
Effect of Social Awareness on Employee Performance in Manufacturing Firms in Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract

Human beings possess various forms of intelligence that shape how they think, act, and relate to others. Among these, social intelligence, the ability to understand, manage, and build effective relationships is a cornerstone of personal and professional success. Closely linked to this is emotional intelligence (EI), which encompasses the capacity to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own emotions while responding appropriately to the emotions of others. In modern organizations, emotional intelligence has emerged as a critical determinant that differentiates exceptional performers from average ones. This study examined the role of social awareness component of emotional intelligence on employees' performance in manufacturing firms within Kiambu County, with a specific focus on Bata Shoe Manufacturing Company in Limuru. The study was anchored on Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory. A descriptive survey research design was employed, targeting managerial-level employees at Bata Shoe Manufacturing Company, including senior, middle, and functional managers. Using a proportionate stratified sampling technique, a total of 80 respondents were selected. Data was gathered through semi-structured questionnaires. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), generating descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies, which were presented in tables for clarity. Regression analysis was conducted to establish the relationship between social awareness and employee performance. The findings revealed that social awareness had a significant positive influence on employees' performance at Bata Shoe Manufacturing Company. Consequently, organizations are encouraged to integrate emotional intelligence development into employee training and leadership programs to foster higher performance and sustainable growth.

Keywords: *Social Awareness, Employee Performance, Manufacturing Firms*

INTRODUCTION

Early theorists and influential psychologist such as Thorndike and Gardner proposed that humans possess several types of intelligence, one form being called social intelligence, or the ability to understand and manage people, and to act wisely in human relations (Thorndike, 1920). Emotional intelligence (EI) is one of such intelligence. EI has gained worldwide attention by the leaders of the organizations after Goleman put forward the theory of EI. A study done in a cigarette factory in China, found that the EI could predict the employees' performance (Law,

Wong & Song, 2014) the findings by Law et al. (2014) confirmed Goleman (1999) theory of EI that EI could predict workplace success potentially.

In recent years, there has also been some work which has suggested that the ability of employees to perform excellently in the workplace is also dependent upon EI traits such as empathy, emotional awareness, interpersonal skills, and other aspects of tacit knowledge (Chinowsky et al., 2004; 2016). In addition, Rosete and Ciarrochi (2015) in a study examining the relationship between EI and IQ found that an executive needs a high IQ to get to the management or executive levels, but once people reach that position, IQ does not discriminate between better or worse performing individuals, instead EI becomes the main predictor to differentiate the star performers from the average performers. Furthermore, there is a growing body of evidence which supports the contention that EI is crucial to the performance and success of individuals and hence that of the organisations (Ashkanasy et al., 2012).

Emotional intelligence (EI) describes capabilities, competencies and skills required to cope with environmental requirements and forces. People need to know how to behave in a host of different situations as well as know how to lead and unite to those they work with (Wall, 2013). The “ability to use awareness of emotions to manage behaviour and relationships with others” is a definition of emotional intelligence offered by Bradberry and Greaves (2003, p. 3). It follows that emotional intelligence is a person’s skill to exercise recognition of feelings in order to handle and conduct interactions with others.

Emotional intelligence is a person’s ability to recognize personnel feelings and those of others and to manage emotions within themselves and in their relationships with others (Goleman, 1998). Emotional intelligence includes four competencies. (1) Self-awareness is the ability to accurately perceive one’s emotions and remain aware of them as they happen, including the ability to manage one’s response to specific situations and people. (2) Self-management is the ability to be aware of one’s emotions and have the flexibility to positively direct one’s behavior in response to those emotions, to manage emotional reactions in all situations and with all people. (3) Social awareness is the ability to accurately identify the emotions of other people and thus understand the effects of those emotions, i.e., to understand what other people are thinking and feeling even though the perceiver does not feel the same way. (4) Relationship management is the ability to use awareness of one’s own emotions and those of others to successfully manage interactions, i.e., to provide clear communication and effectively handle conflict (Bradberry & Greaves, 2003). The current study focused on social awareness.

Globally, emotional intelligence (EI) has become a key factor influencing employee performance across various sectors, including manufacturing. Mayer et al. (2004) assert that developing employees’ emotional intelligence enhances their ability to regulate emotions, stay motivated, and perform effectively even under demanding work environments typical of manufacturing industries. High EI enables employees to handle stress, adapt to dynamic production demands, and maintain positive interpersonal relationships—factors essential for productivity and quality output.

Within the African context, studies have confirmed that emotional intelligence is essential for improving employee performance and organizational productivity. Osunsan et al. (2018), in a study at Kampala International University in Uganda, found a strong correlation between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness. Employees who demonstrated high emotional awareness and regulation were better able to handle work challenges, leading to improved performance outcomes.

In Kenya, research on emotional intelligence and employee performance has largely been conducted in educational and service institutions, though its relevance to manufacturing remains strong. Mwangi (2011), studying Kenyan universities, found that emotional intelligence components such as self-awareness and social awareness significantly influence employee engagement and job performance. These findings are relevant to manufacturing industries, where teamwork, emotional regulation, and interpersonal cooperation directly affect production efficiency.

Although limited research has been done specifically within Kenya's manufacturing sector, existing evidence suggests that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in improving employee performance, innovation, and collaboration. Manufacturing environments are often characterized by repetitive tasks, high targets, and tight deadlines, which can create emotional strain. Employees with higher EI are better equipped to handle such pressures, maintain concentration, and contribute to continuous improvement in production processes.

Given the growing role of manufacturing in Kenya's economic development, understanding the link between emotional intelligence and employee performance is increasingly important. Developing EI among manufacturing employees and managers can enhance teamwork, reduce workplace conflicts, minimize errors, and improve overall productivity and organizational performance. Therefore, fostering emotional intelligence is not only beneficial for individual well-being but also essential for achieving operational excellence in Kenya's manufacturing industries.

Statement of the Problem

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become increasingly recognized as a critical determinant of employee behavior and performance in modern organizations. According to Ashkanasy et al. (2012), employees' emotions significantly influence their productivity and workplace behavior. High levels of emotional intelligence—characterized by self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management—enhance employees' ability to manage emotions, communicate effectively, and sustain positive relationships. These competencies are vital for achieving efficiency and performance, particularly in manufacturing environments that demand coordination, teamwork, and continuous problem-solving.

Despite the recognized importance of EI, studies such as those by Kim, Cable, Kim, and Wang (2019) emphasize that emotional intelligence alone does not guarantee improved performance unless employees can apply emotional understanding effectively to achieve organizational goals. Ashkanasy and Daus (2015) and Giardini and Frese (2016) further observed that EI remains a relatively underexplored construct within workplace performance research, particularly in industries outside the service and education sectors. While EI has been linked to reduced turnover, higher motivation, and greater job satisfaction (Tett & Meyer, 2013; Stock, 2013), many managers continue to overlook its impact on how employees respond to stress, interpersonal challenges, and performance expectations.

In the manufacturing industry, where production processes often involve repetitive tasks, strict deadlines, and diverse teams, employees frequently face emotional strain. Low emotional intelligence among workers and supervisors can lead to miscommunication, conflicts, low morale, and decreased productivity. Conversely, employees with higher EI are more adaptable, cooperative, and resilient, which directly contributes to improved individual and organizational performance (Carmeli & Josman, 2016). However, many organizations in developing economies, including Kenya, have yet to integrate emotional intelligence development into their human resource and performance management systems.

Most existing studies on emotional intelligence and performance have been conducted in developed countries or non-industrial contexts. For instance, Kalaiarasi, Amaravathi, and Soniya (2014) studied emotional intelligence in Sri Lanka's cycle manufacturing industry, while Rahim and Malik (2010) examined EI and performance in Pakistan's banking sector. In Kenya, research has largely focused on educational and service institutions. Sambu (2019) investigated emotional intelligence and job performance in international schools, and Omondi (2016) explored managerial emotional intelligence in the banking sector. Although these studies affirm the positive influence of emotional intelligence on job outcomes, they do not adequately address the context of manufacturing industries—sectors that are central to Kenya's economic growth and employment creation.

Manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, such as Bata Shoe Company, play a significant role in Kenya's industrial and export development. However, they continue to face challenges related to employee performance, motivation, and productivity. Given the emotional and interpersonal dynamics of industrial work environments, understanding how emotional intelligence affects employee performance is vital for improving operational efficiency and competitiveness.

Therefore, despite existing evidence from other sectors and regions, there remains a clear research gap regarding how social awareness facet of emotional intelligence influences employee performance within Kenya's manufacturing industry. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the effect of social awareness on employee performance in manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya, with the goal of generating insights that can enhance workforce effectiveness and organizational success.

Objective of the Study

To assess the effect of social awareness on employee performance in manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The study was anchored on Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory. Goleman explained that the concept of Emotional Intelligence is encapsulated by four elements: Self-awareness, self-regulation, social-awareness, social skills and self-motivation. According to Goleman (1998), these Emotional intelligence abilities are considered independent of each other and contribute to job performance interdependently each drawing to some extent, strong interactions of Emotional intelligence capabilities that build upon one another but not sufficient to have emotional intelligence that will guarantee the competencies that will be demonstrated at different jobs. Social awareness is one of the elements of emotional Intelligence. This is the ability for a leader to comprehend the emotions of team members around them and to get a good understanding of their emotional makeup. The ability to treat people according to these emotional reactions is vital. This area is linked to empathy: The ability to understand and see things in other peoples' viewpoints, expertise in building and retaining talent, valuing diversity and appreciating the organizational goals. In essence this part of emotional intelligence then is about understanding and being truly in touch with the complete demands of the environment and acting to suit those conditions. The social awareness cluster contains three competencies which include: Empathy which is sensing others feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns, organizational awareness which is reading a group emotional currents and power relationships and service orientation which involves anticipating, recognizing, and meeting customers' needs (Goleman, 1998). The theory is applicable to the current study as it explains how the social

awareness components of emotional intelligence are intertwined to bring about employee performance.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework depicts the link between the dependent and independent variables. A dependent variable is what is measured in the experiment and how it responds to the independent variable during the experiment. A change in the independent variables will have a direct change in the dependent variable. The relationship between the variables in the current study is shown in the figure below:

Independent Variable

Social Awareness

- Empathy
- Organizational Awareness

Dependent Variable

Employees Performance

- Productivity
- Teamwork

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Author (2022)

Empirical Review

In relation to employee performance, the impact of social awareness depends on the length of time that the people involved have for interaction in order to have better understanding of who they are dealing with, how they ought to approach specific situations or people, trend analysis and so on hence the more time spent on process orientation the better and improved employee performance otherwise relationship is bound to be task oriented (Victoroff & Boyatzis, 2012). It was argued that, when effectively leveraged, past performance can lead to greater influence over one's constituents and work environment (Treadway et al., 2013).

High performance is perceived to only exist among employees or persons with very high social connections among the fellow employees of colleagues they work with as compared to the very quiet and the so called anti-social groups and this is widely believed to be due to the ability for these socially aware to seek for advice about issues concerning their jobs from knowledgeable colleagues and are also motivated and look forward to going to work every day and socialize with colleagues hence boosting their very own performance as compared to the anti-social colleagues (Treadway et al, 2013).

It's believed that for performance enhancement among organizational employees, management must improve their ways of dealing with feedback delivery among the different staff and factors such as age, timing, mode of communication and then the content of feedback is paramount for example when giving feedback supervisors don't need to only dwell on the mistakes and gaps but also the achievements, for mistakes people need to be called aside and considerate manner of feedback delivery needs to be used for the older people and quality of feedback for the younger generation needs to be considered to improve general performance within the organization (Wang et al., 2015).

Wang et al (2015) states that supervisors can improve employee performance by encouraging moderate helping behaviors to towards colleagues at work and by doing so they are likely to improve the working relationships amongst themselves and creating a working environment where staff are free to talk to each other and consult about work related issues amongst themselves thus boosting performance but this has to be carefully monitored to ensure that there isn't over reliance by some staff on the helping staff which could kill the performance thus working against its primary purpose.

Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) states that at the very beginning of our work or studies we bare a lot of empathy for people we deal and relate with and especially patients for the medical field but with time this empathy begins to die down and become a normal thing in our lives but it seen as a positive thing for performance enhancement because the less empathy medical doctors have the better they are able to perform their duties without any hindrances and therefore as much as social awareness has its advantages its application must be with care and only after thorough evaluation of situations

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research was conducted using a descriptive survey research approach. Descriptive survey research lets a researcher explain a phenomenon in terms of attitude, values, and features by determining and reporting how things are done (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003).

Target Population

The target population of this study comprised employees at the managerial levels of Bata Shoe Manufacturing Company in Kiambu County. The total target population consisted of 160 employee encompassing 35 senior managers, 50 middle managers and 75 functional managers.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The researcher used proportionate stratified sampling technique based on management levels to determine the sample size. The researcher used 50% of the target population as the research sample in line with the standards recommended by Kothari (2004). Thus a sample of 80 respondents comprising of 17 senior managers, 25 middle managers and 38 functional managers were the sample population.

Research Instruments

The main source for data collection in the study was the primary data collected using a questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data was submitted to the descriptive statistics tool of SPSS to generate mean, standard deviation, and percentages, which was presented in tables. Regression analysis was used to estimate the relationship between social awareness and employees' performance in Bata Shoe Company. The regression model was;

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Where, Y was Employees' Performance in Bata Shoe Company; X_1 was social awareness; β_0 was constant and β_1 was coefficient of determination; and ε = Error term.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Return Rate

Questionnaire return rate refers to all the participants who completed a questionnaire divided by the total number of participants targeted to fill a questionnaire or who have been targeted. From a sample of 80 a total of 75 questionnaires were returned duly filled, translating to 93.8 percent response rate.

Effect of Social-Awareness on Employee Performance

The study participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following statement assessing on social awareness influence on employee performance.

Table 1: Social awareness influence on employee performance

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Social awareness enables a leader-manager to attune to a wide	75	2.00	5.00	4.08	0.63

range of emotional signals, letting them sense the felt, unspoken, emotions in a person or group					
Social awareness enables a leader-manager to detect crucial social networks and understand key power relationships	75	2.00	5.00	4.19	0.65
Social awareness makes it possible for a leader to get along with people of diverse backgrounds	75	2.00	5.00	4.12	0.66
Social awareness enables a leader-manager to monitor customers or clients satisfaction carefully to ensure that they get what they need	75	3.00	5.00	4.20	0.68

Source: Researcher data, (2022)

From the findings, majority of the respondents agreed that social awareness enables a leader-manager to monitor customers or clients satisfaction carefully to ensure that they get what they need (M= 4.20 SD=0.68) and that social awareness enables a leader-manager to detect crucial social networks and understand key power relationships (M=4.19 SD=0.65). These results validated the Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) study, which found that self-awareness, had helped employees know themselves and understand their own behaviors in high-profile situations, allowing them to then guide those behaviors toward attaining their goals.

Further the study establish, social awareness makes it possible for a leader to get along with people of diverse backgrounds (M=4.12 SD=0.66) and that social awareness enables a leader-manager to attune to a wide range of emotional signals, letting them sense the felt, unspoken, emotions in a person or group (M= 4.08 SD=0.63). Similar conclusion by McPheat, (2010).also assets that mastering social awareness skills helps an employee's become more innovative and resourceful.

Employee Performance

The study participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the following statement assessing on employee performance.

Table 2: Employee Performance

Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Employee productivity levels in the company is high as compared to the beginning	75	2.00	5.00	4.12	0.66
Employees are extremely satisfied working for this company	75	2.00	5.00	4.21	0.74
Effectively collaborates with other department members is necessary	75	2.00	5.00	4.15	0.71
The ability to set appropriate priorities for tasks is necessary	75	3.00	5.00	4.32	0.62
The current level of the decision making process in the company is highly formal	75	2.00	5.00	4.29	0.80

From the findings, majority of the respondents agreed that the ability to set appropriate priorities for tasks is necessary (M=4.32 SD=0.62), the current level of the decision making process in the company is highly formal (M= 4.29 SD= 0.80) and that employees are extremely satisfied working for this company (M=4.21 SD=0.74). These results support empirical deductions by Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012), ultimate goal with emotional intelligence is to empower employees to make the right decisions and produce the best output.

Further the study establish that the leadership effectively collaborates with other department members is necessary ($M= 4.15$ $SD=0.71$) and that employee productivity levels in the company is high as compared to the beginning ($M= 4.12$ $SD=0.66$). These results are in line with study findings by Ham, et al., (2014) that emotional intelligence helps to keeps people in sync with productivity and independence.

Regression Test

In this study, a simple regression analysis was conducted.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.751 ^a	.564	.512	.32415

Source: Researcher data, (2022)

The study used coefficient of determination to evaluate the model fit. The adjusted R^2 is the percent of the variance in the dependent explained by the independent variable. The model had an average adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.512 and which implied that 51.2% of the variations on employees' performance in Bata Shoe Company are explained by the independent variable (social awareness).

The study further tested the significance of the model by use of ANOVA technique. The significance value was less than 0.05 indicating that the model was significant

Table 4: Summary of One-Way ANOVA results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1.876	1	1.876	11.439	.000 ^b
Residual	11.972	73	0.164		
Total	13.848	74			

Source: Researcher data, (2022)

From the ANOVA statics, the study established the regression model had a significance level of 0.000% which is an indication that the data was ideal for making a conclusion on the population parameters as the value of significance (p-value) was less than 5%. The calculated value was greater than the critical value ($11.439 > 2.73$) an indication that social awareness has a significant effect on employees' performance in Bata Shoe Company.

Table 5: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.810	.499			3.628	.001
	Social Awareness	.592	.154	.356		3.833	.000

Source: Researcher data, (2022)

In addition, the study used the coefficient table to determine the study model. As per the SPSS generated output, the equation ($Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$) becomes:

$$Y = 1.810 + 0.592X + \epsilon$$

Results show that unit change in social awareness while holding the other factors constant would enhance employees' performance in Bata Shoe Company by a factor of 0.592. These result agreed with McPheat (2010) views that social awareness enables employees to recognize the importance of social networks in getting things done and also be able to detect social network related issues well in advance and be in position to deal with them effectively.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that a unit change in social awareness while holding the other factors constant would enhance employees' performance in Bata Shoe Company by a factor of 0.592. Descriptive results show that social awareness enables a leader-manager to monitor customers or clients satisfaction carefully to ensure that they get what they need ($M= 4.20$ $SD=0.68$) and that social awareness enables a leader-manager to detect crucial social networks and understand key power relationships ($M=4.19$ $SD=0.65$). These results validated the Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) study, which found that self-awareness, had helped employees know themselves and understand their own behaviors in high-profile situations, allowing them to then guide those behaviors toward attaining their goals.

Further the study establish, social awareness makes it possible for a leader to get along with people of diverse backgrounds ($M=4.12$ $SD=0.66$) and that social awareness enables a leader-manager to attune to a wide range of emotional signals, letting them sense the felt, unspoken, emotions in a person or group ($M= 4.08$ $SD=0.63$). Similar conclusion by McPheat, (2010).also assets that mastering social awareness skills helps an employee's become more innovative and resourceful.

Conclusion

The study concludes that social awareness has a positive effect on employees' performance in Bata Shoe Company, social awareness allowed workers to identify a variety of emotional cues, allowing them to detect the felt, unsaid emotions of coworkers or groups and intervene before they erupted and negatively impacted performance. Employees that were socially aware were able to recognize important social networks, comprehend fundamental power dynamics, and know how to use this information to enhance performance. Additionally, social awareness enabled workers to get along with people from all backgrounds and skill levels.

Recommendations

The study recommends that Bata Shoe Company should take the social awareness of its employees seriously because it boosts worker productivity. Since social awareness had a negligible impact on employees' performance, it is advised that Bata Shoe Company should take responsibility for social awareness and integrate it into staff training and development as well as recruitment processes. This is because social awareness allowed employees to identify a variety of emotional signals, which allowed them to sense a variety of emotions in coworkers or groups and handle them before they erupted and negatively impacted performance.

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