

LEADER EMPATHIC EMOTION AND PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR OF THE DIVERSIFIED WORKFORCE OF TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN PORT HARCOURT

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Abstract

This study evaluates leader empathic emotion as a predictor of subordinate prosocial behaviour in five (5) major telecomm firms situated in Port Harcourt. The objective was to investigate the possible correlation between leader empathic emotion (the predictor variable) and the personal morality, building of organizational image and psychological identification measures of subordinate prosocial behaviour. The survey design was structured based on a quantitative methodology and data generated through the distribution of structured questionnaire issued to a sample size of two hundred and ten (210) employees (middle and junior level) of the firms. Analysis revealed that there is a significant relationship between leader empathic emotion and subordinate pro-social behaviour with results indicating a stronger relationship between leader empathic emotion and the psychological identification measure of subordinate pro-social behaviour than in the other two instances (personal morality and building of organizational image). In conclusion we assert that empathy as a tenet should be emphasized within managerial and leadership structures with emphatics on attributes such as patience and genuine concern especially in day-to-day dealings with subordinates.

Keywords: Leader empathic emotion, subordinate pro-social behaviour, diversified workforce.

Introduction

Prosocial behaviour (Afolabi, 2014), is a voluntary action intended to benefit others and comprises actions such as volunteering, donations and sharing. It involves inconveniencing oneself and requiring some significant level of discomfort for the benefit of others (Benabou and Tirole, (2004). In describing the construct – prosocial behaviour, it is important to point out that a major distinctive feature which differentiates it from constructs such as organizational commitment, organizational spontaneity and organizational citizenship behaviour is that apart from intra-role and extra-role activities, it also encompasses behaviour which may not be linked directly to the organization but which may concern members of the organization.

Instances of these include assisting colleagues with their personal issues as well as visitations or catching up with other staff members outside work hours and at one's own leisure time. This behaviour may even be considered functional as well as dysfunctional to the organization (Bulbul 2014: Grant & Berg, 2011). The growing body of research regarding prosocial behaviour bears evidence of congruence in terms of the advantages of its features or characteristics it offers the organization. Onyishi (2012) took up the view that prosocial behaviour, which encompasses assisting other employees to accomplish their tasks, cooperating with other staff members on different levels and units and also protecting the interests of the

organization, necessitated organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

Similarly, prosocial behaviour within organizations has also been revealed to enhance workers relationship by creating a more harmonious and cordial work environment (Twenge, DeWall, Ciarocco & Bartels, 2007), in this light, it can be viewed as having a gluing effect on organizational identification since it serves to promote organizational bonding and membership. However, one cannot overlook the implications of leadership or managerial behavioural inclinations on subordinate attitudes and behaviour.

In evaluating this, we are drawn to the social exchange theory of behavioural reciprocity, especially as obtainable within the workplace (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). When examined as a consequence of other relative activities within the organization, as applicable within the social exchange framework, there is the tendency to emphasize prosocial behavioural outcomes relative to antecedents such as compensation, working conditions, employee voice, support systems and such as are most often linked to the workings of the employment contract.

However, George (2000) has bemoaned the paucity of studies on leadership moods cum emotions and their effects on work relations such as subordinate behavioural dispensations and attitudes, and pinpointed that at best most studies rather focused on the cognitive aspects, physical attributes and competency of leadership. In the bid to fill the lacunae so identified, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between leader empathic emotion and subordinate prosocial behaviour. In so doing, an attempt is made herein to empirically assess the nature of the relationship between the constructs as applicable in telecommunication firms in the hydro-carbon city of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

It is pertinent to ask-why study telecomm firms? Given the current effort and drive by the federal government of Nigeria for a shift

from the oil and gas industry which has hitherto been the country's mainstay, to others such as agriculture, hospitality and tourism, entertainment and the likes, the choice of Telecomm is hinged on the observed growth and competition inherent in the industry which emphasizes customer relations and interactions as major success factors (Leon and Lestlie, 2000; Adesina & Chinonso, 2015). This is in line with the assertions of Parasuraman and Malhotra (2006) and Oki (2014) that customer satisfaction is the heartbeat of service-oriented businesses and that the role of employees is critical to maintaining a functional and harmonious relationship between the companies and its customer base.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent do leaders in the Telecomm firms in Port Harcourt express empathic emotions?
- ii. To what extent are subordinates in the Telecomm firms prosocial in behaviour?
- iii. To what extent does leader empathic emotion correlate with subordinate prosocial behaviour in telecomm firms in Port Harcourt?

Leader Empathic Emotion

Empathy conveys a sense of understanding based on experience. It is the ability to relate to the predicament or situation of others without losing one's own sense of reality, and it is an apt indicator of good interpersonal skill. Goleman (2006) opines that empathy forms the basic skill frame for effective social competency, and represents the capacity for sensing the feeling of others, seeing things from others own perspective and the ability to adjust and collaborate with a variety of diverse individuals and groups.

Kellett, Humphrey and Sleeth (2002) argue that empathic emotion in leadership is pertinent for effectiveness because it presents the leader as being "in touch" with the issues that affect the subordinate. This line of argument follows that of Ashkanasy, Hartel and Daus (2002) who opine that empathic emotions reveal a leaders sensitive

side and presents leadership in terms of being considerate and more disposed to fair judgements and treatment of subordinates (Sadri, Weber & Gentry, 2011).

Fairbairn (2002) distinguishes between empathy and sympathy, wherein sympathy is described as a spontaneous, uncontrolled reaction to an experience or event, empathy on the other hand is a skill, which reveals a capacity for communicating understanding and feelings while yet maintaining a sort of "cool" that allows the bearer remain in control of his or her own mood and feelings. While one may argue in terms of the need for rationality and impersonality in leadership, as imperatives for decision-making which can be considered logical and unbiased, studies (George, 2000; Goleman, 2006; Sadri, Weber & Gentry, 2011) reveal otherwise, with most emphasizing on the usefulness of emotions in maintaining healthy and supportive relations within the organization.. Sadri, et al., (2011) in their empirical analysis of leader empathic emotion and performance across 38 countries observe that there was a significant relationship between the constructs and that empathic emotion contributed meaningfully to leadership roles and effectiveness.

Furthermore, their results revealed that even across various cultural contexts, especially with regard to the moderating effect of power distance as a dimension of culture, the relationship between leader empathic emotion and performance is still rated highly. This result runs contrary to earlier arguments (DeVoe & Iyengar, 2004; Chhokar, Zhuplev, Fok & Hartman, 2001) that the effectiveness of empathic emotion as an attribute of leadership tended to differ across various cultural contexts. Likewise, empathy has been revealed to reduce communication gaps especially between health care professionals and their patients (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008), to create a paternalistic relationship geared towards the support and concern for the well-being of subordinates (Sadri, et al., 2011), and also enhance a climate for trust and cooperation within organizations (George, 2000).

Subordinate Prosocial Behaviour

Historically, studies of the construct - prosocial behaviour, has its roots in general psychology; however, it currently offers a vivid projection and approach for understanding and evaluating behaviour and actions reflecting cooperation, volunteerism and sharing within other disciplines particularly as it applies to the management discipline (Omoankhalen, Osagie, Akhator, Itoya & Aiegoba, 2014). Within the organization, it is described as behaviour expressed by certain individuals and directed towards other individuals, groups or even the organization with the intent of satisfying the need, welfare or challenge of the individual, group or organization towards which it is directed. It involves a proactive as well as reactive response to issues and challenges facing others – comprising subordinates, superiors, teammates as well as the organization as a whole, and entails a considerable amount of sacrifice or self-neglect (Omoankhalen et al., 2014).

Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco & Bartels (2007) argue that prosocial behaviour is often as a result of perceptions of belongingness or identification wherein the individual identifies with the recipient party and either feels morally inclined or obligated to look after the interest of the recipient. This is as further argued (Twenge et al., 2007) that within social constructions and structures, prosocial behaviour can be considered to bear certain benefits for the subject in the long run such as increased recognition and character validation by group members, trustworthiness, agreeability and respect. Similarly, Batson (2003) identifies four main factors which he ascribed as motivators of prosocial behaviour within organizations, namely – egoistic, collectivistic, principialistic and altruistic motivations. In the same vein, Bulbul (2014) avers that various factors come into play for prosocial behaviour to be categorized as advantageous to the organization or for it to be categorized as advantageous to individuals. The author further emphasize the relative effect of work

design on subordinate's tendencies to engage in prosocial behaviour which can either be considered as benefiting to the organization or as benefiting to the individual.

Engaging in prosocial behaviour has also been argued to offer subordinates an avenue to contribute meaningfully and to feel as a part of "something larger", enabling them to carve out identities for themselves within a larger framework (Pratt, 2000). Most often, these activities, although seemingly benefiting to others, yet serve to provide a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction to the worker, thereby giving a "soul" to his or her work (Grant & Berg, 2011). However, this does not imply that engagement in prosocial behaviour is due to anticipated self-interest or gratification but rather the satisfaction and joy derived from seeing others happy as a result of one's actions or behaviour which is most often reactive rather than proactive (Grant, 2007; Grant & Berg, 2011).

Leader Empathic Emotion and Personal Morality

Studies (Moore, Detert, Trevino, Baker and Mayer, 2011; Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, and Kim, 2014) assert that there exists a conflict within workers as regards internalized moral standards or what this study terms personal morality, and their engagement in activities or behaviour which most often could stem as a result of role expectations in the organization. Cohen et al (2014) opine that morality can be considered as a medium for the facilitation and coordination of interpersonal relationships which thus enables one to function effectively within identified groups and social constructions.

In assessing personal morality within organizations, this study follows the assertion of Cohen et al (2014) and their view of the workplace as affording workers a myriad of opportunities to either act responsibly and right, or to act irresponsibly and unjust. Similarly, Trevino and Brown (2004) emphasize on the role of leadership based on the social exchange assumption of

reciprocity, to influence subordinate behaviour through their own actions and behaviour; thus placing the leader or manager at the helm of subordinate behavioural outcomes, for as George (2000) argues, feelings have to be managed and expressed in order to effectively influence the judgement and decisions of others. Based on this we postulate that:

H₁: Leader expressions of empathic emotions will positively enhance subordinate personal morality.

Leader Empathic Emotion and Building of Organizational Image

Grant and Berg (2011) in their assessment of prosocial motivation and its effect on employee relations with colleagues and their promotion of organizational image and values, observe that transformational leadership; with regards to show of concern, expressions of interest in the well-being and well-fare of employees, support for employee oriented programs and other individualized considerations aimed at the development of the employee; further motivates employees by synchronizing their work to their core value systems and believes and thereafter stimulating employees to prioritize issues related to the organization above their own issues or self-interest. Conger, Kanungo and Menon (2000) opine that the use of emotions and other symbolic forms of appeal by transformational leaders as a means of facilitating cooperation and a trust-based form of mutual dependency between the organization and its employees, also necessitated a reciprocation from employees in their commitment to the goals and values of the organization which comprises activities ranging from their relationship with co-workers to their behaviour towards issues that affect the organization as a whole (Grant & Berg, 2011). We therefore postulate that:

H₂: Leader expressions of empathic emotions will positively enhance subordinate building of organizational image.

Leader Empathic Emotion and Building of subordinate psychological identification

Psychological identification, according to Braddock and Lacewing (2007) reflects a transient process whereby the subject identifies with and also assimilates aspects and features of another. It encompasses a process of a sense of attachment, belongingness and most often ownership. Zhu, Sosik, Riggio and yang (2012) in their study, linked outcomes of employee self-definition, affection, attachment and belongingness to aspects of leadership which emphasize inspiration of subordinates, intellectual stimulation and also individualized consideration, an assertion which corroborates that of Yukl (2010) that effective leadership empowers employees psychologically and allows for their participation as well as active extra-role involvement through their engagement in activities which promises no additional reward or otherwise punishment. This follows Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) argument that leadership which offers support, understanding, meaning and value to the employee allows for their active identification and sense of belonging to the organization; behaviours which invariably translate into prosocial given the opportunities and requisite events. Therefore, in line with this argument we postulate that:

H₃: Leader expressions of empathic emotions will positively enhance subordinate psychological identification.

Methodology

The study is a correlational study based on a quantitative methodology and adopts the cross-sectional survey design in its assessment of the relationship between the constructs; leader empathic emotion and subordinate prosocial behaviour. An accessible population of 443 junior and middle level staff of five major telecomm firms in Port Harcourt were the focus of the study. Using the Krejcie and Morgan 1970 sampling table a sample size of 210 was

adopted for the study and it formed the representative model for the population of the study.

The structured questionnaire was adopted in sourcing the primary data for the study and comprised a set of indicators which served as empirical referents for the constructs of the study. A 4-item instrument per construct was utilized giving a total of 16 items for the measurement of the study constructs on the questionnaire. The scale for measuring leader empathic emotion was adapted from the Emotional Competency Inventory (ECI) framework (Goleman et. al, 2002) while the scale for measuring subordinate prosocial behaviour (personal morality, psychological identification and building of organizational image) were adapted from the studies of Bubul (2014) and Twenge et al, (2007). A Cronbach reliability alpha coefficient for each variable was obtained as follows: Leader empathic emotion ($\alpha = .898$); personal morality ($\alpha = .922$); psychological identification ($\alpha = .747$) and organizational image building ($\alpha = .914$). The results of the reliability tests indicate adequacy in terms of scale response consistency to constructs given the benchmark of 0.70 put forward by Tavakol and Dennick (2011).

Data Analysis Results

The data generated for the study comprised both discrete and continuous data. Analysis entailed a detailed assessment of the distribution of the respondents (demographic); the distribution of data for each construct (univariate) and then the test of hypotheses and for correlation between the constructs (Bivariate).

Demographic

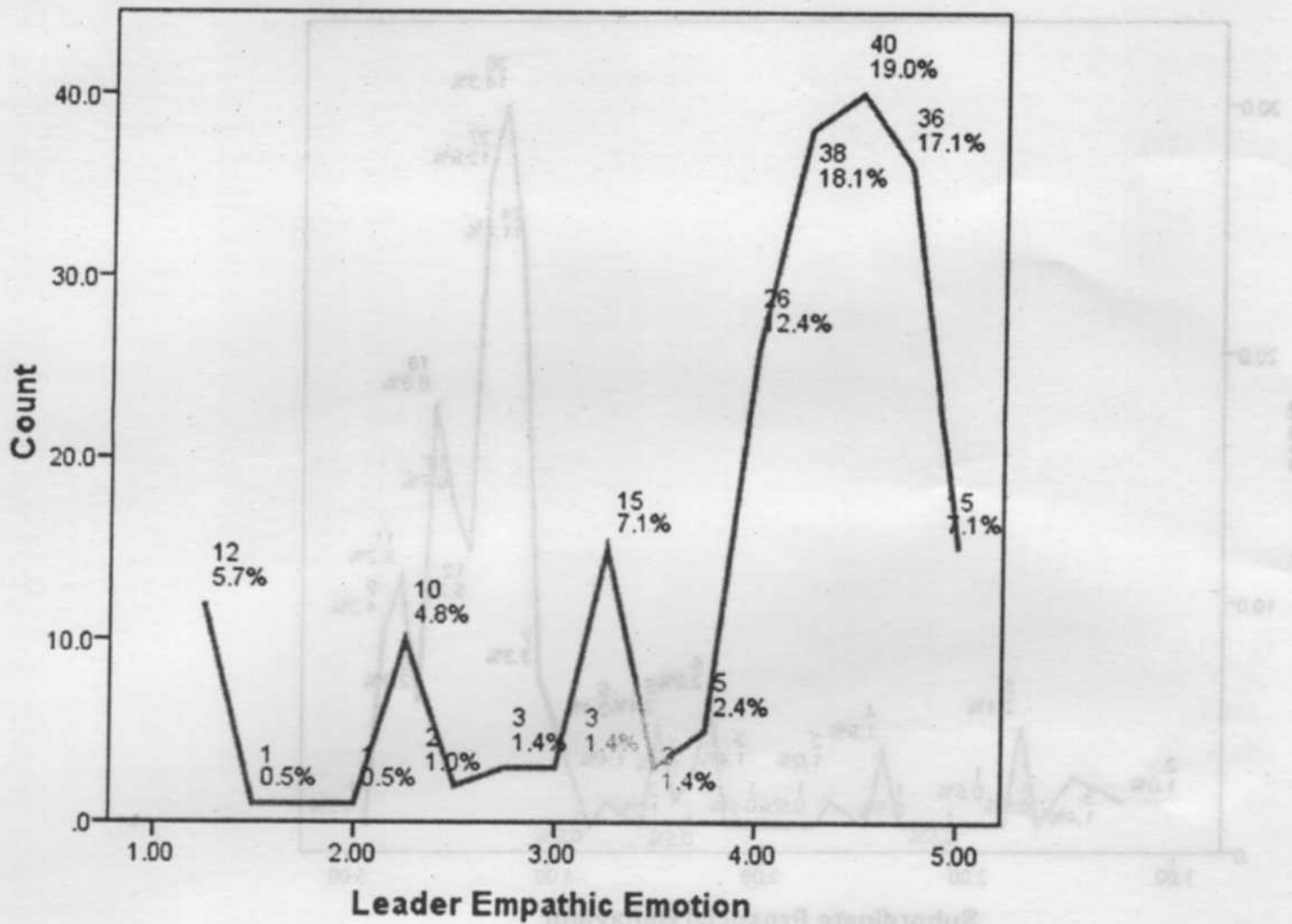
The distribution of respondents according to their demographic dispensation revealed that most of the respondents were male (66%) compared to the female gender category (34%); results also revealed that a majority of the respondents only had Diploma certifications (49%) followed by the frequency for those who had acquired first degree certificates (33%) and finally those with post graduate degree certifications

(18%). Furthermore, the distribution according to respondents length of service with their respective hotels were assessed with most of the respondents having worked with their particular hotels between 5 – 10 years (62%); followed for the frequency for

those that had worked with theirs for less than 5 years (27%) and finally the frequency for the category of those who have worked with theirs for more than 10 years (11%).

Univariate Analysis

Figure 1: Data Distribution for Leader Empathic Emotion



The analysis on the data distribution of the predictor variable: leader empathic emotions (figure: 1) indicates that at the highest frequency of 40 (19%), average response from participants favour affirmations of their experiences and observations of expressions

of empathic emotions. This is as the mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.9655$) and standard deviation ($s = 0.97991$) further reveal the central tendencies of the responses as well as the low dispersion in opinions.

Table 1: Data distribution for the measures of subordinate prosocial behaviour

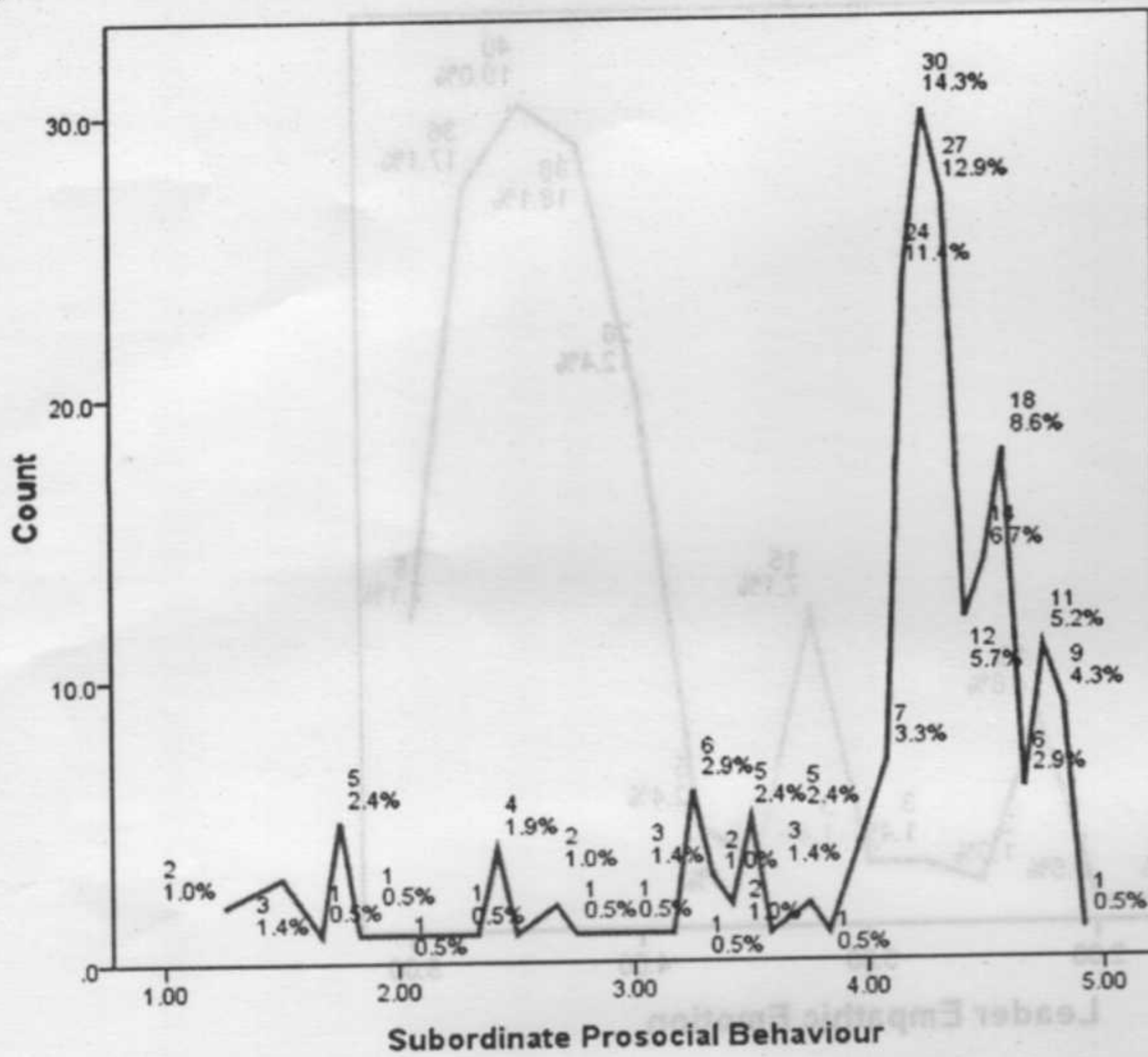
Measures of Subordinate Prosocial Behaviour	Mean (\bar{x})	Std. Deviation (s)
Personal Morality	4.0619	.82990
Psychological Identification	4.0536	.75087
Organizational Image Building	4.0095	.93312
Valid N (listwise)		

Source: Data survey, 2016

The analysis on the distribution of the measures of the criterion variable: subordinate prosocial behaviour (Table 1) reveals high central tendencies for each of the measures where dispersion measures are very low. The data implies significant levels of affirmation by respondents to activities or

behaviour which can be perceived as being within the context of personal morality, psychological identification and organizational image building, being measures of subordinate prosocial behaviour.

Figure 2: Data distribution for subordinate prosocial behaviour



The analysis on the data distribution for subordinate prosocial behaviour (figure 2) reveals a high level of frequency of 30 (14%) in support of agreement by respondents as regards activities and behaviour which can be considered prosocial in nature. This implies that most of the

respondents believe they have on several occasions performed acts which can be considered as being moral, portraying a sense of psychological attachment with the organization and also building of the organizational image.

Table 2: Tests for hypothesis 1: Leader empathic emotion and personal morality

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.771 ^a	.595	.593	.52959

a. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy

Table 2 illustrates the result for the relationship between leader empathic emotion and personal morality wherein correlation, $R = .771$; $R^2 = .595$ and $P <$

0.05 . This indicates a significant relationship between both constructs where 60% unit changes in personal morality can be accounted for by variations in leader

empathic emotion. Therefore the hypothesis of significant and positive relations between

both constructs is accepted.

Table 3: Tests for hypothesis 2: Leader empathic emotion and psychological identification

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.850 ^a	.722	.720	.39708

a. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy

Table 3 shows the result for relationship between leader empathic emotion and psychological identification. The correlation coefficient for the relationship between both constructs is given at $R = .850$ and $R^2 = .722$ where $P < 0.05$. The coefficients illustrate a significant relationship between both

constructs (leader empathic emotion and psychological identification) where 72% changes in psychological identification can be attributed to variations in leader empathic emotion. Hence the hypothesis of significant and positive relations between both constructs is accepted.

Table 4: Tests for hypothesis 3: Leader empathic emotion and building of organizational image

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.898 ^a	.806	.805	.41199

a. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy

The result for the analysis on the relationship between leader empathic emotion and the building of organizational image is illustrated in table 4. The results reveal a correlation coefficient of $R = .898$; $R^2 = .806$ where $P < 0.05$. The results indicate that there is a significant and positive relationship between leader empathic emotion and the building of organizational image. This is as the coefficients further attribute significant unit changes in the building of organizational image at 81% to variations in leader empathic emotion.

Discussion

The study assessed prosocial behaviour as a consequence of perceptions of leader empathic emotions amongst junior and middle level employees of eight selected hotels in Rivers State. The results are discussed relative to the three research questions which served to guide the intent of the study.

To what extent do leaders in the target hotels in Port Harcourt express empathic emotions?

The study finds that on the average, subordinates of the target hotels believe that their leaders or managers do express empathic emotions. This is evidenced by the high central tendencies in favour of agreement and the low dispersions in responses. This is as respondents affirm to aspects of leader empathic emotions reflecting understanding, communication, support as well as benevolence. In a similar study, Olowu (2011) observes that managerial expressions of empathy and concern for the well-being of subordinates are fundamental to the effective management and coordination of the various social elements which held the organization in place. The ability to communicate concern and to link with the feelings and emotional states of significant others within the organization is considered advantageous in garnering trust and collaboration (Olowu, 2011; Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008).

To what extent are subordinates in the target hotels prosocial in behaviour?

Evidence from the analysis reveals that on the average respondents affirm to their activities and behaviour as being prosocial and also reveal a tendency or inclination towards such behaviour given the need or opportunity for such. Findings indicate that respondents have and are willing to engage in activities such as helping colleagues with their tasks, expressions of pride with the image and identity of the organization, defence of the organization in the face of criticism, attending of non-mandatory meetings, volunteering for activities that carry no financial reward (Bulbul, 2014). Likewise, Baruch et. al (2004) and Gregg et al (2008) assert that prosocial behaviour is a prerequisite for enhanced job performance and productivity as it offers an endearing connection between the worker and the organization, one in which the organization is perceived to offer meaning and "a place in the world" for the employee.

To what extent does leader empathic emotion correlate with subordinate prosocial behaviour in the target hotels in Port Harcourt?

The results of the tests of the hypotheses reveal that there is a significant relationship between leader empathic emotion and subordinate prosocial behaviour in the target hotels in Rivers State. A total of three hypotheses in favour of correlations between leader empathic emotion and three measures of prosocial behaviour, namely: personal morality, psychological identity and building of organizational image. All three hypotheses were accepted as empirical evidence showed that leader empathic emotions significantly contributed to occasions of personal morality, psychological identification and the building of organizational image by the subordinates in the target hotels in Rivers State. The findings of this study further corroborate those of previous studies which emphasize on the role of empathy, especially as a quality of leadership in facilitating a more harmonious, cooperative and trust-based work environment (Olowu, 2011; Bulbul,

2014; Yukl, 2010; Grant & Berg, 2011; Twenge et al., 2007).

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study finds that leadership through expressions of empathy can further stimulate and inspire subordinates to be more prosocial and engaged in the activities of the organization. The implications of this is that through the "reaching out process" which empathy as an emotion affords the leader, subordinates are reassured of their place and value within the social network which the organization offers (Twenge et al., 2007; Grant & Berg, 2011; George, 2000; Goleman, 2006). This assertion is also in line with the theoretical framework provided by the social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and further illustrates the reciprocal nature of emotion based relationships which, bearing no direct economic values, however tend to offer various benefits to both parties as regards organizational performance, goal accomplishment, collaboration, trust and mutual understanding. It is as observed in the findings of other studies (Olowu, 2011; Bulbul, 2014; George, 2000) which also lend credence to the empirical evidence put forward herein that expressions of empathic emotions by leadership apart from a display of concern for the well-being of subordinates further offers an insight into the personality and nature of the leader as an individual and provides a measure for effectively assessing levels of emotional intelligence in leadership (Goleman, 2006).

Recommendations

- ⊙ Leaders of Telecomm firms should show understanding and communicate effectively with their subordinates by avoiding all forms of toxic boss syndrome.
- ⊙ Leaders of Telecomm firms should exhibit benevolence in dealing with the diverse workforce under their tutelage because it helps in building trust.
- ⊙ Leaders of Telecomm firms should treat subordinates with great sense of respect and dignity deserving of human beings who flow with emotions

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