

EMPOWERING Leadership, Competencies, and Work Engagement among Administrative and Finance Personnel of State Universities and Colleges in Caraga Region, PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

In this competitive global work environment, fostering employee engagement is crucial. Various organizational challenges can lead to a decline in work engagement. This study aimed to determine how empowering leadership and employees' competencies could influence work engagement among administrative and finance personnel of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in the Caraga Region, Philippines. Data were collected from 213 randomly chosen administrative and finance non-teaching personnel from various SUCs. Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson's R Correlation, and Multiple Regression were used in analyzing the data. The findings revealed that the status of empowering leadership and the level of employees' competencies of administrative and finance personnel in SUCs are very high and their level of work engagement is high. Moreover, there are significant relationships between empowering leadership and work engagement and employees' competencies and work engagement. Additionally, when comparing the influence of empowering leadership and employees' competencies on work engagement, employees' competencies showed a stronger influence than empowering leadership. The combined influence of empowering leadership and employees' competencies on work engagement was found to be significant.

KEYWORDS: *Business Management, Human Resource Management, Descriptive-Correlational Research, State Universities and Colleges, Caraga, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Work engagement has compelled companies to adopt modern Human Resource Management practices and is recognized as a crucial driver of

sustainable success (Plaskoff, 2017; Bakker et al., 2014). In higher education, a strategic approach to work engagement is vital for continuous development in the competitive academic landscape (Gupta & Shaheen, 2017). Employees in the university finance department feel burdened with heavier workloads than their counterparts, leading to increased staff turnover compared to other departments and this impedes the department's overall business agility and places additional strain on the remaining staff. If employees remain disengaged, this would lead to a dysfunctional department which negatively affects the strategic goals (Plessis, 2016). Dysfunctional behaviors at the workplace can be observed when job demands turn excessive (Nordin & Hamzah, 2021). Excessive demands create work pressures that are detrimental to mental and emotional health which affects productivity and performance (Malik & Noreen, 2015; Yang et al., 2016).

Fostering higher levels of employee work engagement resonates clearly in every organization. In academia, when faculty and staff members feel connected to their institution's mission and values, they become motivated and more effective in teaching, research, and administrative work (Adamou, 2023). Moreover, engaged employees are spirited, mentally resilient, enthusiastic to work, and enjoy the challenges in the workplace (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2014). Thus, work engagement is a cornerstone of strategic human resource management, guiding organizations in crafting recruitment, retention, and talent development strategies that prioritize engagement (Bakker et al., 2014).

Empirical evidence underscores the profound link between empowering leadership and work engagement. In the telecommunication industry in South Korea, it was found that empowering leadership has a positive and significant association with work engagement (Joo et al., 2022), and empowering leadership is correlated to work engagement through job autonomy, social community at work, and unreasonable tasks in Norwegian universities (Helland et al., 2020). Moreover, Arshad et al.'s (2022) research demonstrated that empowering leadership impacts work engagement through organizational identification. There was also empirical evidence that proved the relationship between competencies and work engagement. Malinda et al. (2018) proved that competency has a significant positive effect on work engagement in the banking and finance industry in Indonesia. In other words, the higher the competency of the agent, the higher the work engagement with the partner bank. In addition, foundational competencies have a significant positive effect on work engagement. engagement in the context of the Malaysian small and medium enterprises (SMEs) service sector (Haruna & Marthandan, 2017).

While the empirical landscape of employee engagement has been explored extensively, particularly in the private sector, there is a visible dearth of research concentrating on public sector employees, particularly in state-owned higher educational institutions. At present, employee work engagement is significantly low among higher education institutions and beyond (Wasilowski, 2018). Hence, there is an increasingly pressing need to delve into the concept of work engagement among SUC non-teaching employees. The lack of research on how these employees perceive empowering leadership and individual competencies as factors influencing their work engagement underscores the significance of this endeavor. Moreover, understanding the individual construct of empowering leadership, competencies, and work engagement, is crucial for comprehending the intricate relationships among these variables.

The findings of this research contribute to enriching existing literature and deepening scholars' comprehension of empowering leadership, competencies, and employee work engagement. These findings will serve as a robust foundation for future empirical studies and will be disseminated through national and international conferences, as well as in distinguished international business and management journals. Copies of the published paper will also be archived in the university library and Graduate School, serving as a valuable resource for scholars and future researchers. Furthermore, the insights derived from this study hold the potential to guide efforts to enhance or sustain exemplary work engagement among public sector personnel.

This study determined whether empowering leadership and employees' competencies influence work engagement among State Universities and Colleges (SUC) non-teaching personnel assigned to administrative and finance divisions in the Caraga Region. It first measured the level of work engagement. Second, it determined the status of empowering leadership as rated by the administrative and finance non-teaching personnel. Third, it measured the level of employees' competencies. Lastly, it tested whether empowering leadership and employees' competencies significantly influence work engagement among administrative and finance non-teaching personnel.

This study was anchored to the study Kassahun and Raman (2021) where they investigated the antecedents influencing employees' engagement in universities. They emphasize the significant role of leadership towards employees' work engagement. According to them, employees' engagement is a vital paradigm in a body of research as engaged workers are not only rendering

better services but are motivated, satisfied, and happier in the work environment. One of the fundamental assumptions in human resource management is that employees who lack the basic competencies would greatly affect the attainment of the organization's vision. Mangeron, et. al (2023) proposed that employees who have a high level of work competency may also have a high level of engagement to the organization. Thus, throughout the lives of individuals, they are required to emphasize leading to improving competencies and abilities (Kapur, 2024).

The predictors of work engagement are empowering leadership and competencies. Empowering leadership has five indicators namely: leading by example, participative decision-making, coaching, informing and showing concerns to members. Competencies have four indicators namely: self-liking competence, team competence, communication competence, and social competence. And work engagement has three indicators namely: vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Work engagement is the process by which an organization's human resources are motivated both economically and strategically to be actively involved and committed to the organization's goals and values (Ogbonnaya et al., 2017). Understanding and fostering work engagement is crucial for every organization, especially in academia, as it enhances motivation, leading to more effective research, teaching, and administrative outcomes (Adamou, 2023).

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research design to assess the level of work engagement of administrative and finance non-teaching personnel in various SUCs, with a focus on empowering leadership and competencies as predictors. This approach facilitates understanding work engagement through the lens of empowering leadership and competencies as perceived by the personnel themselves.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in SUCs in Region XIII (Caraga Region). The region comprises five provinces: Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Dinagat Islands, Surigao del Norte, and Surigao del Sur. Caraga Region is home to different SUCs, hence the researcher has opted to conduct the study in this specific region. Moreover, since the Caraga Region and its SUCs were not yet

widely studied, this study will unveil the constructs of empowering leadership, competencies, and work engagement.

Research Respondents and Sampling

The respondents of this study were composed of non-teaching personnel assigned to various units within the administrative and finance divisions in various SUCs. Respondents were chosen through simple random sampling where everyone had an equal chance to be chosen as representative of the same class. All personnel working in the offices mentioned will have an equal chance to be chosen as respondents regardless of the number of years in service and status of employment. Two Hundred Thirteen (213) respondents were the sample size computed using the Raosoft sample size computation with a margin of error of 0.05.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was made up of three parts. The first to third parts of the questionnaire were designed to measure the status of empowering leadership, level of competencies and level of work engagement, based on the degree of judgment of the respondents. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale, where respondents should rate from 1 as the lowest to 5 as the highest. Empowering leadership is measured using the Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) by Arnold, et. al. (2000) ($\alpha = 0.882$). The ELQ consists of 28 items which are distributed as follows: Leading by Example (5 items), Participative Decision-Making (6 items), Coaching (11 items), Informing (6 items) and Showing Concern/Interacting with the Team (10 items).

For employees' competencies, the questionnaire was adopted from Salman, et. al. (2020). The questionnaire consists of 48 items distributed as follows: self-competence/self-liking (20) ($\alpha = 0.897$), team competence (8) ($\alpha = 0.869$), communication competence (15) ($\alpha = 0.836$), and social competence (5) ($\alpha = 0.908$). The work engagement was measured using Work Engagement Questionnaire by Schaufeli et al. (2002) ($\alpha = 0.90$), with 17 items distributed as follows: vigor (6), dedication (5) and absorption (6).

Data Gathering Procedure

The actual research undertaking has commenced after securing the approval from the University of the Immaculate Conception - Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC). Endorsements from the UIC-REC were given to respective SUC Presidents for the approval and conduct of the research. The

researcher has observed the following procedures: the conduct of the research has begun after the said request to conduct the study was granted and approved by the SUC Presidents. Full consent from the respondents was obtained as evidenced in the informed consent form (ICF) signed by the respondents. Instructions were given to the respondents on how they are going to answer the survey questionnaire. The researcher has personally administered the survey to the respondents. After all the respondents have answered the survey questions, the researcher has kept the data for tabulation and statistical analysis.

Statistical Tools

Mean score was used to determine the status of empowering leadership and the level of competencies and work engagement. Pearson R Correlation was used in determining the relationship between empowering leadership and employee work engagement as well as the competencies and work engagement. Multiple Regression was used to determine which between empowering leadership and competencies is a better predictor of work engagement.

Ethical Statement

The UIC-REC evaluated this study before conducting the actual survey. To guarantee that all procedures were followed to secure and preserve the confidentiality and privacy of the respondents' responses, the respondents' right to privacy was also carefully observed. During the data collection process, each respondent was requested to sign the ICF. For future reference, every completed questionnaire was safely stored in an extremely secure location.

RESULTS

Table 1

Level of Work Engagement

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Description
Vigor			
1. Bursting with energy at work.	4.07	0.71	High
2. Feel strong and vigorous at their job.	4.04	0.72	High
3. Feeling of going to work every morning.	4.01	0.73	High
4. Can continue working for very long period of time	4.04	0.72	High
5. Very mentally resilient	4.15	0.63	High

6. Always persevere even when things do not go well.	4.21	0.64	Very High
Category Mean	4.09	0.69	High
Dedication			
7. Find the work meaningful and purposeful.	4.46	0.54	Very High
8. Enthusiastic about the job	4.39	0.57	Very High
9. The job inspires them.	4.34	0.67	Very High
10. Proud of the work that they do.	4.45	0.61	Very High
11. Job is easy.	3.88	0.87	High
Category Mean	4.31	0.65	Very High
Absorption			
12. Time flies when working.	4.44	0.58	Very High
13. Forget everything else when working.	3.80	0.95	High
14. Feeling happy when working intensely.	4.03	0.77	High
15. Immersed at work.	4.08	0.64	High
16. Carried away when working.	3.83	0.88	High
17. Difficult to detach from job.	3.71	0.97	High
Category Mean	3.98	0.80	High
Overall Mean	4.12	0.72	High

Presented in Table 1 is the level of work engagement. The overall mean rating of work engagement is 4.12 which is interpreted as high, which is evident in their perseverance to perform their jobs even when things do not go well, how they give meaning and purpose to their work, and how fast the time runs whenever they work.

Vigor has a mean score of 4.09, interpreted as high, which means that employees persevere at work even in hard times, are very mentally resilient, and bursting with energy when at work. Dedication, with a mean score of 4.31, interpreted as very high, which indicates that personnel are proud of the work they do and find it meaningful and purposeful. Lastly, a mean score of 3.98 for absorption is interpreted as high which is evident in the way they feel so attached to the job that they forget to check or mind the time they spend while working.

This result confirms the findings of Arcadio et al. (2023) that the employees' level of work engagement was high which indicates that employees were highly engaged in their work. However, it negates the findings of Desta

& Mulie (2024) which revealed that work engagement falls on the disagreed continuum, which means that work engagement is at its lowest level among sales representatives in Ethiopia.

Table 2
Status of Empowering Leadership

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Description
Leading by Example			
1. Setting high standards for performance	4.44	0.67	Very High
2. Working as hard as they can	4.59	0.65	Very High
3. Working as hard as anyone in the workgroup	4.57	0.67	Very High
4. Setting a good example by the way they behave	4.53	0.66	Very High
5. Leads by example	4.55	0.65	Very High
Category Mean	4.53	0.66	Very High
Participative Decision-Making			
6. Encouraging work group members to express ideas/suggestions	4.58	0.63	Very High
7. Listening to the group's ideas and suggestions	4.57	0.66	Very High
8. Using group's suggestions to make decisions that affect them	4.50	0.65	Very High
9. Giving workgroup members a chance to voice their opinions	4.56	0.62	Very High
10. Considering work group's ideas when they disagree with them	4.43	0.70	Very High
11. Making decisions that are based only on the group collaborative ideas	4.29	0.82	Very High
Category Mean	4.49	0.68	Very High
Coaching			
12. Helping workgroup see areas in which they need more training	4.39	0.68	Very High
13. Suggesting ways to improve work group's performance	4.50	0.61	Very High
14. Encouraging work group members to solve problems together	4.45	0.68	Very High

15. Encouraging work group members to exchange information with one another	4.50	0.64	Very High
16. Providing help to work group members	4.55	0.62	Very High
17. Teaching work group members how to solve problems on their own	4.31	0.72	Very High
18. Paying attention to work group's efforts	4.46	0.66	Very High
19. Telling work groups when they perform well	4.45	0.67	Very High
20. Supporting work group's efforts	4.55	0.64	Very High
21. Helping work group focus on our goals	4.43	0.70	Very High
22. Helping develop good relations among work group members	4.54	0.67	Very High
Category Mean	4.47	0.66	Very High
Informing			
23. Explaining company decisions	4.35	0.68	Very High
24. Explaining company goals	4.38	0.66	Very High
25. Explaining how work group fits into the company	4.39	0.67	Very High
26. Explaining the purpose of the company's policies to the group	4.36	0.72	Very High
27. Explaining rules and expectations to work group	4.46	0.71	Very High
28. Explaining decisions and actions to work group	4.48	0.71	Very High
Category Mean	4.40	0.69	Very High
Showing Concern/Interacting with the Team			
29. Caring about the work group members' personal problems	4.40	0.79	Very High
30. Showing concern for work group members' well-being	4.49	0.77	Very High
31. Treating work group members as equal	4.55	0.72	Very High
32. Taking the time to discuss work group members' concerns patiently	4.48	0.70	Very High

33. Showing concern for work group members' success	4.55	0.67	Very High
34. Staying in touch with work group	4.46	0.70	Very High
35. Getting along with work group members	4.57	0.65	Very High
36. Giving work group members honest and fair answers	4.57	0.63	Very High
37. Knowing what work is being done in work group	4.50	0.65	Very High
38. Finding time to chat with work group members	4.40	0.71	Very High
Category Mean	4.50	0.70	Very High
Overall Mean	4.48	0.68	Very High

The status of empowering leadership of administrative and finance personnel of SUCs in Caraga Region is shown in Table 2. The overall mean rating of the status empowering leadership is 4.48, interpreted as very high, which is manifested in the way they work as hard as they can, encourage the work group members to express their ideas and suggestions, help the work group members whenever they need assistance, explain their decisions and actions to the workgroup, get along with the group members and give work members honest and fair answers.

Leading by example has garnered a mean score of 4.53 which is interpreted as very high. This indicates that employees have witnessed that their immediate supervisors worked as hard as they could and as hard as their work group members. Participative decision-making was very high, represented by a mean score of 4.49. This suggests that unit heads in different units in the SUC setting encourage work group members to express ideas and listen to their opinions.

Coaching has garnered a mean score of 4.47, interpreted as very high, which manifested that employees have experienced from their immediate supervisor the assistance in coming up with solutions to the problems they encountered and that they helped their work group members. Informing was very high with a mean score of 4.40. This indicates that supervisors explain decisions and actions to the group and explain the rules and expectations to the work group.

Showing Concern/Interaction with the team has obtained a mean score of 4.50, interpreted as very high. This is evident in the way unit heads get along with work group members and gives work group members honest and fair answers.

This result confirms the findings of Saleh (2021) that the empowering leadership among employees in the university setting is evident and they are aware of the nature of and have a great orientation towards empowering leadership. However, the result of this study contradicts the findings of Desta & Mulie (2024) that there is a lack of empowering leadership practices among employees.

Table 3
Level of Employees' Competencies

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Description
Self-Competence/Self-Liking			
1. With potential in capabilities	4.18	0.59	High
2. Comfortable about one's self	4.34	0.61	Very High
3. Succeeded at much	4.03	0.65	High
4. Done well in life so much	4.00	0.74	High
5. Perform very well at several things	4.10	0.71	High
6. Pleasant to think about one's self	4.14	0.67	High
7. Value one's selves	4.63	0.56	Very High
8. Focus on strengths	4.37	0.57	Very High
9. Feel worthy at all times	4.15	0.67	High
10. Capable persons	4.38	0.60	Very High
11. Have much to be proud of	4.30	0.68	Very High
12. Secure in sense of self-worth	4.26	0.65	Very High
13. Appreciate one's self in all aspects	4.07	0.69	High
14. Have enough respect for one's self	4.55	0.53	Very High
15. Are talented	4.00	0.71	High
16. Feel good about one's self	4.41	0.62	Very High
17. Very competent	4.04	0.77	High
18. Have positive attitude toward one's	4.46	0.62	Very High
19. Deal outstandingly with challenges	4.19	0.58	High
20. Perform adequately in many important situations	4.18	0.64	High

Category Mean	4.24	0.64	Very High
Team Competence			
21. Work very effectively in a group setting	4.32	0.60	Very High
22. Contribute valuable insight to a team project	4.25	0.61	Very High
23. Easily facilitate communication between people	4.24	0.63	Very High
24. Effective at delegating responsibility for tasks	4.18	0.75	High
25. Coordinate effectively tasks and activities of a group	4.32	0.61	Very High
26. Resolve conflicts between individuals effectively	4.12	0.69	High
27. Effectively take on a leadership role in a group	3.99	0.78	High
28. Very good at integrating information and suggestions from individuals into a plan	4.02	0.70	High
Category Mean	4.18	0.67	High
Communication Competence			
29. Find it easy to get along with others.	4.31	0.66	Very High
30. Deal with others effectively	4.29	0.59	Very High
31. Good listeners	4.46	0.58	Very High
32. Know how others feel	4.23	0.63	Very High
33. Inform other people that leaders understand them	4.28	0.69	Very High
34. Understand other people	4.38	0.64	Very High
35. Relaxed and comfortable when speaking	3.92	0.75	High
36. Close and personal with people	4.09	0.72	High
37. Know what type of behavior is appropriate in any given situation	4.17	0.74	High
38. Effective conversationalists	3.85	0.74	High
39. Pay attention to the conversation	4.33	0.59	Very High
40. Feel relaxed when conversing with a new acquaintance	3.86	0.86	High
41. Enjoy social gatherings and meeting new people	3.84	0.83	High
42. Unafraid to speak with people in authority	3.82	0.76	High

43. Use one's voice and body expressively	3.78	0.83	High
Category Mean	4.11	0.71	High
Social Competence			
44. Help other people	4.54	0.55	Very High
45. Ask others if they can be of help	4.46	0.59	Very High
46. Show concern for others	4.49	0.59	Very High
47. Show care for others	4.56	0.58	Very High
48. Give support to others	4.55	0.59	Very High
Category Mean	4.52	0.58	Very High
Overall Mean	4.26	0.65	Very High

The level of employees' competencies can be gleaned in Table 3 with an overall mean rating of the level of employees' competencies is 4.26 which is interpreted as very high. This means that employees give value and have enough respect for themselves, work effectively in a group setting, are good listeners, and show support and care for others.

Self-competence/Self-liking has garnered a mean score of 4.24 which is interpreted as very high. This indicates that personnel value themselves and have enough respect for themselves. Team Competence has a mean score of 4.18 which is interpreted as high. This indicates that personnel can work very effectively in a group setting and can effectively coordinate tasks and activities of a group

Communication competence has gained a mean score of 4.11 which is interpreted as high. This indicates that administrative and finance non-teaching personnel are good listeners and they understand other people. Social competence was very high, represented by a mean score of 4.26. This means that administrative and finance personnel have exuded care and support for his or her work group members in the workplace.

This result supports the findings of Osei & Ackah (2015) that employees' competency is high, which indicates that employee competence or the ability of firms to largely provide an environment that promotes friendly coexistence aids in the development of an enabling environment that promotes organizational learning.

Table 4
Relationship between Variables

Variables Paired with Work Engagement	r*	p-value	Remarks
Empowering Leadership	0.398	0.000	Significant
Competencies	0.719	0.000	Significant

**Significance level at 0.01*

The correlation data are shown in Table 4. There was a low positive correlation ($r = .398$; $p < 0.05$) between empowering leadership and work engagement. Helland et al. (2020) mentioned in their study that empowering leadership can enhance intrinsic motivation which improves work engagement. Empowering leaders gives employees the autonomy to decide and act on matters involving their job which makes them feel responsible for their jobs and be encouraged to achieve their goals. Further, Cai, et. al (2018) that empowering leadership can fuel intrinsic motivation to stimulate work engagement.

Conversely, there was a high positive correlation ($r = .719$; $p < 0.05$) between employees' competencies and work engagement. Mangeron, et. al. (2023) emphasized the significant relationship between employees' work competency and engagement and it further implies that employees become more competent as they become more engaged in the workplace.

The result of the regression analysis is presented in Table 5. As shown in the data, the two variables have significantly influenced the dependent variable ($p < 0.05$). This means that the combined efforts of the two variables will result in higher employee work engagement.

The beta coefficient of 0.180 signifies that a unit increase in empowering leadership will lead to 0.180 increase in work engagement. Similarly, a beta coefficient of 0.659 signifies that a unit increase in employees' competencies will also lead to 0.659 increase in work engagement ($WE = .180 (EL) + .659 (EC)$). F statistics which have a numerical equivalent of 125.97 signifies that the overall model is highly significant.

Of the two predictors, Competencies has a higher influence compared to Empowering Leadership. As to the regression model, the r^2 of .541 signifies that 54.10 percent of the variation in work engagement could be attributed to the

combined influence of empowering leadership and employees' competencies. Moreover, the remaining 45.90% of other factors were not included in this study.

The results demonstrated alignment with the Work Engagement Theory, corroborating Kassahun and Raman's (2021) discovery that leadership significantly impacts employees' engagement. This is in line with Helland's (2020) research, which established a connection between empowering leadership and academics' work engagement, particularly through factors like job autonomy, social community at work, and handling unreasonable tasks. Additionally, the findings confirmed Haruna and Marthandan's (2017) conclusion that competencies play a crucial role in enhancing work engagement, suggesting that as employee competency rises, so does work engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommended that supervisors can play a crucial role by initiating regular sessions or meetings where employees can freely share ideas and suggestions to enhance their roles. Additionally, supervisors can create an environment where employees feel comfortable reaching out when they feel exhausted or lacking the energy to perform their tasks effectively through group or individual coaching and mentoring sessions. Most importantly, supervisors can foster a culture that promotes resilience, energy, and open communication, which enhances employees' work engagement, ultimately leading to improved overall performance and success. Unit heads and supervisors may explain to the workgroup members the management decisions involving the university's operation during office meetings. Annual strategic planning can also be done to cascade the university's overarching goals for administration and finance divisions. Also, supervisors may conduct division strategic planning to highlight specific targets that would contribute to the attainment of the university's strategic plan. Management may take proactive steps to strengthen team connections by conducting team-building activities and regular meetings involving individual functions and the challenges they experienced. Additionally, management may provide annual customer service training to enhance their communication skills and quality of service. Supervisors may encourage their personnel to be involved in every activity at the university where they can participate and socialize with other employees.

For future researchers, they may continue to investigate other factors

that would affect the work engagement of the SUC personnel. They may also conduct qualitative and in-depth studies to unveil other indicators of work engagement.

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