Academic Research in Kenya: Quantitative Sense Making

Details
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Zulea noticed seemingly striking similarities between employees in various offices over her years in the workplace. She found that employees who seemed happier with their lives outside of work also came across as happier with the realities in the workplace. She wondered whether someone satisfied with their personal lives, family, etc. then would also performed better because they were happier at work too.

Eventually Zulea found a top-notch Kenyan consulting firm to fund her to conduct research on whether such a linkage exists. The consulting firm felt that any correlations between life satisfaction and employee performance could significantly aid its client firms. The implications could become immense as companies could provide simple services that boost employee quality of life as a possible way to boost its own profits. It seemed like a win-win for employees and employers and the consulting firm in return could sell the research solutions to its clients. However, the research idea needed testing and validation.

Given the backing of the consulting firm, Zula proceeded to go forth with her research idea. Her idea could prove revolutionary for businesses, but where to begin?

Clearly, Zuela needed to conduct a thorough review of existing research studies to see whether anyone else ever uncovered such a link. She searched credible sources of literature and uncovered existing research that tied employees’ life satisfaction to their job satisfaction and then to job performance. Zuela felt reassured that her observations were supported by substantial research. However, she simultaneously felt sad that many other researchers already uncovered and validated the link that she hoped to uncover.

Since the “what” and “how” already existed in Zuela’s research area, the only remaining literature gap involved the “where”. Researchers already tested the theory extensively in North America, South America, Europe, East Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. However, no one ever tested the constructs in Sub Saharan Africa. So Zuela could make a substantial contribution to global knowledge by testing the universal applicability of the theory as to whether Sub Saharan Africans psychologically hold the same antecedents to workplace success as most of the world or retain different causes and effects.
So in continuation of Business Talk’s series on raising the level of research rigor in Kenya, let us examine how Zuela could undertake her research. Zuela must decide whether to conduct qualitative or quantitative research. Most Kenyan professionals hear these terms thrown about freely. Quantitative research seeks to determine the degree of effects of independent variables upon dependent variables. Essentially, quantitative research decides whether a cause has any effect and how big is the effect. Meanwhile qualitative research discovers the “why” behind causes and effects.

The easiest way for a researcher to examine a situation like Zuela’s includes developing a questionnaire and utilizing quantitative techniques. Pose questions that relate to each construct you desire to test. Zuela’s independent variable, employee life satisfaction, should involve several questions, as well should her mediating variable, job satisfaction, as well as her dependent variable, job performance. Do not ask “yes or no” questions on a questionnaire. Instead ask open ended queries that respondents should agree to on a five or seven point Likert scale. An example for life satisfaction: “I am happy with where my life is at right now”. Then the researcher should put “1” to correspond to strongly disagree then all the way up to “6” as agree and finally “7” as strongly agree. By seeking subjects’ answers on a Likert scale, you quantitatively capture their opinions and may use the data in potent ways.

In order for her research to hold international credibility, she must carry out her study in a very similar way to previous research. Students and researchers in organizations often make the fatal flaw that kills the reliability of their research: they create their own tools to examine a subject. So in a questionnaire, Zuela should not just make up her own questions. If she does, then her questions may not test the exact psychological construct of life satisfaction, for example, in employees. She should utilise the survey questions already tested and used in other research. Therefore, her results cannot be discounted due to different methodologies applied. So if other researchers utilized a five point Likert scale, then you do the same, or a seven point Likert scale, etc. Proverbially, compare apples and apples, not mangos and apples.

Once Zuela collects her data, she should enter the responses into a statistical analysis software. The most commonly utilized software by researchers in Kenya and most of the world is SPSS by IBM. Once she enters all the responses, then Zuela can undertake some very easy but incredibly powerful tests. She can compare her independent variable, life satisfaction, and see how it relates to her dependent variable, job performance using correlations, regressions, and so on depending on her research framework. While the statistical terms sound scary, they are actually extremely easy to perform.

Utilize the following secret: many YouTube clips exist to explain how to conduct statistical analysis in SPSS. Search for Professor Andy Field who narrates the most popular easy to understand YouTube statistical video collection. You can produce professional high-end quality research easily by following the methods in the videos.
In a master’s degree thesis, you may require over 100 respondents to your questionnaire. In a Ph.D. or funded research, like Zuela’s, you should obtain at least 400 questionnaires filled if your research framework holds many variables, independent or dependent or both. Many respondents allow you to pursue structural equation modeling. However, master’s degree and DBA students may utilize simple regressions, multiple regressions, or mediating and moderating variable regressions without worrying about structural equation modeling.

Sound complicated? Not at all. Take the above simple steps and you can produce international quality research results publishable around the world.

Submit your research successes, challenges, and ideas as we continue Business Talk’s research series with other readers through #KenyaResearch on Twitter.

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