“Individualized employee engagement or collaborative employee relations: insights on leadership strategies to manage employees in the UK market”

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ARTICLE INFO	Sourav Mohanty (2018). Individualized employee engagement or collaborative employee relations: insights on leadership strategies to manage employees in the UK market. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, *16*(3), 366-376. doi:10.21511/ppm.16(3).2018.29
DOI	http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/ppm.16(3).2018.29
RELEASED ON	Friday, 07 September 2018
RECEIVED ON	Wednesday, 02 May 2018
ACCEPTED ON	Tuesday, 07 August 2018

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JOURNAL	"Problems and Perspectives in Management"
ISSN PRINT	1727-7051
ISSN ONLINE	1810-5467
PUBLISHER	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”
FOUNDER	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”

NUMBER OF REFERENCES	NUMBER OF FIGURES	NUMBER OF TABLES
22	2	6

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BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES

LLC "CPC "Business Perspectives"
Hryhorii Skovoroda lane, 10, Sumy, 40022, Ukraine

www.businessperspectives.org

Received on: 2nd of May, 2018
Accepted on: 7th of August, 2018

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INDIVIDUALIZED EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT OR COLLABORATIVE EMPLOYEE RELATIONS: INSIGHTS ON LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES TO MANAGE EMPLOYEES IN THE UK MARKET

Abstract

Leadership can be defined as the ability of an individual to lead or guide other people, teams or organizations. There have been many theories related to this topic including the characteristics of leaders, their situational communication, purpose, performance, authority, vision and mission, charm and presence of mind. The main types of employee engagement discussed in this study are individualized employee engagement and collaborative employee engagement in the context of the UK. This study mainly seeks to investigate the insights of employees and leaders on different leadership strategies to manage employees in the UK-based MNCs. Descriptive and inferential analysis was performed so as to ascertain the influence of two different leadership strategies – Individualized Employee Engagement (IEE) and Collaborative Employee Relations (CER) – on effective employee management. It was validated from findings in this study that employees and leaders both prefer and believe that individualized employee engagement leads to better and effective employee management.

Keywords effective employee engagement, employee management, MNCs, leadership approaches, UK market

JEL Classification M10, M19

INTRODUCTION

The paradigm of employee engagement was first coined and suggested by Kahn who in a simple language characterized it as making full utilization of employees at workplaces and at the same time apart from being at work, it pertains to cater in terms of thinking, soul-stirring and corporal (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). Employee engagement certainly is individualistic in nature. It depends upon how much you are deeply rooted along with heartfelt interests embedded in the impending organization by mixing with it great zeal, valor and vigor (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002, p. 205).

Employee engagement is broadly the level of assurance and participation employees have towards their company and its principles. As opposed to individualized employee engagement, collaborative employee engagement requires more resources and takes more time to extend. In collaborative employee relations, it has been seen that employees network, converse and assist each other along with sharing information, harmonizing operations and activities, sharing resources and enhancing each other's capacity (Buzan & Lawson, 2015)

The two main requirements for collaborative engagement are the talents of senior managers for the purpose of managing and regulating the work responsibilities, as well as the nature of associations between

managers and their employees. It has been seen that the relationship between managers and employees needs to be a respectful and collaborative one, otherwise, even if managers work very hard with the employees, it shall not have a positive impact in response to the initiatives. Therefore, collaboration or partnership with the employees is of utmost importance, as it leads to better results for engagement as compared to individualistic employee relations.

Individual employment relations have been a subject of interest of the UK scholars since its inception in relation with creation of a common labor market regarding its workers and reinforcing their rights to liberated movement and social safety. Individual employment relations have also been of concern to the EU due to its importance as a factor of production in European financial integration. Costs of labor, mainly indirect labor costs, have been the differentiating factor amongst companies in different states of the European Union, especially since the worldwide economic crisis of 2008. It has been seen that the crisis is a major factor affecting the work situation and relations of Europe with the rest of the world.

Previous studies have shown that both individual and collaborative engagement have a positive impact on the leadership strategy. Positive relationship has been found to exist between collaborative engagement, as well as leaders and employees (Townsend et al., 2014). Employee engagement needs commitment to be present from leaders, as well as employees, in order to ensure that the organizational architecture is intact. Successful management of employees requires collaboration and partnership to develop between the leaders and their employees in the same way as training and development is required for effective HRM. It is more than an official file plus happening of every day connections amid leaders and their employees.

A clear cut indication of displaying some of the most effective policies and practices is quite often unable to engage the employees in any organization, which itself became a daunting task to differentiate it out from human perspectives (Guest, 2014). It might lead to deciding whether focusing on employee engagement leads to an improvement for HRM professionals. There is also a concern regarding the labelling of employee engagement as the "commercial 'product' of consultancy firms; whose services often include the measurement of engagement through annual organizational surveys" (Hong et al., 2013).

Need for the study

The previous literature has clearly depicted that a large chunk of workers by CEB leading to more than 66.67 percent of employees stated that they have seen that since the past three years, there is a need to quickly increase the level of collaboration. A report comprising the organizational performance in New Work Environment counted only a meagre of 57 percent of respondents performed better while working with employees at other places and 60 percent interacted with a minimum of ten persons on a daily basis (CEB, 2014).

CEB observed that around 75 percent of employees are motivated more by collaborative leadership strategies, but they're limited by their organizational working, i.e. inability of performance management systems to reward collaboration or establishment of poor communication strategies, which lead to conflicts in meeting organizational goals (CEB, 2014). Therefore, it can be concluded that strong employee engagement benefits the entire organization including their underlying base. Successfully sharing and possessing a gigantic rise in shares are the hallmark of mostly engaged centric employers in comparison to loosely structured organizations (Aon Hewitt, 2015; Harter et al., 2002). Therefore, this study was conducted in order to provide more insights regarding individualized, as well as collaborative employee relations, which respect to companies in the UK market.

Aim of the study

The study aims to provide valuable insight into the leadership strategies used by managers of UK companies to manage the human resource capital of the organization. It shall compare and analyze the

benefits and limitations of individualized employee engagement and collaborative employee relations. The leadership strategies used to manage employees corresponding to UK's organizational culture and functioning along with their impact on employee behavior shall be studied in detail.

Central research question

Research questions mainly focus on the study, its methodology and guide other aspects like data collection, analysis and reporting. The research paper seeks to answer the main research question: "Which is a better leadership strategy to manage employees in the UK market – individualized employee engagement or collaborative employee relations?"

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. UK's dominant organizational culture as per Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Organizational culture has been defined as "being collective but often intangible. It is, however, what distinguishes one group, organization or nation from another" (Hofstede, 2010). In the opinion of Hofstede, culture consists of the invisible, internal values of culture, as well as the visible exterior basics of culture also termed as practices. Individualism is the inclination of people to fit in to a loosely woven society, where more emphasis is given to self and autonomy. On the contrary, collectivist structures give more emphasis to inter-reliant social units rather than to self. In companies following individualized leadership strategies, employees need to be able to work independently and require challenging work in order to reach self-actualization. However, in collectivist organizations, unquestioned organizational structures lead to the organization of teams of employees and the unity of the group. It can be clearly seen that Hofstede's cultural dimensions are still applicable in recent times, as shown by the recent GLOBE study (Thomas, 2008). Contritely, it has been seen that cultures have various learning principles and rules, which helps in determining actions, and are of vital significance in impacting business outcomes.

1.2. Leadership strategies to manage employees

In countries like the UK, it has been seen that individualism employee engagement policies are more important. In sturdy collectivist countries, there are higher expectations of the obligations of the employer towards the employees and their families. In these countries, leaders who take initiatives themselves and exhibit elasticity in achieving a goal are more desirable, as these leaders tend to flourish in uncertainty. However, it has been advised to check in regularly with team members in order to update them regarding change in plans.

It can be seen that the leadership style followed nowadays is different from the traditional individualistic leadership styles (Fletcher, 2004; Fletcher & Kaeufer, 2003; Senge & Kaeufer, 2001). As opposed to the traditional way of concentrating on various personal description and attributes, the new strategies of leadership believe that leaders, including heads of various departments, directors, as well as team leaders, have been known to be supported by a variety of people, which transact with leadership practices throughout the organization devoid of being branded as a leader with social networks, cooperation, shared responsibility, which supply to leadership. Organizations need to support impulsive collaborations and sustain individuals working together for incorporating initiatives in order to be effective.

1.3. Impact of individualized employee engagement and collaborative employee engagement on employee behavior: empirical review

McFeeters (2003) studied the anomalies in attainment involving groups, which exhibit various cultural extents within a particular atmosphere. The research method included a statistical analysis of the chosen variables, including ANOVA and cor-

relation analysis, in order to determine the extent and magnitude of relation between dependent, as well as independent variables. The variables that have been used to measure the linking included instructional and cultural environment, as well as the preference of the learner to work online. The respondents included a sample of graduate students that belonged to diverse cultures. The measuring instrument consisted of a conduct that was shown crosswise two different environments, which included an online tool, which is useful for measuring respondent's cultural dimension, recollection, sharing of knowledge and learning preference. ANOVA analysis method was used for the purpose of determining the impacts of individualism and collectivism on learner preference and achievement. It was found that there was statistically high significance in transfer measures. This showed profound perception of materials for collectivist respondents. Correlation analysis was performed in order to show the relationship between cultural dimension and learner preference for instructional methods. The findings of this study were also in line with the previous studies on cross cultural psychology.

Lawson (2004) has stated that facilitation of collaboration needs new types of leadership styles and structures. This study used two separate canonical correlations in order to examine the relationships between different leadership styles. This study used inductive research approach and quantitative data analysis for deriving information regarding the research topic. According to the results of this study, collaborative leadership styles provide authority, power and accountability to the entire group and lead to shared commitments, help in resolving conflicts, facilitate lasting relationships and lead to effective deed. Collaborative leadership requires acquisition of new leadership styles and power structures, as well as requires team approaches instead of single person approaches.

James (2011) suggests that the traditional concept of leadership, which can be linked to the competencies, behavior and skills of leaders, needs to be expanded for helping leadership development to congregate the needs of complex companies in current times. This research paper used case study method in order to outline the latest concepts in leadership theory and leadership development. This method was useful in the context of this research study, as it sought to understand the leadership programs that have already been used in different organizations, understand the weaknesses and formulate the further programs in order to overcome these shortcomings. For the purpose of this study, three case studies of leadership development programs that incorporate these ideas were studied.

Rebecca and Franke (2013) used survey-based quasi-experimental design in order to reach the conclusion that leaders using higher levels of individualism strategies tend to be more sensible in their decision making as compared to those with higher levels of collectivism. The study used experimental design and the participants were asked to complete the AICS instrument for understanding their individualism and collectivism traits and the GDMS instrument for the purpose of determining the general decision making style. Leaders using collaborative leadership strategies tended to be more reliant and less likely to be disloyal to the security of their employees. Regression analysis was conducted in order to study the relationship between individualism and rational decision making as a factor of the location of the participants. In addition, the results of this study showed that in case of familiar conflict settings, employees were more likely to cooperate for the purpose of achieving peace.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology can be regarded as the procedure, which is used for the purpose of achieving the research objectives of a particular study through the application of diverse processes, techniques and methods (Kothari, 2004). This chapter mainly describes the manner in which the study has sought to answer the proposed research questions by using different techniques and tools.

The methodology to be used in the present study will be a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis. Pragmatism research philosophy has been adopted for present research. Due to the mixed nature of the study, all the three research

purposes that are exploratory, explanatory and descriptive studies have been adopted in the study. Additionally, it can be seen that inductive, as well as deductive research approach, have been used by the author, as this research paper studies the impact of employee engagement strategies for the purpose of managing employees in the UK labor market. It has used both survey and interview methods to analyze the concept of individualized, as well as collaborative employee engagement. Data were collected in the survey method by using a close-ended questionnaire, which consisted of relevant questions regarding the research topic generated by the author himself who circulated to the selected respondents. The interview consisted of open-ended questions, which were generated for the purpose of collecting qualitative data related to the research topic. For the qualitative analysis, the five leaders of the UK-based MNCs have been interviewed during their working hours at the place of their work itself for the purpose of finding their perception regarding the better-suited strategy out of individualized employee engagement and collaborative employee relation in order to manage their employees. The total time taken to collect quantitative, as well as qualitative data, comprised of one month in total, as the time duration of each interview was short and the quantitative questionnaires were administered online in order to save on the time and cost of data collection process.

For quantitative analysis, the middle level employees ($N = 200$) of five MNCs have been surveyed to understand the perception of employees regarding the best-suited strategy out of individualized employee engagement and collaborative employee relations for managing employees. This means that around 40 employees approximately were selected from each MNC for the purpose of data collection. The sample size has been selected on the basis of 95% confidence interval, which is denoted with the following mathematical calculations below:

$$ss = \frac{Z^2 \cdot (p) \cdot (1-p)}{c^2}, \qquad (1)$$

where Z – Z value (confidence level); p – percentage picking a choice, expressed as decimal (.5 used for sample size needed); c – confidence interval, expressed as decimal.

Validity relates to the ability of a thesis to examine what is intended to be researched and reliability is a measure of how trustworthy the authors' conclusions are (Saunders & Tosey, 2012). For the purpose of checking the reliability, Cronbach's Alpha test has been used to test the reliability of the data and face validation method has been used in order to check the validity of the questionnaire.

For conducting the qualitative analysis, the matrix method has been conducted using the NVIVO software and other data collected shall be analyzed using different statistical tools in order to derive meaningful information from it. For the purpose of quantitative analysis, logistic regression and correlation analysis have been conducted using the SPSS software.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

In this section of the study, a quantitative analysis consisting of descriptive and inferential analyses was conducted on the survey data collected from middle level employees of MNCs to understand their perception regarding the best suited strategy for managing employees, followed by, a quantitative analysis on the sample data collected from the leaders of UK-based MNCs about their perception regarding the best suited strategy out of individualized employee engagement and collaborative employee relations for managing employees.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Quantitative – descriptive analysis

Figure 1 exhibits the distribution of respondents based on their demographic profile. Closely studying the graph helped to understand that the majority of the respondents is below 35 years holding less than equal to 5 years of relevant experience. Only 18% of the employees had more than 6 years of experience. Furthermore, 88% of the total respondents were working as executives or senior executives. Exploring more about their remuneration, it was found that a well over 69% of these employees earn less than 3 lakhs INR annually. And

Source: Compiled by the researcher.

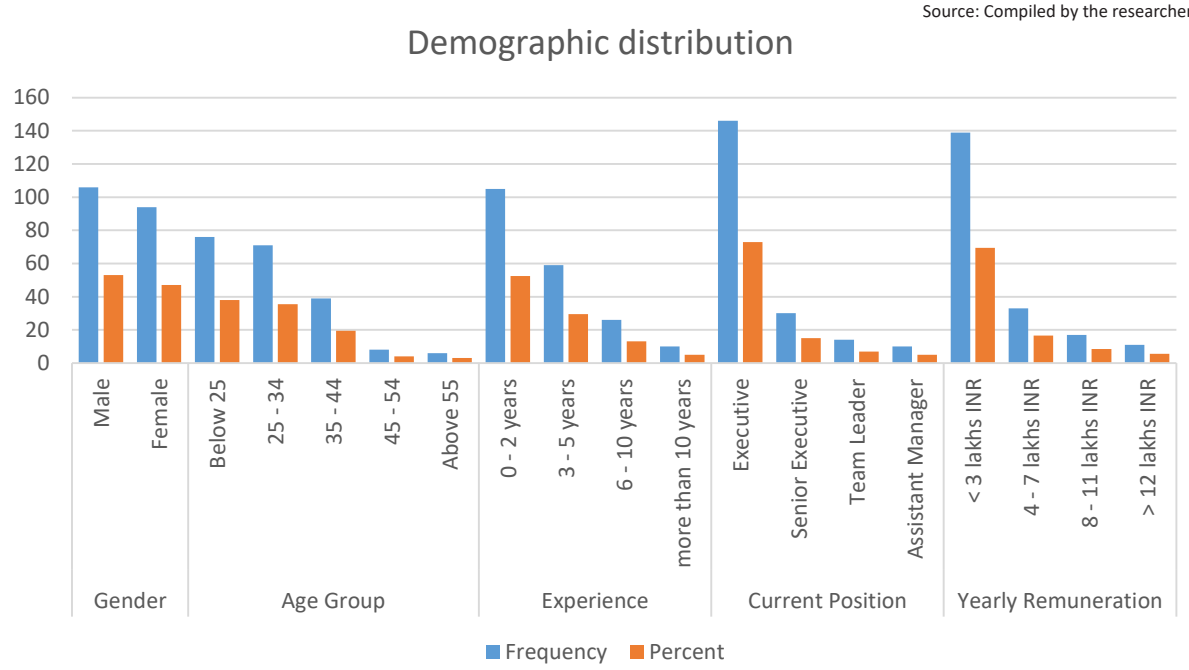

Figure 1. Descriptive analysis of the demographic background of respondents

just about 31% of them earn more than 4 lakhs INR every year.

4.2. Inferential analysis

All of these respondents were asked to share their opinion regarding the most influencing and motivating leadership strategy, out of individualized employee engagement and collaborative employee relation, to promote effective employee management. A comprehensive inferential analysis was performed in order to analyze the dependency of effective employee management on the traits belonging to the individualized and collaborative leadership strategies.

This subsection of the study presents a more comprehensive understanding of the employee's perspective on the effectiveness of two of the widely practiced leadership strategies i.e. Individualized Employee Engagement (IEE) and Collaborative Employee Relations (CER).

Table 1 shows the association between IEE traits and effective employee management. It can be seen that almost all the IEE traits have a positive association with effective employee management, except for IEE_1. This implies that when an employee works efficiently and effectively in an individualistic environment, it does not induce the effective employee management. While analyzing Table 1 more, it was found that high correlation exists between IEE_4 and effective employee management of $\rho = .804$ or 80% at significance level $p < 0.05$. Thus, it implies that when a leader sends department-wise mail praising employee's contribution, it increases the morale of the employees and ultimately leads to an effective employee manage-

Table 1. Correlation analysis on IEE

Source: Compiled by the researcher.

Correlations								
Variables		**IEE_1**	**IEE_2**	**IEE_3**	**IEE_4**	**IEE_5**	**IEE_6**	**IEE_7**
Do you think these traits lead to effective employee management of your team or organization?	r	.100	.754**	.658**	.804**	.709**	.703**	.325**
	Sig.	.158	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 2. Logistic regression analysis on IEE

Model summary							
Step 1		**–2 Log likelihood**		**Cox & Snell R-square**		**Nagelkerke R-square**	
	58.832a		.664		.886		
Variables in the equation							
		B	**S.E.**	**Wald**	**df**	**Sig.**	**Exp (B)**
Step 1a	IEE_2	1.076	.539	3.977	1	.046	2.932
	IEE_3	.747	.319	5.480	1	.019	2.112
	IEE_4	1.976	.568	12.097	1	.001	7.217
	IEE_5	1.127	.494	5.199	1	.023	3.086
	IEE_6	.414	.654	.401	1	.526	1.513
	IEE_7	.567	.263	4.636	1	.031	1.763
	Constant	–17.805	3.525	25.515	1	.000	.000

ment. Employees get encouraged to perform better in the presence of rewards and recognition (Ibrar & Khan, 2015). Whereas IEE_7 shows the least significant positive relationship with the effective employee management indicating that when a leader assists employees individually in learning and development, it causes the least significant improvement in employee management.

To further explore the influence of all these traits on effective employee management, logistic regression analysis has been performed. However, IEE_1 was eliminated from the model, as it did not evince a significant association in the correlation analysis.

Table 2 shows the logistic regression results, where traits belonging to IEE were kept as independent variables and effective employee management was dependent variable. A high R-square value of about 0.886 was found in this model, which suggests that more than 88% of the variance in dependent variable is explained by the covariates.

While looking at the effect of IEE on the effective employee management, it can be interpreted that most of the factors related to IEE are significantly causing a positive change in the effective management. Just like the correlation results showed, IEE_4 has also reported the highest positive significant impact on effective employee management in the regression results. It infers that the effective employee management shows a positive change of 1.97 units with one unit increase in IEE_4. IEE_6 does not show a significant impact, which means getting appreciated individually through post doesn't significantly influence the effective employee management.

Correlation analysis on CER shows only four of the 13 traits to be significantly associated with the effective employee management. Yet, these four traits (CER_6, CER_7, CER_10 and CER_12) do not show high correlation with the dependent variable. CER_6 shows the highest significant correlation among the four of just $\rho = .277$ or 28% at significance level $p < 0.05$. This simply verifies that when the task is assigned to a group, it maximizes quantity and quality of work (Salman & Hassan, 2015) and eventually increases the effectiveness of employee management. On the other hand, CER_12 shows the least significant relationship with effective employee management.

Table 3. Correlation analysis on CER

Source: Compiled by the researcher.

Correlations														
		CER_1	**CER_2**	**CER_3**	**CER_4**	**CER_5**	**CER_6**	**CER_7**	**CER_8**	**CER_9**	**CER_10**	**CER_11**	**CER_12**	**CER_13**
Traits lead to effective employee management	r	.015	.004	.008	.045	.008	.277**	.184**	-.007	.041	.191**	.032	.156*	.045
	p	.832	.952	.910	.528	.908	.000	.009	.927	.561	.007	.648	.028	.523

Table 4. Logistic regression analysis on CER

Source: Compiled by the researcher.

Model summary							
Step 1		**–2 Log likelihood**		**Cox & Snell R-square**		**Nagelkerke R-square**	
	243.280a		.156		.208		
Variables in the equation							
		B	**S.E.**	**Wald**	**df**	**Sig.**	**Exp (B)**
Step 1a	CER_6	.306	.100	9.321	1	.002	1.358
	CER_7	.284	.108	6.909	1	.009	1.328
	CER_10	.317	.112	8.028	1	.005	1.373
	CER_12	.301	.111	7.349	1	.007	1.351
	Constant	–3.788	.777	23.781	1	.000	.023

Only four of these variables were taken into consideration while deploying logistic regression model to explore the influence of CER on effective employee management.

Table 4 clearly shows that only about 21% of the variability in dependent variable is explained by the exogenous variables. However, all these variables are showing a significant positive impact on the dependent variable. According to the odds ratio (Exp (B)) in Table 4, CER_10 is the highest impacting trait among others. It implies that when a leader solicits feedback and creates environment where everyone can speak and act, it results in boosting the overall effective employee management. It can be said that with an increase of each unit in CER_10, an approximate positive change of 0.32 units can be witnessed in effective employee management. Further, it can be seen that employee management gets affected the least by CER_7, where recognition and rewards are provided based on employee's performance.

The quantitative analysis conducted in the previous subsection focused on to understand the perception of employees regarding the best-suited strategy (out of individualized employee engagement and collaborative employee relations) to be adopted by the leaders to manage them. Further, it is important to get the information on the perception of the leaders on the best strategy to be used to manage the employees. This is because the leaders are the people who actually have to adapt and follow a strategy in practice to get the best results out of the employees. Thus, the perception of the leaders will provide a more precise understanding on the best strategy out of individualized employee engagement and collaborative employee relations. Owing to this reason, the following section of qualitative research has been conducted on the leaders.

4.3. Qualitative results

In this subsection, 5 leaders were asked questions about their current adopted strategy out of individual and collaborative employee engagement. Furthermore, they were asked about their preference and drawbacks of the strategy they're not using.

Table 5. Frequency analysis on transcripts

Word	Length	Count	Weighted percentage (%)
Task	4	25	6.70
Individual	10	20	5.36
Output	6	17	4.56
Effectively	11	20	4.42
Work	4	14	3.75
Understand	10	9	2.41
Communication	13	8	2.14
Quality	7	8	2.14
Collaborative	13	7	1.88
Complete	8	7	1.88
Expert	6	7	1.88
Approach	8	6	1.61
Sometimes	9	6	1.61
Teamwork	8	6	1.61
Dealing	7	5	1.34

Table 5 and Figure 2 simply display the frequency of each of these words used by the leaders in their interviews. This is giving a partial image of the mode of employee engagement used and pre-

Source: Compiled by the researcher.

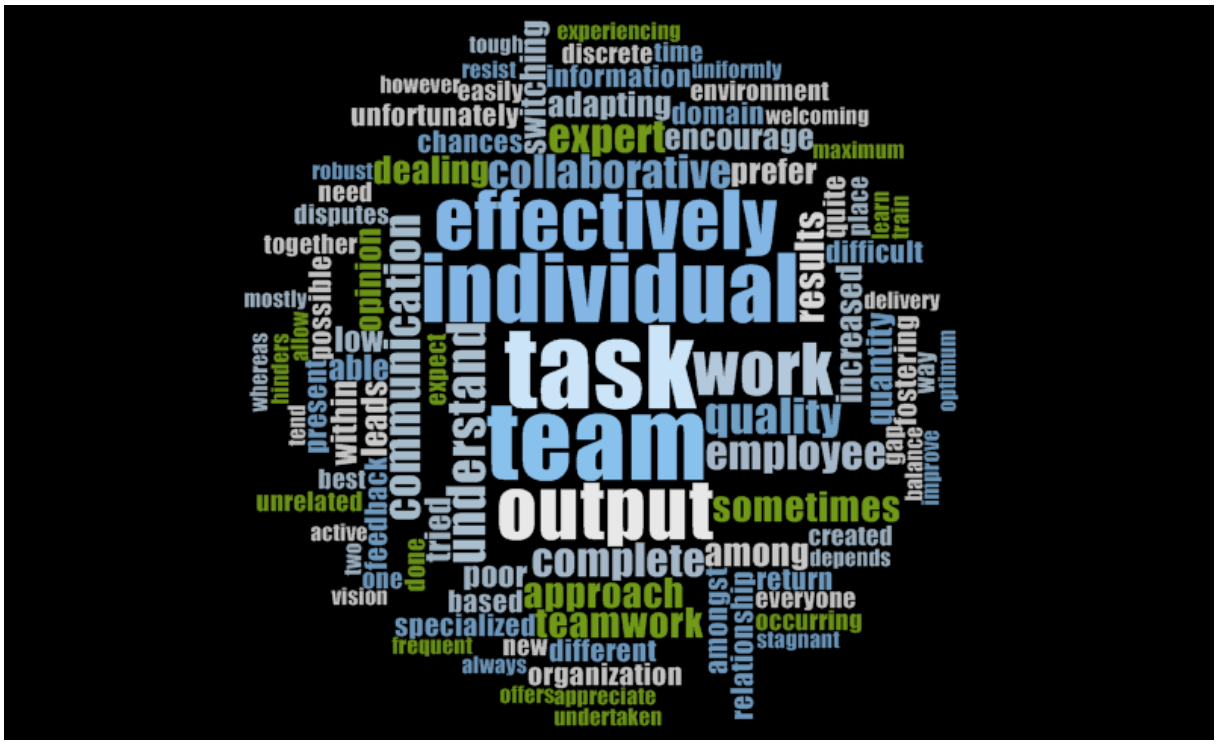

Figure 2. Text frequency analysis

ferred by each leader in their organizations. This clearly shows that the leaders are favoring the individual approach over collaborative working environment, same as the employees. It appears that leaders are more focused and concerned about the effective completion of the task and quality output from their employees. However, it can also be said that leaders are more inclined to individual employee management approach in order to effective completion of the assigned task.

Matrix text analysis was performed on the data collected from these five leaders to understand more about the drawbacks of both the approaches they have stated.

Leaders 1, 4 and 5 were in favor of individualized employee engagement approach, whereas 2nd leader is in favor of collaborative approach. Table 6 shows that assigning part of projects individually to each of the employee is a tough task for the leaders and also cooperative relationship is not present in the individualized employee engagement. Lack of effective communication and teamwork was also experienced by the leaders who follow individualized approach. On the contrary, leaders have expressed that they get expert opinion from the employees on their specialized subject/domain. However, leaders praised about the presence of effective communication and better work environment in collaborative or-

Table 6. Matrix analysis

No.	Assigning tasks	Collaborative teamwork	Cooperative relationship	Discrete outputs	Effective communication	Environment	Expert opinion	Low productivity	Poor quality output	Sharing information	Team	Whole team
1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	1
2	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	3	0
4	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	1
5	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	3	1

ganizational culture, which is a very important aspect to increase dedication and performance of the employees (Nduru, 2014). Also, that they don't worry about low productivity and poor quality output when it comes to individualized working environment.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the insights and influence of different leadership strategies – Individualized Employee Engagement and Collaborative Employee Relations – on effective employee management was explored via quantitative and qualitative analysis. Result of quantitative study has confirmed that most of the employees think and experienced that individual employee engagement approach leads to a more effective employee management. This is also supported by the qualitative analysis performed on the data collected from leaders.

Employees were more inclined towards working individually instead of working in a team in the UK professional environment. It has been seen that most of the employees have appreciated department wise mail praising their individual output in order to perform better. This in turn helps leader in effective engagement of employees in the organization. Leaders have also stated that they get better response from the employees when each of the employees is treated individually. Employees tend to learn and understand the assigned task more when they are told personally and also they prefer getting feedbacks individually so as to see the positive change in their morale. However, some of the employees also believe that when a task is assigned to be worked in a collaborative environment, there is more effective communication and they're able to deliver maximum quality output.

While studying the insights of employees and their leaders on the influence of different leadership approaches on effective employee management, this study has suffered a limitation, as the study has only been conducted on 5 UK MNCs on the basis of which the employee engagement scenarios in all the UK based MNCs have been generalized. Results derived in this study can be taken further in future after collecting an adequate amount of data to understand the scenario, which would be close to reality and unbiased.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The implication of the study is for the managers of MNCs based in UK who can now focus more on individualized engagement of the employees that will increase the productivity and performance of the organisation. Using the individualised engagement, leaders are expected to get expert opinion from the employees on their specialized subject/domain.

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