Original Article

Leadership Empathy and Employee Retention in Health Sector NGOs in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Employee turnover undermines the achievement of organizational goals. Retaining talented employees is a significant challenge for many health sector non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and it threatens their sustainability. Previous studies have been conducted to determine the causes of employee turnover in Kenya; however, there is inadequate empirical evidence regarding the correlation between emotional intelligence competencies and employee retention. This study aimed to determine the impact of leadership empathy on employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. The study was conducted based on Bar-On's Emotional Intelligence Competencies Model. Positivism was the philosophical foundation of this descriptive design study. The analysis unit included 30 health sector NGOs in Kenya, while the observation unit included 1,500 management-level employees. The Yamane formula was used to determine the study sample size, which consisted of 316 respondents. A stratified random sampling technique was implemented to determine the sample. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect the study data. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (version 26) was used for data analysis, where descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. The findings are presented in tables and figures and prose form. We found a positive influence, indicating that increased empathy enhanced employee retention. Therefore, we concluded that leadership empathy is positively and significantly correlated with employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. Managers and supervisors in health sector NGOs should receive training and development programs to enhance their empathy skills. Additionally, health sector NGOs should provide workshops, seminars, and coaching sessions that emphasize developing leadership empathy skills through active listening, perspective-taking, and genuine concern for others.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of the workforce to the foundation and success of any organization cannot be understated. While attracting the appropriate employees to an organization may be difficult, organizations find it increasingly challenging to retain them (Chitra, 2020). Although employees who depart an organization may be physically replaced by recruiting new personnel, their skills and tacit knowledge cannot be entirely replaced, as everyone possesses a unique set of skills and experience. This underscores the need to retain crucial talent for the organization.

Several factors contribute to employee retention. Leadership effectiveness is critical in all organizations, as staff tends to abandon leaders rather than organizations (Beardwell et al., 2020). Therefore, organizations cannot entrust employee retention responsibility to human resource departments. Leaders must possess qualities and characteristics that induce subordinates to remain with the organization and willingly contribute their knowledge, skills, and abilities. A previous study has demonstrated the vital role of leadership in influencing the intention of an employee to stay on a job (Vecchio, 2021). The relationship between employees and their immediate supervisor or the leader is one of the most critical in a professional setting. The quality of the relationship an employee has with their immediate managers significantly influences the length of their stay in an organization (Ferreira, 2019, as cited in Michael, 2020).

A previous study reported that the emotional intelligence (EI) of a leader significantly influences the outcomes of employees, including their job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job stress (Antonakis, 2019). Leaders who can effectively make decisions in stressful situations and empathize with the needs of their colleagues and clients to achieve optimal outcomes are sought by employers (Ciarrochi, & Scott, 2019). Therefore, while technical competencies and intelligence are valuable assets for all employees, emotional intelligence in leadership becomes equally or more important when the job involves management and leadership. A previous global study on leadership EI and intelligent quotient (IQ) selection decisions in hiring managers reported that 71% of hiring managers ranked leadership EI as more significant than IQ in their hiring and promotion decisions, while 59% of hiring managers stated that they would not hire an individual with low leadership EI and high IQ (Barling et al., 2020). This study aimed to build on this body of knowledge by assessing the impact of leadership empathy on employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Employee turnover is a primary challenge in the humanitarian sector, significantly leading to poor performance and compromised sustainability (Jimma Zone's Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations' Forum (2021) report). In Kenya's health sector, NGOs experience an alarming annual staff attrition rate of 26%, severely hindering their efficacy (The

National Council of NGOs Kenya Report (2017)). This sector is dominated by NGOs that provide primary health, community outreach, program management, health emergencies, and humanitarian services. Notably, the private sector and non-profit service providers employ over 70% of doctors and more than 45% of available nurses in Kenya (Kioi et al., 2019).

Despite their importance, health sector NGOs face numerous challenges that affect employee morale and retention. These include inadequate compensation compared to other sectors due to limited financial resources (Wang'ombe, 2019), heavy workloads, long hours, and restricted opportunities for professional development (Wamai, 2019). Furthermore, donor funds are often restricted to specific project deliverables, leaving little room for staff development. This situation is compounded by poor work-life balance, which contributes to high employee turnover rates (Thuku et al., 2021). The negative impact of turnover extends beyond human resource challenges, affecting financial resources and the success of project implementation (Njeri et al., 2020).

Understanding the specific challenges related to staff retention in public health NGOs is crucial for developing targeted strategies that enhance employee satisfaction and promote organizational stability. Factors such as burnout (Akinyi, 2019), negative organizational culture (Waweru, 2021), and the emotional intelligence of leadership (Antonakis et al., 2019) significantly influence job satisfaction and retention outcomes. This study aimed to investigate the effect of leadership empathy on staff retention in public health NGOs in Kenya, providing actionable recommendations for improving workforce stability and performance in these vital sectors.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the effect of leadership empathy on employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya.

- To establish the moderating effect of organization culture on the relationship between leadership empathy and employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Bar-On's Emotional Intelligence (EI) Competencies Model

Bar-On (1997) proposed that EI is a collection of interconnected behaviors derived from emotional and social competencies that influence performance and behavior. Bar-On's model comprises five scales: self-perception, self-expression, interpersonal skills, decision-making, and stress management (Chankova et al., 2019). Bar-On developed 15 measurable sub-scales for this model: self-regard, self-actualization, emotional self-awareness, emotional expression, assertiveness, independence, interpersonal relationship, empathy, social responsibility, problem-solving, reality testing, impulse control, flexibility, stress tolerance, and optimism, which are responsible for human behavior and relationships (Bordage et al., 2020).

Bar-On postulates that emotional and social intelligence is the ability to effectively understand and articulate oneself, to relate well with others, and to cope effectively with daily demands, challenges, and pressures (Faltas, 2020). The theory, therefore, guided the study in understanding the effect of leadership empathy on employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. Bar-On postulates that leaders with high empathy understand the emotions, needs, and perspectives of their team members. This understanding allows them to establish a more profound connection with their team, foster positive relationships, and establish trust. This can subsequently boost morale and motivation. Employees are considerably more productive, committed, and engaged when they perceive that they are understood and encouraged. Additionally, leaders foster a positive work environment where team members experience respect, appreciation, and encouragement. This can reduce attrition rates, increase loyalty, and increase job satisfaction.

The early work of Darwin on the significance of emotional expression for survival and adaptation (1872/1965) has influenced the ongoing development of the Bar-On model, which emphasizes the importance of emotional expression and interprets the outcome of emotionally and socially intelligent behavior in Darwinian terms of effective adaptation (Bar-On, 1997).

Schein's Theory of Organizational Culture

Schein (1985) developed an impactful theory of organizational culture, which comprises three interrelated levels: artifacts, espoused values, and shared basic assumptions. Artefacts represent the superficial aspect of organizational culture, comprising tangible and readily observable manifestations, including products, physical environments, language, technology, clothing, myths and stories, published values, rituals, and ceremonies (Nguyen et al., 2017). Iqbal *et al.* (2018) reported that the artefacts present in the organizational environment constitute the climate of the organization and are inherently ambiguous. Observers must acquire evidence of their existence before better comprehending the artefacts. Only after an observer has resided within the organization for an extended period and has gained a better understanding of its artefacts. Only at that instance can an analysis of the espoused values and beliefs be undertaken, which is the next level of organizational culture.

Espoused beliefs and values include strategies, goals, shared perceptions and assumptions, norms, beliefs, and values instilled by founders and leaders. Indiya *et al.* (2021) reported that the espoused beliefs and values of an organization predict observable behaviors at the artefact level. The strategies, goals, and philosophies represent the espoused values or justifications for actions in the organization. The behaviors demonstrate the espoused values to observers. However, inconsistencies may exist between some espoused values and the exhibited behaviors. The discrepancies stem from a deeper level of thought and perception influencing the observable behaviors. One must analyze the deeper level of underlying assumptions to comprehensively understand the organizational culture.

Conceptual Framework

This study's independent variable was empathy, while the dependent variable was employee retention. Organizational culture was the moderating variable as follows:

Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework

Leadership Empathy
- Active listening
- Genuine concern for others
- Perspective-taking

Employee Retention
- Intention to leave survey
- Intention to stay survey
- Manager effectiveness survey.

Dependent Variable

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

Organization culture
- Values and beliefs
- Leadership behaviors
- work environment

Moderating Variable
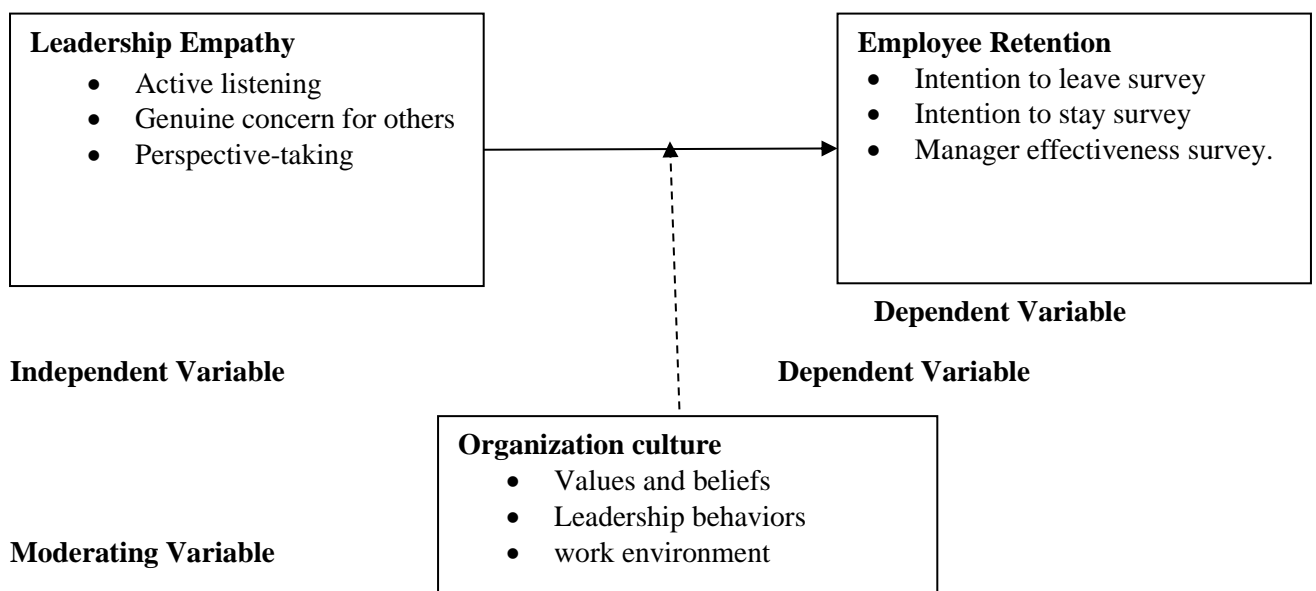
Leadership Empathy

Leadership empathy is the ability to understand and appreciate the emotions and views of others (Negoro, & Wibowo, 2021). It is the ability to recognize the feelings, anxieties, pleasures, and needs of another individual without necessarily experiencing those emotions personally. Empathy allows individuals to establish emotional connections, exhibiting compassion, understanding, and sensitivity toward their thoughts and emotions. Interpersonal relationships, communication, and social interaction are significantly influenced by empathy. Additionally, empathy fosters trust, connection, and mutual understanding among individuals, thereby facilitating the development of stronger relationships and more effective resolution of conflicts and challenges. Empathy contributes to prosocial behaviors, including compassion, generosity, and cooperation, as individuals are more inclined to act in a manner that benefits others when they can empathize with their experiences and needs. Active listening, genuine concern for others, and perspective-taking are components of empathy (Naveed *et al.*, 2020)

Active listening is an essential component of empathy. It involves fully engaging with another person during communication by concentrating on their words, understanding their message, and exhibiting empathy through verbal and nonverbal responses. It extends beyond the mere act of hearing words to include understanding the emotions, intentions, and underlying needs of the speaker. Demonstrating genuine interest in the perspective of the speaker and providing undivided attention are essential components of active listening. This entails minimizing distractions, maintaining eye contact, and facing the speaker to indicate their words are valued and respected. Individuals strive to understand the emotions, experiences, and viewpoints of the speaker through active listening. They are attentive to the tone of voice, body language, and other nonverbal cues that convey emotional nuances in addition to the spoken words. Listeners demonstrate their capacity for understanding and connection by empathizing with the emotions and experiences of the speaker (Uchenna, & Nkechi, 2020).

Genuine concern for others is sincere and authentic caring for the emotions, needs, and well-being of others. It involves a passionate desire to alleviate their suffering, support their happiness, and promote their overall welfare. Genuine concern extends beyond mere politeness or social obligation; it stems from a profound sense of empathy and compassion for the experiences and struggles of others (Igoki, 2021). Individuals who possess a genuine concern for others exhibit empathy in their interactions, actively listening to the concerns of others, offering support, and demonstrating compassion and understanding. They prioritize the needs of others and are willing to make sacrifices to help alleviate their pain or address their challenges. Genuine concern involves regarding others with respect, dignity, and care, acknowledging their humanity, and being emotionally attuned to them (Oponi, & Agu-Gyamfi, 2019).

Perspective-taking is the cognitive ability to understand and evaluate the thoughts, emotions, convictions, and experiences of others from their perspective. It involves mentally transitioning into the footsteps of another individual, imagining their circumstances, and seeing the world through their perspective. Individuals can understand the motivations, emotions, and context of others through perspective-taking (Kurgat, & Kamaara, 2022).

Organization Culture

Organizational culture is the shared values, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and behaviors that define an organization and shape its identity and operation. It includes the unwritten rules and expectations that govern how members of the organization interact with one another, make decisions, and behave in their roles. Organizational culture is often described as the "personality" or "DNA" of an organization because it influences the overall work

environment, employee morale, and organizational performance (Shoaib et al., 2023)

Values and beliefs are central to organizational culture, serving as guiding principles for decision-making and behavior. Values are fundamental beliefs that shape the identity of an organization and define its purpose. They frequently embody ideals including integrity, accountability, innovation, and customer service excellence. However, beliefs are the shared assumptions and convictions held by members of the organization that influence their attitudes and behaviors. When values and beliefs are aligned, they form a solid foundation for organizational culture, fostering employee purpose, unity, and direction (Iqbal et al., 2019).

Empirical Literature Review

Leadership Empathy and Employee Retention

Negoro, & Wibowo (2021) investigated empathetic leadership, job satisfaction, and intention to quit among millennials in a startup industry, using needs satisfaction as a mediating variable. The cross-sectional study collected data from 137 millennial employees of startup companies in Indonesia. They found that empathetic leadership has a direct and positive relationship with the employee's job satisfaction and a direct and negative relationship with the employee's intention to quit.

Uchenna, & Nkechi (2020) conducted a study on empathy and interpersonal relations in service industries in Nigeria. The study enrolled 167 staff from selected deposit-taking financial institutions, and the Taro Yamane formula was used to derive the sample size of 118. They found that self-awareness is positively and significantly correlated with empathy toward colleagues in the organization, and social skills are positively and significantly associated with improved teamwork.

Oponi, & Agu-Gyamfi (2019) investigated the impact of empathy on service quality and customer satisfaction in the Ghanaian telecommunications sector. The quantitative study included employees and customers of the six major telecommunication firms in Ghana. They found that service quality and customer satisfaction are significantly increased by empathy.

Kurgat, & Kamaara (2022) studied the relationship between leadership empathy competencies and employee retention among NGOs in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The descriptive study included 623 employees at different managerial levels working with NGOs in Kenya. They found that empathy skills influence employee retention among the NGOs.

Igoki (2021) examined the relationship between empathy and employee engagement in public universities in Kenya. The exploratory study included managers and employees of the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Egerton University, and Jomo Kenyatta University of Technology. The study found a positive relationship between empathy and employee engagement in all the universities.

Organization Culture

Shoaib et al. (2023) researched on the impact of organizational culture and compensation on job satisfaction and employee retention in Karachi. The study reported a significant positive correlation between compensation, job satisfaction, and employee retention. Organizational Culture substantially and directly influences Job Satisfaction, while Compensation positively influences employee retention through the mediating effect of Job Satisfaction. The study concluded that compensation has a significant positive effect on Job Satisfaction, while Organizational Culture has a considerable positive impact on Job Satisfaction. Job Satisfaction has a significant positive effect on Employee Retention, while compensation and Organizational Culture positively affect Employee Retention through the Job Satisfaction mediation.

Iqbal et al. (2019) reported that organizational culture, benefits, and salary significantly impact job satisfaction. The study concluded that

organizational culture, benefits, and compensation are suitable to raise job satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design to establish the effect of leadership empathy on employee retention among health sector NGOs in Kenya. This method allowed for the collection of information by asking the respondents questions using the standard procedure of questioning aimed at identifying the association between the variables (Saunders et al., 2019).

Research Philosophy

Positivism was the philosophical foundation for this study, which was accomplished through qualitative and quantitative data to attain triangulation. This philosophy is advantageous because it does not limit the ability of an individual to select between positivism and interpretivism based on methods, logic, and epistemology (Creswell, 2020).

Target Population

Management and non-management employees in health sector NGOs in Kenya were the targeted population. The analysis unit consisted of 30 health sector NGOs in Kenya, and the observation unit consisted of management and non-management level employees. This study included 1,500 employees at various managerial and non-managerial levels working with 30 health sector NGOs. According to Z Central, the staffing ratios range from 4:1 for direct reports to a senior manager and 20:1 in an administrative area (Mugenda, & Mugenda, 2019). Therefore, the study population was distributed in a ratio of 1:4:20.

Table 3.1. Target Population

Category	Population	Proportion (%)
Top-level management	60	4
Middle-level management	240	16
Non-management/direct report	1,200	80
Total	**1,500**	**100**

Source: HRM Records (2021)

Sampling Frame

A sampling frame from which a sample was selected included 1,500 management-level employees working in health sector NGOs in Kenya.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study used the Yamane (1967) formula at a 95% confidence interval to determine the sample size. The formula was as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where;

n = is the desired sample size

N = is the population size (1,500)

e = is the margin of error (at 95% confidence interval

Therefore, the sample size was;

$$N = \frac{1500}{1 + 1500 \times 0.05^2} = 315.7894737$$

Therefore, using the Yamane (1967) formula, the sample size was 316 respondents, representing 21.05% of the target population. This was a representative sample size, using Mugenda, & Mugenda's (2019) definition of a representative sample as a sample representing approximately 10%–50% of the study population. Creswell (2020) emphasized the need to select a sample from a sample frame. Thus, the sample used in this study was selected from a sampling frame.

Table 3.2. Sample Size

Category	Population	Sample
Top-level management	60	13
Middle-level management	240	51
Non-management/direct report	1,200	252
Total	**1,500**	**316**

Data Collection Instruments

Semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect information from the respondents. Kothari, & Garg (2019) reported that structured questionnaires best suit a descriptive study because of their ease of use and fewer required skills. The questionnaire comprised open- and closed-ended questions.

Pilot Test

The pilot study included 24 pilot test participants, representing 10% of the sample. The sample was appropriate, using Sim's (2019) definition that 1% to 10% of the study sample size is adequate for a pilot test. The pilot group was selected randomly from two agricultural development NGOs in Kenya.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained a letter of confirmation from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology for the collection of data. A research permit was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation. Additionally, the researcher recruited and trained two research assistants to distribute and collect the questionnaires. The researcher administered questionnaires to each respondent of the study individually. The study maintained a register of the questionnaires issued and those returned to ensure that the questionnaires given to the research assistant were returned, ensuring that care and control were maintained.

The research assistants collected the questionnaires after one week, and the data were collected using the drop-off and pick-up-later method. This provided the respondents with sufficient time to answer the questions. The researcher used this method because of the variation in the time availability of respondents and the geographical spread of the selected health sector NGOs.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The questionnaires were referenced, and the data were coded to allow it to be entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (version 26). Quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Descriptive statistics techniques were used to analyze the quantitative data, while content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data presented in prose form. The data were initially coded and grouped as per the variables before analysis.

Inferential analysis was used to test the hypothesis in the study, and correlation and regression analyses were used for data analysis. The beta coefficients were used to compare the strength of the dependent and independent variables. Data are presented using tables, figures, graphs, frequency tables, pie charts, histograms, frequency polygons, and bar charts.

Multiple regression models were fitted on the data to determine how the predictor/independent variables affected the response/dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis was used in this study because of its ability to predict the response variable by using the predictor variables (Mugenda, & Mugenda, 2019).

DESCRIPTIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

Leadership Empathy

The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with various statements. Table 4.1 summarizes the findings. The respondents generally concurred with the statements regarding active listening, as indicated by an average mean of 3.843 (standard deviation

[SD] = 0.949). Specifically, they concurred with the statements that their managers make a conscious effort to listen attentively to others without interrupting or judging (M = 3.948; SD = 0.907); demonstrate understanding and empathy by paraphrasing and reflecting on what others have said (M = 3.776; SD = 0.937); and pay attention to nonverbal cues, including facial expressions and body language, to understand the emotions and perspectives of others. (M = 3.776; SD = 1.009). The findings underscore the importance of paying attention, indicating interest, and withholding judgment. The findings are consistent with those of Wang et al., (2020), who demonstrated that the ability of leaders to actively listen to their junior employees and provide support based on an understanding of needs and feelings reflects a fundamental aspect of ethical leadership. Hackman (2019) reported the significance of being available and caring for others, as it enhances relationships and builds a supportive organizational culture. Kemper (2020) observed that effective leaders prioritize active listening of their team members, thereby fostering trust and collaboration.

The respondents generally agreed with the statements on genuine concern for others, as demonstrated by an average mean of 3.885 (SD = 0.850). Specifically, they agreed that managers in their organization genuinely care about their well-being and happiness, including their colleagues (M = 3.879; SD = 0.839), take the time to check in with others and offer support or assistance when needed, even if it is outside of their immediate responsibilities (M = 3.879; SD = 0.900); and they demonstrate empathy and compassion toward others who are going through difficult times, offering a listening ear and emotional support (M = 3.897; SD = 0.810). Offering genuine concern for others in an organization is essential in fostering a positive work environment, promoting employee well-being, and driving organizational success. (Edmondson, 2019). Employees feel valued and supported, which enhances their morale and commitment to their work and the organization.

Engaged employees are more inclined to be productive, motivated, and loyal, leading to higher job satisfaction and retention (Kemper, 2020). Additionally, genuine concern from managers creates a foundation of trust and rapport between leaders and their team members. Employees feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, concerns, and ideas, knowing their manager genuinely cares about their well-being (Litwin, & Stringer, 2019).

The respondents generally agreed with the statements regarding perspective-taking, as demonstrated by an average mean of 3.730 (SD = 0.985). Specifically, the findings revealed that the respondents agreed that their managers could put themselves in the position of others and see situations from their perspective, understanding their thoughts, emotions, and motivations (M = 3.828; SD = 0.920); managers consider the backgrounds, experiences, and cultural differences of others when interpreting their behavior or responses (M = 3.776; SD = 1.009); and managers actively seek out diverse viewpoints and opinions, recognizing the value of different perspectives in enhancing their understanding of complex issues (M = 3.586; SD = 1.027). The study results are consistent with those of Goleman (2019), who reported that perspective-taking allows managers to understand better the viewpoints, concerns, and needs of their team members. Managers can communicate more effectively, tailor their messages to resonate with diverse audiences, and address potential misunderstandings or conflicts before they escalate by actively listening and considering different perspectives; according to Litwin, & Stringer (2019), managers who engage in perspective-taking are better equipped to make informed and inclusive decisions. Managers can weigh the potential impact of their decisions more thoroughly and make choices that are fair, equitable, and aligned with the goals and values of the organization by considering various viewpoints and gathering input from different stakeholders (Wanget al., 2020).

Table 4. 1. Descriptive Statistics on Leadership Empathy Skills

Statements	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	Mean	Std. Dev.
Active Listening (*a foundational communication skill that involves fully engaging with a speaker, verbally and nonverbally, to understand their message accurately and empathetically)* in my organization:							
I consciously try to listen attentively to others without interrupting or judging.	1.7	6.9	12.1	53.4	15	3.948	0.907
I demonstrate understanding and empathy by paraphrasing and reflecting what others have said.	3.4	6.9	15.5	56.9	17.2	3.776	0.937
I pay attention to nonverbal cues, including facial expressions and body language, to fully understand the emotions and perspectives of others.	5.2	6.9	12.1	56.9	19.0	3.776	1.009
Average Score						**3.843**	**0.949**
Genuine concern for others (A *heartfelt and authentic empathy that drives individuals to care deeply about the well-being, feelings, and needs of those around them.).* In my organization:							
I genuinely care about the well-being and happiness of those around me, including my colleagues.	5.2	1.7	5.2	75.9	12.1	3.879	0.839
I take the time to check in with others and offer support or assistance when needed, even if it is outside of my immediate responsibilities.	1.7	8.6	10.3	58.6	20.7	3.879	0.900
I demonstrate empathy and compassion toward others going through difficult times, offering a listening ear and emotional support.	1.7	5.2	12.1	63.8	17.2	3.897	0.810
Average Score						**3.885**	**0.850**
Perspective-taking (*The cognitive ability to step into the position of another person, see the world from their viewpoint, and understand their thoughts, feelings, and experiences as if they were your own.)* In my organization:							
I can put myself in the position of others and see situations from their perspective, understanding their thoughts, feelings, and motivations.	5.2	12.1	13.8	56.9	12.1	3.586	1.027
I consider the backgrounds, experiences, and cultural differences of others when interpreting their behavior or responses.	5.2	6.9	12.1	56.9	19.0	3.776	1.009
I actively seek out diverse viewpoints and opinions, recognizing the value of different perspectives in enhancing my understanding of complex issues.	1.7	8.6	15.5	53.4	20.7	3.828	0.920
Average Score						**3.730**	**0.985**

Organizational Culture

The second objective of the study was to determine the moderating effect of organizational culture on the relationship between leadership empathy skills and employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. The study aimed to collect data on organizational culture from organizational leaders. Three metrics were implemented to assess organizational culture: values and beliefs, Leadership behaviors, and work environment. Table 4.2 summarizes the findings.

The respondents generally affirmed their understanding of the core values of the organization and fundamental beliefs (M = 4.103, SD = 0.765), their knowledge of the company mission and vision statement (M = 3.845, SD =

0.670), and their commitment to maintaining ethical standards and integrity (M = 3.793, SD = 0.720). The findings indicate that values and beliefs function as guiding principles that define the identity and purpose of an organization. They offer ethical guidance for employees, directing their actions and decisions following the mission and objectives of the organization. Their findings are consistent with those of Antonioni (2015), who reported that values and beliefs shape the organizational culture and influence employee norms, attitudes, and behaviors. A strong values-driven culture fosters unity, cohesion, and a sense of belonging, enhancing employee engagement and retention. Noe (2020) reported that values and beliefs provide a framework for organizational decision-making. Within situations involving choices or dilemmas, employees may consult the values of the organization to make ethical and consistent decisions that align with its principles and priorities.

The respondents generally agreed that organizational leaders are responsible and accountable for their actions (M = 3.814, SD = 0.773). The respondents generally agreed that employees participate in the organization's decision-making processes (M = 3.672, SD = 0.906). The respondents generally agreed that they are satisfied with the level of leadership flexibility and adaptability in their organization (M = 3.562, SD = 1.191). The findings revealed that leaders establish the organizational atmosphere through their actions, attitudes, and behaviors. Their conduct exemplifies a model for employees to emulate, influencing the organizational culture and norms. Noe (2017) reported that effective leadership behaviors, including fostering open communication, providing support, and acknowledging achievements, can improve employee engagement. Engaged employees are more committed, motivated, and productive, improving performance and outcomes. Additionally, influential leaders prioritize the development and growth of their team members. They offer feedback, coaching, and mentorship to assist employees in improving their skills, capabilities, and confidence. Investing in employee development enhances the organization's talent pipeline and facilitates succession planning.

The respondents generally agreed that their workload is manageable and allows them to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life (M = 3.631, SD = 0.814). The respondents agreed that their organization offers wellness programs to support the physical and mental well-being of the employees (M = 3.648, SD = 0.907). The respondents generally agreed that the organization actively promotes diversity and inclusion in the workplace (M = 3.576, SD = 0.937). Iqbal et al. (2019) indicated that a positive work environment increases employee satisfaction and engagement. When employees feel valued, respected, and supported, they are more inclined to be loyal to the organization and less likely to seek opportunities elsewhere. A conducive work environment can increase productivity and performance. Good lighting, comfortable workspace, and ergonomic furniture can enhance focus, concentration, and efficiency. A supportive culture promoting collaboration and teamwork can also lead to better outcomes (Shoaib et al., 2023).

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics on Organization Culture

Statements	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	Mean	Std. Dev.
Values and beliefs (*are fundamental aspects of our identities and shape how we perceive the world, make decisions, and interact with others*)							
In my organization							
I have a clear understanding of the company's mission and vision statement	3.4	1.7	5.2	86.2	3.4	3.845	0.670

Statements	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	Mean	Std. Dev.
I have a clear understanding of the organization's core values and fundamental beliefs.	1.7	3.4	3.4	65.5	25.9	4.103	0.765
I am committed to upholding ethical standards and integrity	3.4	1.7	12.1	77.6	5.2	3.793	0.720
Average Score						**3.914**	**0.718**
Leadership behaviors (*encompass the actions, traits, and characteristics exhibited by individuals in positions of leadership*) In my organization:							
Employees are involved in the decision-making process in the organization	5.2	1.7	25.9	55.2	12.1	3.672	0.906
Leaders in the organization are responsible and accountable for their actions	1.7	3.4	5.2	51.0	38.6	3.814	0.773
I am satisfied with the level of leadership flexibility and adaptability in our organization	10.3	8.6	17.2	52.1	11.7	3.562	1.191
Average Score						**3.683**	**0.957**
Work Environment (*refers to the overall atmosphere, culture, and conditions within a workplace that influence employees' attitudes, behaviors, and performance*) In my organization							
My workload is manageable and allows me to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life.	1.7	5.2	10.3	63.8	19.0	3.631	0.814
The organization offers wellness programs to support employees' physical and mental well-being.	1.7	6.9	12.1	53.4	25.9	3.648	0.907
The organization actively promotes diversity and inclusion in the workplace.	3.4	6.9	15.5	56.9	17.2	3.576	0.937
Average Score						**3.678**	**0.965**

Employee Retention

Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with various statements on their intention to leave. Table 4.2 summarizes the findings, which revealed that the respondents generally disagreed that they were considering leaving their current position within the next few years (M = 2.017; SD = 0.783); they generally disagreed with the statement that they have actively started looking for new job opportunities (M = 2.035; SD = 0.794). Furthermore, the respondents were generally diagnosed as dissatisfied with their current role and actively explored other career options (M = 2.138; SD = 0.782). The respondents generally did not believe they would be happier and more fulfilled in a different job or organization (M = 2.121; SD = 0.860). The respondents generally disagreed with the statement indicating that they are experiencing a lack of growth or advancement opportunities in their current role (M = 2.052; SD = 0.981). The respondents generally disagreed that they felt undervalued or unappreciated in their current workplace (M = 1.966; SD = 0.898). The respondents generally disagreed that they are experiencing high levels of stress or burnout in their current position (M = 1.966; SD = 0.991). The respondents generally disagreed that they face work-life balance challenges in their current role (M = 2.086; SD = 0.923).

The respondents were requested to indicate their agreement or disagreement with various statements on intention to stay as a measure of employee retention. Table 4.8 summarizes the findings. The respondents generally agreed that they were committed to remaining with their current organization for the foreseeable future (M = 4.035; SD = 0.917) and that they had no immediate plans to leave their current position or employer (M = 4.086; SD = 0.884). Furthermore, they generally expressed satisfaction with their current role and were not actively seeking other job opportunities (M = 4.121; SD = 0.938). Generally, they saw ample growth and advancement opportunities within their current organization (M = 4.052; SD = 0.782) and were

fulfilled and engaged in their work, therefore did not see the need to explore other career options (M = 4.103; SD = 0.852); they generally exhibit a strong sense of loyalty to their current employer, and they have invested in the success of the organization (M = 3.845; SD = 1.005). Respondents generally agreed that they felt valued and appreciated in their current workplace and were motivated to contribute to its goals (M = 4.017; SD = 0.964). Generally, the respondents felt they have a positive relationship with their colleagues and enjoy working as part of the team (M = 3.897; SD = 0.949). Generally, they were satisfied with the organizational culture and work environment in their current workplace (M = 3.982; SD = 0.848).

The study collected data from non-management employees on their views of their relationship with their managers and supervisors. Table 4.8 summarizes the findings. Respondents generally agreed that their manager communicates performance expectations (M = 4.058; SD = 1.041); they generally agreed that their manager encourages them to take on new challenges and pursue new organizational opportunities (M = 4.035; SD = 0.858). Furthermore, the respondents generally agreed that their manager treats them respectfully and demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior (M = 3.983; SD = 0.964). The respondents generally agreed that their manager encourages a healthy work-life balance and cares for their well-being (M = 3.966; SD = 0.936). The respondents agreed that managers promote creativity and innovation (M = 3.776; SD = 0.937).

Table 4.2. Descriptive Statistics on Employee Retention

Statement	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	Mean	Std. Dev.
Intention to Leave							
I am considering leaving my current position within the next few years	1.7	35.2	3.4	19.0	20.7	2.017	0.783
I have actively started looking for new job opportunities	1.7	35.7	13.8	16.9	25.9	2.035	0.794
I feel dissatisfied with my current role and am exploring other career options	1.7	37.7	28.6	16.9	31.0	2.138	0.782
I would be happier and more fulfilled in a different job or organization	1.7	45.2	5.2	15.2	32.8	2.121	0.860
I am experiencing a lack of growth or advancement opportunities in my current role	25.2	31.7	8.6	11.7	32.8	2.052	0.981
I am feeling undervalued or unappreciated in my current workplace	1.7	26.9	30.3	15.2	25.9	1.966	0.898
I am experiencing high levels of stress or burnout in my current position	11.7	22.1	33.4	13.4	19.3	1.966	0.991
I am facing challenges with work-life balance in my current role	13.4	35.2	11.7	18.6	21.0	2.086	0.923
Aggregate						**2.014**	**0.971**
Intention to stay							
I am committed to remaining with my current organization for the foreseeable future	1.7	8.6	3.4	56.9	29.3	4.035	0.917
I have no immediate plans to leave my current position or employer	1.7	6.9	3.4	56.9	31.0	4.086	0.884
I feel satisfied with my current role and am not seeking other job opportunities	1.7	8.6	1.7	51.7	36.2	4.121	0.938
I believe there are ample growth and advancement opportunities for me within my current organization	1.7	1.7	12.1	58.6	25.9	4.052	0.782
I am fulfilled and engaged in my work and do not feel the need to explore other career options	1.7	5.2	5.2	56.9	31.0	4.103	0.852

Statement	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	Mean	Std. Dev.
I have a strong sense of loyalty to my current employer and am invested in its success	3.4	10.3	6.9	56.9	22.4	3.845	1.005
I feel valued and appreciated in my current workplace and am motivated to contribute to its goals	3.4	6.9	3.4	56.9	29.3	4.017	0.964
I have a positive relationship with my colleagues and enjoy working as part of this team	3.4	5.2	13.8	53.4	24.1	3.897	0.949
I am satisfied with the organizational culture and work environment in my current workplace	3.4	3.4	5.2	67.2	20.7	3.982	0.848
Aggregate Score						**3.865**	**0.943**
Manager Effectiveness Survey							
My manager communicates performance expectations	3.4	3.4	13.8	51.7	27.6	4.058	1.041
My manager encourages me to take on new challenges and pursue organizational opportunities.	3.4	6.9	5.2	56.9	27.6	4.035	0.858
My manager treats me with respect and demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior	5.2	5.2	3.4	50.0	36.2	3.983	0.964
My manager encourages a healthy work-life balance and takes care of our well-being.	3.4	1.7	8.6	60.3	25.9	3.966	0.936
My manager constantly encourages creativity and innovation	3.4	6.9	15.5	56.9	17.2	3.776	0.937
Aggregate Score						**3.744**	**0.989**

Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the predictor and response variables. The study findings reveal a positive and significant correlation between leadership empathy and employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya ($r = 0.801$; $P = 0.000$). According to Pearson, when $r = \pm 0.5$ and above, there is a strong relationship between the two variables under consideration. This implies that higher empathy can lead to increased employee retention. The findings are consistent with those of Bello (2021), who concluded that when leaders and colleagues demonstrate empathy, they build trust and rapport with employees. Employees feel that their concerns, feelings, and experiences are genuinely understood and acknowledged, leading to stronger bonds and relationships within the workplace.

Table 4.3. Correlation Analysis

		Employee Retention	Empathy
Leadership employee retention	Pearson correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	232	
Empathy	Pearson correlation	.801**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	232	232

Univariate Regression Analysis

Univariate regression analysis was used to test the research hypothesis. The predictive power of the model was based on R^2, while F-statistic was used to determine the fitness of the model at $p < 0.05$. The significance of the study variables was based on p-values at 0.05 significance level. The tested null hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis 1

Ho_1: Leadership empathy has a non-significant effect on employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya.

Test for Hypothesis One

The study aimed to investigate the effect of leadership empathy on employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. The associated null hypothesis was that empathy has a non-significant impact on employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. A univariate analysis was conducted to test the null hypothesis.

Correlation coefficient (R) analysis was used to measure the intensity and direction of the relationship between the predictor and outcome variables. Herein, R = .843 suggests a strong positive relationship between leadership empathy and the outcome variable (employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya). The coefficient of determination (R square) was used to indicate the proportion of variance in the outcome variable that the predictor variable can explain. Herein, R Square = .295 indicates that leadership empathy accounted for 29.5% of the variation in employee retention among health sector NGOs in Kenya.

The remaining 70.5% variation in employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya indicates that other important factors affect the outcome variable. Additional research may be necessary to identify these factors and enhance the predictive accuracy of the model.

Table 4.4. Model Summary for Leadership Empathy

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
1	.543[a]	.295	.296	.44086

a. Predictors: (constant) leadership empathy

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether the regression model was a suitable fit for the data. The ANOVA (Table 4.5) reveals that the study found that Prob > F (1, 230) = 0.000 was less than the selected 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the model as it was constituted was fit to predict employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. Furthermore, the F-calculated, from the table (30.87), was more significant than the F-critical, from the F-distribution tables (3.882), supporting the findings that empathy can be used to predict employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya.

Table 4.5. ANOVA for Leadership Empathy

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	5.742	1	5.742	30.87	.000[b]
1	Residual	42.68	230	.186		
	Total	48.422	231			

a. Dependent Variable: employee retention in health sector NGOs
b. Predictors: (Constant), leadership empathy

From the results in Table 4.6, the following regression model was fitted.

$Y = 1.161 + 0.812 X_2$

(X$_2$ is Leadership Empathy)

The coefficient results revealed that the constant exhibited a coefficient of 1.161, indicating that if leadership empathy were held constant at zero, employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya would be 1.161 units. Additionally, results revealed that the leadership empathy coefficient was 0.812, indicating that a unit increase in empathy would result in an 81.2% improvement in employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. The P-value for the empathy coefficient was 0.000, which is less than the set 0.05 significance level, indicating that leadership empathy was significant.

Based on these results, the study rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative that leadership empathy has a significant positive influence on employee retention in health sector

NGOs in Kenya. These findings are consistent with those of Negoro, & Wibowo (2021), who found that leadership empathy was a significant factor in determining employee retention.

Table 4.6. Beta Coefficients for Leadership Empathy

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	**Std. error**	**beta**		
1	(Constant)	1.161	0.165		7.036	.001
	Leadership empathy	.812	.149	.743	5.435	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee retention in health sector NGOs

Test for Hypothesis Two

This study computed moderating effect regression analysis based on the second objective of the study.

Ho2: Organizational culture does not significantly moderate the relationship between leadership empathy and employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya.

The study employed stepwise regression to determine the moderating influence of organization culture (M) on the relationship between leadership empathy (X) and employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya (Y).

According to the model summary in Table 4.7, the regression analysis between leadership empathy (X) and the absence of moderator interaction yielded an R-squared value of 0.693, indicating that a 69.3% change in employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya can be attributed to changes in leadership empathy. The p-value for the initial model (0.000) was less than the selected significance level (0.05), indicating that the model was significant.

The findings in the second model, leadership empathy, organization culture, and interaction term (X × M) as predictors, yielded an r-squared value of 0.711. Incorporating organizational culture in the second model resulted in a 0.100 increase in r-squared, indicating that organizational culture positively moderates the relationship between leadership empathy and employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. This is consistent with the findings of Aibinu, & Jagboro (2018), who reported that influential organizational culture, characterized by values and beliefs, leadership behaviors, and work environment, leads to improved employee retention.

Table 4.7: Model Summary for Moderation Effect

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.832[a]	.693	.634	.39019	.612	37.814	1	230	.000
2	.844[b]	.711	.672	.36941	.100	18.085	2	229	.038

a. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Empathy

b. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Empathy, organization culture, X × M

Table 4.8 illustrates that the F-calculated for the first model was 39.54, and for the second model was 20.915. Since the F-calculated for the two models were more than the F-critical, 3.882 (first model) and 2.644 (second model), the two models fit the data well. Additionally, the p-values for both models were < 0.05, indicating they were significant. Therefore, the model could be used to predict the moderating effect of organizational culture on the relationship between leadership empathy and employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya.

Table 4.8: ANOVA for Moderation Effect

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	6.366	1	6.366	39.54	.000[b]
1	Residual	36.96	230	.161		
	Total	43.326	231			
	Regression	7.404	3	2.468	20.915	.000[c]
2	Residual	26.928	229	.118		
	Total	34.332	231			

a. Dependent Variable: employee retention in health sector NGOs
b. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Empathy
c. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Empathy, organization culture, $X \times M$

Furthermore, by substituting the beta values and the constant term from the findings of the coefficient in Table 4.9 for the first step of regression modelling, the following regression model will be fitted:

$$Y = 1.435 + 0.884\ X$$

By substituting the beta values and the constant term from model 2 emanating from the second step in regression modeling, the following regression model was fitted:

$$Y = 1.861 + 3.986\ X + 3.209\ M + 0.868\ X \times M$$

Where X is leadership empathy, M is organization culture, $X \times M$ is the interaction term between leadership empathy and organization culture, and Y is employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya.

In Model 1, the findings indicate that leadership empathy has a significant positive influence on employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya (Beta = .884, p < .05). In Model 2, the results indicate that leadership emotional intelligence (Beta = 3.989, p = .002) and organization culture (Beta = 3.209, p = .012) have significant positive effects on employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. Additionally, the interaction effect between leadership empathy and organization culture ($X \times M$) is significant and positive (Beta = .868, p = .012).

These findings suggest that effective leadership empathy and effective organization culture are important factors in enhancing employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. The positive interaction effect between leadership empathy and organizational culture indicates that effective organizational culture can amplify the positive effects of effective leadership empathy on employee retention.

Table 4.9: Beta Coefficients for Moderation Effect

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.435	.544		2.638	.002
	leadership empathy	.884	.144	.782	6.149	.000
2	(Constant)	1.861	.379		4.910	.010
	leadership empathy	3.989	1.139	3.530	3.502	.002
	Organization Culture	3.209	1.168	2.066	2.746	.012
	$X \times M$	.868	.315	3.878	2.752	.012

a. Dependent Variable: Employee retention in health sector NGOs

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership Empathy and Employee Retention

The findings of this study reveal a significant and positive relationship between leadership empathy skills and employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. Key aspects of empathetic leadership, such as active listening, emotional support, understanding diverse perspectives, and demonstrating genuine compassion, were crucial leadership behaviors that enhanced staff retention. Managers who listen attentively, demonstrate understanding and consider the backgrounds of their employees help create an environment that fosters trust, engagement, and loyalty. This study suggests that empathetic leadership is essential for health sector NGOs aiming to reduce employee turnover and enhance employee satisfaction in an already struggling sector.

Empathy

The study's null hypothesis, stating that "leadership empathy has no significant effect on employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya," was rejected. The findings demonstrated that leadership empathy is statistically significant and positively influences employee retention in these organizations. Enhancing leadership empathy among managers and leaders can lead to higher employee retention rates, as empathetic leaders are better at connecting with their teams, recognizing their needs, and providing necessary support. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies that demonstrate the importance of emotional intelligence and empathy in leadership to foster employee engagement and reduce turnover rates.

Organization Culture

The second research hypothesis examined was that 'organization culture does not significantly moderate the relationship between leadership empathy and employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. However, the study found that organizational culture significantly influences leadership emotional intelligence and employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya. The positive influence indicated that organizational culture encompassing values and beliefs, leadership behaviors, and work environment contributes to better employee retention. The study concluded that organizational culture significantly moderates the relationship between leadership empathy and employee retention in health sector NGOs in Kenya.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

The comprehensive data collection method, which included surveys and interviews, is one of the strengths of this study. This method facilitated a thorough understanding of the impact of empathy in leadership and its effects on employee retention. The focus of the study on health sector NGOs in Kenya provides specific insights relevant to this sector, helping to inform targeted leadership development strategies and policies. Additionally, the study contributes to the growing body of research on emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness by examining leadership empathy's role in employee retention.

This study employed a cross-sectional design, which did not consider changes in leadership empathy or employee retention over time. Future studies may gain from a longitudinal approach to better understand the long-term effects of empathetic leadership on employee retention. Additionally, this study used self-reported data from employees, potentially introducing bias. Employees may provide socially acceptable responses instead of reflecting on their true experiences, potentially compromising the reliability of the findings. Furthermore, the findings of the study may have limited generalizability because of its specific focus on health sector NGOs in Kenya. The results may not be directly applicable to other sectors or geographical regions, which could limit the broader applicability of this study.

Limitations of the Study

The secrecy and fear of victimization, especially on issues detrimental to the organization by the employees, limited the study. Some information

was difficult to obtain because senior managers were unwilling to release such information. The researcher used a professional approach, obtaining the relevant authorizing documents from the university and writing directly to each manager involved in the project, which helped to put many of them at ease. Some respondents were unwilling to cooperate because of their busy activities during the research. To overcome the limitation, the researcher visited the management earlier to secure a convenient time, which gave room for data collection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Health sector NGOs should provide training and development programs, including workshops, seminars, and coaching sessions focused on emotional intelligence skills for managers and leaders, focusing on empathy skills, including active listening, demonstrating genuine concern, and taking inclusive perspectives in decision-making. Enhancing leadership empathy skills will have significantly favorable effects on employee retention and reduce the costs of hiring while enhancing organizational competitive advantages through retaining outstanding human talent.

Future studies could examine the mediating variables that affect leadership empathy on employee retention, including team dynamics, motivation, and organizational structure. The study examined the moderating effect of organizational culture. Future studies could explore other moderating variables that affect employee retention.

This study employed a descriptive research design. Future studies should use mixed-method research to comprehensively understand the impact of the variables on employee performance, including focus groups and case studies.

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