



## INFLUENCE OF OPTIMISM ON WORK ENGAGEMENT OF MANAGERS IN STATE CORPORATIONS IN KENYA

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### **Abstract:**

The concepts of optimism and employee engagement as mechanisms to improving individual performance have been discussed in management literature. Although studies on optimism in the workplace are relatively limited, evidence certainly exists that links the concept to improvement in individual and workplace performance. This study sought to investigate the extent to which optimism influence work Engagement among middle level managers in State Corporations in Kenya. The study was informed by social learning theory. To achieve this, the study adopted a cross sectional quantitative survey design. The target population was the middle level managers in State Corporations in Kenya. A total of 389 middle level managers were sampled and self-administered questionnaires issued. The data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS computer software. Multiple regression model indicated that optimism predicts 0.036 (3.6%) of work engagement which was insignificant. Consequently, the predictor did not have a statistically significant effect on Work engagement. The coefficients show that the prediction of work engagement in relation to optimism was insignificant ( $\beta_1 = 0.013$ ,  $p > .01$ ). Thus optimism was not a significant predictor of work engagement, though methodological limitations may have impacted on this result. This study recommends government agencies in Kenya to assess and identify optimistic employees and also cultivate a working environment that promotes optimism. Executives would promote optimism by instituting measures and practices within its operating systems that create a work environment that assures the employees of their future. Managers 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 employee engagement and subsequent improvement of organizational performance.

**JEL:** L10; L20; L23

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## 1. Introduction

The role of personality has been recognized widely in work psychology particularly in stress-related well-being research (Mäkikangas, Feldt, Kinnunen, & Mauno, 2013), and thus the integration of both job-related and personal resources in predicting well-being has become crucial. Interest in personality characteristics influencing the perception of and reaction to the same environmental features has increased. A recent review of personality differences in occupational well-being (Mäkikangas et al., 2013), however, demonstrates that we still lack full understanding of the role of personality in employee well-being. The emergence of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) has given rise to novel challenges and posed the question of what kind of personality nourishes employees' occupational well-being, including work engagement.

Job resources on their own have been found to be robust predictors of positive occupational well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Mauno, Feldt, Mäkikangas, & Kinnunen, 2010). The inclusion of one of the flagships of positive psychology – optimism – however, brings additional complexity as it is expected, in addition to exerting direct influence. Work engagement, as one of the central concepts of occupational well-being in the field of positive occupational psychology, is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Engaged employees are enthusiastic, dedicated, and fully involved in their work (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008). This in turn could lead to increased individual and/or group performance as well as become a strong foundation for sustainability of organizations.

Bakker *et al.*, (2008) defined work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being. The term employee engagement, often used interchangeably with work engagement, was defined by Shuck and Wollard (2010) as an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes. Based on both definitions, work engagement could help employees become more deeply involved in their jobs and possibly reduce or eliminate job burnout. Thus, engagement might be viewed as a proactive and fundamental approach to organizational performance and sustainability. Because engaged workers have high levels of energy, are enthusiastic regarding their jobs, and often involve themselves deeply in their work (Macey & Schneider, 2008; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004), they might be expected to work better and smarter.

With regard to antecedents of work engagement, Wollard and Shuck (2011) identified 42 antecedents through a structured literature review; 21 individual antecedents (e.g., optimism and self-esteem) and 21 organizational antecedents (e.g., feedback and supportive organizational culture). In addition, Bakker and Demerouti (2008) also suggested the job demands-resources (JD-R) model of work engagement; this model includes job resources (e.g., autonomy and performance feedback) and personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy and optimism) as antecedents of work engagement, which lead to performance improvement. Accordingly, organizations can understand and

utilize various antecedents in that relationship to help and facilitate employees in becoming engaged and in maintaining their engaged status.

Work engagement, as positive work behavior is receiving deserving attention in management literature (Truss, Soane, Edwards, Wisdom, Croll & Burnett 2006). Truss, Soane, Delbridge, Alfes, Shantz, & Petrov (2014) observed that work engagement is a positive work performance culture that influence individual employees' and organizational performance. United Kingdom's government began to take interest around 2006 and scholars in business management and strategic human resource have since taken keen interest in work engagement. Many European scholars are now advocating for development of the concept into a major science in order to improve human resource management theory and practice (Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes & Delbridge, 2013). This may be timely given that Europe registered the lowest work engagement levels according to Aon Hewitt global report (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).

The picture about work engagement in Africa is still not clear; academic as well as practitioner's literature is scanty. Though there are sporadic reports of high work engagement by consultants, for example, Aon Hewitt, Emergence Growth and Open Symmetry consultancies in a survey in 2013 involving 300,000 employees in three regions of Sub Sahara Africa indicated high engagement levels of 74 % for East Africa, 68% for South Africa and 70% for Southern Africa. Hewitt Associates (2014) reports Africa and Middle East jointly have shared growth in levels of engagement at 61% in 2013. However, these statistics need to be taken with caution since counties in these regions are independently unique for example Agyemang *et al*, (2013) reported disparities in levels of work engagement between the public and the private sector in Ghana.

Researchers in Kenya 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 in a state agency. The above scenario may explain the disparities in efficiency and productivity between the sectors globally. It is widely perceived that under-performance at individual and organizational levels is more pronounced in the public sector among developing countries (World Bank, 2004). 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 such as high work engagement.

Recent studies have accumulated evidence of the association of optimism with work engagement as well as its interaction with job resources. Optimism was found to be strongly associated with work engagement among cancer survivors (Hakanen & Lindbohm, 2008). The effects of optimism have usually been studied in combination with other personal resources such as self-esteem, self-efficacy (Mäkikangas, Kinnunen, &

Feldt, 2004; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009) as well as meaning in life (see van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Schreurs, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2009).

Optimism is a source to create the best environment towards the completion of organizational objectives. Every business organization laid stress on the good relationship among the employees and also towards employees. Good leadership style develops the level of performance of the employees through motivation and creating the competitive environment (Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Optimism, and work management are important blessing for career success. Optimistic ability leads to task accomplishment, from practitioners' point of view; it is one of the managerial characteristics (Javed, Ahmad, Nawaz, & Sajid, 2016) which influence job performance positively. This study concentrated solely on the relationship between optimism and work engagement and validated it in a sample of managers.

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 & Nasurdin (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-related behaviour of employee engagement, Naeem, Malik and Bano (2014) found demographic variables do not contribute to the variations in citizenship behaviors among Indian employees.

Employees are critical to achievement of organizational goals and therefore, managers must consider employee engagement as it is related to service quality and work performance. Organizations lay a lot of emphasis on provision of quality service to customers; however, the challenge is to create highly engaged and motivated teams who can facilitate that endeavor. Konard (2006) established that high-involvement work practices and techniques used by management to efficiently involve employees in their works to receive high performance can contribute in effective employee engagement. In order to create an environment for employee satisfaction and engagement, it is vitally important to know which factors most affect employee engagement (Heartfield, 2012). Organizations must spend time, money, and energy on programmes, processes, and factors that will have a positive impact on employee engagement.

Managers seek to improve work engagement on grounds that it leads to superior performance, reduces staff turnover and improves the well-being of employees (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Hakanen *et al.*, 2008). Engaged employees value, enjoy and have pride in their work and are more willing to help each other and the organization succeed. Besides, engaged employees take additional responsibility, invest more effort in their jobs, share information with other employees and remain with the organization than employees who are less engaged (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study conceptualized optimism construct by examining the two main approaches: Seligman and Peterson's Learned Optimism Model of Explanatory Styles (Peterson & Seligman, 1984; Seligman, 1991); Scheier and Carver's Dispositional Optimism model (Scheier & Carver, 1985).

#### 2.1.1 Learned Helplessness Theory

The concept of optimistic explanatory style is derived from the attribution to the reformulated learned helplessness theory proposed by Martin Seligman in 1975 (Carlson & Kacmar, 1994). The original Learned Helplessness Theory proposed that following an experience with an uncontrollable aversive events, people and animals becomes helpless and passive and unresponsive (Peterson & Park, 2004). According to Seligman, (1975), people may act helpless because they have learned to be helpless; it's presumed that they have "learned" that there is no contingency between actions and outcomes (Peterson, 2000).

The theory was formulated by research done on animals, however when the theoretical components were extended to humans, it failed to account for individual difference. To better understand the human aspects, the theory was reformulated to include an attributional framework which was labelled Explanatory Style (Carlson & Kacmar, 1994). The explanatory style is the habitual way in which individuals tend to explain setbacks or failures. According to Peterson and Seligman (1985) the explanatory style was included in the model to further understand why individuals have different reactions to the same event.

The explanatory style is composed of three dimensions; (i) internality- the degree to which one perceives oneself personal responsible for the event (ii) stability- the degree to which one perceives the event to be present throughout time (iii) globality- the degree to which one perceives the cause across conditions. An individual is regarded as having an optimistic explanatory style when he/she attributions of negative events are external (low internality), unstable (low stability) and, specific (low globality) (Tomakowsky, Lumley, Markowitz, & Frank, 2001).

Explanatory style is typically measured with a self-report questionnaire called the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) (Peterson & Steen, 2002). A method for coding attributions of interviews or transcripts (the Content analysis of Verbal Explanations technique, CAVE) has also utilized as a measurement of an individual's explanatory style Tomakowsky et al., 2001). The Cave method allows for written and spoken material to be scored through researchers identifying explanations for bad events, extract them, and present them to judges, who rate along the scale of the Attributional Style Questionnaire (Peterson, 2000).

Research on explanatory style has primarily been focused around investigating relationship between an explanatory style and ill health, depression and failure (Peterson & Steen, 2002; Peterson & Vaidya, 2001). Research results have indicated that individuals

who more optimistic experience better health, fewer illnesses, better immune functioning and longevity (Kamen- Siegel, Rodin, Seligman, & Dwyer 1991; Peterson & Bossio, 1992). In the work context, a report highlighting the benefits of applying learned optimism to increase sales productivity, Schulman (1999) found that optimistic sales people sold 35 % more insurance than pessimistic sales people and that optimism did only increase sales but increased motivation and achievement across various domains.

### **2.1.2 Dispositional Optimism model**

In conjunction with learned optimism model of explanatory Styles, the second most prominent model of optimism is Scheier and Carver (1985) *dispositional optimism model*. Accordingly, optimism is defined as a global expectation that good things will be plentiful in the future and that bad things will be scarce (Scheier & Carver, 1985). It refers to an individual's expectations of positive outcomes across situations and domains (Elbert, 2002).

The model further provides clear distinctions between the optimists and pessimists by characterizing the optimists as people who generally have a favorable outlook on life and the future, where conversely the pessimist are individuals who generally have a more negative outlook on life and expect things to go badly (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Underpinning the dispositional optimism model is the *expectancy value theory*. The theory assumes that behavior is organized around the pursuit of goals and in contrast to the attributional model of optimism, the dispositional optimism places emphasis not only on the pursuit of goals but on the significance of the goal and sense of confidence the individual has to attain their goals (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010).

Two core conceptual elements of the expectancy theory are apparent; goals refer to states or actions that people view as either desirable or undesirable. People try to fit their behaviors to what they see as desirable, and they try to keep away from what they see as undesirable. The more important a goal is to someone, the greater is its value within the person's motivation. Without having a goal that matters, people have no reason to act (Carver & Scheier, 2002). The second core conceptual element is expectancy — a sense of confidence or doubt about the attainability of the goal value. If the person lacks confidence, there will be no action. When people are confident about an eventual outcome, effort will continue even in the face of adversity (Rothmann & Essenko, 2007).

In this study, optimism is conceptualized according the dispositional optimism model which proposed that optimism is a generalized expectancy that the future will be good, while pessimism is the generalized expectancy that the future will be bad (Carver & Scheier, 2002). Both optimism and pessimism influence people's subjective experiences when confronting problems and they influence the actions people engage in to try to deal with these problems. When optimists confront adversity, they expect positive outcomes resulting in a mix of feelings that is relatively positive. On the other hand, pessimists expect negative outcomes (which should yield a greater tendency to negative feelings) (Carver & Scheier, 2002).

## 2.2 Concept of Work Engagement

Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma', & Bakker, 2002). The construct work engagement is new in the literature, it has featured for just over two decades (Markos *et al.*, 2010), however, its' usage and research is gaining immense prominence. According to (Schaufeli, 2013), the term is believed to have been coined by a consultancy firm Gallup in the 1990, though many scholars believe Kahn (1990) as among the first scholars to discuss work engagement theory (Alfes *et al.* 2013, Harter *et al.*, 2002; Rich *et al.*, 2010).

Work engagement has recently become popular within human resource management study. Work engagement is a process for ensuring employees focus on their work efforts in such ways that contribute to achieve the organization's mission. Work engagement tasks are to plan work in advance so that expectations and goals can be achieved; to monitor progress and performance of employees; to develop the employee's ability to perform through training and work assignment. Work engagement not only consequences into job performance but many positive outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior, minimized turnover intention and improvement of organizational commitment and thriving (Nawaz, Bhatti, Ahmad, & Ahmed, 2018; Nawaz, Abid, Arya, Bhatti, & Farooqi, 2018).

The decision to engage is a choice an employee makes, and no organization can force or enforce it; though it can enhance it because it is a work practice which an organization benefit in overall. Perhaps this may explain why the concept is of late receiving much attention (Rurkkhum & Bartlet, 2012). Similarly, Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma' and Bakker (2002b) thought work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption. Engaged employees are physically involved in their tasks, cognitively alert, and ardently connected to others in ways that demonstrate their thoughts, feelings and values. Besides, they are high in energy and identification with work (Gruman *et al.*, 2011).

From the foregoing, it is apparent that Work engagement involves emotional and intellectual commitment to one's organization; it varies with people; depends on the job processes and procedures as well as the quality of life and opportunities the organization provide (Supriya, Deepika & Ajeya, 2014). In addition, Shuck *et al.*, (2010) refers Work engagement as an individual persons' cognitive, emotional and behavioral state in relation to ones' organizational and personal outcome. The cognitive factor is the thinking or the perception employees have about their job and the organization; the emotional factor is the feelings of the employees and the behavioural factor is the outcome and the behavioural outcome will depend on the cognitive and emotional factors.

Moreover, Macey *et al.*, (2008) suggested that the cognitive and emotional factors that give rise to behavioral factors are driven by the conditions under which people work whose outcome improves organizational effectiveness. They concluded that Work engagement is desirable because it serves organizational purpose. Indeed, many studies have demonstrated empirical evidence suggesting that engaged employees not only

contribute to organizational performance, but they are more loyal and less likely to voluntarily leave the organization (Takawira, Coetzee & Schreuder, 2014).

In 2012, a Scottish government commissioned study showed work engagement was low globally. Individual researchers have also reported low work engagement among public sector employees compared to their private sector counterparts (Agyemang and Ofei, 2013). Quantum consultancy firm reported work engagement levels in the private sector stood at 65% and 45% in the public sector in the USA for 2013. Alarmed by low employee work engagement levels in the public sector, Canada much earlier in 2004 developed an employee engagement model and implemented an employee engagement survey program across the governments' jurisdictions (Kosuta, 2010).

Critics of the concept have dismissed work engagement as nothing new other than the same constructs known in management theory and practice such as job satisfaction and involvement. However, Baron (2013) asserts that job satisfaction is not enough for the simple reason that a satisfied employee may derive satisfaction for reason unrelated to work performance, an employee can commit just to the minimum to keep the job. Work engagement is more than just job satisfaction, but principally it is about passion, commitment, and the willingness to invest oneself and expend ones' discretionary effort to help the employer succeed. Under ordinary circumstances a manager who fully embraces work engagement practices would only retain satisfied employees who are fully engaged.

Work engagement is measured at individual level, though organizational factors influence the level of engagement of an employee (Naido *et al*, 2014). However, the definition adopted for work engagement for this study is that based on its dimensions. In summary, it's apparent there is sufficient foundational knowledge in the literature on the construct of engagement at work. Though there still no definite definition, work engagement can be defined as a positive psychological state that drives one to invest themselves actively in their roles and organization. In addition, work engagement in its own right as workplace behaviour could be the driving force through which other positive work behaviours including citizenship behaviour are exhibited.

### **2.3 Concept of Optimism**

Optimism is defined as a generalized expectation of positive experiences and outcomes throughout one's life (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 2001). Optimists are more likely to view stressful work situations as challenging rather than threatening. As a characteristic of personality, optimism is assumed to protect the individual from the negative impact of stress factors (Feldt, Mäkikangas, & Aunola, 2006; Mäkikangas et al., 2013). Optimism could be argued to be a basic requirement in managerial work, as managers are expected to look trustfully to the future, anticipate positive results, and be innovative. They are more likely to treat adversities as an opportunity, and thus preserve their involvement in work. Thus, optimism is expected to influence directly managers' experience of work engagement.



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. 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).

Xanthopoulos *et al.*, (2009) opined that optimism is the tendency to believe that one will generally experience good outcome in life now and in future. Optimistic people are better placed to surmount life challenges including work place challenges because of their abilities to cope with situations (Iwanga, Yokpyama & Seiwa (2004). Luthan (2007) thinks optimists are more adaptive to diverse environments. Lee (2012) considers optimistic individuals as endowed with high internal locus of control and optimism such that they find high level work demands as ordinary surmountable and enjoyable states that would end successfully. Moreover, optimistic individuals are naturally positive and will often reassess situations particularly job demands (obstacles) positively instead of giving up.

Optimists 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 and the future of things. Their positive perspective of reality may explain the reason why others have associated the term happiness to optimism. Tims, Bakker & Xanthopoulos (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.

Optimism has generally been viewed as a tendency to believe, expect or hope that things will turn out well (Dossey, 2006). There are two key frameworks pertaining to optimism and its role in positive change, these are; attribution or explanatory style (Seligman, 1998) and expectancy (Carver & Scheier, 2002). Expectancy framework alludes that, 'optimists are people who expect good things to happen to them; pessimists are people who expect bad things to happen to them' (Carver & Scheier, 2002). Persons with higher levels of optimism tend to maintain positive expectation about what will happen to them in the process of change. In addition to this positive expectation, Seligman's attribution or explanatory framework is premised on the assumption that optimists tend to explain success as internal (attributed to personal abilities), stable (likely to happen again in the specific context), and global (likely to happen in other contexts) and failure as external, unstable, and specific.

These attributions sustain the individual's motivation and efforts, therefore, if a failure occurs during the process of change, they attribute it to something unique (specific) and not likely to repeat again (unstable), rather than something inherent in them

(external). Optimists tend to expect good things to happen to them, have more positive moods and are persevering in their endeavors throughout the change process (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Thus, optimism tends to be an important source of positive change.

Peterson (2000) characterizes optimism into two types; little optimism and big optimism. Big optimism refers to a generalized expectation about positive outcomes in life in which one holds the generalized world view and aptly describes in “glass half full” perspective, whereas the little optimism (big pessimist) views their world from the “glass as half empty” perspective (Van Schalkwyk, 2004). However, what differentiate big optimism from little optimism is the positive or negative expectations of big optimists and pessimists which are not limited to a specific behavior or setting. Rather, optimism is considered a trait personality characteristic and has been operationalized as dispositional optimism (Van Schalkwyk, 2004). Conversely, little optimism is referring to specific expectations about positive outcomes (Peterson, 2000). It is a state-like tendency to view specific situations optimistically, little optimism may be the product of an idiosyncratic learning history. Little optimism may be considered a type of daily optimism that influences specific situations occurring in a day (Peterson, 2000).

Optimists expect good things to happen to them anticipating positive results and success in challenging individual tasks (Avey *et al.*, 2008; Carver & Scheier, 2002). Employees high on optimism believe they will succeed regardless of their abilities, so it is proposed that for optimism to be effective, it must be realistic (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Towards this end, the job demand-resource (JD-R) model of engagement postulates that an individuals’ motivation level is influenced by both job resources and demands (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreuner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Therefore job resources (which is under the control of managers) can help in reducing the strain experienced during high job demands. Research indicates optimism as a personal resource, which has been found to significantly predict job engagement (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007); therefore managers have a responsibility to nurture optimism as a work culture.

Although employees facing high job demands may feel low control and increased cynicism leading to lower work engagement, optimism can counteract cynicism and increase emotional engagement while acting as a buffer from the high job-related demands (Sweetman & Luthans, 2010). Optimists tend to be more psychologically available for a given task, since they naturally expect a positive outcome and greater presence associated with stronger cognitive engagement (Chen, 2015). Also, the expectation of positive outcomes might propel individuals to invest their physical energy to work with intensity.

Over the last few decades research has shown that optimism can be a highly beneficial psychological characteristic linked to good mood, perseverance, achievement and has a direct impact on burnout, ill health (Rothmann, Barkhuizen, & Tytherleigh, 2008; Rothmann & Essenko, 2007) and improve physical health and longevity (Rasmussen, Scheier, & Greenhouse, 2009), thus it is instrumental in stimulating personal growth and development.

## 2.4 Influence of Optimism and 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 since it protects one from threats associated with physiological and psychological costs of work and work settings. Besides, it is instrumental in stimulating personal growth and development. Empirical evidence has demonstrated the role of personal characteristics in positive work behaviors (Lepine *et al.*, 2002; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, (2007, 2009) and Mauno *et al.*, (2007). The Job Demand-Resource model 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, 2003). However, optimism is a personal resource that can effectively counter job demand (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) presupposes 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.

Research has established that engaged workers possess high levels of personal resources, including optimism, self-esteem, resilience, and an active coping style (Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009a; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009b). Pienaar and Sieberhagen (2005) yielded corresponding results. With a sample size of 196 student leaders of a South African university, Pienaar & Sieberhagen (2005) investigated the relationship between burnout and engagement on one hand and work stress, optimism and individual as well as organizational commitment on the other. The results indicated that the dependent variable, dedication and vigour were both best described by the student leader's levels of optimism.

Medlin & Green (2009) suggested that goal setting leads to engaged employees and engaged employees show high levels of workplace optimism; ultimately workplace optimism leads to high levels of individual performance in organizations. Each of these findings create questions in our minds that could be answered, at least in part, from follow-up studies that collect statistical data on these relationships and provide a mechanism by which participants could provide details on their experiences. Therefore, this study sought to investigate whether optimism influence the work engagement of managers.

By examining the associations between the selected variables, it is possible to shed light on the mechanisms underlying the generation of positive experiences at work. Furthermore, it helps us arrive at a better understanding of how interventions might be able to affect individuals and enhance their well-being. Managers are our target group as their work affects whole teams and even organizations. The more vigorous, dedicated and absorbed managers are in their daily work, the better they are able to execute their tasks and transmit the positive experiences to their subordinates (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008).

### 3. Research Methodology

This study used a cross-sectional survey design. The study participants were drawn from State Corporations spread across the country, Kenya. The 197 Corporations spread across the county constituted the sampling frame. Stratified sampling was used to select the primary sample of 32 organizations. 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 estimated at 14,363 managerial staff of State Corporations. The formula by Yamane (1967) was considered;

$$\frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)} = \frac{14363}{1 + 14363(0.05^2)} = 389$$

Where: the confidence level =95%, P=0.5, n=the sample size, N=the population size and e= the acceptance sampling error.

Therefore 389 middle level managers were proportionately chosen from the 32 corporations. Self-administered questionnaires were used to capture respondents' point of view. Self-efficacy was measured using a 10-item generalized self-efficacy scale by Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995); sample statements include "I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough". The statement was rated on a scale ranging from (1) for "Strongly disagree" to (5) for "Strongly agree".

Work engagement is exhibited by three indicative work behaviours namely working with vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2008). This was measured using a 9-item version of the Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES) Schaufeli *et al.*, (2006). The scale is scored on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from (1) for "Strongly disagree" to (5) "Strongly agree. Statements capturing work engagement include, "At work I feel busting with energy", "My job inspires me" and "I am feeling happy when I am working intensely".

Optimism was measured using Life Orientation Test-revised by Scheier, Carver & Bridges, (1994), it is a 6-item scale comprising statements assessing the respondents' tendency to expect good outcome in life e.g. "I usually expect the best". The statement was rated on a scale ranging from (1) for "Strongly disagree" to (5) for "Strongly agree". Piloting involved 50 respondents drawn from three state corporations in three major towns west of Kenya observing all ethical requirements of research. The reliability coefficient for the scale was 0.91 on Cronbach Alpha. Factor analysis was used to ascertain the validity of the study instruments and reliability of data was tested to ensure they meet the assumptions of regression including normality and linearity of the study variables.

Data was screened and cleaned before being captured. Descriptive statistics summarizing the demographic characteristics of the population and variables was generated and findings presented in form of means. Descriptive statistics generated the means and standard deviations. Multiple regression was used to analyse relationship between variables and to test hypothesis.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics on Optimism

Optimism was conceptualised as the tendency to belief that one can generally experience positive outcomes in life which increases one's propensity to act and deal with uncertainties in life (Pearl, 1956). The items measured optimism as well as pessimism. The result in Table 1 indicates most managers were less pessimistic. However, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of Optimism ( $\alpha=.293$ ) indicating a weak internal consistency of the variable. This could be as a result of the number of items on negative and positive answers. Indeed, Costello *et al.*, (2005) suggests, a factor with as little as three items tends to be generally weak and unstable.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Optimism**

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach Alpha if Item Deleted
The respondent usually expects the best	4.44	.857	-2.105	5.192	.351
The respondent believes if something can go wrong for him/her, it will	2.96	1.120	-.067	-.578	.145
The respondent is always optimistic about his/her future	4.37	.881	-1.774	3.546	.366
The respondent hardly ever expects things to go his/her own way	2.33	1.234	.590	-.709	.018
The respondent rarely counts on good things happening to him/her	2.26	1.274	.701	-.699	.062
Overall, the respondent expects more good things to happen to him/her than bad things	1.71	.886	1.290	1.525	.403
<b>Composite value</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>.535</b>	<b>-.003</b>	<b>1.883</b>	<b>.293</b>

#### 4.2 Descriptive Statistics on Work Engagement

The statements representing work engagement were 9 as shown in Table 2. The composite rating for Work engagement was high at 4.14. Indicating that the Managers rated themselves highly in Work engagement, demonstrating their high perception that they work with vigour, dedication and once at work they express their total commitment by being deeply engrossed in work such that time moves unnoticed. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of work engagement ( $\alpha=.907$ ) confirming there was internal consistency of the variable.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Work Engagement**

Items	Mean	SD	Skew.	Kurtosis	Cronbach Alpha if Item Deleted
Feels busting with energy at work	3.84	.830	-.530	.360	.904
Feels strong and vigorous at work	3.97	.810	-.780	1.15	.899
Looks forward to going to work every morning	4.14	.890	-1.11	1.32	.897
Believes his/her job inspires him/her	4.19	.910	-1.21	1.43	.890
Is enthusiastic about his/her job	4.26	.870	-1.31	1.84	.889
Is proud of work he/she does	4.42	.780	-1.53	2.92	.894
Feels happy when working intensely	4.23	.940	-1.32	1.62	.898
Is often engrossed in his or her work	3.95	.940	-.980	1.08	.898
Thinks time often fly's when working	4.29	.870	-1.34	1.83	.901
<b>Composite Value</b>	<b>4.14</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>-1.22</b>	<b>2.24</b>	<b>.907</b>

#### 4.3 Linear regression analysis on Optimism on Work Engagement

The objective was to establish the effect of Optimism on Work engagement among the Managers to test hypothesis Ho using a linear regression model. Table 3 shows,  $R^2=.036$  in model I but by adding Optimism in the model II,  $R^2$  did not change, which meant

Optimism accounted for a mere 0.36% variability in Work engagement which was insignificant. Besides, the predictor did not progressively capture the variation in Work engagement, instead it caused adjusted  $R^2$  to come down from .024 to .021 giving rise to a fall in F ratio from 2.978 to .054 which was insignificant. Consequently, the predictor did not have a statistically significant effect on Work engagement.

**Table 3: Model Summary on Effect of Optimism on Work engagement**

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. S.E	Change Statistics				
					R <sup>2</sup>	F	df1	df2	Sig. F
					Change	Change			Change
I	.189 <sup>a</sup>	.036	.024	5.36367	.036	2.978	4	320	.019
II	.190 <sup>b</sup>	.036	.021	5.37161	.000	.054	1	319	.816

a. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age, Education, Experience

b. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age, Education, Experience, Optimism

c. Dependent Variable: Work engagement

An analysis of variance was further used to test whether the regression model could significantly fit in the data. Table 4 shows F- ratio reduced from 2.978 in model I to 2.386 in model II and the ratio was not significant at ( $p > .01$ ); therefore, the null hypothesis stating that Optimism does not affect the level of Work engagement among Managers was accepted.

**Table 4: ANOVA on Effect of Optimism on Work Engagement**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	342.642	4	85.661	2.978	.019 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	9206.058	320	28.769		
	Total	9548.701	324			
2	Regression	344.209	5	68.842	2.386	.038 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	9204.492	319	28.854		
	Total	9548.701	324			

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age, Education, Experience

c. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age, Education, Experience, Optimism

Further, the standardized  $\beta$  coefficient for the variable Optimism was also generated from the model and subjected to a t-test, to establish whether it makes a significant contribution and to test the hypotheses. Table 5 shows the estimates of  $\beta$  values. The coefficients show that the prediction of Work Engagement in relation to Optimism was insignificant ( $\beta_1 = 0.013$ ,  $p > .01$ ). Besides, the t-test was insignificant,  $t = 0.23$  meaning Optimism could not contribute to the model predicting OCB.

**Table 5:** Coefficients of Effect of Optimism on Work Engagement

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.	Collinearity	
		Coefficients		Coefficients			Statistics	
		B	S.E	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	32.530	1.641		19.819	.000		
	Gender	-.407	.668	-.034	-.609	.543	.971	1.030
	Age	1.459	.455	.224	3.206	.001	.620	1.613
	Education	-.267	.340	-.044	-.786	.432	.981	1.019
	Exper.	-.773	.454	-.118	-1.702	.090	.630	1.587
2	(Constant)	32.312	1.892		17.074	.000		
	Gender	-.411	.669	-.034	-.614	.539	.970	1.031
	Age	1.463	.456	.224	3.208	.001	.619	1.616
	Education	-.258	.342	-.042	-.755	.451	.969	1.031
	Exper.	-.776	.455	-.118	-1.707	.089	.629	1.589
	Optimism	.033	.142	.013	.233	.816	.984	1.017

a. Dependent Variable: Work Engagement

Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho) stating that there is no significant relationship between Optimism and work engagement fail to be rejected. The findings imply that Optimism does not determine the level of work engagement among managers in this sample. However, the predictor's weakness could be on the instrument measuring it. Instead, the Hypothesis was not supported, namely, in the case where, optimistic employees did not report particularly higher levels of work engagement than those who were less optimistic. Optimism seems to primarily play a protective role against the negative effect of low job resources. It is possible that support for this hypothesis would have been found if we had investigated the relationship between optimism and so-called challenge stressors, which contain both stressful and challenging aspects (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000; LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005).

These findings showed that there was a positive but insignificant correlation between Optimism and work engagement [ $r=.036$ ]. Optimism accounted for a mere 3.6% variation in work engagement. The only exception was in the case of absorption where optimism did not exert a statistically significant effect. However, taken together with the fact that absorption was the dimension least explained by the present set of antecedents, these findings may be indicative of the different nature of absorption in comparison to the other two dimensions (Demerouti et al., 2010).

However, Othman *et al.*, (2014) & Fredrickson (2003) suggested that optimistic individuals steer their energy towards attaining goals while Luthans *et al.*, (2008) opines that personal resources may assist engaged workers to control and impact upon their work environment successfully. Similarly, Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter and Taris, (2008) thought work engagement is a unique concept best predicted by personal resources (optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem). 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.



## 5. Conclusion

Optimism was not a significant predictor of work engagement; however methodological limitations may have impacted on this result. Nevertheless, being optimistic in the job situation is the only thing that brings the best outcome of devoted efforts. The desired outputs can only become possible when employees are empowered and given freedom to look forward to the best; this comes about from investments by management of a positive work culture and environment. The gains come through employee performance and productivity leading to accomplishment of organizational objectives. Overall, more research needs to be conducted for the awareness of optimism, work management and job performance be enhanced.

### 5.1 Recommendation

This study recommends public entities to assess and identify optimistic employees in their recruitment and appraisal systems and also cultivate a working environment that promotes optimism. Besides, 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. Meanwhile, managers and supervisors ought to be faithful to its promises particularly on matters touching employees. They should develop capacity to identify and nurture optimistic individuals among its ranks; by so doing they enhance the level of engagement of their employee.

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