

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: LEVERAGING ON COMMUNICATION OF ELECTRICITY AND GAS COMPANIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between communication and employee engagement of electricity and gas companies in Nigeria. A quasi-experimental research design was adopted with a cross-sectional survey Approach. The population of the study consisted of six hundred and two (602) employees of the three (3) electricity and gas companies in Rivers State. Owing to the infinite nature of the respondents, the Krejcie and Morgan sample determination table was used to derive the sample size of two hundred and thirty four (234) individual employees. Two hundred and thirty four copies of questionnaire were administered out of which two hundred and seven (207) were retrieved. However, two hundred and five (205) copies were used for the analysis. Data gathered were analysed with Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Statistics. Based on data analysed, The findings revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between communication and employee engagement of electricity and gas companies in Rivers State. Based on the findings the study concluded that, communication is a critical tool in achieving employee engagement. Based on this finding and conclusion, the study recommended that electricity and gas companies should encourage clear and open communication as it has been found to trigger employee engagement which is expressed with loyalty, absorption and dedication.

Keywords: Communication, Employee Engagement, Loyalty, Absorption, Dedication

INTRODUCTION

Defining communication is like the story of the elephant and the 6 blind men where each describes the elephant based on their perception. Thus, trying to give a comprehensive definition would merely be a waste of time and efforts. However, irrespective of the various views, it all boils down to one purpose which is to be understood. Communication according to Ince and Gul (2011) is defined as the exchange of ideas, emotions and opinions through letters, words, and symbols amongst two or more people. Altinoz (2008) sees communication as a means through which the tasks and the resources needed to carry out an assignment, the role and duties and the expected results are made known to the subordinate. Therefore it is pertinent to know that, communication is an invaluable aspect of an organization and organizations that take cognizance of this are bound to succeed. Communication goes beyond exchanging of information, but as Bovee and Thill (2010) put it, communication is a mechanism that defines how the decoder deciphers the encoder's message as well as its intended meanings. Therefore, this study defined communication as the exchange of information in a clear and honest manner from one party called the encoder(sender) to another party called the decoder(receiver) through the use of signs, symbols and words with a view to be understood.

Nevertheless, the focus here is how organizations communicate their goals, objectives, and strategies to their internal stakeholders (employees) with a view to keep employees informed and also enable them perform better. Therefore, corporations should be open, frank and transparent in communicating these goals and objectives to their employees, as well as encourage an atmosphere within the organization that will enable employees express their

thoughts and ideas without fear of being punished or implicated. Therefore, when such atmosphere is created employees are most likely to be engaged to their organization which is most times expressed with loyalty, dedication and absorption.

Wellins et al. (2005) define engagement as “the extent to which people enjoy and believe in what they do and feel valued for doing it”. This practically means that because employees believe and enjoy what they do, they tend to show a favourable attitude with the organization, such as, giving everything to ensure the goals of the organization are met, they speak positively about the organization and they also stick with the organization irrespective of the situation involved. Hewitt (2018) defined employee engagement as "the level of an employee's psychological investment in their organization". For Hewitt an engaged employee consistently demonstrate three behaviors that enhance organizational performance. They are expected to say; by speaking confidently and positively about the company to all stakeholders. They are also expected to stay; by having an intense sense of belonging and desire to be a part of the organization, and lastly, to strive; by giving their best efforts to support the organization's quest to succeed.

The electricity and gas companies in Nigeria play a critical role in the efficient generation, transmission and distribution of electricity across the nation. However, despite the important roles played by the electricity and gas industry in ensuring the development of the Nigerian economy, it is appalling that issues such as, poor communication, low staff morale, poor staff commitment and low engagement are some of the problems that still affect these companies (Ejumodu, 2014). Consequently, when employees are disengaged, the organization suffers great loss characterized by low productivity, poor performances, disloyalty, distrust and poor dedication and this is most likely as a result of lack of clear and open communication in communicating the goals and objectives of the organization to their employees as well as employees inability to express their opinions or view due to the organization does not encourage open communication. Therefore, this study examined the relationship between communication and employee engagement of electricity and gas companies in Nigeria.

Over the years, several studies have been conducted in related areas; Welderghabriel (2020) investigated the relationship between organizational communication and employee performance in selected large manufacturing business in Eritrea. Mishra et al. (2014) carried out a study entitled Driving Employee Engagement: The Expanded Role of Internal Communications. Karanges et al. (2015) investigated the influence of internal communication on employee engagement: A pilot study. Despite the many studies carried out, there is still not much empirical works on communication and employee engagement as it relates to the electricity and gas companies in Nigeria. Therefore, this served as the gap this study closed. As such, this study focused on communication and employee engagement as it relates to the electricity and gas companies in Nigeria. Below is the conceptual framework that guided the study;

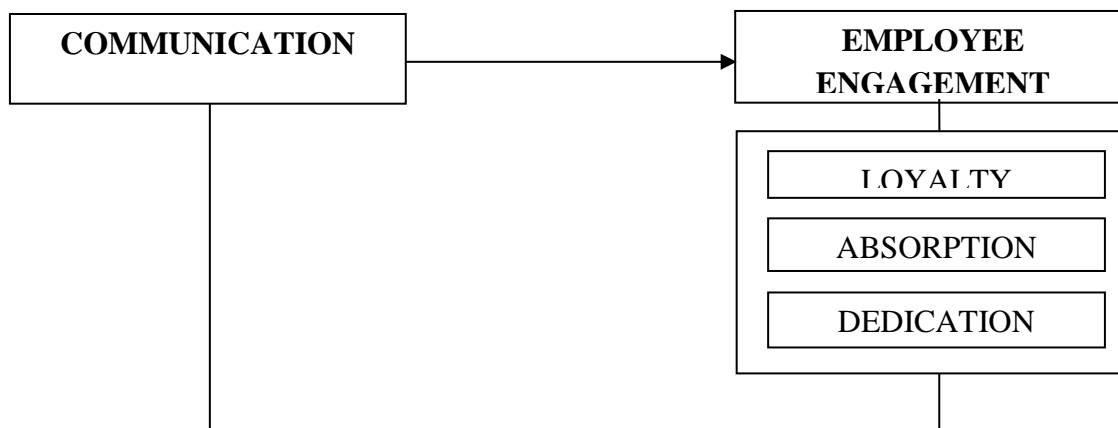


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework of communication and employee engagement of electricity and gas companies in Nigeria.

Source: Researcher's Conceptualization

Stakeholders' theory

The stakeholder's theory was first introduced by Freeman in the year 1984. The theory lies in many business literatures and has also been linked to the renowned economist Adam Smith and his article on Theory of Moral Sentiments. Its modern utilization in management literature was brought about by the Stanford Research Institute, which introduced the term in 1963 to generalize and expand the notion of the shareholders as the only group that management needed to be sensitive towards (Jongbloed et al., 2008). Within this perspective, Freeman (1984) argued that business organizations should be concerned about the interests of other stakeholders when taking strategic decisions. This informed and served as the reason why the stakeholders theory was chosen as the baseline theory for this study because an organization that care and protects the interest of their stakeholders will communicate clearly with honesty and as well as encourage an atmosphere where employees can express their views without being haunted or punished. This theory presupposes that the interest of the stakeholders should be placed first before any other interest and that organizational success is not only dependent on productivity but on the actions of organizations to always take actions that benefit and profit its stakeholders rather than cause harm to them. As such, management of organizations should encourage clear and open communication with their employees as they are a critical aspect of the stakeholders' chain.

Communication

According to Vercis and Vokic (2017), when employees are satisfied with the communication practices within their organization, it increases significantly their level of engagement. Therefore, when these ideas, opinions, strategies, performance, operations, goals and objectives are being openly shared to employees across all levels within the organization, a more collaborative and trustworthy workplace is born (Hutchinson, 2020). Thus, according to Men and Stack (2014) organizations should make "available all legally releasable information to employees whether positive or negative in a timely, balanced and unequivocal for the purpose of enhancing the reasoning ability of employees and holding organizations accountable for their actions, policies and practices. It is with this, Nwinyokpugi and Ikoromasoma (2021) posited that, when employees perceive that organizations encourage the

act of communicating effectively by using the appropriate channels, medium and methods, the tendency of employees reciprocating such attitude with being committed becomes high.

The communication climate that exists within an organization also have a way of influencing the attitude of employees; Accordingly, Stacho et al. (2019) stated that organizations with effective communication show good interaction between members of the organization and managers so that trust and cooperation are established to coordinate work. Organizations, whether big or small need to create “a climate which would facilitate communication that is open and effective in sharing the roles, expectation, goals and vision of the organization” to its internal and external stakeholders alike (Mohammed & Hussein, 2013). Therefore, this study looked at communication from the degree of openness in communicating the goals, objectives, performances and operations to its stakeholders. Openness in communication has been viewed from the eyes of several scholars and researchers alike. According to Carrier Guide (2021), open communication is the process by which people can openly express their thoughts and ideas to one and other. Consequently, Ayoko (2007) sees open communication as the ease of talking to each other and the extent of understanding gained when talking to each other. Rogers as cited in Schiller and Cui (2010) posited that the concept of open communication has been treated in several literatures as being synonymous to listening, honesty, frankness, trust and supportiveness. Thus, drawing insight from these different views of open communication, the study defined *open communication as the process by which corporations share their thoughts, ideas, goals, objectives and its operations with their employees in an honest, and a consistent manner and in return, employees give a transparent feedback*. Summarily, one could say open communication allows for both employers and employees to express their thoughts and ideas without holding back anything.

Employees are critical assets of every organization, as such; they are often seen as the bedrock of the organization. Consequently, the survival of an organization is not only dependent on the degree of profit acquired by an organization but also on the degree of openness by organizations in communicating with their stakeholders (employee). It is expedient to note that one of the factors that contribute to employee engagement is communication between management and employees. Taylor (2015) posits that clear communication and consistent feedback are key indicators of organizational success. And clear communication and feedbacks are ingredients of an open communication. Thus, this view is in consonance with Harter (2018) that when organizations communicate openly with honesty, problems are easily solved. Firms often complain about their employees being disengaged which results to their poor performances but tend to keep blind eyes to poor communication as one of the causes of their ordeals. The impact of communication on employees cannot be overstressed, as its benefit is a reassuring pointer for organizational success. When organizations communicate clearly and honestly, their employees tend to develop the sense of belongingness which is critical for employee engagement.

In this era of highly competitive business environment, transparency has become a strategy corporations adopt in order to remain in business. And one of the vehicles used by corporations to drive down the road of transparency is called communication. Openness refers to the level of transparency in sharing task-relevant information (Schein, 2010). Openness facilitates the alignment of goals and expectations and help team members to achieve a common and mutual understanding of the project scope (McLeod & MacDonell, 2011). Open and adequate communication helps to develop a shared understanding, improves the atmosphere of the relationship, fosters commitment, ensures that deadlines are respected, and enhances trust between the partners (Dyer & Chu 2003; Bstieler 2006; Zidane et al., 2016). A transparent organization should be able to communicate clearly with honesty and

frankness the goals, objectives, policies and corporate stands to their employees. The lack of communication openness in most organizations has been identified partly as a causal factor in most organizational problems. Similarly, Rajhans (2012) posited that communication has become an important determining factor for the functioning and success of a corporation. That is, no organization has ever succeeded in the business world without being able to communicate its strategies, policies, goals and objectives to its stakeholders (employees) in a frank and transparent manner. When corporations communicate openly, they encourage candor and frankness in sharing information to their stakeholders (employees) and this usually triggers engagement “as organizations who can communicate effectively are four times likely to report high levels of employee engagement as firms that communicate less effectively (Iyer & Israel, 2012). However, it is worthy to note that both effective communication and open communication are different concepts and while effective communication deals with when the messages sent is understood in accordance with the intent of the sender which triggers feedback, open communication deals with honesty, frankness and transparency in the message as well as the feedback. Therefore, if corporate communication is not designed with utmost honesty, frankness and transparency, such organization should not also expect a transparent feedback from its stakeholders (employees). Because “when employees perceive that they are getting information from their supervisors and coworkers that is timely, accurate, and relevant, they are more likely to feel less vulnerable and more able to rely on their coworkers and supervisors” (Thomas et al., 2009).

Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000) agreed that communication is a critical aspect of how relationships between the organization and its publics are evaluated. Thus, when organizations communicate in an open and honest manner, such organization is considered to have a healthy and strong relationship with its stakeholders but when they do not, the reverse becomes the case. Consequently, this affects the level of engagement from their stakeholders.

Employee Engagement

According to Robinson (2006) employee engagement can be achieved through the creation of an organisational environment where positive emotions such as involvement and pride are encouraged, resulting in improved organisational performance, lower employee turnover and better health. West cited in Agrawal (n.d) argued that “when individuals feel positive emotions, they are able to think in a more flexible, open-minded way and are also likely to feel greater self-control, cope more effectively and be less defensive in the workplace”. Parent and Lovelace (2015) stated that when employees are engaged, everyone benefits because the employees feel that they can use their talents to develop fruitful relations and increase their efficiency through the relationships created.

Considering the too many argument surrounding employee engagement on what really fosters employee engagement in organizations, the concept employee engagement lacks consensus since employee engagement has been associated with other constructs, such as, job involvement, organizational commitment or organizational citizenship (Saks, 2006). However, Purcell et al. (2003) argue that employee engagement is only meaningful if there is a more genuine sharing of responsibility between management and employees over issues of substance. And this is the idea of corporations being transparent with their stakeholders. It is worthy to note that employee engagement is becoming a strategic driven requirement for business today in order to extend their organizational effectiveness, innovation and competitiveness (Madhura & Deepika, 2014). Many scholars have concluded that employee engagement leads to high productivity, lower turnover, increased customer satisfaction and increased workplace performance (Richman 2006; Shuck & Rocco 2011; Rana et al.,

2014). But for Agarwal (2014) employee engagement is positively related to innovative behavior.

It has been argued that one of the main drivers of employee engagement is for employees to have the opportunity to feed their view upwards (Truss et al., 2006). As such, this study would not be mistaken if it concludes that the survival of organization is largely dependent on the employees in the organization and well meaning organizations are always striving to find better ways to achieve employee engagement. Hence, in order to achieve organizational success, Kortmann et al. (2014) posited that organizational heads should always strive to engage their employees. It is when employees of an organization are duly engaged, that parameters of organizational success such as profitability, productivity, and growth can be achieved. One of the factors that trigger employee engagement in organizations is the degree of openness in communicating with employees. Several studies have found that employee engagement is on the decline and there is a deepening disengagement among employees today (Bates, 2004; & Richman, 2006).

Loyalty

A loyal employee is an individual who always chooses the interest of the organization before any personal interest. Several scholars have actually viewed employee loyalty from different point of views which has led to different definitions about the concept. For example, according to Silvestro (2002) employee loyalty is the measure of the amount of time one works for the company. Employee loyalty can be defined as long-lasting, dependable, trustworthy relationship that an employee holds by acting as brand ambassador of the organization while working with it. Mehta et al., (2010) posited that In general, employee loyalty can be best described in terms of a process, where certain attitudes give rise to certain behaviors. Consequently, when organizations imbibe the attitude of encouraging clear and open communication, employees will exhibit trust and loyal behaviour towards the organization. "Employees are considered the core of an organization and the success or failure of the organization is attributed to the performance of the employees and it is of prime importance that the employees are loyal to the organization and don't actively search for other alternative opportunities" (Murali et al., 2017). Therefore this defined employee loyalty as "the ability of employees to stay with one organization for a long period of time irrespective of other opportunities available to them".

Dedication

Dedication is one of the measures of employee engagement as proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). For them, employees who are engaged exhibit 3 forms of behaviours which are; Absorption, dedication and vigour. Conversely, Hewitt (2018) posited that an engaged employee constantly express the following behaviours; they speak positively about the organization, they stay with the organization, and lastly, they work to ensure the organization succeeds. Therefore, deducing from Hewitt's view of employee engagement, advocacy, loyalty and dedication are the three behaviours constantly expressed by an engaged employee. This is slightly different from the proposition of Khan (1990) that an engaged employee is physically, psychologically and emotionally attached to their jobs. Nevertheless, looking at the different views, it is striking that both Schaufeli and Hewitt have dedication as measures of employee engagement. Interestingly this informed the reason why this study adopted dedication as one of the measures of employee engagement.

The concept employee dedication has no universally accepted definition and this is because different scholars perceive the concept differently. The term dedication literally means to devote oneself to a cause or a task. According to Williams et al. (2010) dedication is the

feelings by which employees are engaged due to their services are retained in the organization and there will be no need to think of looking elsewhere. Additionally, Schaufeli et al. (2002) viewed dedication as the “state of an employee characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge”. On the other hand, Dedication is about being inspired, enthusiastic and highly involved in your job (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). With this in view, Song et al. (2012) defined dedication as an individual deriving a sense of significance from work, feeling enthusiastic and proud about the giving job, and feeling challenged by the job. Therefore, extracting from these established definitions, this study viewed employee dedication as “a process by which employees derive pride and interest on their job and devote themselves, time and effort to their job with a view to ensure the organization succeeds”.

Absorption

Absorption is one of the measures of employee engagement proposed by (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Although there are other measures of employee engagement as proposed by other scholars, this study adopted absorption as a measure of employee engagement because of the significance and benefits absorbed employees bring to the organization. This logic is supported by research results which say that there is a moderately significant positive relationship between absorption and performance (Shusha & Abdelkader, 2016). When employees are engaged to their organization according to several studies, they tend to express the following forms of behaviors which are; loyalty, vigour, dedication and absorption amongst others. However, haven distilled the concept of loyalty and dedication as measures of employee engagement, the focus here is on “absorption”. The question what is absorption is a recurring question in management literatures and in order to foster understanding about what absorption is, the study will review different scholarly views before proposing a working definition for the study on the concept of absorption.

Absorption literally means the act or process of absorbing or being absorbed. Whereas, according to Schaufeli et al. (2002) absorption is a state “characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. They further reiterated that employees that are absorbed are distinguished by being totally and happily immersed in their work. Being fully absorbed in ones work is likened to a concept called “flow” which according to Csikszentmihalyi et al.(1990) is a state of optimal experience that is characterized by focused attention, clear mind, body unison, effortless concentration, complete control, loss of self-consciousness, distortion of time, and intrinsic enjoyment. This state is “characterized by an individual's incapacity to disengage from their task while experiencing intense pleasure from it” (Ogolo, 2023). Deducing from these views and definitions, this study defined employee absorption as “*an unreserved concentration characterized with utmost happiness in doing ones job such that one finds it an herculean task to detach oneself from the job*”.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the survey, non-contrived cross sectional correlation and hypothesis testing. With this in view, the study adopted a quasi-experimental survey design which do not subject research variables to laboratory test but measured by the researcher’s interaction and experience. The non-contrive studies are normally conducted in the natural and normal work environment. The above research design is correlational and it helps researchers to determine the degree to which variables are related. The population of the study consists of all the employees in the electricity and gas companies in Rivers State. There are three (3) companies namely; Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN), Generation Company of Nigeria (GENCO) and the Distribution Company of Nigeria (PHED) with staff strength of six

hundred and two (602) individual employees. Therefore, the population size of this study is six hundred and two (602) individual employees of electricity and gas companies in Rivers State. Owing to the infinite nature of the respondents, the study used the Krejcie and Morgan sample determination table to derive the sample size of two hundred and thirty four (234) individual employees. Therefore, two hundred and thirty four (234) individual employees served as the sample size of this study. Data collected were analysed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient aided by the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). 234 copies of questionnaire were administered but only 207 were retrieved out of which 2 were unusable. Therefore, 205 copies of questionnaire were used for the analysis. Below is the Pearson's product moment correlation co-efficient formula.

$$r = \frac{n \sum xy - \sum x \sum y}{\sqrt{\left(n \sum x^2 - \sum x^2 \right) \left(n \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2 \right)}}$$

Where:

r	=	Pearson product moment correlation coefficient,
X and Y	=	individual observations of the two variables,
\bar{X} and \bar{Y}	=	arithmetic means of the two sets of observations.
n	=	number of bivariate observations.

Communication and Employee Engagement Measures

Table 1.1 shows the result of correlation matrix obtained for communication and employee engagement. Also displayed in the table is the statistical test of significance (p - value), which make us able to answer our research question and generalize our findings to the study population.

Table 1.1: Correlations Matrix for Communication and Employee Engagement

		Communication	Loyalty	Dedication	Absorption
Communication	Pearson Correlation	1	.744**	.659**	.673**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	205	205	205	205
Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.744**	1	.932**	.893**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	205	205	205	205
Dedication	Pearson Correlation	.659**	.932**	1	.931**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	205	205	205	205
Absorption	Pearson Correlation	.673**	.893**	.931**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	205	205	205	205

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Q2. How does communication relate with employee engagement in Electricity and Gas companies in Rivers State?

The correlation coefficient (r) result in table 1.1 was used to answer the research question 2 stated in the chapter one of this study. Table 1.1 shows a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) of 0.744 on the relationship between communication and loyalty. This value implies that strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of the relationship indicates that the correlation is positive; which implying that an increase in loyalty was as a result of the adoption of communication. Therefore, there is a strong positive correlation between communication and loyalty of Electricity and Gas companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Similarly, Table 1.1 shows a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) of 0.659 on the relationship between communication and dedication. This value implies that a very strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of the relationship indicates that the correlation is positive; which implying that an increase in dedication was as a result of the adoption of communication. Therefore, there is a strong positive correlation between communication and dedication of Electricity and Gas companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Also, Table 1.1 shows a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) of 0.673 on the relationship between communication and absorption. This value implies that a strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of the relationship indicates that the correlation is positive; implying that an increase in absorption was as a result of the adoption of communication. Therefore, there is a strong positive correlation between communication and absorption of Electricity and Gas companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Therefore, to enable us accept or reject hypotheses 4,5 and 6 as well as generalize our findings to the study population the p- value was used as shown below:

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between communication and loyalty in Electricity and Gas companies in Rivers State.

Equally displayed in the Table 4.18 is the statistical test of significance (p-value) which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtained from Table 4.18, the sig- calculated is less than significant level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between communication and loyalty in Electricity and Gas companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H₀₅: There is no significant relationship between communication and dedication in Electricity and Gas companies in Rivers State.

Further displayed in the Table 4.18 is the statistical test of significance (p-value) which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtained from Table 4.18, the sig- calculated is less than significant level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between communication and dedication in Electricity and Gas companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H₀₆: There is no significant relationship between communication and absorption in Electricity and Gas companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Further displayed in the Table 1.1 is the statistical test of significance (p-value) which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtained from Table 4.18, the sig- calculated is less than significant level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the

alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between communication and absorption in Electricity and Gas companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings as presented in Table 1:1 revealed that there is a strong significant positive relationship between communication and employee engagement of electricity and gas companies in Rivers State. These findings agree with the previous findings of Karanges et al. (2015) that investigated the influence of internal communication on employee engagement: A pilot study. The results suggest that there is a significant relationship between internal communication and employee engagement and that internal communication facilitates interactions between an organization, supervisors, and employees which create workplace relationships. This study is also in collaboration with the findings of Karanges et al. (2014) that carried out a study entitled Optimizing employee engagement with internal communication: A social exchange perspective. The findings suggest organisations and supervisors should focus internal communication efforts toward building greater perceptions of support and stronger identification among employees in order to foster optimal engagement. Therefore the study recommended that organizations and supervisors should focus on internal communication efforts toward building greater perceptions of support and stronger identification among employees in order to foster optimal levels of engagement.

CONCLUSION

The findings presented in Table 4:18 revealed that there is a strong positive significant relationship between communication and the measures of employee engagement which are loyalty, absorption and dedication of electricity and gas companies in Rivers State. Therefore, the study concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between communication and employee engagement of electricity and gas companies in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendation was made;

- i. The study recommended that electricity and gas companies should encourage clear, open and honest communication with their employees as this is most likely to trigger employee loyalty, absorption, dedication and in general their engagement level will be enhanced.

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