

Effects of Demographics on the Relationship between Optimism and Work Engagement among Employees of State Agencies in Kenya

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Abstract

Organizations desire highly engaged employees for higher productivity. Both personal and organizational factors drive work engagement. Work engagement in the public sector is low globally. In a survey of 389 managerial employees in 32 state agencies in Kenya, the study explored whether optimism and demographic factors influence the level of work engagement. 325 returned questionnaires were analyzed to derive descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS version 21. The reliability and the validity of the questionnaire items were checked. Work engagement levels was high (mean 4.14), Optimism was moderate (mean 3.44). Work engagement positively and significantly correlated with optimism ($r=0.257$, $p<0.01$). Age positively and significantly correlated with work engagement ($r=0.153$, $p<0.01$). Optimism and demographics predicted 6.6% and 3.5% of work engagement respectively. The study demonstrated evidence that optimism influence work engagement more than demographic factors. Employees can exhibit high levels of work engagement when they are psychologically positive about their future.

Keywords: Optimism, Work engagement, Positive organizational behaviour, Public sector.

1. Introduction

Work engagement, as positive work behaviour is receiving deserving attention in management literature (Truss, 2006). According to Kahn (1990) work engagement is the state at which an employee is emotionally committed to his organizations' goals resulting in the use of discretionary effort characterized by vigour, absorption and dedication in assigned tasks. Truss, Soane, Delbridge, Alfes, Shantz, & Petrov (2014) observed that work engagement is a positive work performance culture that influence individual employees' and organizational performance.

The concern for employee work engagement has only recently attracted both the private sector and governments. Early in the 21st century scholars such as Kowalski, (2003); Bate (2004) and Johnson, (2004) reported that USA economy loses up to \$300 billion annually in productivity resulting from disengaged employees. As a result, Canada in 2004 developed an employee engagement model and implemented an employee engagement survey program across the governments' jurisdictions to boost its levels (Kosuta, 2010).

Measuring employee engagement levels is now a common practice in Northern America and this may explain the statistics by Aon Hewitt placing the continent among the leading in work engagement as at 2013.

In Europe research in employee engagement was initially active only in Netherlands amongst psychologist led by Professor Wilmar Schaufeli, (Truss *et al.*, 2006). According to Katie Truss, UK government began to take interest around 2006 and scholars in business management and strategic human resource have since taken centre stage. European scholars are now advocating for development of the concept work engagement into a major science in order to improve human resource management theory and practice (Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes and Delbridge, 2013). This may be timely given that Europe registered the lowest engagement levels according to Aon Hewitt global work engagement report for 2013.

Work engagement research is receiving deserved attention in the Asian academic literature (Ahlowalia, Tiwary & Jha (2014). Reports show South Pacific companies enjoyed work engagement levels of between 64% and 61% with mixed growth and stagnation between 2012 and 2013 according to Hay group (2013) and Hewitt Associates (2014)

In Africa, the picture about work engagement is still not clear; academic as well as practitioner's literature is scanty; there are sporadic reports of high work engagement attributed to consultants. Agyemang & Ofei, (2013) reported disparities in levels of work engagement between the public and the private sector in Ghana. Slabbeth *et al.* (2011) compared the Chinese work ethic with the South Africans; accordingly, Chinese workers believed more in hard work exhibited by their high levels of vigour, dedication and absorption in tasks compared to their South African counterparts. Kenyan researchers have also reported high work engagement among employees in the private sector (Mokaya and Kipyegon, 2014), however Kangure, Wario & Odhiambo (2014) reported a moderate work engagement levels among employees of Kenya Ports Authority and Oduor (2015) also reported moderate engagement levels among media industry employees.

It is apparent that the concept work engagement is growing in popularity as a new frontier in enhancing organizational effectiveness; however the route towards achieving high employee engagement is still hazy. As a

developing concept, researchers have prescribed varieties of antecedents both organizational and individual factors. The later is attracting attention in the literature under the more inclusive term personal resources which are aspects of the self associated with resiliency and ability to control and adopt to their environment (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). The typical personal resources are self efficacy, organizational-based self esteem and optimism (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli 2007). This personal resources are associated with positive work behaviors (Malik, 2014).

Optimism is defined by Scheier & Carver, (1985) as the tendency to believe that one will generally experience good outcomes in life such that it propels one to take action on forces within ones environment. According to Seligan (1998) optimistic people associate positive events to personal, permanent and pervasive causes and negative events to external and temporal forces. Optimistic individuals are realistic (Schneider, 2001) and flexible (C. Peterson, 2000). It has an impact of performance (Luthans, et al., 2005). Furnham (1997) noted optimistic individuals emphasize favorable aspects, situations, actions and events at the same time maintaining a positive perspective of future outcomes.

Researchers have linked optimism with other positive aspects of the individual, for example; Gist and Mitchell (1992) linked optimism with self efficacy; Optimism and OCB (Naeem, Malik and Bano, 2014). There are also empirical evidence associating optimism with various positive work related outcomes such as higher employee performance (Jensen et al, 2007) and student academic performance (Bressler et al 2010)

Demographics are important factors taken into consideration in most human resource and management decisions because they influence work behaviour and productivity (Kipkebut, D. J. (2013). According to (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) the level of work engagement is affected in general terms by their demographic characteristics. Kong (2009) found differences in work engagement between male and females employees. Sarwar and Arwan (2010) noted female employees value their jobs more than their male counterparts. However, Ariani (2013) found no statistical significance in variation in work engagement between male and female employees but reported differences in citizenship behaviors. While Naruse, Sakai, Watai, Taguchi, Kuwahara, Nagata and Murahima (2012) study among Japanese home care nurse showed age as the only demographic variable with significant statistical correlation with work engagement. Czerw and Grabowski (2015) found employees with higher levels of education were more engaged in their work than those with less education.

The present study focus on public sector employees is informed by the popular perception that under performance at individual and organizational levels is most pronounced in the public sector particularly in developing countries (World Bank, 2004). Moreover, the public sector is known for inefficient use of resource and low productivity Omollo (2012), the probable reason could be deficiency in positive work behaviours including low work engagement levels.

The study was informed by the Job Demands–Resources model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004); the model predicts that employees high in both organizational and personal resources exhibit higher work engagement practices and those high in work engagement behave positively in their task performance ((Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

2.1 Work Engagement

The term ‘engagement’ was used to specifically describe a worker’s involvement in assigned tasks (Kahn (1990) .He posits that individuals can be personally engaged in their work by investing positive, emotional and cognitive energy into tasks courtesy of three psychological conditions (Truss *et al.* 2014). First, the psychological meaningfulness associated with work elements that created incentives or disincentives to engage or disengage. Secondly, the psychological safety; referring to elements of social systems that created more or less secure, predictable and consistent social situations in which to engage in. Finally, the psychological availability which relates to individual distractions that preoccupied people to various degrees and left them with more or fewer resources with which to engage in role performance.

The argument behind William Kahn’s theory of work engagement is that emotional and psychological state, though internal is largely externally driven; this suggests that the psychological state precipitating work engagement may not necessarily be inborn but the forces within the individual person’s work environment play a significant role. In other words the environmental forces shape the psychological state of an individual to engage or disengage (Kahn, 1991). Therefore the principle determinants of work engagement according to Kahns’ model are the job itself, the people and the organization. The implication is that managers have the responsibility to link the three elements in a manner that facilitate employees to engage in tasks assigned.

From the practical perspective, Hewitt Associates (2014) engagement levels depends on the people, the job itself, procedures, quality of work life and opportunities the organization provides. Organizations can therefore harness its physical and human resources, align its work procedures and set quality standards as an effort towards boosting the employees’ engagement to their work.

A highly engaged employee work harder, is more likely to deliver beyond the minimum requirements and expectations (Lockwood 2007). Such employees perceive their work as crucial determinants of their physical

and psychological well-being (Crabtree, 2005). Engaged employees exhibit high levels of mental and physical energy, as such they are quite resilient in task performance; they put their minds and souls in their jobs as shown from their persistence and willingness to invest effort. They exhibit strong work involvement; derive and exhibit strong feelings of significance, enthusiasm, passion, inspiration, excitement and challenge from their work. Time often passes quickly without noticing because they are fully concentrated and immersed in their work (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). As such, Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez & Bakker(2002) defined work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind which is characterized by three factors; vigor, dedication and absorption. However it is important not to confuse work engagement with the traditional management constructs like job involvement and satisfaction.

An organization cannot rely on employee satisfaction alone because an employee can be satisfied and comfortably remain in the job because of other reasons unrelated to work performance (Baron, 2013). A satisfied employee commits just to the minimum provided for in the job description. Baron argued that work engagement is more than just satisfaction; it is about passion, commitment, and the willingness to invest oneself and expend ones' discretionary effort to help the employer succeed. Organizational effectiveness depends on more than simply maintaining a stable workforce; employees must perform assigned duties dependably and be willing to engage in activities that go beyond role requirements. Accordingly, satisfied employees are retained if they are fully engaged. As such a fully satisfied employee is not necessarily a highly engaged employee.

It is the individuals' emotional and intellectual commitment that drives employees to exhibit work engagement practices (Supriya *et al.*, 2014). Engaged employees are physically involved in their tasks, cognitively alert, and ardently connected to others in ways that demonstrate their thoughts, feelings and values (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2007). An employee filled with vigor exhibits high levels of energy when doing his or her work; a dedicated one demonstrate meaningful effort in whatever he or she is engaged in while an absorbed one exhibit high levels of concentration on assigned duties. These are positive work experiences and behaviors desired of employees at any level because studies have shown they make a positive impact on an organization.

As previously highlighted, research in work engagement is widely advocated for, through which human resources productivity may be enhanced (Truss *et al.*, 2013), Gruman and Saks, (2010) reviewed literature on work engagement and performance management. They suggested a number of elements that may enhance the interactive nature of work engagement and performance management that need to be empirically tested as a way of improving organizational effectiveness.

Researchers have demonstrated evidence of positive organizational outcomes of work engagement across sectors, while studying a hospital set up, West and Dawson (2012) reported that work engagement had many significant associations with work outcomes such as patient satisfaction, lower infection and mortality rates, as well as lower absenteeism and turnover. Their conclusion was that high work engagement among employees lead to better outcomes for patients and the organization in general. Also a study in Jordan on the role of employee engagement in work-related outcomes Ram and Prabhakar (2011) linked organizational support with work engagement. They recommended for more research to unearth drivers of work engagement because it is associated with numerous positive work outcomes.

Others have also linked high employee work engagement with important work performance variables such as job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviours and employee commitment (Zigarmi, 2009, Agymang & Ofei, 2013).

Work engagement serves organizational purpose by improving organizational effectiveness (Macey *et al.*,2008).For organizations to compete well in the present economic order it is important for employees to be psychologically connected to their work (Bakker & Leito,2010).They need to demonstrate voluntary willingness and ability to invest themselves fully to their assigned roles; the reason why organizations seek and desire to retain only energetic and dedicated workers for their survival (Brevaat *et al.*, 2015).The conditions under which people work as the main driver of work engagement (Macey *et al.*,2008) . Researchers have also demonstrated that customer satisfaction (West & Dawson, 2012), retention and loyalty (Bates, 2004) significantly link with employee engagement. It enhances good working relationship between fellow employees (Vance, 2006). As such it enhances employee performance (Nyongesa, Sewe & Ng'ang'a, 2012).

Researchers have also discussed whether demographic factors influence levels of work engagement, Czerw and Grabowski (2015) while studying employees in Poland reported that psychological factors are the major determinants of work engagement rather than demographics. Other studies seem to concur with the finding; Wilson (2009) found demographics particularly gender not to significantly relate with work engagement. Chen (2000) also reported no significance of demographic variables in work engagement levels among the Chinese employees. Ariani (2013) found gender does not explain variances in work engagement levels.

Using UWES scale developed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002), Sonnentag, 2003 and Xanthoupolu, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli (2009a) demonstrated that work engagement levels vary substantially according to people and situations. Therefore organizations must put effort to identify, harness or develop work engagement if it seeks to benefit from it.

In summary the potential benefits of a highly engaged work force are numerous at both individual and organization levels. Employers benefit from highly engaged employees because they create value to the organization as a result of their superior job performance (Chughtai & Buckley, 2011; Gruman & Saks, 2011). Such employees are more creative and often exhibit proactive reasoning and logical thinking when handling work related issues (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Park *et al.*, 2013); they often practice innovative work behaviors (Agarwal *et al.*, 2014) and they are associated with reduced absenteeism and turnover (Ibrahim & Al Falasi, 2014). They exhibit more organizational commitment and loyalty (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013), superior customer service leading to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty (Harter *et al.*, 2002; Salanova *et al.*, 2005; Chughtai & Buckley, 2011). At the individual employees' level, the benefits of highly engaged employee are also abundant; they enjoy much higher career and life satisfaction (Timms & Brough, 2013; Bakker *et al.*, 2014;), higher personal safety concerns (Harter *et al.*, 2002); higher commitment to specific individuals, including their spouses, children, parents and siblings besides coworkers (Vance, 2006). Work engagement therefore is a new frontier towards which organization can realise its objectives, investing in employee engagement is therefore paramount.

2.2 Optimism

Optimism consists of a set of generalized positive outcome expectancies (Scheier and Carver 1985). The basic assumption of this definition is that people who generally expect things will go their way and believe that they will have more good outcomes than bad, are optimistic. Green Jr. *et al.* (2004) defined optimism sub culture as work unit cultural values geared to encouraging innovation, giving attention to results as opposed to activities and remaining focused on outcomes through teamwork.

Optimistic people are known to associate positive events with personal, permanent and pervasive causes and negative events with external, temporary and situation-specific causes (Seligman, 1998). Optimistic persons have attributes that are characteristically opposite of the pessimist. The success of the later is undermined by their negative expectations, since it increases their potential towards failure. Strutton and Lumpkin (1993) linked optimistic individuals with improved performance because of their coping abilities to deal with work related problems and job demands such as stress. They demonstrated that optimistic individuals outperform the pessimist.

An optimistic work force provides an ideal work environment of hard work, satisfaction and high morale. Optimistic employees aspire to achieve high goals and often persevere in times of difficulty (Malik, 2013). According to Harter, Schmidt & Keyes (2003) optimism contributes to employee well being; it promotes personal growth and enhances ones' sense of purpose in work, it improves relationship with others (Chiok, 2001). Subsequently these attitudes contribute to personal satisfaction, good health and work fulfillment (Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1997).

Optimistic individuals direct their energy towards attaining their set objectives because they are naturally positive, they assess situations positively in times of hardships and tribulations instead of resigning to fate (Fredrickson 2004). They have a clear positive perspective about their future. Their positive perspective of reality may explain the reason why others have associated the term happiness to optimism. Tims Bakker and Xanthopoulou (2011) demonstrated a positive correlation between optimism and self efficacy. This implies that the positive nature of optimistic individuals improves their self efficacy levels in the sense that they are more confident and assertive about their ability to exert effort when confronted by challenges and opportunity.

2.3 Influence of optimism on work engagement

Whereas organizational factors stimulate high work engagement, individual factors in terms of personal resources impact significantly on work engagement (Simpson (2009). Optimism is one of the personal resources conceptualized as psychological capital consisting of four elements; optimism, efficacy, resilience and hope (Luthans *et al.*, 2006). Optimism has prominently featured as a key concept in the emerging field of positive organizational behavior whose elements include work engagement. According to Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2009), Youssef *et al.* (2007) optimism contributes towards positive work-related employee outcomes. Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2009) points out optimism as one of the personal resources important in achieving goals; it protects one from threats associated with physiological and psychological costs of work and work settings. It is also instrumental in stimulating personal growth and development.

Empirical evidence have demonstrated the role of personal characteristics in positive work behaviours (Lepine *et al.* 2002; Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2007, 2009) and Mauno *et al.* (2007). For example, the Job demand-resource model (Demerouti, 2001) suggests that job demands (physical, social and organizational aspects of the job that involve physical and mental effort) bring about physical and psychological costs such as energy depleting emotional stress and physical strain leading to exhaustion and fatigue (Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2003b). However, optimism is a personal resource that can effectively counter job demands (Fredrickson, 2004).

Furthermore, studies have shown that optimistic individuals tend to sustain positive feelings despite hardships compared with the pessimist who despair while expecting the worse when faced with high levels of job demands (Malik, 2013). Accordingly, any negative feeling leads to lower levels of job resources (Hopfall 2011). Simpson (2009) posits that there is a strong link between high job resources and work engagement, while job resources and personal resources have a reciprocal relationship (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Evangelia Demerouti, Wilmar, Schaufeli, 2009). Therefore optimistic individuals are more likely to exhibit higher levels of work engagement than the pessimist because they have the ability to unleash their job resources to counter job demands.

Optimistic employees tend to focus more on job resources and less on job demands (Xanthopoulou, 2009) this supports Seligman (1998) view that optimistic people tend to associate positive events in terms of personal, permanent, and pervasive causes and negative events as externally driven, situational and therefore temporal. Therefore the energy of optimistic people is positively focused, as such they are less likely to suffer burnt-outs and their level of engagement in their work would remain high. Indeed, optimism is an aspect of positivity (Fredrickson (2003); positivity broadens one's ability to resolve problems, develop adaptive mechanism and even built an inventory of resources and buffers to protect these psychological resources including work engagement. Fredrickson, (2004) argued that optimistic people steer their energy towards attaining their objectives because they are naturally positive; they often reassess situations positively whenever faced with obstacles instead of resigning to fate.

Optimistic individuals have a clearer positive perspective about their future, therefore they remain more confident and assertive about their ability to exert effort when confronted by challenges and opportunity (Avey, Wersing & Luthans, 2008) and thus they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement in their work. Othman (2013) researched on the relationship between work engagement and two personal resources, self efficacy and optimism in a Malaysian context; the two variables positively related with work engagement; however none of the five control variables made any significant contribution towards the variance in work engagement. In a study of citizenship behavior, a closely related work behaviour of work engagement Ariani, (2013); Naeem, Malik and Bano (2014) found demographic variables does not contribute to the variations in citizenship behaviors among Indian employees.

From the foregoing, optimism helps in reversing the destructive impact of negativity which in turn may lead towards positive work behaviors including work engagement; the following two hypotheses were therefore proposed and tested.

Hypothesis Ho1; Individual optimism is not a significant predictor of work engagement.

Hypothesis Ho2; Work engagement levels are not determined by individual employees' demographic characteristics.

3. Methodology of Study

The study employed a cross-sectional design in which hierarchical regression was used for data analysis. Stratified sampling was used to select the primary sample of 32 organizations from a population of 197 state agencies (also known as parastatals in Kenya). The strata constituted the five sectors of finance, commerce, public universities, regional development, regulatory bodies and services. A sample of 389 respondents was proportionately selected from a target population of more than 14,790 managerial employees in the selected agencies.

For ethical consideration purposes, authority to carry out the study was sought from the management of all the selected state agencies and approval received. Respondents were also formally informed of the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their opinions and identity.

Data was collected between July-October 2015 from participants spread across Kenya. Questionnaires were issued through the respective heads of units of participating state agencies. A total of 325 returned questionnaires were ideal for analysis representing a response rate of 81.6%.

As part of data preparation, the data were tested to ensure they meet the assumptions of regression. The data were examined and found to be normally distributed by checking that the Skewness and Kurtosis and found to be within set criteria. By ascertaining the normality of data on individual variable, this served as an indication that other statistical assumptions including linearity were met (Kline, 2005)

The measurement scales were adopted from previous established researchers; optimism was measured using Life Orientation Test-revised (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994), it is a 10-item scale comprising 6 items measuring optimism with four feeder items, excluded in the analysis. The items were scored on a likert scale ranging from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree". The mean and standard deviation were derived.

Work engagement was assessed using the shortened nine-item version Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) developed by Schaufeli and Bakker, (2003). The scale constitutes three indicators measured each with three items namely; Vigour (e.g "At work I feel bursting with energy"); Dedication (e.g "My job inspires me") Absorption (e.g "I get carried away when I am working") and scored on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1

for “Strongly Disagree” to 5 “Strongly Agree. The reliability coefficient for the scale was 0.91 on Cronbach alpha. The mean and standard deviation was also computed. The predictive power of the independent variable was set at 95% confidence level.

4. Demographic Characteristics of the study subjects

Table 1 below indicates the subjects were diverse in terms of gender, age, educational levels and work experience. Notable from the results was that, majority of the respondents were male (71.4%), this was unexpected given the popular belief that many women have risen to managerial levels in Kenya given the large strides made in educating the girl child. The bulk of respondents (77.3%) had a bachelors and a Masters degree; this was expected because the target population were management employees and Kenya enjoys a fairly high levels of educated employees, particularly at managerial levels. Observed also was the tenure of the respondents, over 50% had served the present organization for more than 10 years, therefore had better evaluation of themselves in relation to their employer.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	232	71.4%
	Female	93	28.6%
Age	41-50	140	43%
	31-40	109	33%
	Over 50	51	15.5%
	Below 30	25	8.5%
Education Level	Bachelors	127	39.1%
	Masters	124	38.2%
	Diploma	55	16.9%
	PhD	11	3.4%
	Other	8	2.4%
Tenure	Above 10 years	182	56%
	6-10 years	68	20.9%
	Below 5 years	75	23.1

4.1 Correlation between optimism and work engagement

Pearson moment correlation was used to depict the relationship between optimism and work engagement, a positive relationship between the variables was established [$r=.257, n=325, p<.01$], as shown in Table 2. This indicated a small correlation existed between optimism and work engagement. Thus the more the managers were optimistic the higher their level of work en

Table 2: Correlation between Optimism and Work Engagement.

		Engagement	Optimism
Work engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.257**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Optimism	Pearson Correlation	.257**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

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

b. Listwise N=325

4.2 Linear Regression on Optimism and Work Engagement

A linear regression model was used to predict work engagement using the level of optimism among the managers. R^2 represent the variability in work engagement levels that the optimism level of the managers accounted for, controlling for demographic variables. From the model, R^2 was .066 showing that optimism accounts for 6.6% variation in work engagement (Table 3).

Table 3 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.257 ^a	.066	.063	.63988	1.980

a. Predictors: (Constant), Optimism.

b. Dependent Variable: Work Engagement.

4.3 ANOVA on Optimism and Work Engagement

An analysis of variance was used to test whether the regression model could significantly fit in predicting work engagement than using the mean as shown in (Table 4). The F- ratio was 22.80 and model was significant ($P < .05$).

Table 4: Analysis of Variance on Optimism and Work Engagement

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9.336	1	9.336	22.801	.000 ^b
	Residual	132.249	323	.409		
	Total	141.585	324			

a. Dependent Variable: Work Engagement.

b. Predictors: (Constant), Optimism.

4.4 Coefficients of Optimism and Work Engagement

In addition, the β coefficient for the variable optimism was generated from the model and subjected to a t-test in order to establish whether it makes a significant contribution and to test the hypothesis H_01 . Table 5 shows the estimates of β value of a positive coefficient for optimism, implying a positive relationship with work engagement. The coefficients results showed that the prediction of work engagement in relation to the optimism was significant at; $\beta_1 = 0.319$ ($p < 0.05$). Therefore we reject the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between optimism and work engagement since for each unit increase in optimism, there is a 0.319 unit increase in work engagement.

Table 5: Coefficients of Optimism and Work Engagement

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.044	.233		13.076	.000
	OPT	.319	.067	.257	4.775	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Work Engagement.

4.5 Relationship between Optimism and Work Engagement.

Pearson moment correlation was used to establish the relationship between optimism and work engagement. A positive relationship exist between optimism ($r = .25$) and age ($r = .153$) on work engagement as shown in Table 6. This indicated that optimism and age influenced work engagement positively. Thus as employees grow older their level of work engagement also increases. There was no statistical significance on the rest of the demographic variables.

Table 6 Correlation between demographics, optimism and work Engagement

		1	2	3	4	5	6
Work Engagement	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
Optimism	Pearson Correlation	.257**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.058	.025	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.297	.659				
Age	Pearson Correlation	.153**	-.050	-.140*	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.370	.011			
Education	Pearson Correlation	-.030	-.149**	-.030	.047	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.592	.007	.589	.399		
Tenure	Pearson Correlation	.019	-.009	-.005	.595**	-.075	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.732	.875	.927	.000	.176	

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

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

c. Listwise N=325

4.6 Effects of demographics on the relationship between Optimism and Work Engagement.

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of demographics on the relationship between optimism and work engagement among the managerial employees. From the model, R^2 changed from .024 to .094 when was optimism was entered. This showed that optimism accounted for 7% variation in work engagement (Table 7).

Table 7: Model summary on Effects of Demographics on the Relationship between Optimism and Work Engagement

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.153 ^a	.024	.021	.65424
2	.306 ^b	.094	.088	.63130

a. Predictors: (Constant), Age

b. Predictors: (Constant), Age, Optimism

Further, the β coefficient of optimism was generated from the model and subjected to a t-test, in order to test Ho2 as shown in Table 8. The β value of age and optimism was a positive coefficient. This implied that there was a positive relationship between age, optimism and work engagement. **The coefficients results showed the prediction of work engagement in relation to the age (0.132) and optimism (0.330) was significant at ($p < 0.05$). Therefore we reject the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant effect of demographics on the relationship between Optimism and Work Engagement. It is evident that a unit increase in work engagement may be attributed to 0.132 units of age and 0.330 units of optimism.**

Table 8: Coefficients on effects of demographics on the relationship between Optimism and Work Engagement

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.818	.122		31.266	.000
	Age	.122	.044	.153	2.790	.006
2	(Constant)	2.655	.261		10.174	.000
	Age	.132	.042	.167	3.136	.002
	Optimism	.330	.066	.265	4.990	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Work Engagement

5. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of optimism on work engagement and whether demographic variables influence this relationship. Our findings indicate optimism predicts work engagement. This confirms previous studies including Othman *et al.*, (2014) and Fredrickson (2003) who suggested that optimistic individuals steer their energy towards attaining goals. Other scholars such as Luthans *et al.*, (2008) also found that personal resources may assist engaged workers to control and impact upon their work environment successfully. Similarly, Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter and Tavis, (2008) concluded that work engagement is a unique concept that is best predicted by personal resources (optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem). Also Ouweneel, Blanc, and Schaufeli (2012) identified personal resources (hope, optimism, and self-efficacy) relate positively with work engagement.

Apparently, employees high in optimism have a positive outlook about the future which is likely to be attributed to their careers and their relationship with their present employer. Consequently, they are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes by being highly engaged in their work.

Regarding whether demographic variables influence work engagement, our findings showed that only age may affect work engagement practices. But, Bledow, Schmitt, Frese & Kuhnel (2011); Sehunoe & Viviers (2015) and Xanthopoulou, Baker, Heuven, Demerouti & Schaufeli (2008) found none of the common demographic factors including age influence work engagement. Ugwu (2013) reported higher levels of work engagement among male than females Nigerian employees, though he reported age did not made any significant contribution to work engagement among teachers. Interestingly in this study, age negatively correlated with optimism. This implied that the older employees were less optimistic compared to the younger ones. The dwindling positive expectation of the older employees may be attributed to the dawning reality that as their ages advance, personal prospects expected from the organization such as career advancement become remote.

6. Conclusions and Implication

The study presents evidence of a positive relationship between optimism and work engagement. Since optimism is a major construct in positive psychology, this study affirms the job demands-resources model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) proposing that employees high in resources exhibit high work engagement practices and behave positively. Fredrickson's (2001) broaden and built theory that proposes a link between positive psychology and positive actions was also confirmed. Optimistic individuals are positive about the future because they believe as long as they remain highly engaged in their work; they will succeed at personal level. It therefore makes sense for managers to recognize that optimism drive individual employees to exhibit vigour, dedication and be totally immersed in their tasks in pursuit of success for self and organization. Therefore cultivating optimistic

tendencies at the work place is a frontier towards enhancing work engagement for the benefit of individual and organizational performance.

A social implication was evident in this study; as individuals grow older their commitment to work increases, as shown from their engagement levels, however their level of optimism decreases. It is probable that younger employees are yet to settle down career-wise and gaining sufficient insight of the job could be an important aspect of high work engagement. Additionally, this study focused on management employees whose ages are relatively higher; it is possible to assume that managers, because of their responsibility of managing resources are more likely to exhibit higher levels of work engagement. However, the tendency to grow cynical with age carries puzzling sociological implication; managers and psychologist need to find out why negative attitudes crops up as age advances among employees at the work place

There is empirical evidence demonstrating that optimism and age influence work engagement; it is of paramount importance for government agencies in Kenya to assess and identify optimistic employees and also cultivate a working environment that promotes optimism. Executives would go a long way to promote optimism by instituting measures and practices within its operating systems that create an environment that assures the employees of their future. For example executives ought to be faithful to its promises particularly on matters touching employees. They should also be able to identify and nurture optimistic employees, by so doing they enhance the level of engagement of their employee.

7. Limitations and recommendation for further research

This study covered optimism as a personal resource, further research on other personal traits is necessary so as to define the person as a whole so as to make generalizations. The study was limited to public sector management employees, for better generalization of findings, similar research ought to be extended to none management and private sector employees respectively. An interesting observation was made regarding the decreasing optimism as the employee's age up. There is need for research to establish why cynicism crops up among employees as they advance in age. Finally, this study applied a cross sectional design restricted to self report measures, there is need for a longitudinal study that would validate the findings and predict causal relationships.

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