

Optimism and Work Engagement at a South African Municipality

Bridget de Villiers^{1*}, Chantel Harris², Mpumelelo Mkoko³

¹Department of Human Resource Management, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, South Africa, Orcid: 0000-0002-1845-7194

²Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, South Africa, Orcid: 0000-0002-8220-5610

³Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, South Africa, Orcid: 0009-0009-3573-9052

Keywords

Optimism
Municipality
Public sector
Work engagement

Abstract

Work can be stressful and demanding. Employees who are optimistic are better able to handle work-related challenges. This is because optimistic employees tend to be more engaged and will persist in the face of adversity due to deep sense of connection to their jobs. The South African local government sector presents a particularly challenging work environment. Frequent political regime changes, bureaucratic corruption and inefficient leadership may influence the ability of public sector employees to work effectively and ensure service delivery. It is therefore important to understand how a sense of optimism could influence their engagement and assist them to rise above difficult circumstances.

A quantitative and survey-based study was conducted to explore optimism and engagement at a municipality located in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa (n=155). The findings of the study revealed that employees experienced high levels of optimism and work engagement; further, a moderate and positive relationship emerged between these variables. A moderate and positive relationship also emerged between optimism and the engagement subconstructs of dedication and vigour, and a slight but significant relationship between optimism and the subconstruct of absorption. The study contributes towards the field of knowledge and practice as it relates to the constructs of optimism and engagement, more particularly in the public sector.

*Corresponding Authors

¹bridget.devilliers@mandela.ac.za

²chantel.harris@mandela.ac.za

³mw.mpumi@gmail.com

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The South African Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) allocates the responsibility of mobilising local economies and resources to municipalities. According to section 152 (1) of the Constitution it is the duty of local government to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner. However, the South African public sector is criticised for a lack of quality service delivery (Maake et al., 2021). Further, it is regarded as financially mismanaged, not abiding to principles of good corporate governance, and corrupt (Mafini & Pooe, 2013).

In 2016, the National Treasury admitted that service delivery was substandard and that improvements were required from all government departments (Maake et al., 2021). At the same time, the demand for service delivery that meets the expectations of citizens remains high (Kalonda & Govender, 2021). This is because communities rely on these services to improve or maintain the quality of their lives (Stats SA, 2017).

The fact that municipalities are not delivering on their mandates is evidenced through community protest action. There were 193 recorded service delivery strikes in 2022, with strikes now being regarded as a firmly entrenched social phenomenon (Masson, 2023). These protests are linked to grievances related to access to water and sanitation, general service delivery, political representation, housing, municipal administration, health, unemployment, land, corruption and crime (Grant, 2014). They provide evidence of a degradation of the public sector and the perception that employees in this sector are inefficient, demotivated and idle (Costantini et al., 2017).

The South African public sector operating environment is turbulent. Much of the turbulence in local government can be linked to politics and changes in governing parties. A regime change can lead to a party with a differing ideology to that of its predecessor being elected to office. This frequently leads to changes in policy and personnel (Engelbrecht, 2013) and this can lead to increased levels of uncertainty and insecurity among municipal staff.

A study conducted in three district municipalities by Tsako (2020) revealed that municipalities operate in a political environment and that this leads to challenges associated with instability, uncertainty and political patronage. This, in turn, influences the effective implementation of policies and the delivery of services. As an indication of this instability, one local South African municipality had six different mayors representing four different political parties elected over the period 2011 to 2021. None of these mayors completed a full term in office. Furthermore, in the two years leading up to the appointment of a mayor in 2020, this municipality had no less than ten acting city managers (Dayimani, 2021). Even when there is no change in political regime following local elections, new political appointments that are made to municipal councils has an impact on its administration (Engelbrecht, 2013).

A further factor that could influence the enthusiasm and engagement of municipal staff is that of bureaucratic corruption. This refers to corruption in public administration and pertains to efforts by civil servants to enrich themselves through illegal means (Zindela, 2016). An additional factor to consider is a lack of strategic leadership in municipal structures which has a direct influence on the commitment of employees and leads to high levels of labour turnover (Afifah & Daud, 2018). These challenges could have a negative effect on the performance of public sector employees.

1.2 Problem statement

There are individuals who enter the public service willingly and who are optimistic that they can make a difference. Studies indicate that employees who are optimistic are more likely to work harder and engage actively towards attaining desired goals. Even when their path is impeded, optimistic employees have the capacity to re-evaluate and adapt accordingly (Barkhuizen et al., 2013). However, levels of enthusiasm and engagement can be sapped if the environment is one of turbulence, bureaucratic rigidity and institutionalised underperformance as is encountered in the South African public sector.

Measures have been put in place to curb underperformance in the public sector. These include the 1995 Batho Phele White Paper on transforming public service delivery and the establishment of a code of good conduct for public servants (Mafini & Pooe, 2013). Further, local government officials are required to sign performance agreements that set standards for performance and accountability.

An additional intervention introduced is the Sub-National Doing Business programme. The mandate of this programme is to determine the ease of doing business with municipalities and within municipal areas and thus relates to the extent to which private enterprises can establish and conduct business. Municipalities play a significant role in attracting and retaining business investment through establishing a climate conducive to business growth and local economic development (van der Wald & Fourie, 2022). This plays an important role in influencing investor confidence in a country experiencing extremely high levels of unemployment. However, despite these and other interventions, public sector underperformance persists.

This study sought to explore optimism and work engagement among administrative employees at a local municipality in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Navigating both political and bureaucratic hurdles is part and parcel of working in local government (Davids & Maphunye, 2009) and this could potentially derail employee enthusiasm and lead to disengagement, and ultimately impact negatively on service delivery.

The Eastern Cape province of South Africa has the highest official unemployment rate in South Africa at 42.1% (Stats SA, 2022). Many of the province's citizens are reliant on government grants, subsidies and services to counter vulnerability and poverty. Poor quality service delivery exacerbates general dissatisfaction and increases unemployment and inequality which worsens the poverty challenge (Katywa & Strydom, 2021; Twani & Soyapi, 2022). For this reason, public servants need to be

persistent and adaptive in ensuring that they fulfill their roles in ensuring service delivery. The study is based on the premise that an ambiguous and dynamic environment requires an optimistic and engaged work force that is able to withstand the demands of this milieu.

1.3 Research objectives

The main aim of the study was to examine optimism and work engagement among administrative employees at a municipality in the Eastern Cape Province. On the basis of the main aim the following objectives were set:

- To determine the levels of optimism of these employees
- To determine the levels of engagement of these employees
- To identify whether the optimism experienced by these employees had an influence on their engagement

This paper comprises a literature review in which the main variables are examined, these being optimism and work engagement, including a consideration of previous studies examining the relationship between these variables. This is followed by the research methodology adopted in this quantitative study. Thereafter the results are presented and discussed, followed by relevant managerial implications. Limitations of the study are considered and concluding remarks provided.

2. Literature Review

This study examined the variables of optimism and work engagement and further sought to determine whether optimism had an influence on the work engagement of employees within a South African municipality.

2.1 Optimism

The field of positive psychology and its application to the workplace, this being positive organisational behaviour (POB), focuses on emphasising the importance of adopting a positive approach. Linked to this is the study of positive psychological resource capacities. Amongst others, three important positive psychological resource capacities have been identified that meet the defined POB criteria, these being hope, resilience and optimism (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). The focus of this study was on optimism.

Optimism, as defined by Seligman (1998) is an attributional style that “explains positive events in terms of personal, permanent, and pervasive causes and negative events in terms of external, temporary, and situation-specific ones” (Youssef & Luthans, 2007, p.778). At the other end of the scale is pessimism. An optimist is a person who expects good things to happen to them, while a pessimist expects unfavorable outcomes. Dispositional optimism and pessimism are similarly defined by Carver et al. (2010) as a general expectation for positive or negative outcomes that determines how individuals feel and cope when confronted with challenges and adversity.

Research studies have consistently related optimism to psychological and physical well-being (Alarcon et al., 2012), with optimism being found to positively relate to general psychological well-being, general physical well-being, life-satisfaction, and happiness, and negatively relate to hopelessness, anxiety, and depression. This suggests that employees who are optimistic should be better able to cope with job demands and stressors, and that this, in turn, should decrease the potential for burnout (Carver & Scheier, 2014). While optimism is a trait and relatively stable over time, it is malleable and can be taught and learned (Seligman, 1998).

A much earlier definition of optimism by Tiger (1979, p. 18) is that of “a mood or attitude associated with an expectation about the social or material future – one which the evaluator regards as socially desirable, to his [or her] advantage, or for his [or her] pleasure”. This definition is regarded as particularly comprehensive as it comprises an affective, motivational, and cognitive component - individuals make mental judgements about what they want, which incites positive emotions and these, in turn, act as motivators. This definition links to that of Barnett and Martinez (2015) who viewed optimism as a positive cognitive expectancy of future events.

The cognitive element of optimism comprises the reason individuals believe their futures will be positive. For example, when optimists feel a sense of helplessness, they maintain the belief that their abilities will help them overcome stressful problems (Forgeard & Seligman, 2012). In this vein, optimism may be viewed as a resource-based cognitive construct that relies on an individual’s evaluation of their internal and external resources in making inferences about their expectations of the future. This determination will increase the ability of employees with high optimism to adapt to changing circumstances. This demonstrates the motivational nature of optimism in energising and propelling individuals towards their goals with the belief that they can effect positive change in the future (Luthans, 2011).

In accordance with goal setting theory, which asserts that specific and difficult goals can increase employee performance (Luthans, 2011), it is reasonable to assume that optimists are more likely to set themselves more challenging goals than pessimists and consequently perform better. Further, optimism may inspire persistence and effort towards ambitious and hard to reach “Everest goals” (Forgeard & Seligman, 2012) which is valuable in organisations where challenges may seem overwhelming.

Optimism influences the way in which an individual perceives his or her environment. If the perception is largely positive, the individual will focus on the opportunities at hand. If negative, the individual may see challenges as insurmountable. Further, as optimism amplifies employees’ focus, they are able to foresee multiple scenarios in reaching their objectives and anticipate potential obstacles (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). This makes the optimistic individual more prepared to deal with obstacles should they arise, work hard to overcome them, as well as seek innovative ways to solve problems and achieve goals (Jafri, 2012).

Optimists and pessimists will therefore differ on how they confront adversity and challenges. Optimists will be confident in their ability to achieve a goal and will persevere and put in more effort (Carver & Scheier, 2014; Carver et al., 2010). Further, as an affective construct, optimism influences the way people feel when encountering problems (Carver et al., 2010). In this sense optimism acts as buffer and protects employees from the harmful effects of work-related stress (Ugwu & Igbende, 2017).

It is also important to note that employees with higher levels of optimism are those who are more likely to make use of engagement coping strategies such as seeking support, positive reframing, acceptance, planning and cognitive restructuring (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Muhonen & Torkelson, 2011). Within a challenging work environment, the construct of optimism is thus an important consideration. The link between optimism and reduced absenteeism, higher levels of engagement and retention cement its importance as an organisational consideration.

In considering the antecedents of optimism, research suggests that some people are naturally more optimistic than others as a result of environmental and (indirectly) genetic influences as well as socioeconomic circumstances (Forgeard & Seligman, 2012). This means that optimism can be learned through appropriate techniques and interventions that focus on becoming more positive; further through developing a good personal and professional support system (Allen, 2017). This points to the importance of the environment as a determinant of optimism in the form of support and resources.

2.2 Work engagement

Kahn (1990), regarded as the pioneer of work engagement, refers to an engaged employee as one who is simultaneously physically, emotionally and cognitively present in their role (Cooke et al., 2019). This leads to a sense of attentiveness, connection, integration and focus (Kahn, 1992). Siddiqi (2014) emphasises that work engagement is determined by the extent to which employees experience a sense of meaning in their work, psychological safety, that they are contributing towards something greater, and that they are supported in meeting their role requirements.

Through their research Maslach, et al (2001) conceptualised work engagement as the opposite of burnout. Burnout is a state experienced by the employee characterised by exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy, whereas work engagement is characterised by energy, involvement and efficacy. Schaufeli et al. (2002) conceptualised work engagement as comprising three dimensions, these being vigour, dedication, and absorption.

Vigour refers to employees' levels of energy and stamina and their ability to face and work through challenges, as well as their willingness to exert effort toward their work (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). The opposite of vigour is exhaustion, which refers to the fatigue and tension that employees experience at time. However, job resources can assist employees to maintain their vigour when working for long hours (Brand-Labuschagne et al., 2012) or in difficult circumstances. Vigour, closely aligned with the

concept of intrinsic motivation, is seen to energise and direct goal-oriented behaviour (Nienaber & Martins, 2016).

Dedication represents the extent to which an employee identifies with his/her work role (Bakker et al., 2008) and is thus referred to as an emotional connection to (Geldenhuis et al., 2014) and high levels of involvement in work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Dedication leads to employees experiencing pride in their jobs, meaningfulness in their work and enthusiasm towards the organisation. At the opposite end of the spectrum is cynicism, a component of the dimension of burnout (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006). Cynicism is characterised by a callous attitude, loss of interest in, and attaching little meaning to work (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006; Upadaya et al., 2016) and ultimately poor identification with work roles (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Dedication is associated with the construct of job commitment, with dedicated employees being incredibly involved in and committed to their work (Taris et al., 2017).

Absorption represents the cognitive connection that employees have with their work (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). It refers to a state of being totally focused on and engrossed in the job. In this state employees may not note the passing of time and find it difficult to disengage, thus suggesting alignment with the concept of “flow”, a mind state in which employees become so totally immersed in their work that nothing else seems to matter (Nienaber & Martins, 2016). Absorption, while not on the opposite end of a continuum, may, in its absence, be characterised by employee inefficacy. Absorption has been found to correlate highly with vigour, suggesting that high levels of absorption require high levels of energy and vice versa (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

The antecedents of work engagement have been identified as emanating from leadership (du Plessis & Boschhoff, 2018; Mendes & Stander, 2011; Stander et al., 2015); organisation/work design (Bano et al., 2015; Rothmann & Joubert, 2007) and the individual (Bakker et al., 2012; Ugwu, 2012; Youseff & Luthans, 2007).

Work engagement is a very important workplace consideration, understanding the linkages that have been identified in studies between engagement and positive organisational and individual outcomes including organisational effectiveness and efficiency, organisational citizenship behaviour, employee physical and mental well-being, organisational commitment, job satisfaction, job performance, customer satisfaction, and focused coping mechanisms (Ariani, 2013; Robertson & Cooper, 2010; Rothmann et al., 2011; Saks, 2006; Salanova et al., 2005; Veromaa et al., 2017). Further, work engagement has been found to correlate negatively with negative organisational and individual outcomes such as exhaustion and cynicism, absenteeism, and turnover intention (Kašpárková et al., 2018; Leiter & Maslach, 2017; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

2.3 The relationship between optimism and work engagement

The relationship between optimism and work engagement is explained in the framework of the JD-R model as developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2008). In this model optimism is regarded as a personal resource and work engagement as a work-related energetic state. On this basis, the JD-R model was used as the theoretical framework in this study to examine optimism and work engagement and the relationship between these variables.

2.3.1 The Job Demands Resources model

All occupations are associated with a level of job-related stress. However, employees with a greater pool of job and personal resources are better able to cope with job demands and are thus more likely to have higher levels of work engagement (Barkhuizen et al., 2013). This is explained by the Job Demands Resources Model (JD-R Model) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). This model takes into consideration various internal and external dimensions contributing to engagement at work, with one of these being the personal resource of optimism.

According to the JD-R model, job risk factors associated with job related stress can be classified into two categories, these being job demands and job resources (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Both relate to psychological, physical, social, and organisational aspects of the job. Demands are those aspects of a job that necessitate sustained physical and or psychological effort (i.e., cognitive or emotional) or skills application and are thus associated with particular physical or psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). These would include work pressure, an unfavorable working environment and irregular working hours (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011).

Resources, on the other hand, are those aspects of the job that assist in reducing the potentially negative consequences associated with job demands such as disengagement and burnout. Job resources also assist in stimulating personal growth, promoting learning and development, and in contributing towards the achievement of work goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job resources are identified at the macro-organisational level and relate to salary, career opportunities and job security. They are also identifiable at the interpersonal level, including supervisor and co-worker support and team climate, or linked to the specific position (role clarity and participation in decision-making) and level of the task (skill variety, task identify, task significance, autonomy and performance feedback) (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011).

Over time the JD-R model has been extended to include the role played by personal resources. These resources relate to the individual's sense of being in control and able to influence his/her environment successfully. They include feeling appreciated as well as possessing skills and attitudes that support these feelings (Mastenbroek et al., 2014).

According to the JD-R model, work engagement is driven by personal resources which buffer the effects of job demands such as burnout and disengagement (Barkhuizen et al., 2013; Wrosch & Scheier, 2003). Therefore, personal resources, including optimism, together with job resources, contribute to higher work engagement (Barkhuizen et al., 2013; Karatepe & Karadas, 2015). Employees scoring higher on levels of personal resources have generally been found to have higher work engagement levels (du Plessis & Boshoff, 2018; Stander et al., 2015).

Further to the JD-R model, Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) examined personal resources as a predictor of work engagement. The results of this study indicated that optimistic employees who generally believe they will experience positive outcomes are more engaged. Karatepe and Karadas (2015), contend that the mere presence of optimism contributes to increased work engagement, with their studies revealing that when job resources are accounted for, it is personal resources such as optimism that impact work engagement the most over time.

2.4 Hypothesis

On this basis, one hypothesis was set for this study:

H₁: There is a relationship between optimism and work engagement.

H₀: There is no relationship between optimism and work engagement.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research approach and design

In order to describe the phenomena under study and make inferences to the broader population of interest, a quantitative research approach was adopted. This allowed for the gathering of data for the purposes of analysis with the goal of explaining the phenomena under study (Leavy, 2017). Further, the study adopted a descriptive and correlational design as it sought to describe the variables of interest, these being optimism and work engagement, as they related to the population under study, this being administrative employees at a local municipality, and further to explore for a relationship between these variables. Data were gathered via a self-administered survey questionnaire.

3.2 Measuring instruments

Two scales were utilised in this study, these being the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) as a measure of optimism and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-17) as a measure of work engagement.

The LOT-R is a measure of dispositional optimism (Scheier et al., 1994) and comprises 10 items – three assessing optimism, three assessing pessimism and four placebo items. A five-point Likert-type scale of agreement ranging from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (4) accompanies these items. An

overall score is generated by adding the cumulative optimism score to the inverted pessimism total. Separate scores can be calculated for optimism and pessimism.

In this study exploring optimism and engagement, only the optimism score (LOT-R: Optimism) was utilised. When adding the scores for the three optimism items a maximum score of 12 is achievable. A higher score would thus be indicative of greater levels of optimism. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 has been reported for this subscale (Glaesmer et al., 2011). The measure was adopted in this study as it has demonstrated reliability and validity in differing cultural settings (Chang et al., 2011) which is an important consideration in a multicultural context such as South Africa.

The UWES-17 is a self-reported measure that has been found to demonstrate psychometrically sound properties (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). It measures three attributes of work engagement, these being vigour (6 items), dedication (5 items) and absorption (6 items) and utilises a 7-point Likert-type scale of agreement ranging from never (0) to every day (6). The 17-item version is more commonly utilised to study engagement among employees as it has been found to demonstrate internal consistency and reliability with coefficients ranging between 0.80 and 0.90 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) including in the South African context (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007).

3.3 Population, sample and data collection

In this study the population comprised all employees within the administrative structure of a municipality located in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. These employees are responsible for overseeing service delivery in line with the objectives and policies approved by the municipal council. They range from entry level to senior management employees and represent the offices of the Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Operating Officer and a number of directorates which are divided on a functional basis. This population totaled almost 6000 employees at the time of the study.

A non-probability and convenience sampling technique was adopted. Respondents were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study, as well as their access to a computer or smart phone registered with the corporate services department of the municipality. This was important to enable electronic distribution of the survey instrument that was circulated via email and developed using the QuestionPro online platform. While this may be seen to reduce the generalisability of the findings, it was deemed appropriate understanding the limited time available to conduct the study which was completed as part of the requirements for the degree Masters in Industrial Psychology. Prior to circulation of the survey via email, the necessary institutional permission was applied for and granted to conduct the study within the municipality.

3.4 Ethics

Ethical clearance was obtained from the university where the study was conducted (reference number H19-BES-IOP-015). No personal or identifying information was gathered from the respondents as part of the survey.

4. Results and findings

In this study data were collected using a survey administered on the QuestionPro platform. The data were returned to the researcher in an aggregated format for the purposes of analysis and reporting. A final sample size of 155 was achieved. The data were subjected to descriptive and inferential analysis making use of the STATISTICA analytics software package.

4.1 Demographic information

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the sample as it pertains to representativity across the two offices and various directorates that comprise the administrative function of the municipality. While most respondents were from the Infrastructure and Engineering directorate, there is nonetheless representation from each directorate or office. In relation to demographics, most of the respondents were female (63%), and aged between 25 and 44 years (63%). The average tenure was less than five years (47%).

Table 1: Representation across offices and directorates

Office/Directorate	n	% of total sample
Office of the Chief Financial Officer	16	10
Office of the Chief Operating Officer	10	7
Corporate Services	17	11
Economic development, Tourism & Agriculture	6	4
Electricity and Energy	13	8
Human Settlements	14	9
Infrastructure & Engineering	32	21
Public Health	17	11
Sport, Recreation, Arts & Culture	18	12
Safety & Security	11	7
Special Projects & Programmes	1	1
Total	155	100.0

Source: Own compilation

4.2 Validity and reliability considerations

The LOT-R (optimism scale) and the UWES-17 were deployed in this study due to their demonstrated validity and reliability in the South African multicultural context. Cronbach alpha coefficients were calculated to determine the internal reliability (Bryman et al., 2021) for both measures as indicated in Table 2. Acceptable reliability (Zikmund et al., 2013) was demonstrated for the LOT-R: Optimism scale (0.60) suggesting that findings deduced from this instrument be regarded with some caution. The coefficients ranged from 0.81 to 0.93 for the UWES, indicating very high levels of reliability (Moerdyk, 2015).

Table 2: Cronbach's alpha coefficients: reliability of the measuring instrument (n=155)

Instrument/Subscale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
LOT-R: Optimism	0.60	3
UWES: Work Engagement	0.93	17
UWES: Vigour	0.83	6
UWES: Dedication	0.88	5
UWES: Absorption	0.81	6

Source: Own compilation

4.3 Employee experiences of optimism

In this study the LOT-R: Optimism scale was used to determine employee experiences of optimism, understanding that this scale assesses optimism – pessimism as a continuum. This scale is accompanied by a five-point Likert-type response scale with zero representing low levels (strongly disagree) and four representing high levels (strongly agree). To calculate an overall score the scores were added for the three optimism item which results in a score ranging from zero to 12. To indicate the level of optimism the following scoring key was applied: 0 – 4.00 = low score; 4.01 – 8.00 = moderate score; 8.01 – 12.00 = high score. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Employee experiences of optimism

N	155
Mean	8.74
Std. Deviation	2.63

Source: Own compilation

The mean score of 8.74 suggests high levels of optimism. The standard deviation of 2.63 reveals some inconsistency of response and thus differing experiences among the respondents as it relates to their sense of optimism.

4.4 Employee experiences of work engagement

Employee experiences of work engagement were measured using the UWES-17 which rates responses on a scale of zero to six, with zero (never) representing no level of engagement and six (every day) representing high levels of engagement. The UWES-17 comprises three scales, these being absorption, dedication and vigour. Table 4 presents the mean scores and standard deviations achieved in regard to the UWES-17. In indicating the level of work engagement, the following scoring key was used: 0 – 2.00 = low score; 2.01 – 4.00 = moderate score; 4.01 – 6.00 = high score.

Table 4: Experiences of work engagement

	Absorption	Dedication	Vigour	UWES
N	155	155	155	155
Mean	4.05	4.27	4.15	4.15
Std. Deviation	1.13	1.34	1.17	1.11

Source: Own compilation

For the overall scale rating, the UWES achieved a mean score of 4.15 which is suggestive of high levels of work engagement. This was reflected for each of the dimensions of absorption, dedication and vigour. The recommendations of Iacobucci and Churchill (2010) were considered in interpreting the variance of response (1.41 = low, 1.57 = medium, 1.73 = high). As all standard deviations obtained were below 1.41, this demonstrates consistency with responses tending towards the “often” category.

4.5 Relationship between optimism and work engagement

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to determine whether relationships existed between the constructs and sub-constructs measured by these scales as well as establish the strength and direction of any emerging relationships (Bryman et al., 2021). These results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients (n=155)

	Absorption	Dedication	Vigour	LOT-R: Optimism	UWES score
Absorption	1	.759**	.748**	.183*	.907**
Dedication	.759**	1	.808**	.256**	.928**
Vigour	.748**	.808**	1	.276**	.928**
Optimism	.183*	.256**	.276**	1	.259**
UWES score	.907**	.928**	.928**	.259**	1

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

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

Source: Own compilation

In interpreting the coefficient values the recommendations of Guilford (1956) as cited in Sprinthall (1987) were applied. A low correlation (.259) was identified between optimism and work engagement, signifying a definite but small and significant relationship, as well as between the work engagement subfactors of dedication and optimism (.256), and vigour and optimism (.276). A slight but nonetheless significant relationship was determined between the work engagement dimension of absorption and optimism (.183).

Based on these findings the hypothesis set for the study that proposed that there is a relationship between optimism and work engagement among administrative employees of the municipality was accepted.

5. Discussion of results

This study was conducted to gain understanding on the constructs of optimism and work engagement in the public sector, understanding that employees in local municipalities are faced with a multitude of challenges which could impact on their performance in ensuring quality service delivery. Public sector employees, including those in municipalities, are perceived as idle and dispirited (Costantini et al., 2017). However, the results of this study suggest that this may not be the case for all employees.

Employees of the municipality were found to demonstrate high levels of engagement, and this was found for all three dimensions measured, these being absorption, dedication and vigour. This is encouraging understanding the instability that they experience as a result of ineffective leadership, bureaucratic corruption and leadership and regime changes, amongst others. Service delivery is a key performance area for local governments (RSA, 2009) and to achieve this, employees need to be engaged to enable them to work in a manner that allows for the achievement of organisational objectives (Fitzpatrick, 2017). However, while engagement emerged in this survey, citizens continue to criticise service delivery.

A report compiled by the South African Cities Network (2022) notes that many municipalities are constrained in terms of financial and human resources. It is stated that efficiency challenges may not necessarily be resolved through providing additional resources but rather through the more efficient use of existing resources. This is seen to include human resources.

If employees are indeed psychologically present and engaged, then this potential needs to be more effectively harnessed. What the results further demonstrate is that if employees experience vigour, dedication and absorption, they have the potential to become engrossed in their work in a positive, persistent and persuasive manner (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Although further investigation is required to determine this, it may be that these municipal employees need to bolster their personal resources and, in this way, drive up their levels of intrinsic motivation as a way of enhancing their engagement levels. It also suggests a need to identify the organisational

resources that are seen to promote engagement and those aspects of the organisation or the task that detract therefrom (demands).

As with engagement, the (largely political) instability and uncertainty experienced over a sustained period of time within the municipality does not appear to have dampened the optimism of employees. In this study, while the results demonstrated some inconsistency of response, high levels of optimism were demonstrated by some respondents. This is a valuable finding understanding that high optimism is indicative of expectations of positive outcomes and may be found to bolster employee morale during challenging times. It suggests that these employees do not let “political issues” detract from their work. As with engagement, the challenge becomes identifying how better to activate this optimism to promote quality service delivery.

One of the objectives of this study was to probe for the existence of a relationship between optimism and work engagement. A small but significant positive relationship was determined. This supports the findings of other studies that have determined a significant and positive correlation between these variables, including those of Xanthapoulou et al. (2007), Xanthapoulou et al. (2009) and Mache et al. (2014).

The study further supports the contention of Bakker and Demerouti (2008) and Roux (2010) that employees with high work engagement are more likely to possess high levels of optimism. This is an important finding understanding that optimistic employees work harder, are easier to motivate, and more likely to succeed in work settings with low job resources (Mache et al. 2014; Salminen et al., 2014).

The study further examined whether there was a relationship between optimism and the sub-constructs of work engagement. Small and significant positive relationships emerged between optimism and the sub-constructs of dedication and vigour. A slight and significant relationship emerged between optimism and absorption. These results are similar to those found in a study by Mache et al. (2014). In the literature review it was established that engaged employees usually possess high levels of personal resources, including, but not limited to optimism (Xanthapoulou et al., 2007; Salminen et al., 2014).

Further, support was provided to the study of Pienaar and Sieberhagen (2005) that demonstrated that vigour and dedication were best explained by the participant’s levels of optimism. In the same way that engaged employees are energetic and persistent as a result of their vigour, optimism has a similar effect due to its energising and invigorating influence (Luthans, 2011). While absorption only registered a slight correlation, this relationship is worth noting. This is because employees who are highly absorbed in their work become effortlessly captivated and consumed therein (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010; Schaufeli et al., 2002).

The findings of this study suggest that it is important, from an organisational perspective, to identify what drives employee optimism and their engagement. This will ensure the best deployment of

organisational resources and the use of best practices to promote optimism and engagement. These are elucidated on in the managerial implications.

6. Managerial Implications

The public sector in South Africa is fraught with challenges that impede on the effective and efficient delivery of services to citizens. While mandated by law to ensure this delivery, the public service continues struggle to meet basic needs as they relate to the provision of water and electricity, amongst others. This will continue to have a knock-on effect on employment and the alleviation of poverty unless addressed. While initiatives, including the introduction of the Batho Phele principles in 1995 and various codes of good conduct and mandatory reporting exist, there is a need to leverage the resources of municipalities to expedite service delivery improvements. This includes the effective utilisation of human resources.

Empirical evidence suggests that engaged employees are more motivated and productive, further that optimistic employees will persist in the face of adversity and challenges. This study supported the work of other researchers in determining a link between these variables. While the study did not seek to determine the predictive variable, it sufficiently demonstrated a positive relationship between optimism and work engagement. This would suggest that attempts to increase the one variable will lead to increases in the other.

The JD-R model provided a framework for the study in which the linear relationship between one personal resource and one work-related state was examined. It is important that organisations identify what additional personal resources employees possess that influence engagement in a positive manner. It is also important to determine the nature and level of the job demands and resources that can be minimised or leveraged as relevant. This will provide a clearer picture of work engagement as it relates to job performance.

To this end the JD-R model provides an indication of the type of personal resources as well as the job demands and resources that could be examined. What the JD-R model appears to lack is inclusion of personal demands. This element is “hidden” within the job demands component of the model that speaks to elements such as role conflict and emotional demands (Bakker et al., 2008). It is believed that as job demands and resources are distinct and separate considerations, so too should the elements of personal demands and resources be considered. This will allow for a clearer determination of what employees “bring to the table” that could potentially influence their level of engagement.

As optimism was found to link to engagement, cultivating optimism could improve the levels of work engagement of these employees. This is an important consideration understanding the link between engagement and positive employee outcomes including motivation and ultimately productivity which, in the case of this study would refer to service delivery. One of the ways in which optimism can be

promoted is through reference to Seligman's (1998) notion of learned optimism. Through following the recommendations of the author, individuals can gradually teach themselves to be more optimistic. Further, Allen (2017) proposes engaging in mindfulness practices and introspection as a way of becoming more optimistic. Through doing this, individuals can learn to accept their personal and professional limitations and those of others, adopt a development mindset, focus on holistic wellbeing, and build healthy relationships and support structures (in both the personal and professional domain).

Further techniques to promote dispositional optimism include that of Peters et al. (2010) who tested a version of the Best Possible Self (BPS) exercise that aims to encourage positive outcome expectancies in different life domains. After doing the BPS exercise once only an increase in optimism was reported in this study. A further technique is the Penn Resiliency Program (PRP) which premises that emotions and behaviour are not influenced solely by an activating event but mediated by thoughts and beliefs about the event (Gilham & Reivich, 2004).

While these methods may seem to represent short term solutions, it is believed that with regular use and practice, optimism can be cultivated through the elimination of pessimism and negative self-beliefs. Most seem to suggest the use of cognitive behavioural techniques to tackle irrational assumptions and errors in logic. For this reason, it is proposed that employees work with an experienced facilitator in the form of a consultant, life coach, industrial or counselling psychologist who can guide employees through the process(es). These facilitators could be introduced as part of an employee assistance programme, or broader talent management strategy.

In summation, the following recommendations:

- That organisations implement a purposeful strategy that aims to promote engagement as a driver of quality service delivery. This strategy entails identifying the enabler and barriers to engagement in the form of individual and organisational resources and demands. Optimism should be considered as one of a broader range of personal resources. The strategy should entail identification of the greatest human capital risk areas in terms of service delivery as they link to organisational sustainability. These risks could include talent flight, burnout and absenteeism as possible consequences. This might entail identifying specific organisational roles/functional areas ranked in terms of severity of risk and putting appropriate interventions in place to eliminate or reduce this risk. It is imperative that employees who demonstrate personal and job-related competencies as well as a track record of success in quality service delivery are retained within the public sector.
- Work engagement and the building of POBs should become embedded in the culture of the organisation. This can be achieved through positive role-modelling, in this case employees who demonstrate the requisite interpersonal and job-related competencies and who are recognised for their positive contribution to quality service delivery. Further regular formal communication on

engagement and the administration of surveys to monitor levels of engagement and identify potential areas of demand overload are recommended.

- A positive organisational culture, as well as any emergent strategies to promote engagement and the positive outcomes associated therewith, should be supported at an operational level by the appointment of managers who are well trained / experienced in people management to allow them to play an active role in identifying at risk departments, roles, functions, teams and individuals.
- Municipal HRM managers should assist in creating plans and policies linked to the recommendations provided here as well as identify mechanisms and metrics for reporting on the success thereof. For example, if interventions are put in place to enhance employee optimism, these should be reviewed and reported on. It is no use proposing and implementing measures for which a demonstrable and positive influence cannot be determined. To this end metrics should be developed that demonstrate the links between optimism, engagement and quality service delivery.
- Employees should be encouraged to explore opportunities for active self-development as it relates to building their sense of self-efficacy and personal resilience as demonstrated in the JD-R model.
- HRM processes and systems, including recognition and reward, performance management and talent management must be designed and implemented in a manner that supports quality service delivery through the achievement of performance objectives linked to organisational objectives. For example, remuneration systems that reward individuals for mere presenteeism should be overhauled to ensure that employees are accountable for their performance and understand the role that they can take through their active engagement and immersion in their work.

7. Conclusions, limitations and future research

In this study employee optimism and work engagement were investigated at a municipality in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. This included an examination of employee experiences of these phenomena, as well as probing for the existence of a relationship between these variables. Optimism was measured using the LOT-R: Optimism scale and work engagement via the UWES-17, a scale which addressed the subcomponents of engagement as absorption, dedication and vigour.

Optimism and work engagement were found to be significantly and positively related, and this extended to the subconstructs of work engagement, with dedication demonstrating a lesser relationship. The findings suggest that organisations need to identify the barriers and enablers of work engagement as they pertain to both personal and job-related demands and resources. This would include building employees' sense of resilience and efficacy in handling work-related challenges through strengthening their personal resources, including optimism. Further, as part of a broader strategy to promote engagement, organisations, in particular the HRM department, need to ensure that appropriate techniques and HRM practices exist to support an engaged work force.

Directing attention to the engagement of public sector employees holds benefits for the citizens that they serve. Employees who are optimistic and engaged are more likely to persist in times of adversity, including working in challenging environments where others may not share their positive orientation. Through a deep sense of connection to their jobs and believing that they can bring about positive change they are more likely to be goal-oriented in the pursuit of quality service delivery. These are the individuals who may better align their values and behaviour with the Batho Pele principles and the foundations of the South African Constitution and this is imperative in achieving the public sector mandate.

The limitations of this study were considered. While the study only represents the experiences of employees in one municipality located in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, the results of the study could be considered throughout the South African public sector as (1) similar challenges are experienced across various departments and entities in this sector, and (2) poor service delivery is not limited to local government. A further limitation is linked to the research methodology – the study utilised convenience sampling and may, as such, have attracted respondents by mere virtue of the fact that they were engaged.

In terms of future research, it would be beneficial to conduct studies among public sector employees beyond the administrative function to determine their levels of optimism and engagement. This is important as operational employees also play an integral role in service delivery, for example through ensuring the necessary infrastructure and maintenance linked to the provision of water and electricity; further those who are liaise directly with the customer (South African citizens) as these employees have a direct influence on the perceptions held of civil servants, and ultimately the public sector in general.

It would also be valuable to determine whether there is a direct and predictive relationship between the optimism – engagement nexus and employee in-role performance (behaviour as it relates to job tasks) and extra-role performance (behaviour beyond the job including organisational citizenship behaviour).

REFERENCES

- Afifah, N., & Daud, I. (2018). Strategic leadership style and commitment to service quality on services innovation in local enterprise water services. *Journal of Management and Marketing Review*, 3(3), 143-148.
- Alarcon, G. M., Bowling, N. A., & Khazon, S. (2012). Great expectations: A meta-analytic examination of optimism and hope. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 54, 821–827. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2012.12.004>
- Allen, V. L. (2017). Learned optimism: A balm for social worker stress. *Social Work & Christianity*, 44(4), 83–91.
- Ariani, D. W. (2013). The relationship between employee engagement, organizational citizenship behaviour, and counterproductive work behaviour. *International Journal of Business Administration*, 4(2), 46-56. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijba.v4n2p46>

- Bakker, A. B. & Demerouti, E. (2007). The Job Demands-Resources model: State of the art. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(3), 309-328.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940710733115>
- Bakker, A. B. & Demerouti, E. (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. *Career Development International*, 13(3), 209-223. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430810870476>
- Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & ten Brummelhuis, L. L. (2012). Work engagement, performance, and active learning: The role of conscientiousness. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 80, 555–564. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2011.08.008>
- Bakker, A. B., Schaufeli, W. B., Leiter, M. P. & Taris, T. W. (2008). Work engagement: An emerging concept in occupational health psychology. *Work and Stress*, 22(3), 187-200. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.2.274>
- Bano, S., Kriti Vyas, K., & Gupta, R. (2015). Perceived organisational support and work engagement: A cross generational study. *Journal of Psychosocial Research*, 10(2), 357-364.
- Barkhuizen, N., Rothmann, S., & van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2013). Burnout and work engagement of academics in higher education institutions: Effects of dispositional optimism. *Wiley Online Library*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2520>
- Barnett, M. D., & Martinez, B. (2015). Optimists: It could have been worse; Pessimists: It could have been better: Dispositional optimism and pessimism and counterfactual thinking. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 86, 122–125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.06.010>
- Brand-Labuschagne, L., Mostert, K., Rothmann, S., & Rothmann, J.C. (2012). Burnout and work engagement of South African blue-collar workers: The development of a new scale. *Southern African Business Review*, 16(1), 58-93.
- Bryman, A., Bell, E. & Hirschsohn. (2021). *Research Methodology: Business and Management Contexts*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Carver, C. S., & Connor-Smith, J. (2010). Personality and coping. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 61, 679-704. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.093008.100352>
- Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (2002). Optimism. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (pp. 231-243). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (2014). Dispositional optimism. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 18(6), 293-299. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2014.02.003>
- Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., & Segerstrom, S. C. (2010). Optimism. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30, 879–889. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2010.01.006>
- Chang, E. C., Bodem, M. R., Sanna, L. J., & Fabian, C. G. (2011). Optimism–pessimism and adjustment in college students: Is there support for the utility of a domain-specific approach to studying outcome expectancies? *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6(5), 418-428.
- Coetzer, C. F., & Rothmann, S. (2007). Job demands, job resources and work engagement of employees in a manufacturing organisation. *Southern African Business Review*, 11(3), 17 – 32.

- Cooke, D. K., Brant, K. K., & Woods, J. M. (2019). The role of public service motivation in employee work engagement: A test of the job demands-resources model. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 42(9), 765-775.
- Costantini, A., De Paola, F., Ceschi, A., Satori, R., Meneghini, A. A., & Di Fabio, A. (2017). Work engagement and psychological capital in the Italian public administration: A new resource-based intervention programme. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 43. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v43i0.1413>
- Cresswell, J.W. (2014) *Research Design*. United Kingdom, Sage Publications.
- Davids, I. & Maphunye, K.J. (2009). The public sector: Promoting development and good governance. In Davids, I., Theron, F. & Maphunye, K.I. (eds). *Participatory Development in South Africa: A Development Management Perspective. 2nd Edition*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers. 60-64.
- Dayimani, M. (2021). ANC destroyed Nelson Mandela Bay, says newly elected mayor. *News 24* accessed 24/08/2021 <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/anc-destroyed-nelson-mandela-bay-says-newly-elected-mayor-20210129>
- Demerouti, E., & Bakker, A. B. (2011). The job demands-resources model: Challenges for future research. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 37(2), 01-09.
- Dunlop, R., & Scheepers, C. B. (2023). The influence of female agentic and communal leadership on work engagement: vigour, dedication and absorption. *Management Research Review*, 46(3), 437-466.
- Du Plessis, M., & Boshoff, A. B. (2018). Authentic leadership, followership, and psychological capital as antecedents of work engagement. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 28(1), 26-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2018.1438832>
- Engelbrecht, M. M. (2013). *Sustaining Administrative Effectiveness after Municipal Elections through Change Management*. Unpublished master's thesis. University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.
- Fitzpatrick, S. (2017). From employee engagement to employee experience: Helping employees 'own' engagement. *NHRMA 2017 Conference*, The Ever-Change Waters of HR.
- Forgeard, M. J. C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2012). Seeing the glass half full: A review of the causes and consequences of optimism. *Pratiques Psychologiques* 18, 107–120. <https://doi: 10.1016/j.prps.2012.02.002>
- Geldenhuis, M., Łaba, K., & Venter, C.M. (2014). Meaningful work, work engagement and organisational commitment. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 40(1), 1-10. <https://doi: org/10.4102/sajip. v40i1.1098>
- Gillham, J., & Reivich, K. (2004). Cultivating optimism in childhood and adolescence. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591(1), 146-163.
- Glaesmer, H., Rief, W., Martin, A., Mewes, R., Brähler, E., Zenger, M., & Hinz, A. (2012). Psychometric properties and population-based norms of the Life Orientation Test Revised (LOT-R). *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 17(2), 432-445.
- Gonzalez-Roma, V., Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Lloret, S. (2006). Burnout and work engagement: Independent factors or opposite poles? *Journal of Vocational Behaviour* 68(1), 165–174. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2005.01.003>

- Grant, L. (2014, February 12). Research shows sharp increase in service delivery protests. *Mail & Guardian* (Accessed 01 May 2018).
- Iacobucci, D., & Churchill, G. A. (2010). Marketing research. *Methodological Foundations*, 10.
- Jafri, H. (2012). Psychological capital and innovative behaviour: An empirical study on apparel fashion industry. *The Journal Contemporary Management Research*, 6(1), 42-52.
- Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692-724. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256287>
- Kahn, W. A. (1992). To be fully there: Psychological presence at work. *Human Relations*, 45(4), 321-349.
- Kalonda, J. K., & Govender, K. (2021). Factors affecting municipal service delivery: A case study of Katima Mulilo Town Council, Namibia. *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 12(2), 1-26.
- Karatepe, O. M. & Karadas, G. (2015). Do psychological capital and work engagement foster frontline employees' satisfaction? A study in the hotel industry, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 27(6), 1254-1278. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-01-2014-0028>.
- Kašpárková, L., Vaculík, M., Procházka, J., & Schaufeli, W. P. (2018). Why resilient workers perform better: The roles of job satisfaction and work engagement. *Journal of Workplace Behavioural Health*, 33(1), 43-62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2018.1441719>
- Katywa, Z., & Strydom, K. (2021). Transformational leadership as a catalyst for efficient service delivery in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. *Journal of Public Administration*, 56(2), 213-232.
- Leavy, P. (Ed.). (2017). *Handbook of Arts-based Research*. Guilford Publications.
- Leiter, M., & Maslach, C. (2017). Burnout and engagement: Contributions to a new vision. *Burnout Research*, 5, 55-57.
- Luthans, F. (2011). *Organisational behaviour: An Evidence-based Approach*. Singapore, Asia: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Maake, G., Harmse, C. P., & Schultz, C. M. (2021). Performance management as a mediator for work engagement and employment relationships in the public sector in South Africa. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19, 12.
- Mache, S., Vitzthum, K., Wanke, E., Groneberg, D. A., Klapp, B. F., & Danzer, G. (2014). Exploring the impact of resilience, self-efficacy, optimism and organizational resources on work engagement. *IOS Press*, 47, 491-500. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-131617>
- Mafini, C., & Pooe, D. R. I. (2013). The relationship between employee satisfaction and organisational performance: Evidence from a South African government department. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 39(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v39i1.1090>
- Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 397-422.
- Masson, E. (2023, February 2). Data shows that service delivery protests will increase, intensify in 2023. *Mail & Guardian* (Accessed 10 July 2023).

- Mastenbroek, N. J. J. M., Demerouti, E., Van Beukelen, P., Muijtjens, A. M., Scherpbier, A. J. J. A., & Jaarsma, A. D. C. (2014). Measuring potential predictors of burnout and engagement among young veterinary professionals; construction of a customised questionnaire (the Vet-DRQ). *Veterinary Record*, *174*(7), 168-168.
- Mendes, F., & Stander, M. W. (2011). Positive organisation: The role of leader behaviour in work engagement and retention. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *37*(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v37i1.900>
- Moerdyk, A. (2015). *The Principles and Practice of Psychological Assessment*. Van Schaik Publishers: Pretoria.
- Moynihan, D. P., & Pandey, S. K. (2007). Finding workable levers over work motivation comparing job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment. *Administration and Society* *39*(7), 803-832. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399707305546>
- Muhonen, T., & Torkelson, E. (2011). Exploring coping effectiveness and optimism among municipal employees, *Psychology* *2*(6), 584-589. <https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2011.26090>
- Nienaber, H., & Martins, N. (2016). *Employee engagement in a South African context*. Randburg : KR Publishing.
- Peters, M. L., Flink, I. K., Boersma, K., & Linton, S. J. (2010). Manipulating optimism: Can imagining a best possible self be used to increase positive future expectancies? *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *5*(3), 204-211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439761003790963>
- Pienaar, J., & Sieberhagen, C. (2005). Burnout and engagement of students in a higher education institution. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *19*(1), 155-167.
- Republic of South Africa (RSA) (2009). *State of Local Government in South Africa*. Overview Report National State of Local Government Assessments Working Documents. Pretoria: Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs (COGTA).
- Robertson, I. T. & Cooper, C. L. (2010). Full engagement: the integration of employee engagement and psychological well-being. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, *31*(4), 324-336. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731011043348>
- Rothmann, S., Jorgensen, L.I., & Marais, C. (2011). Coping and work engagement in selected South African organisations. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *37*(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v37i1.962>
- Rothmann, S., & Joubert, J. H. M. (2007). Job demands, job resources, burnout and work engagement of managers at a platinum mine in the North West Province. *South African Journal of Business Management*, *38*(3), 49-62.
- Rothmann, S., & Rothmann, S. (2010). Factors associated with employee engagement in South Africa. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *36*(2). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v36i2.925>
- Roux, S. (2010). *The Relationship between Authentic Leadership, Optimism, Self-efficacy and Work Engagement: An exploratory study*. Unpublished master's thesis. University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.
- Saks, A. M. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *21*(7), 600-619. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940610690169>

- Salanova, M., Agut, S., & Peiro, J. M. (2005). Linking organizational resources and work engagement to employee performance and customer loyalty: The mediation of service climate. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*, 1217–1227. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.90.6.1217>
- Salminen, S., Makikangas, A. & Feldt, T. (2014). Job resources and work engagement: Optimism as moderator among Finnish managers. *Journal of European Psychology Students, 5*(1), 69-77.
- Schaufeli, W. P., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour, 25*, 293–315. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.248>
- Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., Gonzalez-Roma, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 3*, 71-92. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015630930326>
- Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (1994). Distinguishing Optimism From Neuroticism (and Trait Anxiety, Self-Mastery, and Self-Esteem): A Re-evaluation of the Life Orientation Test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*(6), 1063-1078. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.67.6.1063>
- Seligman, M. (1998). *The president's address: APA 1998 Annual Report*. Appearing in the August, 1999 American Psychologist.
- Siddiqi, M. A. (2014). Work engagement as a reaction to work environment and customer outcome: a service marketing perspective. *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science, 24* (1), 21-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21639159.2013.852911>
- South African Cities Network (2022). *Nelson Mandela Municipality (NMBM): Open for Business?* Retrieved from https://www.sacities.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Nelson-Mandela-Bay_case-study-report_final-June-2021.pdf
- Sprinthall, R. C. (1987). *Basic statistical analysis (2nd ed.)* Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley.
- Stander, F. W., De Beer, L. T., & Stander, M. W. (2015). Authentic leadership as a source of optimism, trust in the organisation and work engagement in the public health care sector. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management, 13*(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v13i1.675>
- Statistics South Africa (2017). *The state of basic service delivery in South Africa: In-depth analysis of the Community Survey 2016 data*. Report No. 03-01-22 (2016). Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Statistics South Africa (2022). *Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Quarter 4: 2019*. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/Presentation%20QLFS%20Q4%202022.pdf>
- Taris, T. W., Ybema, J. F., & Beek, I. (2017). Burnout and engagement: Identical twins or just close relatives? *Burnout Research, 5*, 3-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.burn.2017.05.002>
- Tiger, L. (1979). *Optimism: The biology of hope*. Simon & Schuster, New York.
- Tsako, V. (2020). The effect of political environment on service delivery: A study of Political instability, patronage and factionalism in a municipal environment. *Journal of Public Administration, 2*(3), 6-11.

- Twani, N., & Soyapi, C. B. (2022). The legal accountability of local government in South Africa for the failure to deliver sanitation services. *South African Journal on Human Rights*, 38(1-2), 92-111.
- Ugwu, F. O. (2012). Are good morals often reciprocated? perceptions of organizational virtuousness and optimism as predictors of work engagement. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, 1(3), 188-198.
- Ugwu, F. O., & Igbende, D. A. (2017). Going beyond borders: Work centrality, emotional intelligence and employee optimism as predictors of organizational citizenship behaviours. *Cogent Psychology*, 4(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2017.1362805>
- Upadyaya, K., Vartiainen, M., & Salmela-Aro, K. (2016). From job demands and resources to work engagement, burnout, life satisfaction, depressive symptoms, and occupational health. *Burnout Research*, 3, 101–108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.burn.2016.10.001>
- Van der Waldt, G., & Fourie, D. (2022). Ease of Doing Business in Local Government: Push and Pull Factors for Business Investment in Selected South African Municipalities. *World*, 3(3), 470–486. MDPI AG. Retrieved from <https://dx.doi.org/10.3390/world3030025>
- Veromaa, V., Kautiainen, H., Korhonen, P. E. (2017). Physical and mental health factors associated with work engagement among Finnish female municipal employees: a cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2017-017303>
- Wrosch, C., & Scheier, M. F. (2003). Personality and quality of life: The importance of optimism and goal adjustment. *Quality of Life Research*, 12, 59–72.
- Xanthopoulou, D., Bakker, A.B., Demerouti, E. & Schaufeli, W.B. (2007). The role of personal resources in the job demands-resources model. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 14, 121-141.
- Xanthopoulou, D., Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2009). Work engagement and financial returns: A diary study on the role of job and personal resources. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 82, 183–200.
- Youssef, C. M., & Luthans, F. (2007). Positive organizational behaviours in the workplace: The impact of hope, optimism, and resilience. *Journal of Management*, 33(5), 774-800. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206307305562>
- Zikmund, W. G., Babin, B. J., Carr, J. C., & Griffin, M. (2013). *Business research methods*. Cengage learning.
- Zindela, G. Z. A. (2016). *Political and bureaucratic corruption during President Jacob Zuma's first term in office: causes, consequences and measurements* (Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu Natal).