

Effect of Supervisory Support on Women's Career Advancement in Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effect of supervisory support on women's career advancement to managerial positions in Kenya. A descriptive research design was applied. Data was collected from a sample of 400 women employees who were working in the Federation of Kenya member organizations. A total of 366 completed questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 95.1 percent. Cross tabulations, means and standard deviations were computed to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The results indicate that two supervisory dimensions which affected women's career advancement to managerial positions were getting information about career opportunities and support on work related training.

Keywords: Supervisory Support, Women, Career Advancement.

Introduction

One of the reasons why employees stay in their current jobs is career advancement (Linge, Van Rensburg & Sikalieh 2011). According to research, both men and women desire to advance in their careers. However, the playing ground has been skewed towards the advancement of men although affording women advancement can also be beneficial to organizations. Career advancement is perceived as comprising promotions and receiving increased earnings like bonus/merit pay (Gupta, 2004; Snell & Bolander, 2010) Organizations stand to benefit by bringing women to decision making positions because they achieve competitive advantage by reaping from the diverse talents women bring to the work place (Appelbaum, 2002).

Several factors influence the career advancement of women. These include individual characteristics, cultural practices, family issues, self-confidence and supervisory support among others (Linge et al., 2011)). Many researchers have focused on many of the mentioned factors but have failed to address how supervisory support affects the career advancement of women. This study seeks to fill in this gap by examining the effect of supervisory support on women's the career advancement to managerial positions in Kenya. Jennings (as quoted by Gould & Penley, 1984) states that harmony between a person and his or her immediate superior, commonly referred to as supervisor, is important for the person's career advancement because such a person receives support from the supervisor.

Theoretical Background

This study is informed by the leader-member exchange theory. Rosenbaum (1984) indicates that supervisors only support and guide selected individuals. Such employees may be termed as the in-group.

Graen et al. (1995), on the leader-member exchange theory state that some employees have high quality relationships with their supervisors (the in-group) and others have low quality relationships (the out-group). He adds that the in-group members have relationships with their supervisors that are characterized by respect, liking, mutual trust and influence; the opposite is true of the out-group members. In-group members tend to have higher performance and satisfaction, lower turnover and more positive career outcomes than out-group members. Wakabayashi et al. (1984) observe that the leader-member exchange is important for salary progression and promotion throughout one's career; in other words career advancement. Based on the leader- member exchange theory, discussed above, it is reasonable to categorize most women employees as the out-group because they receive little support from supervisors (Linge et al., 2011). It is also reasonable to argue that not all women are in the out-group.

Literature Review

According to Dessler (2008), the supervisor can give different types of support to an employee in order to support the employee's career advancement. These include discussing the employee's personal development plan, mentoring, affording the employee training opportunities and also information about career opportunities. Each of these types of support is explored in the discussion which follows.

With regard to personal development, a supervisor can periodically check with an employee and discuss how the accomplishment of the employee's personal development plan is progressing and also to offer support where the employee has a challenge with developmental activities (Higson & Wilson, 1995). A personal development plan helps one to set out the actions to learn and develop oneself (Armstrong, 2006). It includes concrete, actionable steps to address feedback on performance and comprises activities like undertaking training courses and knowing your strengths in terms of skills and knowledge (Higson & Wilson, 1995).

Mentoring can be defined as a method for helping people to learn on the job to acquire particular skills and knowledge that the job holder needs (Armstrong, 2006). To date, many researchers have shown that mentorship leads to career advancement (Ismael & Arokiasamy, 2007; Hirsh & Cater, 2002 and Wernick, 1994). According to Wernick (1994), mentors are recognized as being extremely important in the development and advancement of an individual employee to management positions. Hirsh and Carter (2002) state that mentors prepare individuals to perform better in the future and groom them for higher and greater things like career advancement. Ismael and Arokiasamy (2007) claim that employees with mentors support gain more promotions, higher incomes and work satisfaction than employees without mentors. Dessler (2008) exemplifies the importance of mentors with a survey conducted in the United States on women workforce which showed that 47% of minority women indicated that their main hindrance to advancement was lack of a mentor. So far, it is reasonable to assume that supervisor mentorship of their subordinates may contribute to an employees' career advancement.

In a different view Pasework and Viator (2006) state that mentorship can also have its downside effects on employees careers. For instance, mentorship tension is associated with negative job outcomes. This means that if the mentoring relationship is not doing well, it could harm an employee's productivity and consequently career development. The implication is that not all mentoring relationships are successful and lead to career advancement.

Employee training is important for skill and knowledge development. Supervisors can nominate and select participants for short specific programs with an aim of developing them (Wernick, 1994). Such training can help an employee to upgrade his or her skills and knowledge and be able to improve on current and future work performance. This may be the case particularly if the training is targeted on addressing the weaknesses of the employees. Employees are likely to perform poorly in their weak areas. Supervisors can also discuss employees job qualifications with them to enlighten employees about the current and future job requirements (Nzuve, 2007).

Useful information can include the skills and knowledge gaps in the organization where training is needed, the type of training that is needed, information about desired organizational norms and values for progressing and projected future direction of the organization. Information about available opportunities in organizations is also key to career advancement (Gvozeva & Gerchikov, 2002). Employees who receive such information from supervisors are those who are close to them; women may miss out on the information if supervisors are not close to them.

Studies done in the Western World have also portrayed women as unlikely to receive support of supervisors. In this regard, a study conducted in Russia about women's career advancement indicate that women have said that they do not receive information about opportunities for career advancement (Gvozeva & Gerchikov, 2002). It is not clear if this is the case in the Kenyan context. This study seeks to determine the extent to which supervisory support affects the career advancement of women to managerial positions in Kenya. The objectives of the study were four: To determine the extent to which supervisor guidance on personal development plans affects the career advancement of women to managerial positions in Kenya, to determine the extent to which supervisor mentoring affects the career advancement of women to managerial positions in Kenya, to determine the extent to which supervisor initiated training affects the career advancement of women to managerial positions in Kenya and to determine the extent to which supervisor informational support affects the career advancement of women to managerial positions in Kenya.

Methodology

The descriptive research design was applied in this study. The population of the study included 7353 women employees of FKE member organizations. The sample size was determined at 400. The data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Data was cleaned, coded and entered into The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. It was analyzed using cross tabulations, means and standard deviations. Data was presented using tables.

Findings

A response rate of 366 (95.1%) was realized in this study. The presentation the results follows.

Supervisor Guidance on Personal Career Plan and Career Advancement

Cross tabulation results in Table 1 showed that among the respondents who had received promotion, 52.3% (19.3+33) were in agreement that their supervisors gave them guidance their personal career plan whereas 38.6% (22.8.2+15.8) were in disagreement with the same. On those who had not been promoted, 81.9% (49.2+32.7) disagreed receiving supervisor guidance of the same factor.

Other cross tabulations showed that many respondents 55% (35.2+19.8) who had received bonus/merit pay were in disagreement that their supervisors discussed their individual career plan as compared to 38.5% (22+16.5) who were in agreement on the same factor. On those who had not received bonus or merit pay, a majority of 81.9% (48.4+33.5) said that they had not received supervisors guidance on personal career plans whereas 14.5% (12.7+1.8) agreed so. Mean ratings of 3.25 and 1.85 and standard deviations of 1.607 and 1.091 for the promoted and non-promoted respondents, respectively, suggest that most of the scores for each group were clustered around the respective means.

Mean ratings of 2.70 and 1.86 and standard deviations of 1.609 and 1.085 for the bonus/merit pay receiving and non-bonus/merit pay receiving groups, respectively, suggest that most of the scores for each group were clustered around the respective means. The standard deviation values for the non-promoted and the non-bonus/merit pay receiving groups are lower indicating that the clustering is more intense in the scores within these groups. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Supervisor Guidance on Personal Career Plan and Career Advancement

Indicators of Career Advancement		supervisor discusses my individual career plan with me							
		SDA	DA	NS	A	SA	TOTAL	Mean	SD
Promotion Status	Yes	13 (22.8)	9 (15.8)	5 (8.8)	11 (19.3)	19 (33)	57 (100)	3.25	1.607
	No	152 (49.2)	101 (32.7)	11 (3.6)	39 (12.6)	6 (1.9)	309 (100)	1.85	1.091
		supervisor discusses my individual career plan with me							
		SDA	DA	NS	A	SA	TOTAL	Mean	SD
Bonus/Merit Pay Status	Yes	32 (35.2)	18 (19.8)	6 (6.6)	15 (16.5)	20 (22)	91 (100)	2.70	1.609
	No	133 (48.4)	92 (33.5)	10 (3.6)	35 (12.7)	5 (1.8)	275 (100)	1.86	1.085

% in Parentheses ()

SDA = Strongly Disagree, DA = Disagree, NS = Not Sure, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Supervisor Mentoring and Career Advancement

Cross-tabulations of supervisor mentoring and promotion showed that a cumulative 52.7% (28.1+24.6) of those who had been promoted disagreed that their supervisors had mentored them and 35.1% agreed so. Many more of those who had not been promoted 86.1% (62.8+23.3) also disagreed so with only 10.4% (8.1+2.3) of the non-promoted category in agreement.

Table 2: Supervisor Mentoring and Career Advancement

Indicators of Career Advancement		My supervisor advises me on how to plan my career							
		SDA	DA	NS	A	SA	TOTAL	Mean	SD
Promotion Status	Yes	16 (28.1)	14 (24.6)	7 (12.3)	8 (14)	12 (21.1)	57 (100)	2.75	1.527
	No	194 (62.8)	72 (23.3)	11 (3.6)	25 (8.1)	7 (2.3)	309 (100)	1.64	1.031
		My supervisor advises me on how to plan my career							
		SDA	DA	NS	A	SA	TOTAL	Mean	SD
Bonus/Merit Pay Status	Yes	33 (36.3)	17 (18.7)	9 (9.9)	16 (17.6)	16 (17.6)	91 (100)	2.62	1.548
	No	177 (64.4)	69 (25.1)	9 (3.3)	17 (6.2)	3 (1.1)	275 (100)	1.55	0.905

% in Parentheses ()

SDA = Strongly Disagree, DA = Disagree, NS = Not Sure, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

On cross tabulating between supervisor mentoring and bonus/merit pay, a cumulative 55% (36.3+18.7) of the respondents who had received bonus/merit pay were in disagreement that the supervisor had mentored whereas 35.2% (17.6+17.6) agreed so. A majority of those had not received bonus/merit pay 89.5% (64.4+25.1) disagreed on the same factor with only 7.3% (6.2+1.1) in agreement. Mean ratings of

2.75 and 1.64 and standard deviations of 1.527 and 1.031 for the promoted and non-promoted respondents, respectively, suggested that most of the scores for each group were clustered around the respective means. Mean ratings of 2.62 and 1.55 and standard deviations of 1.548 and 0.905 for the bonus/merit pay receiving and non-bonus/merit pay receiving groups, respectively, suggested that most of the scores for each group were clustered around the respective means. The standard deviation values for the non-promoted and the non-bonus/merit pay receiving groups are lower indicating that the clustering is more intense in the scores within these groups. Results are displayed in Table 2.

Work Related Training and Career Advancement

Cross tabulations regarding being selected for work related training and promotion showed that 49.1% (19.3+29.8) of those who had received promotion were in agreement as opposed to 38.6% (24.6+14) who disagreed. A total of 76.7% (52.4+24.3) of the respondents who had not received promotion disagreed being sponsored for work related training; only 17.4 (15.5+1.9) agreed.

Additional cross tabulations of work related training and bonus/merit pay showed that among the respondents who had received bonus/merit pay, 58.3% (35.2+23.1) were in agreement that the supervisor selected them for work related training as compared to 33% (20.9+ 12.1) who were in disagreement but many 78.6% (52.4+26.2) of those who had not received bonus/merit pay also disagreed with the same with only 15.3 (13.8 +1.5 of this category agreeing so. Mean ratings of 3.36 and 1.90 and standard deviations of 1.590 and 1.172 for the promoted and non-promoted respondents, respectively, suggest that most of the scores for each group were clustered around the respective means. Mean ratings of 3.82 and 1.86 and standard deviations of 1.610 and 1.120 for the bonus/merit pay receiving and non-bonus/merit pay receiving groups, respectively, suggest that most of the scores for each group were clustered around the respective means. The standard deviation values for the non-promoted and the non-bonus/merit pay receiving groups are lower indicating that the clustering is more intense in the scores within these groups. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Work Related Training and Career Advancement

Indicators of Career Advancement		My supervisor selects me supervisor for work related training							
		SDA	DA	NS	A	SA	TOTAL	Mean	SD
Promotion Status	Yes	14 (24.6)	8 (14)	7 (12.3)	11 (19.3)	17 (29.8)	57 (100)	3.36	1.590
	No	162 (52.4)	75 (24.3)	18 (5.8)	48 (15.5)	6 (1.9)	309 (100)	1.90	1.172
		My supervisor selects me supervisor for work related training							
		SDA	DA	NS	A	SA	TOTAL	Mean	SD
Bonus/Merit Pay Status	Yes	19 (20.9)	11 (12.1)	8 (8.8)	21 (23.1)	32 (35.2)	91 (100)	3.82	1.610
	No	144 (52.4)	72 (26.2)	17 (6.2)	38 (13.8)	4 (1.5)	275 (100)	1.86	1.120

% in Parentheses ()

SDA = Strongly Disagree, DA = Disagree, NS = Not Sure, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Information about Career Opportunities and Career Advancement

The results of the Cross-tabulation between getting information about career opportunities from the supervisor revealed that the bigger proportion of 70.3% (59.2+11.1) among those who had been promoted

were for agreement those in disagreement were 27.4% (2.8+24.6). Similarly 80.3 % (53.1+27.2) of those who had not been promoted disagreed getting information about career opportunities from the supervisors with only 14.9% (13.3+1.6) agreeing so. The results of the cross-tabulation between getting information about career opportunities from the supervisor and bonus/merit pay showed a cumulative 56.2% (22+34.2) of the respondents who had been given bonus/merit pay agreeing that they got to information about career opportunities from their supervisors another 53.9% (31.9+22) disagreed so. Further, 82.2% (53.8+28.4) of those who had not received bonus/merit pay also disagreed on the same with only 13.1% (13.3+1.5) agreeing so. Mean ratings of 3.91 and 1.83 and standard deviations of 1.491 and 1.110 for the promoted and non-promoted respondents, respectively, suggested that most of the scores for each group were clustered around the respective means. Mean ratings of 2.65 and 1.79 and standard deviations of 1.479 and 1.068 for the bonus/merit pay receiving and non-bonus/merit pay receiving groups, respectively, suggested that most of the scores for each group were clustered around the respective means. Standard deviation values for the non-promoted and the non-bonus/merit pay receiving groups are lower indicating that the clustering is more intense in the scores within these groups. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Information about Career Opportunities and Career Advancement

Indicators of Career Advancement		I get to know about career opportunities in my organization from my supervisor							
		SDA	DA	NS	A	SA	TOTAL	Mean	SD
Promotion Status	Yes	2 (2.8)	14 (24.6)	1 (2.3)	33 (59.2)	7 (11.1)	57 (100)	3.91	1.491
	No	164 (53.1)	84 (27.2)	15 (4.9)	41 (13.3)	5 (1.6)	309 (100)	1.83	1.110
		I get to know about career opportunities in my organization from my supervisor							
		SDA	DA	NS	A	SA	TOTAL	Mean	SD
Bonus/Merit Status	Pay Yes	29 (31.9)	20 (22.0)	9 (9.9)	20 (22)	13 (34.2)	91 (100)	2.65	1.479
	No	148 (53.8)	78 (28.4)	13 (4.7)	32 (11.6)	4 (1.5)	275 (100)	1.79	1.068

% in Parentheses ()

SDA = Strongly Disagree, DA = Disagree, NS = Not Sure, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Discussion and Conclusions

Findings showed that support on personal development plans had a moderate effect women's career advancement much. This finding contradicted earlier findings (Higson & Wilson, 1995). The reason for this could be because in most organizations, employees are responsible for managing their personal development plans and so many supervisors may not get involved. Findings also indicated that supervisory mentoring did not have much effect on women's career advancement. This could mean that most women may not receive mentoring from their supervisors because most of the supervisors may be of the opposite gender. Following this logic, women may seek mentorship from other people and not their supervisors. The findings further showed that the women who received work related training were more likely to receive promotions than those who did not. It means that women who received training were able to upgrade their knowledge and skills and the resultant development boosted them in their career advancement in line with the observations of Wernick (1994). Findings showed that more women who received information on career opportunities were able to advance in their careers. The findings are in agreement with the observations of Gvozeva & Gerchikov, (2002). This implies that having information about career opportunities in the organizations was crucial to preparation to seize the opportunities. The women who had earlier knowledge

of opportunities were able to prepare for them in advance. Based on the findings, it is reasonable to conclude that the two factors which affected women's career advancement to managerial positions most were knowledge on career opportunities and opportunities for training. On the basis of the findings and conclusions this study recommends that supervisors/organizations should provide work related training for women so that they can advance into managerial careers. Supervisors should also provide information about opportunities for career advancement evenly to both women employees and male employees in order to level the ground for career advancement to managerial positions.

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