels of effort, and the willingness to go beyond formal job requirements (Harter et al., 2002). Such emotional investment translates into higher levels of organisational citizenship behaviour, reduced absenteeism, and increased productivity (Rich et al., 2010). Moreover, engagement reflects individual sentiments toward work, including feelings of purpose, meaning, and self-efficacy, all of which influence how employees perceive and respond to challenges in the workplace (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). These internal dispositions manifest externally through work role behaviours, such as discretionary effort, innovation, and collaboration are key drivers of performance within manufacturing settings where precision, coordination, and efficiency are paramount.

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The relationship between employee engagement and performance operates through distinct behavioural pathways. Empirical evidence indicates that engaged employees exhibit three primary forms of work behaviour: involvement, commitment, and passion (Dajani, 2015). Involvement refers to the level of concentration and focus on tasks; commitment reflects loyalty and dedication to organisational goals; and passion denotes a deep emotional drive to excel in one's role. Together, these behaviours create a synergistic effect that enhances individual productivity and contributes to collective success (Saks & Gruman, 2020). Furthermore, engagement manifests across multiple domains of work experience—intellectual, social, and affective, each corresponding to cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components respectively (Soane et al., 2012). Intellectual engagement involves mental effort and problem-solving; social engagement pertains to collaborative interactions and team cohesion; while affective engagement relates to emotional enthusiasm and positive affect toward work. This tripartite model underscores the reciprocal interdependence between employees and organisations, where mutual investment leads to sustained performance and long-term competitive advantage (Jemal, 2022).

From a strategic perspective, employee engagement has been widely recognised as a key determinant of organisational performance, particularly in labour-intensive industries such as manufacturing. The influence of engagement on performance is both proximate and distal: directly impacting individual output and indirectly shaping broader organisational capabilities, innovation capacity, and adaptability (Cooke et al., 2019). When employees are fully engaged, they are more likely to embrace change, take initiative, and demonstrate resilience in the face of operational challenges—qualities essential for competitiveness in dynamic markets (Kahn, 1990). In this context, engagement serves as a critical human capital lever that enables firms to achieve higher productivity, quality standards, and customer satisfaction (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Several studies have documented the positive association between employee engagement and performance across diverse sectors and geographic contexts. In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Ngwenya and Pelser (2020) investigated the impact of employee engagement on performance in Zimbabwean manufacturing firms, finding that higher levels of engagement were significantly correlated with improved task performance and organisational outcomes. Similarly, Sendawula et al. (2018) examined Catholic mission hospitals in Uganda and demonstrated that employee engagement positively predicted service delivery and staff performance. These findings reinforce the notion that engagement is not only a psychological state but also a measurable driver of tangible results in public and private sector organisations alike.

Despite these insights, there remains a notable gap in research focused specifically on Kenya's manufacturing sector—an industry vital to national economic growth yet plagued by persistent underperformance. During the Second Medium-Term Plan (2013–2017), Kenya's manufacturing sector failed to meet its projected targets, falling short of anticipated contributions to GDP and employment generation (Kering et al., 2020a). This underperformance has been attributed to various factors, including inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, and weak supply chain linkages. However, less attention has been paid to internal organisational dynamics, particularly those related to human resource management practices (Bigsten & Söderbom, 2016). Among these, employee engagement emerges as a crucial yet often overlooked variable. Given that engagement significantly influences individual performance and overall productivity (Soane et al., 2012), its neglect may help explain the low labour productivity observed in many SSA manufacturing firms (Kering et al., 2020b).

This study, therefore, seeks to critically examine the role of employee engagement in shaping

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performance outcomes within selected manufacturing firms in Kenya. Drawing upon prior empirical work in SSA and global contexts, the study posits that employee engagement is not merely a supplementary factor but a foundational element of sustainable performance in manufacturing environments. In sum, the growing body of evidence supports the view that employee engagement is a powerful predictor of individual and organisational performance. Its integration into human resource strategies offers a promising pathway for improving productivity, innovation, and resilience in manufacturing enterprises, particularly in developing economies like Kenya, where systemic challenges demand innovative solutions grounded in people-centred approaches. Addressing this dimension systematically could unlock latent potential in Kenya's industrial sector, aligning workforce capabilities with strategic objectives and enhancing competitiveness in regional and international markets.

Problem Statement

The employee performance for manufacturing firms in SSA is comparatively low when compared to all other regions globally (Kering et al., 2020b). Empirical studies on employee performance have been conducted in several contexts with different findings. The empirical studies have linked employee performance to employee engagement (Rana *et al.,* 2019; Kim, 2017; Cesário & Chambel, 2017; Ismail *et al.,* 2019), but few studies are located in the SSA context (Sendawula *et al.,* 2018) while focusing on the regional manufacturing sector (Ngwenya & Pelser, 2020). These studies have reported the influence of engagement practices on employee performance (Waseem & Mehmood, 2019; Anitha, 2014). However, within the local context, there is a dearth of studies measuring the influence of employee engagement on performance in the manufacturing sector in the Sub-Saharan African region. In particular, however, employee engagement as an HR practice influences employee performance of selected manufacturing firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Job Demands –Resources (JD-R) Theory

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement, particularly within dynamic and often demanding organisational contexts such as manufacturing. Developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), the JD-R theory posits that employee engagement is shaped by the interplay between job demands—factors that require sustained physical or psychological effort—and job resources—elements that facilitate goal attainment, reduce strain, and promote personal growth. This dual-process model not only explains how certain work conditions foster engagement but also clarifies how others may lead to fatigue, irritability, and ultimately burnout (Majumdar & Kumar, 2021). As such, the JD-R model serves as a critical lens through which to analyse the determinants of employee performance in manufacturing firms, where high workloads, time pressures, and repetitive tasks are common.

At the heart of the JD-R framework are two distinct categories of workplace factors: job resources and job demands, each playing a pivotal role in shaping employee motivation and well-being. Job resources refer to aspects of the job that help employees achieve work goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal development. These include social support from supervisors and colleagues, autonomy, feedback on performance, opportunities for skill development, and access to necessary tools and information (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). In manufacturing settings, where teamwork and coordination are essential, peer support and effective communication channels can significantly enhance employee engagement by fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Moreover, when employees perceive that management invests in supportive HR practices—such as training programs, recognition systems, and participative decision-making—they are more likely to feel energised, committed, and fully

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absorbed in their roles (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

In contrast, job demands encompass those physical, emotional, or cognitive requirements that impose a physiological or psychological cost on employees. Examples in manufacturing include long working hours, tight production deadlines, complex machinery operations, and exposure to hazardous environments. When job demands exceed an individual's capacity to cope, they can lead to exhaustion, stress, and disengagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). The JD-R model emphasises that while job demands may be unavoidable in industrial settings, their negative impact on engagement can be mitigated through the strategic deployment of job resources. This underscores the importance of creating a work environment that balances operational needs with employee well-being.

A key strength of the JD-R theory lies in its recognition of both main effects and interaction effects between job demands and resources. The first interaction effect through the boosting effects suggests that job resources have a stronger positive influence on employee engagement when job demands are high (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). In manufacturing firms, demands are often intense due to production targets and quality standards and adequate staffing. For instance, in high-pressure assembly lines, having supervisors who provide timely feedback and encouragement can amplify the motivational impact of job resources, transforming stressful situations into opportunities for growth and achievement (Taris & Schaufeli, 2015).

The second interaction effect, known as the buffering effect, highlights how job resources protect employees from the detrimental consequences of excessive job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). In this context, resources act as protective mechanisms against burnout and disengagement. For example, an employee facing repetitive and physically taxing tasks may still maintain high levels of energy and dedication if they have strong social support, regular breaks, or access to ergonomic equipment. Personal resources such as emotional stability, self-efficacy, and optimism also play a vital buffering role, enabling individuals to better manage stress and sustain engagement over time (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Thus, the JD-R model integrates both environmental and individual-level factors, offering a holistic explanation of engagement dynamics.

Furthermore, the model distinguishes between personal resources, the internal attributes such as resilience, confidence, and emotional intelligence and the job resources, emphasising that engagement emerges from the synergistic interaction between the employee and the work environment. Employees with high personal resources are more likely to interpret challenging situations as opportunities rather than threats, thereby enhancing their ability to engage actively with their roles (Luthans et al., 2017). However, even individuals with strong internal capacities can become disengaged if the work environment fails to provide sufficient external support. This reinforces the argument that organisations must cultivate both supportive cultures and individual capabilities to maximise engagement.

Critically, the JD-R model also implies that engagement is not a static trait but a dynamic state influenced by ongoing interactions between work characteristics and personal attributes. By systematically assessing job demands and enriching job resources, managers can create conditions conducive to sustained engagement and improved performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). For instance, introducing flexible scheduling, promoting skill diversification, and implementing wellness initiatives can serve as powerful engagement drivers in manufacturing settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that engaged employees exhibit greater task performance, enhanced productivity, improved quality of work, and increased organisational citizenship behaviours, actions that go beyond formal job requirements (Soane et al., 2012; Bailey et al., 2017). Engaged workers tend to be

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more attentive, persistent, and proactive, often investing discretionary effort into their responsibilities. As Arslan and Roudaki (2019) emphasise, engagement fosters enthusiastic involvement across physical, cognitive, and emotional domains, enabling employees to transcend routine duties and contribute meaningfully to organisational goals. The impact of this engagement extends beyond personal satisfaction, significantly influencing a wide array of performance outcomes. Studies in manufacturing firms in South Africa found that job control and supervisor support were significant predictors of employee engagement, directly influencing performance outcomes (Ngwenya & Pelser, 2020). Similarly, a study in Ugandan health institutions revealed that perceived job resources, particularly feedback and autonomy, were strongly linked to employee engagement and service delivery effectiveness (Sendawula et al., 2018).

Empirical literature supports the strong, positive relationship between employee engagement and job performance, with numerous studies confirming both direct and causal associations. For instance, Ismail et al. (2019), Jemal (2022), Waseem and Mehmood (2019), and Anitha (2014) have explored this linkage in various industrial settings, including manufacturing firms across different regions. Their findings uniformly indicate that higher levels of engagement correlate with superior task performance, organisational commitment, and overall work output. These studies, though conducted in diverse contexts from banking to manufacturing, converge on a consistent conclusion: employee engagement serves as a powerful predictor of individual and collective performance. Notably, Bailey et al. (2017) highlight that the empirical evidence linking engagement to performance is most robust when examining task-specific outputs, reinforcing the relevance of this construct in operational and production-oriented industries.

Further, recent longitudinal studies have underscored the predictive validity of engagement in explaining variations in employee performance. Cesário and Chambel (2017) found that engaged employees demonstrate better problem-solving abilities, innovation, and adaptability—key competencies in fast-evolving manufacturing sectors. Similarly, Rana et al. (2019) observed that engagement mediates the relationship between leadership support and performance, suggesting that supportive management practices enhance engagement, which in turn drives better results. Kim (2017) further confirmed that sustained engagement contributes to long-term performance improvements, especially in knowledge-intensive and skill-driven environments, where motivation and initiative play critical roles.

Despite these compelling findings, the application of engagement theory in Sub-Saharan African manufacturing contexts remains underexplored. While several studies have validated the engagement-performance nexus in developed economies and select emerging markets, there is limited empirical grounding in Kenya's industrial sector—a region facing persistent challenges such as low labour productivity, high turnover rates, and inadequate investment in human capital development (Bigsten & Söderbom, 2016; Kering et al., 2020a). In this light, employee engagement emerges as a critical yet often overlooked determinant of performance, particularly given its potential to amplify morale, reduce absenteeism, and foster a culture of ownership and accountability. Based on the foregoing reviews, the study formulated the following hypothesis to support empirical literature.

H_1: Work engagement has no significant effect on employee Performance of selected manufacturing firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The explanatory study targeted 6,254 employees from selected eleven manufacturing firms in industrial area, Nairobi city county (Osho Chemicals, Desbro (K), Crown Paints(K), Twiga Chemicals, Manji Food Industries, Pipe Manufacturers, Kartasi Industries, East African Packaging Industries, Beta Healthcare, Silpack Industries and King Plastics Industries**)** with the unit of analysis and observation being the employees. Based on Cochran's formula, an

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initial sample size of 384 employees was calculated. After applying the finite population correction factor for a total population of 6,254 employees, the adjusted sample size was 361 employees, as shown below:

$$n' = \frac{(n)}{(1 + n/\text{Population})} = \frac{(384)}{(1 + 384/6254)} = 361$$

Where *n'* was the desired sample size, while *n* was the sample size. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select the representative respondents, and the study adopted a questionnaire as the main research instrument. The instrument adopted indicators for the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006), and employee performance (Koopmans *et al.,* 2013) and was later checked for internal consistency through the use of Cronbach's alpha coefficient > 0.7, indicating that the instrument had an acceptable scale and measure. Concerning ethical considerations, the study obtained NACOSTI permit No: P/24/36300 and county administration structures, after which authorisation was obtained from the concerned manufacturing firms. Informed consent was obtained from the respondents before the data collection process.

The study organised the variables as described below. Gender was measured based on a binary value where 1 = male and 2 = female, age was measured in years and categorised into 1= 21 – 30 years, 2= 31 – 40 years, 3= 41 – 50 years, and 4= 51 – 60 years. Education level was measured based on an ordinal scale where 1= High school level, 2= Diploma level, 3= Higher Diploma level, 4= Bachelor's Degree, 5= Master's Degree, and 6= PhD level. In addition, work experience was categorized into 1= less than 10 years; 2= 11 – 20 years; 3= 21 – 30 years and 4= Above 31 years;, while job designation was categorized 1= operations; 2= technical; 3= supervisor; and 4= manager, and departmental function clustered into 1= Finance and Accounting; 2= Human Resource; 3= Operations; and 4= Sales and Marketing. The items of the study variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale: 5- Strongly Agree, 4- Agree, 3- Undecided, 2- Disagree, and 1- Strongly Disagree.

Data was prepared in several steps that included data completeness through missing data analysis through Little's Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test, with p-values> 0.05 indicating that the data was MCAR and corrected through mean imputation. Common Method Variance (CMV) was checked and controlled through Harman's One Factor Test, with the single factor explaining 31.423% variance below the 50% variance level, ruling out CMV (bias) in the instrument. Finally, the data were analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of a Statistical package (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 24). Further, the study reduced the indicators of the study variables into a single numerical index and employed multiple regression analysis to establish the nature of the relationship between the study variables.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the study sample provide critical contextual insights into the workforce composition within selected manufacturing firms, offering a foundation for understanding how individual attributes may influence employee engagement and subsequent performance outcomes. The data reveal that the respondent pool was predominantly male, with 62.3% identifying as male and 37.7% as female. In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents (54.3%) fell within the 31–40 age bracket, indicating a relatively young and potentially dynamic workforce. The low proportion of older workers only 1.3% of respondents were aged between 51 and 60 years, may point to early retirement patterns, limited career progression opportunities, or even high turnover rates among senior employees. The low proportion of older workers—only 1.3% of respondents were aged between 51 and 60 years—may point to early retirement patterns, limited career progression opportunities, or even high turnover rates among senior employees.

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Socio-economic Characteristics

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Categories	N	%
Work experience	Less than 10 years	145	48.3
	11 to 20 years	117	39.0
	21 to 30 years	29	9.7
	Above 31 years	9	3.0
	Total	**300**	**100.0**
Job designation	Operational Staff	152	50.7
	Technical Staff	61	20.3
	Supervisor	65	21.7
	Manager	22	7.3
	Total	**300**	**100.0**
Department	Finance and Accounting	44	14.7
	Human Resource	23	7.7
	Operations	171	57.0
	Sales and Marketing	62	20.7
	Total	**300**	**100.0**

Source: Researcher (2025)

The distribution of the socio-economic characteristics indicated that 48.3% of the respondents had work experience of less than 10 years, and only 3% had worked for over 31 years. In terms of job designation, 50.7%(operational), 20.3%(technical), 21.7%(supervisors), and 7.3 % (management). In terms of departmental function, 57.0 %(operations), 20.7% (sales & marketing), 14.7% (finance and accounting), and 7.7% (human resources). The indications from the study show that the majority (48.3%) had less than 10 years' work indicating their entry position. In total, close to six-tenths were plant operators and one-fifth sales and marketing staff, with 7.7 % being drawn from the HR function.

Descriptive Statistics

Based on the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) and items on employee performance(Guthrie, 2001). This study used a Likert-type scale, which rated the level of agreement/disagreement with the items with a scale: 1 - Strongly Disagree (SD); 1 - Disagree (D); 3 - Not at all (N); 4 - Agree (A); and 5 - Strongly Agree (SA).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Employee Engagement

Indicators of Employee Engagement	Mean	SD
At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	4.260	0.784
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	4.207	0.846
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	4.027	0.854
I am proud of the work that I do.	4.013	0.842
I am enthusiastic about my job.	4.164	0.779
My job inspires me.	3.923	0.873
I get carried away when I am working.	3.589	0.956
I feel happy when I am working intensely.	3.277	0.976
I am immersed in my work.	3.185	0.984
Indicators of employee performance	**Mean**	**SD**
The quality of my work in the past three months was very good.	4.390	0.616
The quantity of my work in the past three months was very good.	4.447	0.561
I manage to plan my work so that it is always done on time.	4.373	0.650
I always keep in mind the results that I have to achieve in my work.	4.251	0.751
I have trouble setting priorities in my work.	3.559	1.123
I can perform my work well with minimal time and effort.	4.167	0.689

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I can fulfil my responsibilities.	4.169	0.758
I come up with creative ideas at work.	4.224	0.781
I take the initiative when there is a problem to be solved.	4.083	0.836
I ask for help when needed.	4.128	0.860
I take on challenging work tasks when available.	3.845	0.885
I always work at keeping my job knowledge and skills up-to-date.	4.070	0.805
I can cope well with difficult situations and setbacks at work.	4.239	0.780
I come up with creative solutions to new problems.	4.125	0.741
I can cope well with uncertain and unpredictable situations at work.	4.040	0.759
I easily adjust to changes in my work.	4.010	0.814
I often complain about unimportant matters at work.	2.314	1.066
I sometimes focus on the negative aspects of a work situation, instead of on the positive aspects.	2.228	1.108
I sometimes behave rudely towards someone at work.	2.115	1.132
I purposely make mistakes.	1.910	1.182

Source: *Researcher (2025)*

The descriptive analysis presented in Table 2 offers a detailed description of employee work engagement across multiple dimensions. The findings reveal that employees exhibit high levels of enthusiasm, vigour, and emotional commitment to their roles—key indicators of sustained engagement. Specifically, a majority of respondents reported feeling energised at work, demonstrating physical and psychological resilience, and expressing genuine anticipation about attending work on a regular basis. This level of energy and motivation is consistent with the core components of work engagement as defined by Schaufeli et al. (2002), which include vigour, dedication, and absorption. The fact that most employees look forward to work each day underscores a positive affective-motivational state that fosters consistency, effort, and long-term commitment.

Many indicated that they are deeply invested in their work, take ownership of responsibilities, and derive personal satisfaction from contributing to organisational goals. This sense of purpose not only enhances job satisfaction but also strengthens intrinsic motivation, leading to higher-quality outputs. In terms of task performance, the results indicate commendable levels of effectiveness and reliability. Most employees consistently complete tasks within deadlines, adhere to established standards, and demonstrate strong time management skills. A substantial proportion of employees reported actively seeking solutions to workplace challenges, proposing new ideas, and taking responsibility for addressing issues proactively. Furthermore, many employees demonstrated a willingness to seek help when needed, indicating a healthy balance between autonomy and collaboration. This openness to support reinforces psychological safety and promotes continuous learning, both of which are vital in dynamic manufacturing settings.

A large number of respondents indicated that they regularly update their job knowledge and technical skills to remain competent in evolving work environments. This proactive approach to skill development is especially relevant in modern manufacturing, where technological advancements, automation, and shifting market demands require ongoing learning and flexibility. Finally, the assessment of counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) reveals a largely positive workplace culture. Most employees reported focusing on constructive aspects of their jobs, avoiding negative attitudes, and refraining from intentional misconduct such as absenteeism, sabotage, or deliberate errors.

Inferential Statistics

The study employed ANOVA analysis to examine the nature of the relationship between study variables and socio-demographic characteristics. In conducting the analysis, the study assigned the values based on the categories, and the study only presents the results of significant differences

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between the variables and the socio-demographic characteristics as displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Categorical Demographic Differences in Study Variables

Variable	F-test	p	Categorical differences					
Demographic characteristics			**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Engagement # Gender	5.157	.024	3.779[b]	3.968[a]				
Engagement # Age	7.271	.000	3.952[a]	3.843[a]	3.725[a]	5.000[b]		
Engagement # Education level	6.539	.000	3.599[a]	3.936[a]	3.889[a]	4.022[a]	3.963[a]	5.000[b]
Engagement # Work experience	2.210	.087						
Engagement # Designation	9.470	.000	3.692[a]	4.125[b]	3.931[ab]	3.946[ab]		
Engagement # Department	9.742	.049	4.040[bc]	4.322[c]	3.729[a]	3.876[ab]		

[a, b, c,] *Means with the same letter superscript in a column are not significantly different ($p<0.05$)*

Source: *Researcher (2025)*

The perceptions of employee work engagement differ based on gender ($F = 5.157$, $p < 0.05$), with female employees holding favourable perceptions than their male counterparts. There were statistical age differences in perceptions towards employee engagement ($F = 7.271$, < 0.05). In particular, individuals aged between 51 and 60 years held significantly more favourable perceptions than every other individual aged 50 years and below. Individuals aged between 41 and 50 years held significantly lower perceptions in all the study variables than all the other age groups. The perceptions of employee engagement statistically differed with education level ($F = 6.539$, $p < 0.05$), with individuals with high school certificates holding significantly lower perceptions than all other groups, but there were no statistically significant differences in perceptions of employee engagement based on work duration ($F = 2.210$, $\rho > 0.05$).

Further, perceptions of employee engagement statistically differed with job designation ($F = 9.470$, $p < 0.05$), where technical staff held significantly more favourable perceptions than every other job designation, while operational staff seemed to hold significantly lower perceptions of all study variables than all other job designations. Lastly, perceptions of employee engagement statistically differed according to functional areas ($F = 9.742$, $\rho = 0.049$), with employees drawn from human resource functions holding significantly more favourable perceptions than every other individual drawn from all other functions.

The study reveals significant variations in employee perceptions of work engagement across multiple demographic and organisational dimensions, highlighting the complex interplay between individual characteristics and workplace experiences. These differences underscore that engagement is not a uniform phenomenon but is shaped by gender, age, education, job role, and functional areas. The statistical differences in perceptions towards employee engagement indicate that educational qualification has a significant influence on demographic characteristics on perceptions towards employee engagement. In particular, operational staff with high school education levels seem to hold the significantly lowest perceptions of all study variables.

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Table 4: Effects of Employee Engagement on Employee Performance

	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	**t**	**p**	**β**	**t**	**p**
(Constant)	1.455	42.665	0.000	0.928	23.483	0.000
Gender	0.142	2.517	0.012	0.075	1.841	0.067
Age	-0.045	-0.681	0.496	-0.010	-0.205	0.838
Work experience	-0.205	-2.944	0.004	-0.187	-3.772	0.000
Education	0.053	0.710	0.478	-0.107	-1.959	0.051
Job designation	0.192	2.854	0.005	0.140	2.913	0.004
Departmental function	-0.110	-1.849	0.065	-0.059	-1.401	0.162
Employee engagement				0.700	16.891	0.000
R^2	0.118			0.554		
Adjusted R^2	0.100			0.543		
Std. Error of the Estimate	0.112			0.080		
F	6.552*		0.000	51.826*		0.000

To examine the direct influence of employee engagement on performance, this study conducted a hierarchical regression analysis, with Model 1 focusing on the impact of demographic and job-related covariates on employee performance, and Model 2 assessing the unique contribution of employee engagement in addition to these covariates. The results provide robust evidence that both individual characteristics and engagement levels play critical roles in shaping performance outcomes within selected manufacturing firms in Nairobi City County.

In Model 1, the analysis revealed that gender, work experience, and job designation were statistically significant predictors of employee performance ($F = 6.552$, $p = 0.000$), collectively explaining 11.8% of the variance in performance. Specifically, gender had a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.142$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that female employees reported higher performance levels compared to their male counterparts—a finding consistent with prior research suggesting that women often exhibit stronger organisational commitment and interpersonal effectiveness in collaborative environments (Buil et al., 2019). Conversely, work experience demonstrated a negative but significant coefficient ($\beta = -0.205$, $p < 0.05$), which may reflect a l trend where longer tenure does not necessarily translate to improved performance. This could be attributed to reduced motivation or limited opportunities for advancement among senior employees (Kahn, 1990). Additionally, job designation emerged as a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.192$, $p < 0.05$), with certain roles, particularly those involving technical or supervisory responsibilities, contributing more positively to performance outcomes. These findings suggest that organisational structure, role clarity, and the nature of job responsibilities significantly influence individual productivity. Notably, age, education level, and departmental function did not emerge as statistically significant predictors in Model 1 ($p > 0.05$), implying that while these factors may shape perceptions of engagement, they do not directly determine performance outcomes in this context.

Model 2 introduced employee engagement as a key independent variable, testing its direct effect on performance while controlling for the same covariates. The results were striking: employee engagement exhibited a highly significant positive relationship with performance ($\beta = 0.700$, $p < 0.05$), explaining an additional 56.5% of the variance in performance ($F = 47.310$, $p < 0.05$). This substantial increase in explanatory power underscores the dominant role of engagement in driving performance outcomes. Even after accounting for demographic and job-related factors, engagement remained a powerful

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predictor, reinforcing the notion that how employees feel about their work, characterised by energy, dedication, and absorption, has a profound impact on their actual output and quality of work.

Furthermore, the model retained the significance of education level ($\beta = -0.181$, $p < 0.05$) and job designation ($\beta = 0.123$, $p < 0.05$), albeit with smaller coefficients than in Model 1. The negative effect of education level suggests that individuals with higher qualifications may face unmet expectations or lack meaningful roles, potentially leading to underutilization and lower perceived performance. Alternatively, this could reflect contextual challenges such as misalignment between formal qualifications and practical job demands. Meanwhile, the continued significance of job designation indicates that structural roles still matter, even in the presence of high engagement. The cumulative findings from both models reveal a clear hierarchy of influences: while demographic and positional factors contribute modestly to performance variation, employee engagement stands out as the most potent driver, accounting for over half of the observed variance. This aligns with extensive literature emphasising that engagement is not merely a psychological state but a behavioural catalyst that translates into tangible improvements in task execution, innovation, and organisational citizenship (Bailey et al., 2017; Soane et al., 2012).

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the direct relationship between employee engagement and employee performance within selected manufacturing firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The findings, as presented in Table 4, reveal that employee engagement has a statistically significant positive effect on performance ($\beta = 0.700$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that higher levels of engagement are strongly associated with improved individual and collective performance outcomes. This robust relationship underscores the strategic importance of fostering engagement as a critical driver of organisational success in competitive industrial environments.

The positive influence of employee engagement on performance is well-supported by a growing body of empirical research. Studies such as Ismail et al. (2019) and Carter et al. (2018) have consistently documented a strong positive correlation between engagement and job performance, suggesting that engaged employees are more likely to exceed expectations, demonstrate initiative, and contribute meaningfully to organisational goals. These findings align with broader evidence showing that employee engagement significantly enhances key organisational performance indicators, including job satisfaction, productivity, employee retention, organisational commitment, and workplace safety (Dajani, 2015). In particular, high-engagement environments tend to exhibit lower turnover rates and reduced absenteeism, which directly translate into cost savings and operational continuity for manufacturing firms (Bailey et al., 2017).

Engaged employees are characterised by heightened emotional investment, cognitive involvement, and behavioural effort in their work roles (Soane et al., 2012). This active state, marked by vigour, dedication, and absorption, is distinct from mere job satisfaction, as it reflects a deeper psychological connection to one's work and organisation (Alfes et al., 2013). Unlike passive contentment, engagement involves energy, enthusiasm, and a willingness to go beyond formal responsibilities, often resulting in discretionary efforts that enhance both efficiency and innovation (Wang et al., 2015). Moreover, the benefits of engagement extend far beyond individual performance metrics. Research indicates that when employees feel valued, supported, and connected to their organisation, their engagement levels rise, leading to improved customer service, greater loyalty, and ultimately, enhanced profitability (Kim & Park, 2017). In manufacturing contexts, this can manifest through better quality control, faster production cycles, and stronger collaboration across teams—all of which contribute to competitive advantage. Indeed, employee engagement is increasingly

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recognised as a strategic asset that enables organisations to achieve sustainable growth and resilience in dynamic markets (Huang et al., 2018).

From a theoretical perspective, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model provides a robust framework for understanding how engagement translates into performance. According to this model, job resources such as autonomy, feedback, and social support and personal resources—like self-efficacy and optimism serve as antecedents of engagement, which in turn leads to improved performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). When organisations invest in creating resource-rich work environments, they foster conditions that promote sustained engagement. For example, providing regular performance feedback, empowering employees with decision-making authority, and recognising contributions through formal reward systems can all strengthen engagement and drive performance outcomes (Kim, 2017). This aligns with observations that effective human resource practices, particularly those emphasising development, recognition, and inclusion, are instrumental in cultivating engagement and enhancing productivity (Waseem & Mehmood, 2019).

High levels of engagement correlate with increased mental and emotional well-being, which reduces stress and burnout while enhancing focus, creativity, and problem-solving capabilities (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). This emotional and cognitive activation not only improves immediate task performance but also supports long-term organisational learning and innovation (Carter et al., 2018). Employees who perceive themselves as capable and valued are more likely to invest energy and effort in their work, leading to higher performance outcomes (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Engagement also fosters organisational commitment, which strengthens loyalty and reduces the likelihood of turnover—a crucial factor in industries with high labour mobility like manufacturing (Albrecht & Marty, 2020).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the evidence overwhelmingly supports the notion that employee engagement is a powerful determinant of performance in manufacturing firms. It drives productivity, innovation, and customer satisfaction while reducing costs associated with turnover and absenteeism. The direct influence of work engagement on employee performance occurs through the positive emotional display towards the organisation, which invariably results in reciprocal behaviour, thus influencing individual employee performance.

RECOMMENDATION

The findings reinforce the need for organisations to prioritise engagement as a core strategic objective, leveraging both structural (e.g., job design, HR policies) and psychological (e.g., leadership support, recognition) levers to cultivate a culture of motivation and excellence. By investing in engagement, manufacturing firms in Nairobi and beyond can unlock latent human potential, improve operational effectiveness, and secure a sustainable competitive edge in an increasingly globalised economy.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study findings have implications that employee engagement practices are readily adoptable and contribute to the overall employee wellbeing while augmenting employee performance. Because of its collective benefits, manufacturing firms can improve work behaviour by revitalising formal employee engagement procedures. The JD-R theory provides a foundation for which the work engagement practices can be contextually applied to accentuate employee performance

The limitation lies in the selected eleven manufacturing firms, which were the representative number and were geographically limited in scope to Nairobi City County, and as such, the findings may differ because of the geographical spatial differences.

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