

Moderating Effect of Leadership Style on the Relationship between Training and Employee Engagement among 3-4 Star Rated hotels in Kisumu County

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Abstract

The hospitality industry is a critical driver of economic growth in Kenya and relies heavily on employees to deliver exceptional service quality and maintain a competitive advantage. In Kenya, particularly within the 3–4 star hotel segment, management has increasingly invested in training and development programs to enhance employee skills, service delivery, and productivity. Training equips employees with technical and interpersonal competencies, aligns them with organizational culture, and improves adaptability in a dynamic market. However, evidence suggests that training alone does not automatically translate into high levels of engagement. The way training outcomes are supported and reinforced often depends on the leadership style within the organization. The purpose of this study was to examine the moderating role of leadership style on the relationship between training and employee engagement in 3–4 star-rated hotels in Kisumu, Kenya. The study was grounded on Kahn's theory of personal engagement. It adopted the pragmatist research approach and used explanatory concurrent research design. The target population comprised of 966 employees from 9 hotels. A sample size of 282 employees was drawn and selected using simple random sampling whereas nine (9) general managers were selected purposively. Primary data was collected using questionnaires from employees and interview schedule conducted with managers. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and hierarchical regression, whereas qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. The study revealed that training programs ($\beta=1.035$, $p=0.003$) had a significant positive effect on employee engagement. Further, the study found that leadership style had a significant moderating effect on the relationship between training ($\beta = 0.011$, $p=0.017$) and employee engagement. These quantitative findings were supported by qualitative data, which identified consistent training as key factors for keeping staff engaged. The study concluded that leadership is a moderating factor and recommended that hotels should prioritize developing consistent, structured training calendars to boost employee skill development and in turn, employee engagement.

Keywords: Training programs, employee engagement, leadership style, employee development, hotel management, 3–4 star rated hotels

Journal ISSN: 3005-513X

Issue DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69897/jofhscs.v3i2>

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Funding: The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement: The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials or upon a reasonable request.

Competing interests: The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Introduction

In Kenya's hospitality industry, a critical driver of the nation's economic growth, employee engagement is paramount for maintaining service quality and competitiveness. The ability of hotels to deliver exceptional guest experiences relies heavily on a motivated and committed workforce (Zainol et al., 2023). However, the sector faces persistent challenges with its employees. High staff turnover, job dissatisfaction, and low motivation are significant issues within Kenyan hotels, directly impeding performance and growth (Chebet et al., 2019; Onyango, Egessa & Ojera, 2022). In Kisumu County, for example, 50% of the workforce in 3–4 star rated hotels has been reported as disengaged and demotivated, resulting in reduced revenues and operational inefficiencies (Mburu et al., 2020). Such trends not only affect organizational performance but also diminish the competitiveness of the region's hospitality sector.

Al-Weshah (2019) described employee engagement as the physical, cognitive and emotional investment

employees put into their work essential for delivering exceptional service and sustaining customer loyalty. Engaged employees are more likely to exhibit discretionary effort, maintain consistent service standards, and build strong relationships with guests, which strengthens competitiveness in the market (Bermúdez-González, Sasaki & Zamora, 2016). In hotel, engaged employees are more likely to display discretionary effort, deliver consistent service, and build lasting relationships with guests, which in turn boosts competitiveness. In Kenya, particularly within the 3–4 star hotel segment, management has increasingly invested in training and development programs to enhance employee skills, service delivery, and productivity. Training equips employees with technical and interpersonal competencies, aligns them with organizational culture, and improves adaptability in a dynamic market. However, evidence suggests that training alone does not automatically translate into high levels of engagement. The way training outcomes are supported and reinforced often

depends on the leadership style within the organization.

Leadership style shapes the work environment and influencing how employees respond to training initiatives. Transformational leaders, for instance, inspire and motivate employees to exceed expectations by fostering innovation, shared vision, and a sense of purpose. They create a climate that encourages the application of newly acquired skills, thereby amplifying the benefits of training (Chitiga, 2018). Transactional leaders, on the other hand, focus on clear structures, defined roles, and performance-based rewards, which can also reinforce training outcomes through accountability and recognition (Aljumah, 2023). In contrast, autocratic leadership may stifle creativity and diminish employee initiative, while democratic leadership, although participatory, may not always provide the direction or reinforcement necessary to fully translate training into engagement (Mwambeso, 2023). Globally, studies have shown that leadership style can act as a moderating factor in the relationship between human resource development practices and employee-related outcomes (Kazmi, Alam & Malik, 2023; Alsheikh et al., 2017).

In Africa, and specifically in Kenya, research in sectors such as banking, manufacturing, and hospitality has demonstrated that leadership style can strengthen or weaken the impact of organizational initiatives on employee attitudes and performance (Anyango, 2015; Ngure, 2013; Ouko, 2022). In the hospitality sector, where service quality is highly dependent on the motivation and behavior of frontline staff, understanding this moderating role is particularly important. Kisumu County's 3–4 star hotels operate in a competitive environment where customer expectations are rising, and employee turnover remains a challenge. This environment makes it essential to not only provide quality training.

Training is a cornerstone of human resource management and a critical component of internal marketing, designed to equip employees with the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies to perform their roles effectively (Leong & Lam, 2021). In the hospitality industry, where service quality is paramount, continuous training is essential for ensuring that employees can meet and exceed guest expectations. Effective training programs have been shown to directly and positively influence employee engagement. When an organization invests in training its employees, it sends a powerful message that they are valued. This sense of being valued can increase an employee's cognitive and emotional connection to the organization, fostering higher levels of engagement (Al-Weshah, 2019). Employees who receive adequate training feel more competent and confident in their abilities, which reduces work-related stress and increases job satisfaction a key indicator of emotional engagement (Sesen & Ertan, 2022). The current study focuses on the moderating effect of leadership style on the relationship between training and employee engagement in 3–4 star rated hotels in Kisumu County. While training remains a key driver of engagement, the extent to which it translates into improved performance and commitment depends on how leaders implement, support, and reinforce it.

Literature Review

Empirical Review

Effects of Training on employee engagement

Training programs are structured interventions aimed at improving employees' professional competencies (Al-Gasawneh, AlZubi, & Saputra, 2022). Organizations adopt such initiatives to

strengthen workforce capabilities and align employee skills with operational demands (Mapelu & Jumah, 2023). By equipping staff with job-relevant knowledge and abilities, training enables them to perform daily responsibilities more effectively (Costen & Salazar, 2021). In the tourism sector, consistent training empowers employees to address skill gaps, adapt to industry changes, and deliver higher service quality (Waqanimaravu & Arasanmi, 2020). These programs may include technical modules, compliance instruction, sales techniques, or customer service enhancement (Jain & Khurana, 2017).

Effective training design begins with assessing current competencies, identifying gaps, and tailoring learning interventions to address them promptly (Al-Weshah, 2019). Beyond skill development, training improves efficiency and productivity (Brammah, 2021), nurtures positive organizational culture, enhances talent retention, and fosters job satisfaction (Khazaei Pool & Amirbakzadeh Kalati, 2017). Programs aligned with strategic goals and supported by relevant, engaging content tend to produce stronger results (Al-Majali & Tarabieh, 2020; Domínguez-Falcón & Ballesteros-Rodríguez, 2021). Incorporating interactive approaches, innovative technology, and transparent communication further strengthens participation and knowledge transfer (Çelik & Güllü, 2017; Moh'd Mansour, 2020).

Employee engagement refers to the emotional and psychological commitment individuals have toward their work and organization. Engaged employees demonstrate greater loyalty, take initiative, and often exceed performance expectations. This connection is closely linked to job satisfaction, commitment, pride, and advocacy (Lather & Jain, 2014). In competitive business environments, training is increasingly recognized as a lever for sustaining engagement and cultivating talent. Key training components influencing

engagement include opportunities for continuous learning, career advancement, and targeted skill acquisition.

Empirical studies support this link. Jain and Khurana (2017) found significant positive effects of training on multiple engagement indicators, including job satisfaction and organizational commitment, though they noted no effect on interpersonal emotional bonds. Rozaan and Sagala (2019) reported that training in the telecommunications sector strengthened engagement and commitment, with engagement moderating the commitment outcome. In the pharmaceutical industry, Rezaul Ahsan (2021) observed that training enhanced both commitment and performance, with engagement acting as a mediator between training and organizational loyalty. Similarly, Yimam (2022) identified training design, delivery style, needs assessment, and evaluation as strong drivers of engagement and performance in higher education.

In Kenya's hospitality industry, targeted training in customer service has been shown to improve staff confidence, guest-oriented behaviors, and work commitment (Sitati, Ombui & Wambugu, 2016). Malonza and Walaba (2015) reported that structured training in Kisumu County hotels improved service quality and engagement, although lack of follow-up and leadership support limited sustained impact. The presence of a supportive transfer climate where supervisors and peers encourage application of learned skills further strengthens the training-engagement link (Ratnaningsih, 2024).

However, methodological concerns persist in the literature. Many studies rely on cross-sectional surveys and self-report data, which can overstate correlations between training and engagement (Knight, Patterson & Dawson, 2017; Shiri et al., 2023). Longitudinal and experimental approaches reveal more modest but enduring effects, underscoring the value of

integrating supervisory involvement, clear transfer objectives, and behavioral outcome measurement into training design. Based on existing literature, the proposed hypothesis states that;

Hypothesis 1: *Training has no significant effect on employee engagement in three- and four-star hotels in Kisumu County.*

Moderating Effect of Leadership Style on the Relationship between Training and Employee Engagement

Leadership style shapes the extent to which training programs translate into sustained employee engagement. When leadership behaviours align with learning objectives, employees are more likely to apply new skills, remain motivated, and develop stronger emotional connections to their work (Ned & Umesi, 2023). However, if leadership is unsupportive or fails to reinforce training, any gains in skills may not lead to meaningful improvements in engagement. This moderating role where leadership style influences the strength and direction of the relationship between training and engagement has become an important focus in organizational behaviour research, particularly in service-oriented sectors like hospitality (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Kazmi, Alam & Malik, 2023; Alsheikh et al., 2017).

International studies consistently demonstrate that leadership styles can strengthen or weaken the impact of training on engagement. Meta-analyses and longitudinal studies indicate that employees who undergo training under transformational leaders report higher engagement levels compared to those under laissez-faire or purely transactional leaders (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Thanh & Quang, 2022). Transactional leadership, which focuses on clear expectations and rewards, can still facilitate training transfer, but often results in compliance-based rather than intrinsic engagement (Mota,

2024). Research in hospitality and other service sectors also shows that leadership behaviors that foster psychological safety and meaning amplify training's effect on engagement (Vakira et al., 2023; Khairy et al., 2023).

Studies identify three mechanisms through which leadership moderates the training–engagement link. First, transformational leaders create psychological meaning by framing training as personally and professionally valuable, which fosters intrinsic motivation (Jensen & Bro, 2018). Second, they shape a transfer climate that supports the application of new skills on the job (Gaviria-Rivera & López-Zapata, 2019). Third, transactional leaders may use reinforcement and accountability structures, linking training to performance evaluations, which can drive short-term engagement but sometimes limits creativity (Campbell, 2025). Leader-member exchange (LMX) quality and perceived supervisor support have also been found to mediate or interact with leadership style to influence whether training outcomes sustain over time (Proby, 2022).

Research from African contexts confirms global trends while adding insights about cultural and structural dynamics. Studies across Sub-Saharan Africa show that transformational leadership strengthens training's effect on engagement, especially when leaders actively model learned behaviors and adapt leadership practices to local cultural norms (Forka, 2012). In contexts with high power distance, employees often expect directive leadership, so combining transformational inspiration with clear structure tends to yield stronger results. However, scholars also note that resource constraints, lack of formal HR systems, and limited follow-up can blunt leadership's moderating role, making organisational support systems as important as leadership style (Kanwal, Lodhi & Kashif, 2019).

Kenyan empirical evidence hospitality studies, though fewer, suggest a similar pattern. Training programs in three- and four-star hotels improve staff competence, service delivery, and initial motivation, but long-term engagement hinges on leadership support. Managers who coach, recognize effort, and involve employees in decision-making foster higher post-training engagement compared to those who manage at arm's length. For example, participative leadership has been linked to better training transfer and higher job satisfaction in Kenyan hotels, while purely transactional approaches see training benefits fade more quickly (Omar, 2016). These findings point out the importance of leadership style as a moderator in the Kenyan hospitality context, particularly in regions like Kisumu County where service quality directly depends on engaged frontline staff. This evidence suggests that leadership style moderates the relationship between training and engagement. Based on existing literature, the proposed hypothesis states that:

Hypothesis 2: *Leadership styles have no significant moderating effects on the relationship between training and employee engagement in three- and four-star hotels in Kisumu County.*

Theoretical Review

William A. Kahn (1990) established the Kahn Theory of Personal Engagement in order to provide an explanation for the manner in which individuals meaningfully connect to their professional responsibilities through the utilization of psychological presence and engaging in self-expression. Instead of traditional theories that place an emphasis on motivation or transactional rewards, Kahn presented a human-centered model that places an emphasis on the significance of the full self, including the physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects of one's

being, in terms of driving engagement at work. When employees feel that they are able to fully immerse themselves in their responsibilities, utilizing their energy, mental attention, and emotions in a manner that is congruent with the requirements and ideals of the job, this is what Kahn (1990) refers to as personal engagement.

Psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability are the three psychological criteria that must be satisfied for engagement to take place, according to Kahn's theory (Kahn, 1990). When these requirements are met, engagement can take place. When people talk about psychological meaningfulness, they are referring to the extent to which they believe that the work they do is significant and worthwhile. Research conducted by Saks (2006) found that employees are more likely to exert themselves willingly and to the fullest extent when they perceive that the tasks they are performing are in alignment with their own beliefs, capabilities, and sense of purpose. It is the impression that one may show up at work as their own self without fear of being ridiculed, punished, or experiencing bad consequences. This is what we mean when we talk about psychological safety.

According to Kahn (1990), it gives workers the opportunity to take chances in their interpersonal relationships, express their opinions, and actively engage in the dynamics of the team without compromising their sense of self. An atmosphere that is psychologically secure encourages trust, openness, and creativity, all of which are essential for maintaining participation over an extended period of time. When we talk about an individual's psychological availability, we are referring to their preparedness to engage in professional tasks on all levels that is physically, emotionally, and psychologically. The ability of employees to

make meaningful contributions at work might be hindered when they are distracted by factors such as stress, weariness, personal worries, or emotional depletion (Kahn, 1990). Disengagement can occur when employees are distracted by these factors. Therefore, allowing participation requires a focus on well-being, maintaining a healthy work-life balance, and receiving support from the business.

The theory integrates physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement, recognizing employees as whole individuals whose commitment is shaped by both internal states and workplace factors (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). In this study, the theory underpins the view that training programs can enhance meaningfulness and availability, while leadership style influences safety, thus moderating the training engagement relationship in Kisumu County hotels.

Methodology

The research was conducted in Kisumu County, Kenya, focusing on hotels rated between three and four stars by the Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA). Kisumu County, located in western Kenya, is a significant tourism hub within the Western Tourism Circuit. It is bordered by Siaya and Lake Victoria to the west, Vihiga and Kakamega counties to the north, Kericho County to the east, and Homa Bay County to the south. Kisumu City, the administrative center, is Kenya's third-largest city and a vital economic and transportation hub. Its accessibility is enhanced by a well-developed road network, railway connections, Kisumu International Airport, and water transport via Lake Victoria. The region's diverse economy, including a thriving fishing industry, a growing manufacturing sector (food processing, textiles, construction materials), and agriculture (maize, millet, sorghum,

bananas, mangoes), contributes to the vitality of its hospitality industry.

Kisumu County has a population of 610,082, divided into eight sub-counties and fifty-one wards (GoK, 2019). The area is rich in tourist attractions, such as Lake Victoria, Kisumu Impala Sanctuary, Kisumu Museum, and Ndere Island National Park. The selection of three- to four-star hotels was deliberate, as these establishments represent a significant portion of the hotel industry and maintain structured operational standards crucial for studying internal marketing, leadership, and employee engagement.

This study adopted a pragmatism research philosophy. This approach is centered on solving real-world problems and prioritizes the practical application of knowledge. Pragmatism posits that the value of knowledge lies in its ability to produce desirable outcomes. This philosophy is often associated with the use of mixed methods, as it allows for the integration of different research approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of a problem.

An explanatory concurrent mixed methods design was used for this study. This design involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously and then integrating them to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. This approach was chosen for its capacity to minimize bias through probability sampling and to maximize the reliability of the data.

The target population consisted of all employees and general managers from three- to four-star hotels in Kisumu County. Based on the 2023 ratings from the Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA), there were nine such hotels. The total population for the study was 966 respondents, comprising 957 employees and 9 general managers. A total sample size of 282 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula for the employee population. Both purposive

sampling and simple random sampling techniques were employed. Purposive sampling was used to select the nine three- to four-star hotels and their respective general managers, as they were deemed to have the necessary information for the study objectives. Simple random sampling was then used to select the representative number of employees from each hotel, ensuring that every employee had an equal chance of being selected and thereby minimizing selection bias.

Primary data was collected using quasi-structured questionnaires for employees and interview schedules for general managers. The questionnaires, which included both closed- and open-ended questions, used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to measure the study constructs. The interview schedules provided a list of pre-prepared questions to guide the conversations with general managers, allowing for follow-up questions to gain deeper insights.

A preliminary test of the research instruments was conducted in three- to four-star hotels in Eldoret town with 28 respondents, which is approximately 10% of the planned sample size.

Validity of the instruments was assessed to ensure they accurately measured the intended concepts. Content validity was ensured by reviewing relevant literature to create appropriate scales. Construct validity was examined using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with principal component analysis (PCA). A factor loading of 0.50 or higher was considered significant, indicating a strong relationship between the variable and the factor.

Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha to assess the internal consistency of the scales. A coefficient of ≥ 0.70 was considered an acceptable measure of reliability. Quantitative data from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies,

percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (correlation and hierarchical regression analysis) with SPSS version 26.0. Correlation analysis was used to determine the nature and strength of the relationships between variables.

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test both the direct and moderating effects of leadership style. This involved entering the variables in blocks to assess the incremental change in the model. The null hypotheses were tested using p-values, with a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$ for rejection. The specified regression models were as follows:

Main Effect of Training Programs

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TP + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots \text{Model 1}$$

Adding Leadership Style

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TP + \beta_2 LS + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots \text{Model 2}$$

Moderation Model

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TP + \beta_2 LS + \beta_3 (TP \times LS) + \epsilon \dots \dots \text{Model 3}$$

Where:

Y = Employee engagement (dependent variable)

β_0 = Intercept

β_1 = Coefficients for the independent variables

TP = Training programs

LS = Leadership style

X·M = Interaction term

ϵ = Error term

Qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed using content analysis. The results were presented using tables, charts, and common thematic narratives.

Results and Discussion

Reliability and Validity of Instruments

The reliability of the data collection instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to determine internal consistency. All study variables exceeded

the recommended reliability threshold of 0.70. The composite Cronbach's alpha for all variables was 0.755, indicating a high degree of stability and consistency in the measurement.

Factor analysis confirmed construct validity. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.789, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 619.794$, $df = 325$, $p < 0.001$), indicating sampling adequacy and sufficient correlations for factor analysis. Principal Component Analysis with varimax rotation extracted five components with eigenvalues above 1.0, explaining 67.2% of the total variance. The rotated component matrix retained items with loadings above 0.30, supporting the structural soundness of the measurement model.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of study variable

Variable	Composite Mean	Composite Std. Dev.
Training Programs	2.52	1.43
Leadership Style	2.51	1.42
Employee Engagement	2.50	1.10

Source: Field Data, 2025

Qualitative Findings

Interview findings from nine hotel managers provided valuable context for these survey results. All managers confirmed that training is a structured and essential part of hotel operations. They described programs that are both department-specific and organization-wide, with content aligned to job requirements and departmental goals. One general manager explained:

"The hotels had training programs in place. Training programs were organized for each department for specific roles that touch on a department, and for all the employees in all the departments in the hotels for general roles that cut across all the employees. Training

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the three key study variables that is training programs, leadership style, and employee engagement. The composite mean for training programs was 2.52, with a standard deviation of 1.43. This indicates that employees generally have a neutral to slightly disagreeable view of the training programs, though there is some variation in opinion. Similarly, the composite mean for leadership style was 2.51, with a standard deviation of 1.42. This suggests that employees have a similar neutral to slightly disagreeable perception of their leaders' styles, with a moderate spread in responses. Lastly, the composite mean for employee engagement was 2.50, with a standard deviation of 1.10. This indicates a neutral perception of engagement levels, with less variation in responses compared to the other two variables.

programs were custom-designed to fit training needs and the training content was designed in such a manner that it aligns with the specific job roles of the employees."

Managers also linked leadership practices to higher employee engagement, citing empowerment, trust, continuous learning, and open communication as key approaches. They described a collaborative style where leaders and employees work toward shared organizational goals. One manager stated:

"Hotel managers engage employees by motivating them through empowerment, learning, trust, and communication. We encourage collaborative approach where managers and employees work together on a shared vision for the

present and the future of the organization. This helps hotel managers in provision of the necessary support that helps to encourage employees to perform at their best."

With regard to employee engagement, managers discussed deliberate strategies to keep staff motivated and committed. One respondent noted:

"We make it a priority to involve our staff in decision-making, especially in areas that directly affect their work. We recognize individual contributions, provide opportunities for skill development, and maintain open channels of communication. When employees feel heard and

valued, they naturally become more engaged in their roles."

These qualitative perspectives reinforce the survey data, illustrating how structured training, inclusive leadership, and recognition contribute to stronger engagement, motivation, and performance across hotel teams.

Correlation Analysis

To examine the strength and direction of associations among the study variables, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. This analysis measured how employee engagement relates to training programs and leadership style, as well as the relationship between training programs and leadership style. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation analysis

n=228		Employee engagement	Training programs	Leadership style
Employee engagement	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1		
Training programs	Pearson Correlation	.890*		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
Leadership style	Pearson Correlation	.662**	.490**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data, 2025

The results in Table 2 indicate a very strong positive correlation between employee engagement and training programs ($r = .890, p < 0.01$), suggesting that better training is closely associated with higher employee engagement. Leadership style also shows a strong positive correlation with employee engagement ($r = .662, p < 0.01$), indicating that effective leadership practices are linked to increased engagement levels. The correlation between training programs and leadership style is moderate but significant ($r = .490, p < 0.01$), implying that while the two are related, they represent distinct

organizational factors influencing engagement.

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

This study used a hierarchical regression model to examine the moderating effect of leadership style on the relationship between training and employee engagement. The analysis was conducted in several steps.

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Investigating the direct effect involves analyzing how the

independent variables influences the dependent variable. Table 3 presents the findings of the direct effect.

Table 3: Regression results of direct effect

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.070	4.16786		6.760	.033
Training	1.232	.041	.209	3.700	.000
Model Summary					
R	0.959				
R ² Change	0.918				
Std. Error of the Estimate	4.16786				
Model Fit					
F change	633.041				
Sig.	.000				

Source: Field Data, 2025

Findings in model 1 (Table 3 and 4) revealed a positive and significant effect between training program and employee engagement ($\beta = 1.232$, $p = 0.000$, <0.05) implying that training programs leads to an increase in employee engagement. Thus,

the null hypothesis is rejected and a conclusion is made that training programs has a significant effect on employee engagement.

Table 4: Hierarchical regression results for the moderating effect of leadership style on the relationship between training programs and employee engagement

Variables	Model 1 β (p)	Model 2 β (p)	Model 3 β (p)
Direct Effect			
(Constant)	2.070 (.033)	3.121 (.003)	21.694 (.000)*
Training Programs (TP)	1.232 (.000)*	0.343 (.007)*	0.913 (.008)*
Moderating Effect			
Leadership Style (LS)	—	0.378 (.006)*	1.509 (.000)*
Interaction Term			
Training Programs * Leadership Style	—	—	0.082 (.000)*

Source: Field Data, 2025

This aligns with prior research showing that training builds professional competence, addresses skill gaps, and strengthens service quality in the hospitality sector (Al-Gasawneh et al., 2022; Waqanimaravu & Arasanmi, 2020). Similar to Sitati et al. (2016) and Malonza & Walaba (2015), the findings suggest that training not only improves operational performance but also fosters the psychological

connection employees have with their work, an important component of engagement.

Model 2 introduced leadership style as an additional predictor. According to Table 4, leadership style significantly contributed to employee engagement ($\beta = 0.378$, $p = 0.006$), with the explained variance increasing slightly to 92.2% ($R^2 = 0.922$). This indicates that leadership style

directly influences employee engagement alongside training programs. This is consistent with Bakker & Albrecht (2018) and Ned & Umesi (2023), who highlight that supportive, empowering leadership behaviors contribute to sustained engagement by fostering psychological safety and meaning.

Subsequent model introduced leadership style as a moderator and tested its interaction with training. Model 3 added the interaction term between training programs and leadership style. Results in Table 4 indicated that the interaction was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.082$, $p < 0.001$), with the explained variance rising to 93.4% ($R^2 = 0.934$). This finding confirms that leadership style moderates the relationship between training programs and employee

engagement. Specifically, when leadership style is more supportive and empowering, the positive effect of training programs on engagement becomes stronger. This supports global and African evidence that leadership style determines the extent to which training outcomes translate into enduring engagement (Thanh & Quang, 2022; Forka, 2012). In the context of Kisumu County’s three- and four-star hotels, the findings suggest that transformational or participative leaders create an environment that encourages skill application, recognizes effort, and strengthens employees’ sense of value to the organization. Without such leadership support, the benefits of training appear less sustainable, echoing observations from Omar (2016) that transactional or arm’s-length leadership can cause post-training engagement to fade.

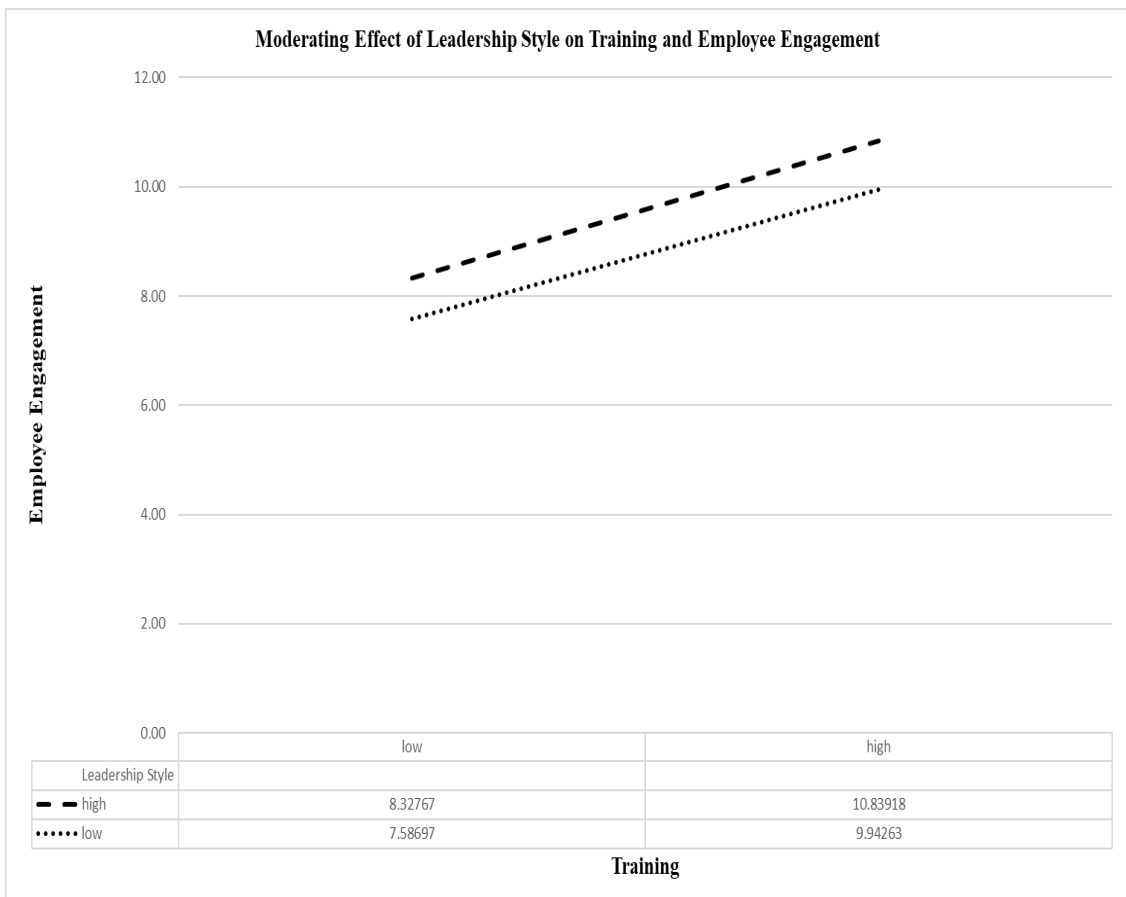


Figure 1: Moderating effect of leadership style on the relationship between training and employee engagement

The findings in Figure 1 show that at low levels of training, employee engagement is low for firms with low leadership style and high for firms with high leadership style. As training increases, employee engagement increases at a higher rate for firms with high leadership style as compared to firms with low leadership style. Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that trainings have no significant effect on employee engagement in 3-4 star rated hotels in Kisumu County is rejected and conclusion made that leadership style exerts an enhancing effect on the relationship between training and Employee Engagement in 3-4 star rated hotels in Kisumu County.

Conclusion

The study examined the influence of training programs on employee engagement in 3–4star hotels in Kisumu County, with leadership style as a moderating factor. Quantitative results revealed that both training programs and leadership style significantly influence employee engagement, with training showing a very strong positive correlation and leadership style also having a strong positive correlation. Regression analysis confirmed that leadership style not only has a direct effect on engagement but also strengthens the relationship between training and engagement. Qualitative findings from hotel managers supported these results, showing that structured, role-specific training, when coupled with collaborative, empowering leadership, leads to higher staff motivation, involvement, and performance. The research concludes that in Kisumu's hospitality sector, training programs are necessary for improving employee engagement, but their effectiveness increases significantly under leaders who inspire trust, facilitate communication, and involve employees in decision-making.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made for 3-4 star rated hotels in Kisumu County:

1. Hotels should re-evaluate their training initiatives to ensure they are perceived as more effective and engaging by employees. While managers believe their programs are structured, employees' neutral to slightly disagreeable views suggest a gap between the intended and actual impact. Training should be more interactive, aligned with employee career paths, and consistently implemented to build a positive learning culture.
2. Given the significant moderating role of leadership style, hotels should invest in training and development for their managers. The focus should be on fostering an empowering, communicative, and collaborative leadership style. Leaders who lead by example, involve employees in decision-making, and provide genuine support are crucial for translating training investments into tangible increases in employee engagement.
3. Management should work to create synergy between training and leadership. This can be achieved by having leaders actively participate in and champion training programs. Post-training follow-up and coaching from leaders can reinforce learning and demonstrate management's commitment to employee development, thereby strengthening engagement.

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