

Importance and improvement of manager–employee relationships in a natural resources mining company in Africa

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Abstract

The mining industry in Africa faces very specific challenges, relating to different cultures, beliefs, standards, geographical areas, remuneration, ethics, communication and management relationships. Mine management and employees are therefore challenged on a daily basis to manage these challenges, something which is even more difficult in a global economic and competitive environment.

The purpose of this study was to confirm the importance of the manager–employee relationships and the improvement thereof in a natural resources mining company in Africa. The population included professionals and specialists in fields such as engineering, technical services, geology and human resource management. Different commodities are mined and consist of copper, cobalt, coal, platinum, fluorspar, bauxite and other non-ferrous divisions. The countries under study were Malawi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique and South Africa. A total of 784 questionnaires were distributed to the different mines via the SurveyMonkey™ website with a response rate of 51%. A principal axis factor analysis was conducted to determine the most important factors concerning the manager–employee relationships.

The results confirmed the importance of the manager–employee relationships in the successful operation in the mining companies in Africa. Suggestions are outlined to improve the manager–employee relationships.

Key phrases

employee engagement; manager–employee relationship; organisational culture; organisational ethics

1. INTRODUCTION

Price Waterhouse Coopers (2011:12) identifies unrelenting skills shortages, the changing demographics of the labour force, the ever-increasing workforce diversity, work–life balance agendas, and the recent recession has led to an extremely unyielding labour market resulting in increased competition from organisations for individuals who are capable of making the greatest differences to organisational performance. Various research projects and reports (GPR Dehler 2011:Internet; Osa, Faunconnier & Webber-Youngman 2011:864) indicate that, although the mining industry is a technologically demanding industry, investment in employees is the actual key to sustainable organisational growth.

With the above-mentioned as background, manager–employee relationships often suffer from a degree of “invisibility” in that the borders of these relationships are unclear and no single function or individual has definite accountabilities for managing it (CIPD 2013:Internet). This contemporary relationship in the African mining industry needs urgent attention, as the focus is primarily on production of natural resources rather than on relationships with employees. The purpose of the study being reported here was to accentuate the importance of manager–employee relationships and the improvement thereof in a natural resources mining company in Africa.

2. MANAGER–EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship between employee and manager is sometimes fragile. The worker may feel anxious to keep his/her job despite his/her negative opinions about the manager, while the manager could expect the employee to work to the best of his/her ability (Nelson & Quick 2013:188). Employers should be concerned about the morale of workers, because low morale could lead to expensive issues with high turnover rates or low productivity. Recessionary times can negatively affect the relationship between employee and manager (Capelli 2008:32), therefore an employee may start to distrust the company more and fear losing his or her job because of hard financial times (Balle 2012:Internet).

If an employer disregards the concerns of employees, it could lead to a number of important and sometimes expensive problems. Besides high turnover rates, workplace violence is a risk to the mining business if employees become discontented (McDermott, Kidney & Flood 2011:352). Employees who feel offended by managers may compromise the security of the company’s exclusive information by either sharing trade secrets or taking such valuable knowledge to another competing business. A company that does not foster a productive relationship between employees and managers may also develop a poor reputation in the industry (Armstrong 2012:109).

Das, Kumar and Kumar (2011:197) state that certain organisational aspects have a significant impact on the management of high-performing individuals. The management of employee relationships relates to personal competencies and behaviours. In the mining industry, skills such as negotiation with trade unions, conflict handling, consultation, interpersonal communication and facilitation need to be mentioned (CIPD 2013:Internet).

Organisational behaviour specialists such as Armstrong (2012:121); Berger and Berger (2011:166-167); Capelli (2008:31); Knight and Willmot (2012) postulate that factors such as

work-relationships, motivation, performance management, management skills and communication are factors that influence manager–employee relationships. Each of the sub-dimensions will be examined below to gauge their importance.

2.1 Work-relationships

According to Bron (2014:58), the number one reason why people leave their jobs is because of their managers. Yet, organisations often neglect to emphasise this issue. Management has to understand the importance of their human capital as a prime resource and should treat them accordingly (Dagger, David & Ng 2011:274).

According to the 2009 survey of the IBEC, a key challenge with extremely talented employees is to keep their interest and motivation levels high, for them to continue to perform and generate new ways of working that have a powerful impact on the bottom line of the business. Support and openness are key elements in the relationship between a talented employee and his/her manager or direct supervisor. Mining organisations must identify and retain internal talent by providing training and development and launching succession and professional development programmes (Nelson & Quick 2013:208).

Gallup researchers (Palmer 2013:Internet) points to the pivotal role that the employee-manager relationship plays in driving the performance of companies. Drawing on data from more than 50,000 employees across 10 major industries, the analysts found that while effective engagement and recognition programs are key to a company's success, strong relationships between managers and their subordinates are the key factor in making those programs work.

Dagger *et al.* (2011:274) highlight the importance of sound relationship between employer and employee. Employers should have trust in their employees and most importantly they should be able to convince the employees of this. Proper communication system between these two parties is vital.

Palmer (2010:Internet) states that if an employer treats his employees well, they will certainly tend to treat the employer in the same manner because they tend to think that they are also a part of the business (sense of belonging). Nevertheless, creating such an environment in an organisation is not an easy task. This may take years but it has been proved that the benefits are enormous. Nothhaft (2010:131) outlines the benefits of good manger-employee relationships as: improving motivation amongst employees; improving efficiency amongst employees and hence finally at organisation level as well; improving teamwork; increasing

loyalty of employees and reduce absenteeism. The importance of the roles of leadership versus management as well as motivation in an effective employer-employee relationship are discussed below.

2.1.1 Leadership and management

McDermott *et al.* (2011:356); Nelson and Quick (2013:208) concur that leadership can affect manager–employee relationships. Knight and Willmott (2012:299) maintain that a distinction should be made between management and leadership. Management can be described as being an advocate for stability and the status quo, where a leader is an advocate for change and new approaches to problems. According to Das *et al.* (2011:198-199), the ability to combine both management and leadership in a managerial leadership role is valuable for an organisation’s growth and success. Three roles to increase performance and motivate employees are identified as firstly, the need to set direction, secondly, align people, and thirdly, motivate and inspire employees (Nelson & Quick 2013:193).

2.1.2 Motivation

Employee motivation is a continuing challenge in any work environment, but the challenge seems to become more intensive in multinational organisations and industries like mining and IT (Ankli & Palliam 2012:10). People are different and have different work values and needs. Hoare and Leigh (2011:84) mention that managers must always keep in mind that, because employees all differ, there is no one way to motivate all staff members in the same way. Motivational factors should be identified and workers motivated accordingly (Hearn 2011:17).

According to Lam and Lambermont-Ford (2010:53-54), sharing or transferring knowledge motivates both the employee who shares the knowledge and the receiver thereof. One should note that the organisation itself has an obligation to share and transfer knowledge via various techniques such as the intranet, newsletters, internal conferences and training sessions.

Berger and Berger (2011:135-137) postulate that a manager can be a powerful motivational factor for employees. “Leadership attributes like how the person thinks, how a person works with other people and how resilient they are” can motivate and encourage employees.

The different organisational characteristics that have an influence on efficient manager–employee relationships include the work relationship between management and employees, performance management, management skills and communication.

2.2 Performance management

Talent management has clear associations with performance management. According to Becker, Huselid and Beatty (2009:95), “a performance management system is a system of creating expectations and inspecting against those expectations”. Lawler (2008:99) maintains that the ability to *manage* performance is frequently the major differentiator between organisations that produce satisfactory results and those that do extremely well. Without a focus on performance management at all levels of the organisation, the competitive advantage is difficult to establish.

Capelli (2008:140) and Oracle (2006:Internet) agree that a company should understand which roles (and the individuals fulfilling them) should be reinforced, and what competencies need to be rearranged. Armstrong (2012); Berger and Berger (2011); Colville and Millner (2011:36); Hearn (2011:17); Maley (2011:31) all concur that through their various research projects the most crucial sub-dimensions of the performance management dimension are goal setting and measurement of performance; talent development; appraisal; performance feedback as well as incentive and performance-based pay.

According to Colville and Millner (2011:38), all employees have a need to know how well they are performing. An effective performance appraisal system ensures that feedback is provided on a continuous basis, from an employee's supervisor or manager. While the annual performance discussion presents an excellent opportunity for both parties to exchange observations in depth, the annual performance appraisal discussion is not a substitute for day-to-day or week-to-week performance feedback. Avoiding such feedback is without doubt a real organisational strategic weakness (Berger & Berger 2011:55; Pilbeam & Corbridge 2010:326). A common mistake in feedback on performance is infrequent measurement. When appraisal takes place once a year, employees only receive feedback annually.

By tracking and giving feedback on a weekly or monthly basis, the employee has the opportunity to make changes, develop where necessary and be productive (Berger & Berger, 2011:58). Gillan (cited by Pilbeam & Corbridge 2010:326) classifies two management skills required to give effective feedback. Firstly, the manager needs the ability

to assess the situation to form a clear picture of the performance; and secondly, good communication skills are needed to explain to the employee what is expected of him/her.

2.3 Management skills

It is essential for employees to have confidence in their leadership (specifically senior management) and the direction in which it steers the organisation. Taylor (2010:358) and Schiemann (2010:228) contend that employees leave organisations because they no longer wish to work for a line manager or senior manager whom they dislike, disrespect or perceive to have treated them unfairly.

Key problems of poor management include supervisors who fail to respond to grievances, act autocratically, abuse their positions, fail to appreciate the efforts of an employee and are self-centred. Poor management skills lead to conflict, stress and unsuitable behaviour and ultimately to resignations and turnover. Schiemann (2010:228) refers to this as “supervisor-subordinate misalignment”. Supervisory skills do not come naturally – they need to be learnt. This means formal training in the principles of effective supervision.

Berger and Berger (2011:184) posit that competencies, skills and knowledge are essential instruments for assisting the training and development efforts of employees and to reach collective knowledge that is critical to organisational success. Byham, Smith and Paese (2002:91) maintain that to have and demonstrate a specific competency one needs certain skills. Skills, competencies and knowledge need to relate particularly to the role of the team or individual and the contribution that they are expected to make to the accomplishment of business objectives.

2.4 Communication

Communication between management and staff members about the strategic direction of the organisation, a constant reminder of how employees should develop, as well as the obstacles that might delay them in reaching their full potential are all significant dimensions of talent management.

According to Becker *et al.* (2009:19), work design and redesign are just as important to add to the greater strategic value of the individual and the organisation. Performance management is the next component that merits attention. Employees should know what is expected of them and regular feedback should be given (Bron 2014:59).

A manager is responsible for ensuring that his employees are able to effectively communicate with one another and with management. This includes establishing specific communication channels, managing expected use of communication tools and troubleshooting when communication issues arise. Effective communication in the workplace can help ensure employees are sharing and exchanging information in a way that's conducive to smooth business operations (Bron 2014:59).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research questions were:

- Are management–employee relations important in a natural resources mining company in Africa?
- How can management–employee relations be improved in a natural resources mining company in Africa?

The type of research, measuring instrument, population and sampling as well as data analysis are discussed below.

3.1 Type of research

In this study, a quantitative research approach was used. Berger and Berger (2011:288) define quantitative research as "... research within the primary aim of establishing casual relationships between variables".

The current research was conducted in the social world. The advantages of quantitative research are described as: "Researchers can gather data from a large quantity of people concurrently and from various places or sites; comparisons can be relatively easy to make because standardised wording and order of questions mean responses can be compared and respondents can answer from their point of view by selecting what is applicable to their situation" (Lawler 2008:104).

3.2 Measuring instrument

To obtain relevant information regarding the role of manager–employee relationships in a natural resources mining company in Africa, it was decided to make use of a questionnaire to gather data. An integration of the literature review, the international organisational strategy and the business plan of the mining group under study led to the design of the questionnaire. It was decided to make use of a 4-point forced Likert-type scale, to "force" definite choices from the respondents; consequently, the researcher was able to make

scientific meaning out of the data as there were no neutral responses (Filipowich 2011:Internet).

The initial questionnaire consisted out of 35 questions to determine factors that influence organisational behaviour. For the purpose of this research, the manager–employee relationship elements were investigated. Five initial manager–employee relationship dimensions were identified. The Cronbach’s alpha was utilised to measure the reliability of the questionnaire. Input was given by 15 experts in the management field to ensure face validity.

3.3 Population and sampling

The natural resources mining industry interested the researcher, as it is a diverse international business. Contact was made with the director of HR: Africa, where the potential study was discussed and approved. The population for this study included professionals and specialists at 14 sites in the natural resources mining company in Africa, including fields such as engineering, science, research, technical services, geology, marketing, human resource management, legal services and electricity supply. Different commodities are mined, such as copper, cobalt, coal, platinum, fluorspar, bauxite and other non-ferrous metals.

The countries under study were Malawi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique and South Africa. A census (non-probability) sample of 784 staff members at all the mining sites in Africa was selected. Questionnaires and letters of consent were distributed via the SurveyMonkey™ website. After two weeks, 396 completed questionnaires were received back from the participants, indicating a response rate of 51%.

3.4 Data analysis

A principal axis factor analysis was utilised to reduce the large number of variables to a smaller number of factors for the purpose of identifying the management–employee relationship dimensions as perceived by staff members of the organisation. The factor loadings were the correlation coefficients between the variables (rows) and factors (columns). In the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), the factor loadings are found in a matrix labelled ‘factor matrix’ when conducting a principal factor analysis. An oblique rotation was performed, and pattern and structure matrixes were provided. The pattern matrix was used to investigate the factors for the study; thus, only unique contributions of coefficients were identified.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether differences exist between two or more population means (Keller 2012:93). This method analyses the variance of the data to determine whether it can be conditional that the population means differ. A post hoc procedure was used to explore the data to determine whether there are any differences between means. Post hoc tests consist of pairwise comparisons that are designed to compare all different combinations of groups (Field 2012:Internet). A t-test was done in the cases where only one independent variable was available. A correspondence analysis was completed to determine systematic relations between different independent variables.

4. RESULTS

The descriptive and inferential statistics are discussed in the sections below.

4.1 Biographical information

In terms of gender distribution, the majority of respondents were males (77.3%), while 22.7% females responded to the questionnaire. The majority (50.5) of the respondents were black, 35.9% were white, followed by 9.1% Indian and 4% coloured. A total of 18.7% had a Grade 12 or equal qualification, 28.8% a National Diploma, 25.3% obtained a degree and 27.3% a post-graduate qualification.

The majority of the respondents indicated that English was their home language (44.2%). French (29.8%) and other languages such as Chichewa, Shona and Ndebele followed (20%). A total of 17.4% specified that they were Afrikaans-speaking and 5.8% were Portuguese-speaking. South Africans formed the largest group (46%). A total of 36.4% were citizens from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 7.3% from Zimbabwe, 3% from Zambia, 5.3% from Mozambique and 0.5% from Malawi. Of the respondents, 1.5% was citizens from other countries such as Britain, Russia and France.

It is interesting to note that 75.1% of respondents had two years or less service within this mining company. The number of respondents became fewer as the years of service increased, for example 6 years (4.3%), 10 years (0.8%) and 13 years (0.3%). The level of respondents' positions showed that the majority of respondents were managers (37.1%), followed by administrative staff (21%), professionals (17.2%), operations staff (12.9%) and technical staff (11.1%). The majority of workers were employed on a permanent basis (60.9%), 30.3% were full-time expatriate employees and 8.1% were employed on fixed-terms contracts. The mine business units were well represented in the sample: Boss mining

in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with 32.1%, headquarters (Johannesburg) with 19.9%, Frontier (DRC) with 11.6% and Mozambique with 10.1%.

4.2 Factorial structure of the questionnaire

A principal axis factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation was performed on the initial 35 closed-question items to investigate the grouping of items and their correspondence to the original theoretical scales. As per Table 1, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.919. The KMO should be 0.60 or higher in order to proceed with factor analysis. Bartlett’s test of sphericity with 0.000 was significant ($p < 0.05$) and indicated sampling adequacy.

TABLE 1: Results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity

KMO and Bartlett’s test		
KMO measure of sampling adequacy		0.919
Bartlett’s test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	4278.804
	Df	465
	Sig.	.000

Source: Calculated from survey results

TABLE 2: Four-dimension identification of manager-employee relationships factors from the principal

Item description	Dim 1	Dim 2	Dim 3	Dim 4
I have a positive relationship with my manager.	.699			
My manager demonstrates that he/she values my contributions.				.652
I receive relevant feedback on my performance.		.606		
My manager has sufficient skills to manage me effectively.				.586
I perceive the relationships between management and employees as satisfactory.	.418			
Individual goals set during the performance management process are clear.		.410		
I experience sharing of knowledge between employees in the organisation.			.408	

Item description	Dim 1	Dim 2	Dim 3	Dim 4
I continue to stay with the organisation because I have a satisfying job.			.400	
Acknowledgement for work done is a motivating factor to remain with the company.				.255

Source: Calculated from survey results

The four factors (as an abstract from the original questionnaire) of the manager–employee relationships were identified by the principal factor analysis as (see Table 2): factor 1: relationships; factor 2: performance management; factor 3: communication and factor 4: management skills. All individual items contributed well to the overall reliability of the instrument. In Table 3, the Cronbach’s alpha for the management–employee relationships (alpha = 0.839) indicates high reliability.

TABLE 3: Cronbach’s alpha Item analysis of management–employee relationships

Item description	Cronbach’s alpha if item deleted
My manager demonstrates that he/she values my contributions	0.809
I have a positive relationship with my manager	0.815
My manager has sufficient skills to manage me effectively	0.816
I receive relevant feedback on my performance	0.820
Individual goals set during the performance management process are clear	0.824
I am aware of changes in the organisation via effective communication	0.815
I perceive the relationships between management and employees as satisfactory	0.810
I experience sharing of knowledge between employees in the organisation	0.821
Acknowledgement for work done is a motivating factor to remain with the company	0.840
Cronbach’s alpha for the management–employee relationship factor	0.839

Source: Calculated from survey results

Figure 1 indicates the importance of the four manager–employee relationship factors. According to the respondents, the most important factors are the skill of the manager (1.62) and his/her relationship with employees (1.8). Communication (2.01) is important but performance management (2.93) is less important to respondents.

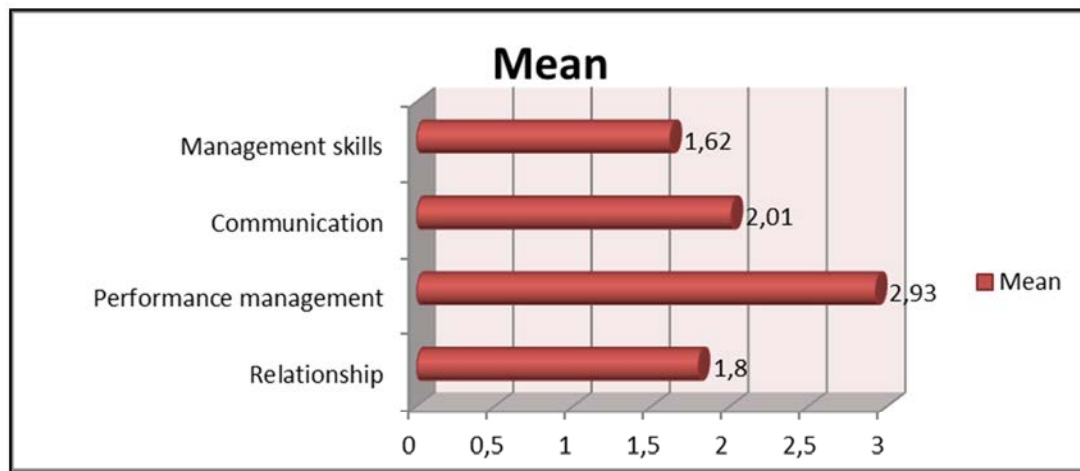


FIGURE 1: Mean score per factor

Source: Calculated from survey results

4.3 Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to assess whether there were differences between subgroups on the different factors. The subgroups were formed by the different demographic variables. Interesting results are discussed with reference to management–employee relationships and the importance thereof.

According to Figure 2, the most important factor for all language groups, were their manager's skills. Performance management as a factor of manager–employee relationships was much more important to the Afrikaans-speaking respondents than to the French. In general, all language groups felt that the four identified factors of manager–employee relationships were of importance to them.

All the qualification groups seemed to agree in equal measure that all the factors were more or less important to them (Figure 3). In relation to all the mean scores, the national diploma and post-graduate degree group adopted the stance that management skills were slightly more important to them than the remaining three factors. The degree group felt that performance management (2.5) was vaguely unimportant to them.

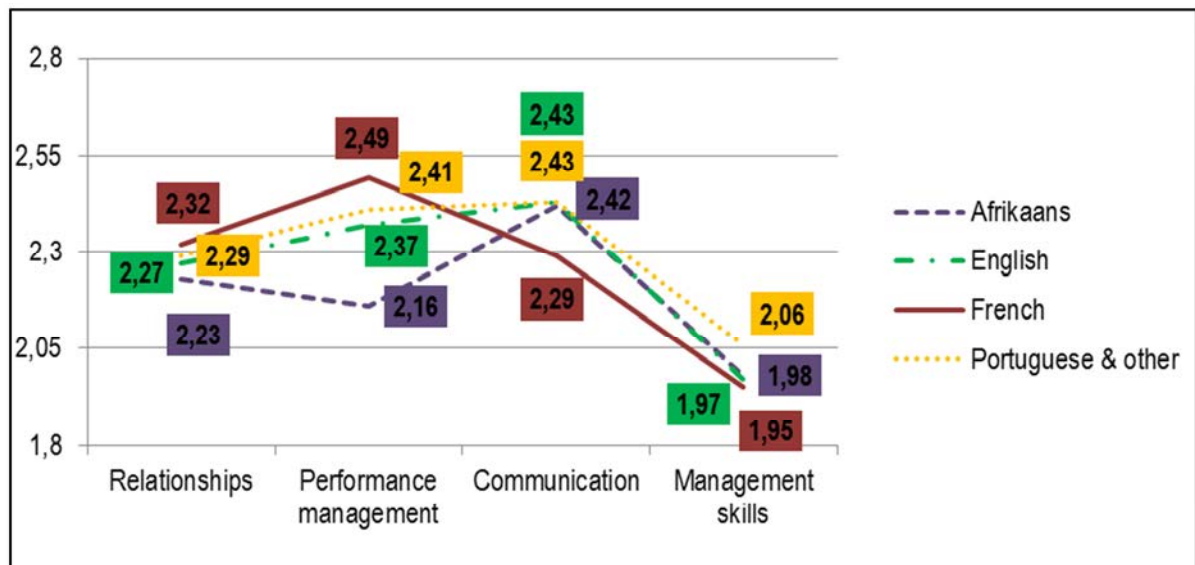


FIGURE 2: Means plot for 4 factors among the different language groups

Source: Calculated from survey results

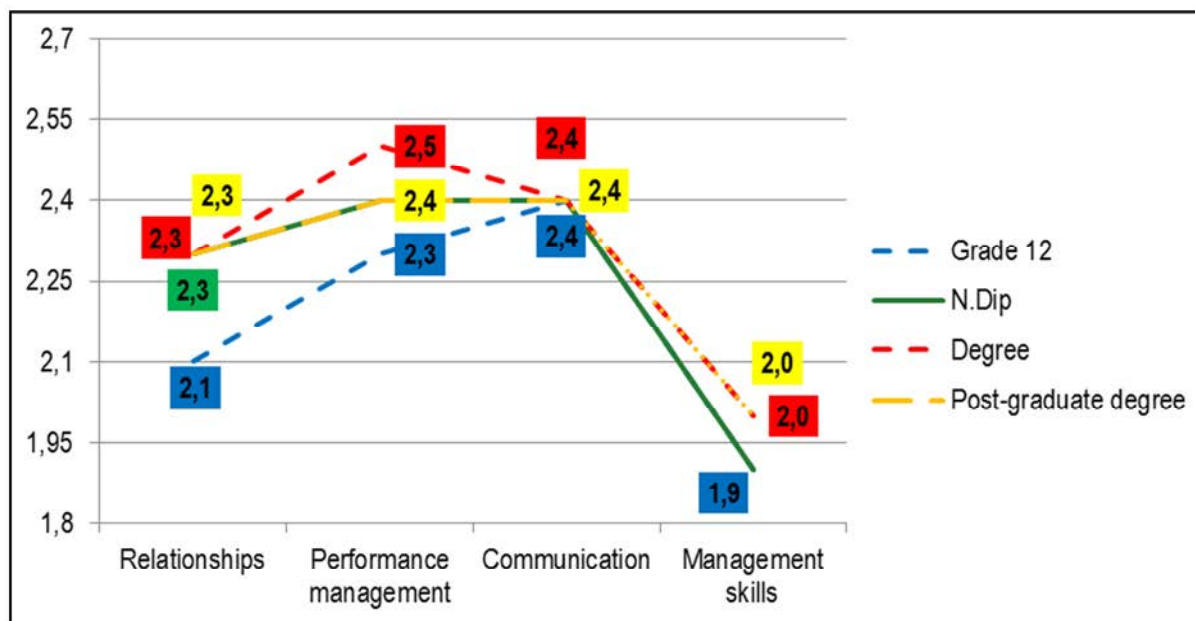


FIGURE 3: Mean plots per factor for qualification different groups

Source: Calculated from survey results

In Table 4, Pearson’s correlations are depicted for each of the manager–employee relationship factors. Small correlations were found between years of service and relationships ($r = 0.101$) as well as management skills ($r = 0.131$). It can be concluded that the longer employees had

been in the organisation, the less important factors like relationships become and management skills became.

TABLE 4: Pearson correlation analysis for age groups

		Years of service
Relationships	Pearson correlation	.101
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.045
	N	389
Management skills	Pearson correlation	.131
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010
	N	389

Source: Calculated from survey results

However, these relationships were not particularly strong. In accordance with the p-score in Table 5, significant differences were identified with a p-value of < 0.05. The differences were detected with the performance management (0.003) and communication (0.016) factors. A post hoc test with pair-wise comparisons was done to compare all the different combinations of the citizenship groups.

TABLE 5: ANOVA: significant differences between citizenship groups

ANOVA							
		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Relationships	Between groups	.071	2	.036	.160	.852	0.000813759
	Within groups	87.297	393	.222			
	Total	87.368	395				
Performance management	Between groups	4.099	2	2.049	5.968	.003	0.029477108
	Within groups	134.957	393	.343			
	Total	139.056	395				
Communication	Between groups	3.048	2	1.524	4.199	.016	0.02091977

ANOVA							
		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared
	Within groups	142.633	393	.363			
	Total	145.681	395				
Management skills	Between groups	.722	2	.361	1.559	.212	0.007873274
	Within groups	91.029	393	.232			
	Total	91.752	395				

Source: Calculated from survey results

The only significant difference that could be identified was between the citizens of South Africa and those from the DRC, with regard to performance management. The DRC leaned slightly towards performance management not being very important as opposed to South African citizens. The correspondence analysis in Figure 4 verifies this (according to the 4-point Likert-type scale, where 1 was strongly agree and 4 strongly disagree).

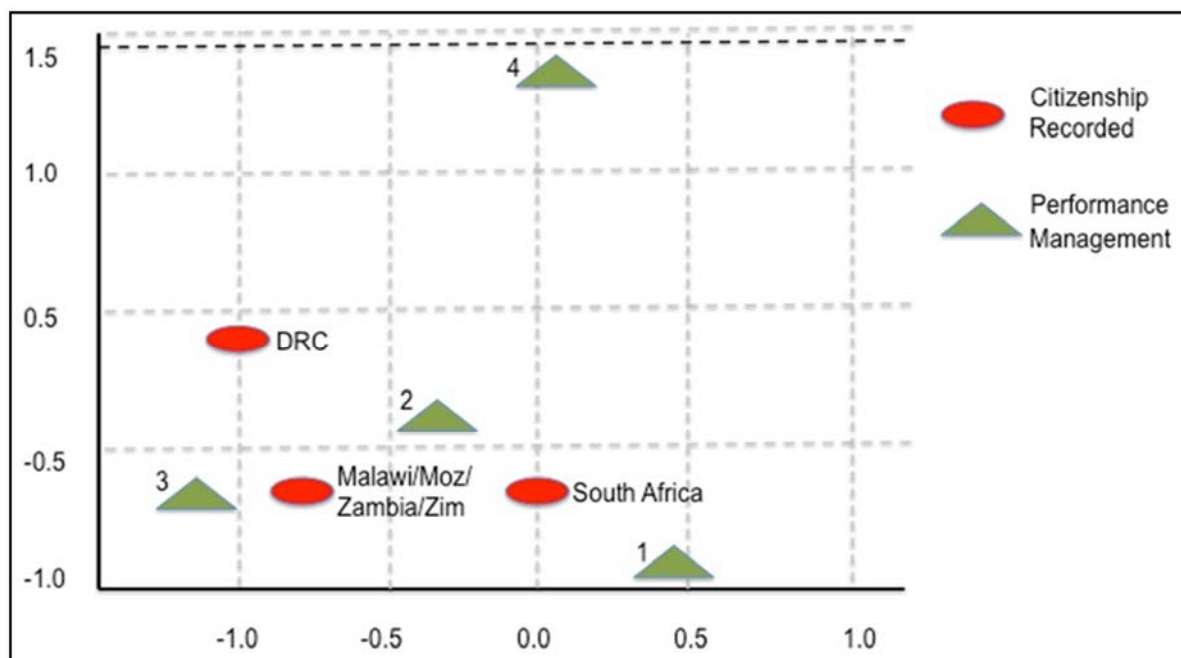


FIGURE 4: Scatter plot for citizenship and performance management

Source: Calculated from survey results

In Figure 5, it appears that all the different job positions generally agreed that all four factors were important to them. On closer inspection it seems as if management skills are most important to the full time staff (1.1) and the expatriate staff members (1.97). The fixed term contract staff members are of the opinion that performance management (1.45) is most important to them. On further investigation, it appeared that all four factors are more or less equally important to the full time staff members.

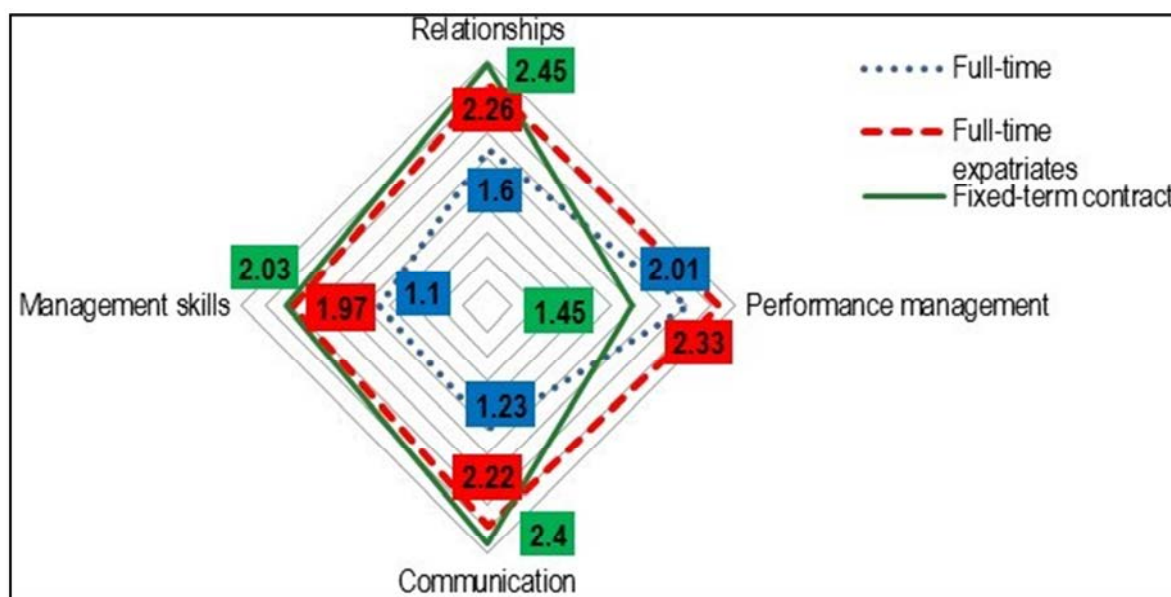


FIGURE 5: Mean plots for job positions

Source: Calculated from survey results

In line with the mean scores in Figure 6, it appeared that management skills and communication are more important to all appointment groups, and performance management and relationships the least important.

From the information obtained, it was clear that the most important factors were management skills, which included management capabilities and interpersonal relationships with employees. The second important factor was the general relationship between management and employees. Employees expected management to communicate with them on a continuous basis. Communication had to take place via various means for example informal communication (oral, written, electronic, downward, upward, lateral communication), sharing of knowledge and feedback on performance.

The results obtained from the questionnaire completed by employees in the mining company were analysed in this section.

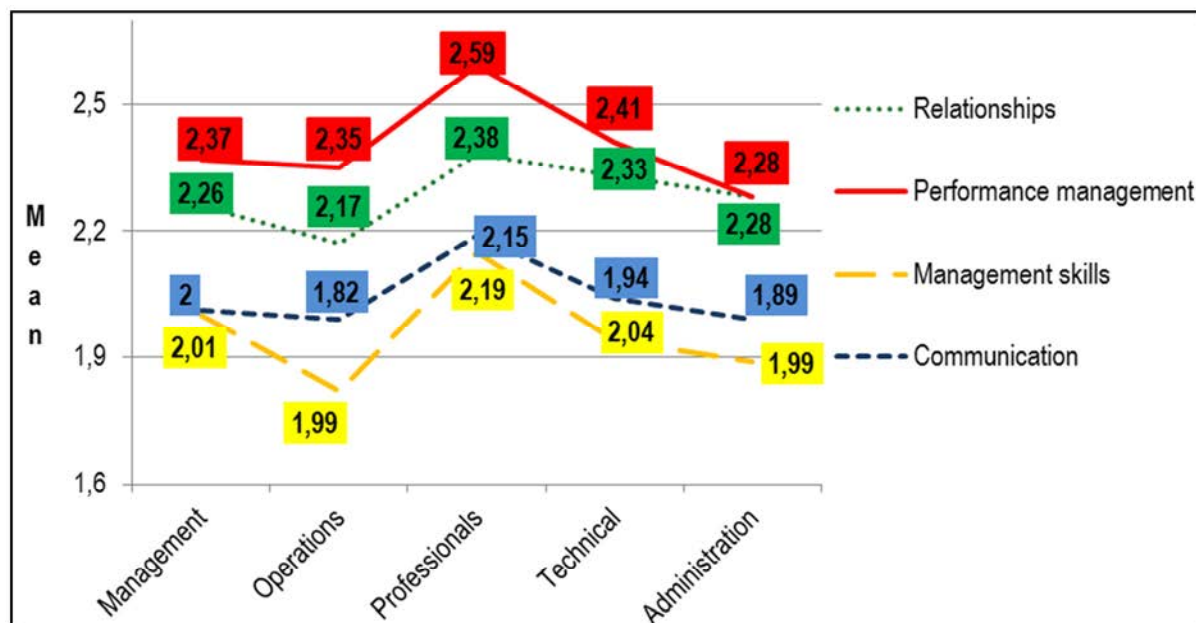


FIGURE 6: Mean for appointment groups

Source: Calculated from survey results

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The employees of the natural resources mining company in Africa indicated that they viewed the manager–employee relationship as the most important factor to be included in a talent management strategy. The senior management cadre of the human resources department in the mining group under study should lead an investigation into the manager–employee relationships and decide on processes and procedures to improve relationships in the organisation.

The HR department as a whole in the various African countries with the support of top management will have to implement a performance management system that will address the needs of workers in the African context. An integrated system that is aligned with the business strategy should address issues such as successful detection of skills “gaps” and the eradication thereof. Support, continuous communication and feedback from all parties involved are essential. Training in a new performance management system needs to be provided and managed by a project/systems manager or managers in HR.

The top management in HR in all the African countries will have to address the following questions about the current organisational culture and how to go about aligning the organisational culture with the needs of the different African countries:

- Who in the mining company communicates and what is communicated?
- What are the unambiguous and unspoken rules in the organisation?
- How and by whom are these rules set?
- Are the rules necessary, effective, appropriate and helpful?
- How are relationships formed, managed and controlled?
- Are relationships conducive to the success of the organisation?
- How do the company describe our competition, clients, colleagues, managers and leaders?

Employee engagement should be part of the organisation's strategic plan, which means that the HR directive ought to take responsibility and implement an effective engagement programme. In order to achieve this, the following factors merit attention: increasing employee confidence by ensuring that employees can do their jobs properly and that they will be supported if they need training and development; and in stressful or tedious jobs, employers should connect with staff in a manner that will meet employees' needs. Managers need to let staff know that they appreciate their efforts and that coaching and counselling are available if necessary.

On-going communication and feedback to workers are critical. Managers need to tell workers what they need to know and give them feedback on their performance. Recognition should be given in public, and negative feedback in private. Organisational leaders furthermore need to instil trust in the company's integrity and brand. At management level, the highest level of integrity should be maintained and managers should lead by example and reach out to employees to show them how valuable they are to the organisation.

The top management HR team in Africa should become aware of the vital role that coaches play at different levels in the organisation. Firstly, the management team needs to determine the readiness of the organisation for coaching and how it will fit into the company's HR and TM strategies. Secondly, potential coaches should then be identified and trained and the difference between coaching and counselling addressed. Lastly, the role of coaches should be clarified and communicated to all parties involved.

For a better relationship between employees and management, it is necessary for employees to have a positive frame of mind and not always regard their colleagues as their enemies. Employees should avoid disputes and misunderstandings and make an effort to work together and make the organisation a better place to work.

The company could investigate the following guidelines to encourage better manager–employee relationships:

- make one-on-one time between management and employees a priority;
- empower employees to make decisions;
- managers should make themselves available;
- communicate a vision; and
- give employees responsibility, not tasks.

6. CONCLUSION

Employees are the major asset of an organisation. It is crucial that employees perform together as a cooperative entity and contribute evenly towards the realisation of a universal target. No task can be accomplished if individuals are occupied in constant conflicts and misunderstandings. It is important to note that the obligation of an effective manager–employee relationship is not only the responsibility of the manager, but it should be a collective effort to enhance relationships.

It is important for managers to build strong relationships with and among employees. Managers should create a sense of community, making agreements, norms and rules of behaviour explicit. Trust should be created between people. Once that is in place, the work can be done. One advantage of building trust among employees is that it helps them to feel comfortable about sharing knowledge. It is equally important for a manager to have a strong relationship with employees when their performance is lacking. If managers spend time developing relationships with their employees, it makes it much easier when they have to speak to them about a problem.

Future research could focus on the international manager–employee relationships in this specific company, this could be compared with that of Africa and possible changes could be suggested to combine the strategies to accommodate the international and the African systems. This research only focused on African countries in a natural resources mining company, although the African countries form part of an international company. Research in other mining organisations (e.g. gold, copper, platinum) in Africa could be undertaken and compared with the natural resources mining industry to identify whether the same or different contributing dimensions of management–employee relationships apply.

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