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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ALTRUISM AND WHISTLE BLOWING INTENTIONS AMONG EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Whistle blowing is essential to organizations as it helps to expose wrongdoings or behaviors which if left, may degenerate to unethical actions that may further bring about loss of property or damage reputation. Even though whistle blowing in Kenyan public universities is rare, some surveys have illustrated instances of whistle blowing from both members of the public and administrators. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between altruism and whistle blowing intentions among employees in public universities in Kenya. The study was anchored on Prosocial Behavior. The study adopted a positivist research philosophy and correlational research design. The research utilized questionnaires as the tool in the collection of primary data. The reliability was examined using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient where an average of 0.85-was obtained from study parameters for internal consistency. Descriptive statistics were obtained using frequencies and percentages and multivariate linear regression was used to determine the factors that were associated with whistle blowing intentions among employees in public Universities in Kenya. The target population was 30,818 employees from public university in Kenya. A sample size of 395 respondents was obtained using Yamane formulae. Proportionate sampling was used to obtain the number of respondents in each university and simple random sampling was used to select respondents to fill the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were analyzed in form of Mean and Standard deviation while multiple linear regression model and correlation analysis were used to establish the relationships. One-unit increase in altruism was associated with an increase in whistle blowing intentions by 0.14 ($R^2 = 0.18$, $\beta = 0.14$, p-value = 0.016),

The study findings revealed that altruism, ethical values and attitude all have positive and significant relationships with whistle blowing intentions and organizational support moderates the relationship. The study recommends that universities need to formulate policies which take into account gender differences, put in place mechanisms of identifying altruists who will promote whistle blowing, continuous sensitization of employees on whistle blowing intentions, need to create a positive culture and finally develop policies that ensures protection of whistleblowers. The study may be beneficial to Universities, Academia and also Government.

1. INTRODUCTION

Whistle blowing is the act of disclosing information about illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices happening at the workplace, to a party that may be able to take action and stop the wrongdoing (Olesen, 2019). An effective whistle blowing process depends on the organization's desire to build an ethical climate and its awareness of the power of whistle blowing as an ethical tool (Smaili, 2023).

Dorasamy *et al*, (2018) posits that there is need to promote and support a culture of whistle blowing throughout the organization by adopting anonymous reporting channels, offering incentives and protecting those who come out to whistle blow. Whistle blowing prevents issues from escalating, combats fraud, raises awareness, and creates an open culture among other benefits to the institution. Whistle blowing is a type of "prosocial activity" in the public sector expected of employees which is occasionally mandated by law.

According to Kamau, Kariuki, & Musuya, (2017) protection is crucial to guaranteeing the whistleblowers' safety. Kleven & Landais, (2017) concluded that if the government pays an incentive to whistleblowers to entice them to reveal instances of tax management malfeasance in their firms, then reasonable whistle blowing may be achieved. When management is suspected of engaging in unethical behavior, the ability of employees to speak out is particularly

at danger. Aderotimi (2017) indicates that the employer may not know about unethical behavior or might be aware of it, and may also support or forbid whistle blowing thus, whistleblowers may be deemed loyal or malicious. Wijayanti, Senjani & Farah (2023) believes that there is a strong relationship between moral courage and altruism. He further alludes that such people are brave to act on ethical malpractices and will proceed to whistle blow irrespective of the potential harm that may befall them.

Vandekerckhove and Lewis (2019), believes that whistle blowing is the most effective method for fostering an ethical workplace culture since it aids in stopping unlawful activities or careless behavior that might hurt others. Some of the elements have a detrimental impact on whistleblower's intentions, while others impact positively on revealing wrongdoing. A study by Alleyne *et al.*, (2018), revealed that the main categories of the characteristics associated with whistleblower intents include basic individual factors such as honesty, integrity, fidelity and attitude towards wrongdoing.

The first whistle blowing case in United States of America (U.S.A) can be traced to 1777 during the American Revolutionary war by two soldiers Samwel Shaw and Richard Marven. The two witnessed their commander torture British prisoners of war and reported the matter. They were jailed and later released and this led to enactment of the False Claims Amendments Act (FCA) by Abraham Lincoln later in 1863. As stated by Thüsing, & Forst, (2016), False Claims Amendments Act (FCA) has throughout time been revised to increase the effectiveness of whistle blowing to encourage private whistleblowers to reveal fraud and to eradicate corruption. It has also helped in the recovery of a significant amount of money for the federal government. This shows why whistle blowing is a very important mechanism in intervening the corruption in the public sectors in every country. In America since the Sarbanes Oxley Act (SOX) event, which encouraged workers of companies to report irregularities without fear of the party being identified, the phrase "whistle blowing" has gained use (Thüsing, & Forst, 2016).

Norway has also been in the limelight for protecting whistleblowers who helped to expose fraud (Norway's Phase 3 Report, 2011). In Scotland, Whistle blowing is handled by Audit Scotland who have to operate under the whistle blowing framework, found in Part (IV) subsection A of the 1996 Employment Rights Law and the 1998 Public Interest Disclosure Act as amended (Council of Europe, 2014). In the Correspondence and Whistle blowing Annual report 2017/2018, Audit Scotland indicated that out of the three hundred (300) correspondences they received, twenty-seven (27) came from whistleblowers which was 200% increase compared to the previous year (McPhee & Sheridan, 2020).This implies that the systems are improving with regards to making whistle blowing easier and safe for the members of the public as well employees in private sector.

Appah, (2017) reported that in 2016 upon the implementation of the whistleblowers policy and follow up through trainings and sensitization programmes, the Federal Government of Nigeria recovered 183 million US dollars courtesy of whistle blowing. He further lists firm size, influence of the offender, organizational ethical climate & judgment, organizational support, the gravity of wrongdoing, position of the offender, age and term in the office as factors significantly linked to whistle blowing intentions in internal auditors.

Whenever whistleblowers know where they will disclose information, they will have a greater likelihood of doing so; however, this may also be determined by the whistleblower's view of the effectiveness of the channel and their general attitude towards the whole process. They continue by saying that if a prospective whistleblower thinks the route is inadequate, they can choose not to disclose something or report it through another channel (Mbago, Ntayi, and Mutebi, 2018).

In Kenya, whistle blowing may not be clearly defined, practiced and promoted in public administration despite the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC), Commission for Administrative Justice (CAJ) and other agencies' efforts to ensure external whistle blowing in the public sector. On June 19, 2021, Maasai Mara University sacked its Chief Finance Officer, Spencer Sankale, after exposing an alleged financial scandal involving the University's Vice-Chancellor (Kevins, 2021). Despite being implicated in the scandal and suspended for a while, the Vice-Chancellor was reinstated by the Employment and Labour Relations Court on January 19, 2023. This may say much about the legal framework lacuna around whistle blowing, corruption, and institutional interest, which means internal whistle blowing channels only symbolize existing ethical efforts. Despite being reinstated by the court and the Public Service Commission, the University was still adamant about fully obeying the order by sticking to its suspension decision, showing a mismatch in applying ethical laws in the public sector (Onyango, 2024).

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Despite rising calls for study and legislation to address the widespread public disobedience, as well as despite the execution of very pertinent public sector reforms, the literature on whistle blowing in third world countries, notably in the continent of Africa, remains scarce (Schuppan & Onyango, 2018). Fundamental challenges that seem to define whistleblower operations in public administration include the fluid scalar chain, loose linkages and uncertainty in understanding administrative roles in issues of bureaucracies in government. In addition, due processes that contradicts each other, organizational justice systems which are unclear, and complex and competitive public & private organizational interests which drive public administration. In any case, it has been discovered that these aspects of public administration make it more difficult to enforce moral standards and take preventative measures to encourage whistle blowing (Pillay *et al.* 2018). The organization's support and its rules and processes around whistle blowing are closely related. An organization that encourages whistle blowing has solid policies and procedures on whistle blowing. Organizational support will always affect the attitudes of whistleblowers either positively or negatively.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between altruism and whistle blowing intentions among employees in public universities.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on prosocial behavour theory. This theory's proponents were Brief and Motowidlo (1986). Prosocial behavior can be defined as "behavior that is (a) performed by a member of an organization, (b) directed toward an individual, group, or organization with whom he or she interacts while performing his or her organizational role, and (c) performed with the intention of promoting the welfare of the individual, group, or organization toward which it is directed" (Brief and Motowidlo, 1986, p. 711).The study acknowledges that this theory views whistle blowing as a kind of beneficial social activity since it takes into account whistleblowers' egoistic and altruistic motivations for exposing organizational wrongdoing (Miceli, Near, and Dworkin, 2008; Ceva & Bocchiola, 2020). This study focused on the incentive behavior of humans where they voluntarily open up about a scenario of corruption to the relevant body for action. The Prosocial behavior is thus very significant to the study as Matowidlo (1986) explains the theory as a behavior which is exhibited by a member of an organization directed towards an individual, group or organization with the aim of promoting the welfare of the concerned party. The theory was thus be applied to this study as it can be used to explain what are the motivations behind this prosocial behavior thus leading to the promotion of whistle blowing in institutions or even various organizations.

Penner et al (2005) both supports and criticized this theory of Prosocial behavior. They state that there is a lot involved before an individual openly take part in a positive act of trying to change the status or a group an organization or another group following a psychological explanation of individualism. On the same review paper, they advocate for this theory as they state that it forms a foundational explanation behind several behavior of people both socially and from an institutional perspective. Dozier and Miceli (1985) explained that whistle blowing is a form of prosocial behaviour as the act involves both selfish (egoistic) and unselfish (altruistic) motives on the part of whistleblowers. In other words, whistleblowers take action to stop the wrongdoing within the organization with the intention of benefiting persons within and outside the organization, as well as, the whistleblowers themselves.

Conceptual Framework

Altruism as a behavior is acting for the wellbeing of others and satisfies the following three requirements: (1) the act is an end in itself and is not done for self-serving reasons; (2) it is a voluntary act; and (3) the act produces good (Leeds, 1963). According to Leeds' (1963) altruistic criterion, there would be no connection between cost-benefit analysis and the whistleblower act if it were entirely motivated by altruism. There aren't many instances of whistle blowing in sports that are documented entirely out of humanitarian motives. The perception that many of the incidents of known whistle blowing are reported after the whistleblower's involvement with the company has ended serves as proof of this. Additionally, it might be challenging to decide to whistle blow without carrying out a thorough cost-benefit analysis because there is an inherent push in both professional and college athletics not to disrupt organizational (or societal) norms (Richardson & Wang, 2019). The Theory of Planned Behavior is the most effective tool for understanding altruism. According to research by Lee, Lee, and Kang from 2003, certain adults are more inclined to act altruistically. It should be quite simple for an actor to decide the right course of action to put right a wrong conduct if they are naturally altruistic. Consequently, the actor would swiftly go through the three precursors of planned activity. In that the actor would favorably prefer doing the right thing above doing wrong, acting for a non-self-serving cause, the attitude toward whistle blowing satisfies Leeds' first criterion. An altruistic person would strongly believe

in their own subjective norms if they had good moral character and moral drive. In this instance, it is the person's view of the actions of the whistleblower to assist others. An altruistic actor would only be interested in carrying out the action freely (criteria 2) in order to assist another person (criterion 3), making it easier to carry out the desired behavior. Ceva & Bocchiola, (2020) did a research on understanding whistle blowing practices in Netherlands. The study was qualitative and used in depth interviews for 20 participants and the outcome was that individuals with a strong sense of altruism were more likely to engage in whistle blowing. This therefore means that increased levels of altruism favors whistle blowing intentions. According to Wijayanti, Senjani & Farah (2023) altruism is closely linked to moral courage and that those people with high levels of altruism are brave enough to act on their ethical principles without really concerning themselves with the effects that may face them either as personal harm or professional harm.

Richardson and Garner (2019) employed attribution theory in investigating whether stakeholders (e.g., university fraternity and alumni) held different perceptions of whistleblowers' credibility, legitimacy, and likeability based on whistleblowers' motives and involvement in wrongdoing. Results from both samples suggested that bystander whistleblowers were more credible and likeable than their complicit counterparts, while the fraternity sample found altruistic whistleblowers admirable, acceptable and legitimate than selfish whistleblowers.

College athletics was the subject of a recent instance of (self-reported) altruistic whistleblower conduct. James Gundlach, a professor at Auburn University, claimed academic dishonesty and internally alerted his sociology department and the athletics department. Gundlach alerted the New York Times outside when both departments failed to act appropriately (New York Times, 2006). Gundlach was furious because, in his opinion, the athletics department had managed to avoid the (National Collegiate Athletics Association) NCAA and that certain students had benefited from special treatment and undeserved marks. To correct this ethical error, he allegedly disclosed it to outside parties. Gundlach said that his activities were selfless in character and got no payment or reward for them. Shortly after, he left his employment. Wijayanti, Senjani, &Farah (2023) did a research on the role of Machiavellian personality, altruistic personality, religiosity, whistle blowing system, and accounting firm size in mitigating fraud intention in Indonesia. They collected data using a survey questionnaire involving 291 accountant .This study used quantitative research with and SMART PLS 3.3.3 was used for analysis. They concluded that altruism was higher levels of whistle blowing among the accountants.

It may be claimed that regardless of one's selfless intentions while making a whistleblower report, factors previous to the act are taken into account, contrary to Leeds' (1963) claim that being altruistic precludes doing a cost-benefit analysis or intending to gain a type of compensation. Whistle blowing is done as prosocial conduct, according to Dozier and Miceli (1985), since it is very challenging to meet all three requirements for altruistic behavior. Staub (1978) provided a possible option to altruistic conduct that put the emphasis on meeting the most crucial requirements, performing a kind act or deed.

Shonhadji (2021) did a study on the determinant of whistle blowing intentions in the Case of Bank Fraud in Indonesia. The researcher's aim was to ascertain the effect of altruistic values, idealism, moral courage and professional commitment on the intention to engage in whistle blowing. Additionally, the research also looked into the aspect of locus of control which was a variable that moderated the relationship. The major instrument for collecting data was the questionnaire and the research was quantitative. All employees of banks operating in Surabaya constituted the population. The sample of the study was made up of workers of national private banks that were operating in Surabaya. The technique adopted for analysis was the path analysis test with the Warp PLS program. The results showed that moral courage, altruistic values and professional commitment had no significant influence on intentions.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design. In addition to testing the hypothesis, the design also used correlation analysis and multiple linear regression as inferential statistics (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2011). This study also adopted a positivism research philosophy. The study targeted the 30,818 employees comprising both teaching and non-teaching staff. The sampling frame comprised of all the staff working in the thirty-one (31) public universities in Kenya. From the target population of 30,818 respondents, the researcher used proportionate sampling to select 395 respondents from the 31 public universities. The study employed a simple random procedure to identify the respondents who took part in the study from all the thirty-one (31) public universities in Kenya. The research made use of use of primary data collected using questionnaires whose validity and reliability were ensured. R Statistical software was used to clean and analyze the data obtained (version 4.3.2). Multiple regression analysis was used to

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examine the connection between a dependent variable and the independent variables (Hair, 2014). The link between the variables as well as their relative strengths were shown by the multiple linear regression model. Tables and bar graphs from the descriptive and inferential statistics were used to display the results.

5. RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Most respondents (88.6%) expressed sympathy for people who were less fortunate than they were. A significant portion (88.6%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, indicating a prevalent sense of empathy and concern for the less fortunate among university employees. The findings also revealed that a substantial proportion of university employees (88.4%) were willing to blow the whistle and report a wrongdoing if it concerned the well-being of others. This suggests that a strong ethical orientation exists among employees, with a focus on ensuring the welfare of their colleagues and peers. A minority of respondents (43.2%) indicated that it wouldn't bother them to harm someone they didn't like. However, it is essential to note that a majority (52.7%) disagreed with this statement to some degree, suggesting that most employees do have reservations about causing harm, even to those they dislike. In addition, a significant portion of employees (78.5%) expressed a willingness to put themselves at risk if it would benefit the organization and other people. This finding demonstrates a strong commitment to the collective well-being and success of the institution.

A substantial majority of respondents (63.4%) also stated that they would report any wrongdoing, even if they were not offered any incentives (Table 5.1). This indicates a high level of ethical responsibility and integrity among university employees.

Table 5.1

Statements of Altruism Among University Employees

Altruism indicators	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
I have sympathy for people who are less fortunate than I am.	395	2.00	5.00	4.09	0.780
Concern for the well-being of others makes me willing to whistle blow and report a wrong	395	2.00	5.00	4.05	0.731
It wouldn't bother me to harm someone I didn't like.	395	1.00	5.00	2.74	1.29
I don't mind putting myself at risk if it will benefit the organization and other people	395	1.00	5.00	2.98	1.09
I will report any wrongdoing even if I am not offered any incentive	395	2.00	5.00	3.44	1.15
I will always protect the vulnerable and the disadvantaged groups even if it can cost my job.	395	2.00	5.00	3.48	0.925
Aggregate Score				**3.46**	**0.995**

Altruism and Whistle Blowing Intentions

The study used a linear regression analysis to investigate the relationship between variables. Linear regression model was fitted as shown below:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_2 X_2 + e \quad \text{..... 1}$$

Where: Y = whistle blowing intentions; β_0=y-intercept (constant); β_1=Beta coefficient; X_1=Altruism and ε= Error term.

Altruism emerged as a significant predictor of whistle blowing intentions. The analysis estimated that a one-unit increase in altruism was associated with an increase in whistle blowing intentions by 0.14 (β =0.14, p-value = 0.016), which is statistically significant (Table 5.2). The coefficient of determination 18% variation in whistle blowing intentions were explained by altruism (R^2 =0.18). This result underscores the pivotal role of altruistic values in promoting ethical behavior among university employees. Those with higher levels of altruism are more likely to report wrongdoing, driven by their genuine concern for the welfare of their colleagues and the institution.

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Table 5.2
Relationship between altruism and whistle blowing intentions

Predictors	Estimates	std. Error	Confidence Interval	p-value
Intercept	11.65	1.19	9.30 – 13.99	**<0.001**
Altruism	0.14	0.06	0.03 – 0.25	**0.016**
Observations	363			
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.18 / 0.15			

6. DISCUSSION

The model fitted was therefore:

$$Y = 11.65 + 0.14X_2 \quad \text{..... (4.4)}$$

This analysis therefore provides evidence to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a statistically significant relationship between altruism and whistle blowing intentions among employees in public universities.

The results shed light on the presence of altruistic tendencies among university employees and their implications for workplace ethics. Altruism, as indicated by the respondents' sympathy for the less fortunate and their willingness to protect vulnerable groups, plays a pivotal role in shaping a positive ethical climate within the university. The majority of employees expressed willingness to report wrongdoing, even in the absence of personal incentives. This commitment to maintaining ethical standards within the institution is crucial for fostering a culture of accountability and integrity. This connection underscores the role of empathy and altruism in driving employees to take action against unethical behavior, especially when it affects their colleagues. The fact that a significant majority of employees are willing to protect vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, even at the potential cost of their jobs, highlights the importance of social justice values within the university setting in Kenya. This commitment to inclusivity and equity aligns with the broader goals of higher education institutions in promoting diversity and fairness.

The findings of this study are similar to findings from other studies which consistently suggests that individuals with a strong sense of altruism, characterized by their genuine concern for the well-being of others, are more likely to engage in whistle blowing activities (Ceva & Bocchiola, 2020; Wijayanti, Senjani, & Farah, 2023). Altruism is closely linked to moral courage, as those with high levels of altruism often exhibit the bravery to act on their ethical principles, even when faced with potential personal and professional risks (Kang, 2003). Such individuals are motivated by a desire to protect others from harm and uphold ethical standards. However, literature also acknowledges that altruistic whistleblowers can confront substantial psychological and ethical dilemmas, particularly when their actions challenge organizational loyalties(Jalan, 2020).

The results also highlight the multifaceted nature of whistle blowing intentions among university employees. Encouraging and promoting altruism can be instrumental in creating a culture of ethical responsibility and accountability. Universities should explore strategies to cultivate these values among employees. These findings provide a foundation for further research and targeted interventions aimed at creating a more ethical and transparent academic workplace. Altruism serves as a significant driver of whistle blowing behavior, reflecting a commitment to social responsibility, ethical values, and the broader public interest.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the relationship between altruism and whistle blowing intentions among employees within public universities. The analysis estimated that a one-unit increase in altruism was associated with an increase in whistle blowing intentions which was statistically significant. It was established that there was a significant relationship between altruism and whistle blowing intentions. Therefore the study showed higher levels of altruism are associated with increased intentions to whistle blow.

This study found that there was a significant relationship between altruism and whistle blowing intentions. Individuals with higher tendencies of altruism were likely to blow the whistle and report any wrong doing.

Based on the finding the study recommends that universities need to put in place mechanisms which will identify and support altruists. Furthermore, the willingness of employees to protect vulnerable groups indicates a need for the institution to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. This commitment should be reflected in policies, practices, and resources allocated to promote a more inclusive environment for all members of the university community.

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