

# EXAMINING THE GENDER INFLUENCE ON EMPLOYEES' WORK ENGAGEMENT WITHIN A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

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## Abstract

Organisations should prioritize and promote employees' work engagement if they are to effectively realise their goals and objectives. This study seeks to examine the influence of gender on employees' levels of work engagement within a South African university. A quantitative non-experimental cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data from 154 university employees who were purposefully selected to participate in this study. Data were analysed using SPSS software (version 23.0) and the findings show no statistically significant gender differences amongst employees with regard to their levels of work engagement. The findings provide scope for further research in South Africa which should examine ethnic and cultural connotations related to gender and further investigate how these influence employees' work engagement.

**Keywords:** Gender Influence, Work Engagement, South Africa

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## 1 Introduction

Competitive organisations depend on skilled, competent and engaged employees in order to develop, maintain and sustain various strategies which enable effective production and delivery of goods and services. Such professionals are in short supply globally and South Africa is not spared from the prevailing talent war. Sharp (2011) indicated that lack of skills will make it difficult for South Africa to productively tap into viable economic opportunities. However, as work is becoming more complex, employers are looking for more specific skills, thus leading to an increasing mismatch between demand and supply (Zieminski, 2009). There are diverse scholarly opinions suggesting that the global talent crunch will not be alleviated anytime soon, but would almost certainly continue for some years to come (Keeffe, 2010; Neumark, Johnson and Mejia, 2011).

As the global talent crunch deepens, many organisations will find it difficult to hold onto their available talent. Some of these organisations are already awakening to the need to grow and develop the intellectual capital of their employees in order to compete successfully in an increasingly demanding global economy (Burke and El-Kot, 2010; Lawler, 2008). However, developing employees without strategies to retain them and keep them engaged seems to be a futile exercise. In reality, the changing

nature of work and the shifting demographics of the workforce today call upon employers to be more focused on retaining their talent and keeping such talent fully engaged. This is mainly because work engagement is claimed to have positive consequences for both the employees and the organisations (Saks, 2006; Jeung, 2011; Bhatnagar, 2012). As a result, organisations may not effectively realise their growth objectives without the competent and engaged employees to make it happen (Seegers, 2012). Oberholster (2014) suggest that engagement happens when employees choose to invest the best of who they are in pursuit of a worthy mission. Employees choose to invest when they perceive that they will get a desired return, that is, when an organisation invests back in them.

## 2 Theoretical perspective and trends regarding work engagement

Work engagement is regarded as one of the hottest topics in management (Welbourne, 2007) and certainly something worth promoting (Taris, Cox and Tisserand, 2008). It is a multi-dimensional construct that involves behavioural as well as attitudinal characteristics which lead to a positive experience in the workplace. Barkhuizen (2014) advocates that organisations often have three types of employees: the engaged, the not-engaged and the actively disengaged.

The role of an effective leader is to ensure an environment that can facilitate the engaged, romance the not-engaged and make the actively disengaged fall head over heels so that they can add value to the organisation (Barkhuizen, 2014). Helping employees understand the importance of their job in achieving organisational success is critical for engagement. Managers must always remember that employee work engagement and organisational success are not polar opposites.

Engagement will, in all likelihood, have a positive impact on the organisation's bottom line. This is because, engaged employees become more attached to their organisations and would have a lower propensity to leave it (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), display more proactive behaviour (Salanova and Schaufeli, 2008), perform better (Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke, 2004), obtain higher objective financial returns for the business (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Damerouti and Schaufeli, 2007), and show less sickness absenteeism (Schaufeli, Bakker and Van Rhenen, 2009). Bakker and Demerouti (2007) and Bakker (2009) argue that there are four reasons that make engaged workers perform better than non-engaged workers. First, engaged workers experience positive emotions such as happiness, enthusiasm and joy. Second, engaged workers have better health (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli, Taris and Rhenen, 2008). Third, engaged workers are able to create their own job and personal resources (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Lastly, engaged workers often transfer their engagement to others (Bakker, Gierveld and Van Rijswijk, 2006).

Kahn (1990) describes work engagement as the employment of oneself physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance. It is argued in the literature that work engagement cures most organisational problems (Banihani, Lewis and Syed, 2013). According to Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002, p.71), work engagement entails 'a positive, fulfilling and work-related state of mind that is characterized by three components: vigour, dedication and absorption. Vigour relates to elevated levels of energy and mental resilience when a person is occupied with a work activity, the willingness to invest effort in one's work activity and showing perseverance when faced with difficulty. Thus, employees who feel great vigour at work are highly motivated by their jobs and are likely to remain persistent when encountering difficulties (Mauno, Kinnunen and Ruokolainen, 2007). Dedication is characterised by a strong involvement and pride in one's work, coupled with a sense of significance, passion and inspiration. Absorption is characterised by being so completely focused and absorbed in one's work that time passes rapidly and one has difficulty detaching oneself from a work activity. Time passes quickly and one forgets everything else that is around.

Nevertheless, there is substantial evidence in the literature which assumes that work engagement is

gender-neutral and that women and men can equally demonstrate their engagement in the workplace (Banihani et al., 2013). The absence of gender reference in the organisational research does not imply gender neutrality, but instead, that a male perspective is tacitly taken (Calas and Smircich, 1992). According to Martin (2000) by ignoring gender in organisational research and theory, researchers are contributing towards the perpetuation of inequality in the workplace. This research seeks to examine the influence of gender on employees' work engagement in a South African university.

In order to understand work engagement as a construct, this study will be guided by Kahn's (1990) theoretical foundation. Several studies on work engagement drew on Kahn's theoretical foundation and his work is regarded as the foundation for work engagement literature and the most influential one (Rothbard, 2001; May, Gilson and Harter, 2004; Koyuncu, Burke and Fiksenbaum, 2006; Saks, 2006; Christian and Slaughter, 2007; Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter and Taris, 2008; Saks, 2008; Kim, Shin and Swanger, 2009; Simpson, 2009; Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010; Christian, Garza and Slaughter, 2011). Kahn (1990) embraced the notion of psychological presence when he studied and introduced the construct of engagement in organisational literature. He presented work engagement as the psychological experience of work and work contexts which influence the process by which people present or absent their selves during role performance.

Kahn grounded his research work on empirical research and existing theoretical frameworks from a number of pioneering scholars (sociologists such as Merton (1957) and Goffman (1961); psychologists such as Freud (1922); and group theorists such as Bion (1961), Slater (1966) and Smith and Berg (1987)) who supported the idea that "people are inherently ambivalent about being members of ongoing groups and systems and seek to protect themselves from both isolation and engulfment by alternately pulling away from and moving towards their memberships. These pulls and pushes are peoples' calibrations of self-in-role, enabling them to cope with both internal ambivalences and external conditions" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). He later describes this process of calibrations of self-in-role as personal engagement and disengagement.

Personal engagement is defined as "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles" (Kahn, 1990, p. 964). People express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance when they become engaged, and they withdraw and separate themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally from work roles when they become disengaged. Kahn's (1990) further study on conditions of work that affect people engagement found three psychological antecedents: meaningfulness, safety and availability. Psychological

meaningfulness refers to “a feeling that one is receiving a return on investment of one’s self in a currency of physical, cognitive or emotional energy (Kahn, 1990, p. 704). Aspects which influence psychological meaningfulness include task characteristics, role characteristics and work interactions. Psychological safety is “feeling able to show and employ one’s self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). Aspects which influence the psychological safety dimension include interpersonal relationships, groups and intergroup dynamics, management styles and organisational norms. Psychological availability refers to a “sense of having the physical, emotional or psychological resources to personally engage at a particular moment (Kahn, 1990, p. 714). Aspects which influence psychological availability include physical and emotional energies, insecurity and external life activities.

These three psychological antecedents were tested by May et al. (2004) whose findings confirmed their positive relationship with work engagement. Kahn’s (1990) perspective provides a holistic view on work engagement and considers both personal and organisational resources in predicting work engagement. It also considers work engagement as a distinct concept. Rich et al. (2010) confirmed that Kahn’s perspective provides a sound conceptual base for research on engagement, hence the decision to embrace it as a theoretical foundation in this study. The foregoing discussion provides positive evidence for enhancing work engagement of employees in an organisation. The question that remains to be answered in this study is: does gender influence employees’ work engagement in a target South African university?

### 3 The interface between gender and work engagement

The Boston College conducted a study on age and generations in relation to work engagement, and gender was found to be one of the overall drivers of employees’ engagement (Pitt-Catsouphe and Matz-Costa, 2009). Work engagement is assumed, implicitly, to be gender neutral (Banihani et al., 2013). This gender neutrality assumption indicates that variations in work engagement are down to individual differences and that both women and men can equally demonstrate engagement. Gender is viewed in this study as the social differences between women and men as opposed to just sex (biological differences). It is a system which derives its meaning from an institutionalised system of social practice rather than an individual property. Ely and Padavic (2007, p. 1128) state that, like other systems of differences such as class and race, gender appears in mutually reinforcing aspects such as “resource distribution in societies, hierarchical structures and work practices in organisations, task allocation in families, patterns of

interaction between people, and meanings and identities people enact as individuals”.

Banihani et al. (2013) argue that work engagement is gendered in that it is easier for men to be engaged than women. Accordingly, men and their characteristics are valued and regarded as more useful than women and their characteristics, leading to a conclusion that processes, practices and interactions in organisations are designed so that it is easier for men to experience psychological meaningfulness, which ultimately leads to more work engagement (Banihani et al., 2013, p. 412). Men are rewarded for emphasising their masculine characteristics and their differences from women, whereas women are usually penalised for their characteristics and differences from men (Williams, 1993). A conclusion that Banihani et al. (2013, p. 414) drew is that men can easily experience psychological safety and be engaged than women in the workplace.

However, Crompton, Lewis and Lynette (2007) indicate that men and women’s experiences in the workplace and at home may influence women’s capacity to be fully available and engaged in work and men’s capacity to be available and engaged at home. In this note, because the majority of individuals who are responsible for taking care of their families are women, their availability for work may be limited and can be construed as lack of work engagement. Banihani et al. (2013, p. 415) argue that the current presentation of work engagement in the literature and the view that work engagement is the cure of most organisational problems is problematic and gendered. They believe that women have fewer opportunities to experience psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability than men and therefore the notion of work engagement is gendered. Research by Schaufeli et al. (2006) across a number of countries shows inconsistent results in the relationship between work engagement and gender. In the South African sample, women were found to have a higher work engagement than men. Thus, it is assumed in this study that:

*H1: Women have higher levels of work engagement than men in a target South African university*

Although the new organisational logics appear to be gender neutral on the surface, they remain gendered (Williams, Muller and Kilanski, 2012) and this influences individuals’ abilities to demonstrate work engagement. Given that the gendered nature of work engagement remains relatively under-explored in the academic and practitioner literature, Banihani et al. (2013, p. 416) emphasise the need to conduct further empirical studies to explore the nature and extent to which work engagement remains gendered and its implications for female and male employees. To date, no evidence of an existing study which examined the gender influence on work engagement has been found in South Africa and in the South African university context, thus, setting the stage for this empirical investigation. Consequently, this study

seeks to empirically examine the influence of gender on employees' work engagement in a South African university.

## **4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Research approach**

This study followed a quantitative non-experimental cross sectional survey design. Primary data were collected from employees working in a South African university in order to achieve the purpose of the study.

### **4.2 Research participants**

Participants in this study were 154 employees purposively sampled from a South African university. Participants were academic (80%) and support professionals (20%) who had some background in economic and management sciences disciplines. The sample was predominantly African (52%) with the remaining percentage split between Whites (37%), Asians (8%) and Coloureds (3%). Females comprised 61% of the participants relative to 39% being males. About 66% of the participants were married and 54% were in the employment of the institution for at least 5 years. About 59% of the participants had been in their current position for five years.

### **4.3 Measures**

Work engagement was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The UWES is a 17 items self-report instrument that includes three sub-scales, namely, vigour (six items), dedication (five items) and absorption (six items). Responses were measured using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1) 'Never' to (7) 'Always'. Sample items include "At my work, I feel bursting with energy", "I am enthusiastic about my job", and "When I am working, I forget everything else around me". The UWES is the most widely used instrument to measure work engagement. A search on PsychINFO showed that 83% of scholarly articles about engagement used this questionnaire (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2011). The structural validity of this instrument has been confirmed in different studies (Salanova, Agut and Peiró, 2005; Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, 2007; Salanova and Llorens, 2009; Seppälä et al., 2009; Llorens, Bakker, Schaufeli and Salanova, 2006; Salanova, Llorens and Schaufeli, 2011).

### **4.4 Research procedure**

Permission and ethics clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the target university before data collection commenced. The research questionnaire was distributed to the target participants using the "Staff Contact Directory" which lists all staff

members employed in the economic and management sciences disciplines. A drop-in and pick-up method was applied to distribute the questionnaires. Questionnaires contained a covering letter which explained the purpose of the study. Participants' consents were obtained prior to data collection and they were advised of the voluntary nature of the research including issues pertaining to anonymity and confidentiality.

### **4.5 Data analysis**

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software (version 23.0). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed in line with the purpose of the study. Frequency distributions were computed in order to profile the respondents in terms of their demographic characteristics. After a normality assumption was not held regarding the data, a non-parametric test was conducted to establish the mean differences between males and females with respect to their levels of work engagement. Furthermore, an inter-correlation and multiple regression analyses were computed to establish the correlation matrix and relationship between gender and the three sub-scales of UWES, that is, vigour, dedication and absorption.

## **5 Results**

The researcher first examined the psychometric properties of the UWES which included the following:

- the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) analysis to determine the sample adequacy and the sphericity of the item-correlation matrix.
- the reliability analysis, using Cronbach Alpha coefficients, to measure the accuracy of the UWES and to determine how repeatable the results are.

### **5.1 Sample adequacy test, item inter-correlations and reliability analysis**

The KMO analysis results are depicted in Table 1. The values vary between 0 and 1, and values closer to 1 are better. The suggested minimum value that is acceptable for further analysis is .60 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index of .942 in this study indicates that the sample is adequate for further statistical analysis. KMO is a measure of how much the items have in common. A KMO value closer to 1 indicates that the variables have a lot in common. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity which tested inter-item correlation matrix in this study was also conducted. An identity matrix is a matrix in which all the diagonal elements are 1 and off-diagonal elements are 0. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ( $Df. 6328; p \leq .000$ ), thus supporting the inter-correlations of items of UWES.

**Table 1.** KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.942
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1816.158
	Df	136
	Sig.	.000

The results of the internal consistency for the UWES and its sub-scales are presented in Table 2. Reliability reflects the consistency of items over time, tests and groups (Kline, 2005; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The UWES scale consists of 17 items in total which were dispersed in three sub-scales (Vigour, Dedication and Absorption). As is evident in Table 2, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the UWES is .95 which is very excellent, while that of its scales range from .85 to .88. Generally, Cronbach's alpha  $\geq$

.70 is considered acceptable (Kline, 2005; Polit & Beck, 2004). A reliability coefficient of .70 marks a threshold evidencing high degree of internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). All sub-scales of the UWES achieved an excellent reliability coefficient, which was considered adequate to continue with further statistical analysis. Thus, the UWES and its sub-scales were found to be very reliable in the current study.

**Table 2.** Summary of the psychometric properties of the Work Engagement scale and its sub-scales

Scale and sub-scale	Number of items	M	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Vigour	6	4.36	1.533	.85
Dedication	5	4.50	1.173	.88
Absorption	6	4.30	1.250	.87
<b>Work engagement</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>4.37</b>	<b>1.194</b>	<b>.95</b>

**5.2 Inter-correlations between gender and UWES sub-scales**

Correlations between gender and the sub-scales of UWES were computed and the results are shown in Table 3. It is clear from Table 3 that the inter-correlations among the variables were found to be within the acceptable range because none is  $\geq$  .85 (Bollen, 1989; Almost, 2010) or  $\geq$  .9 (Maiyaki, 2012). Therefore, this is an indication of the absence of

multicollinearity problems among the constructs under investigation. Multicollinearity is a problem that occurs when the exogenous variables are highly correlated to as high as .9 and above (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). When two or more variables are highly correlated, it means that they contain redundant information and therefore, not all of them are needed in the same analysis (Maiyaki, 2012).

**Table 3.** Correlations between gender and the UWES sub-scales

	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Gender	1.60	.491			
2. Vigour	26.1513	5.27742	.064		
3. Dedication	22.5033	4.84785	.031	.869**	
4. Absorption	25.7961	5.89908	.124	.871**	.839**

Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

In this study, the following parameters were used to determine the practical effect size of the inter-correlation coefficient values as suggested by Cohen (1988; 1992) and supported by Osteen and Bright (2012): coefficient values around .10 or below were considered small; those around .30 were considered moderate; and those around .50 were considered large in terms of practical significance.

The results in Table 3 show that vigour relates significantly and positively to dedication ( $r = .869$ ;  $p \leq .01$ , large practical effect size) and absorption ( $r = .871$ ;  $p \leq .01$ , large practical effect size). Dedication also shows a positive and statistically significant relationship with absorption ( $r = .839$ ;  $p \leq .01$ , large

practical effect size). No statistically significant relationship was established between gender and all three sub-scales of UWES.

**5.3 Distribution of normality and test of significant mean differences**

The UWES sub-scales were examined for their normality distribution. The Kolmogorov-Sminov Z test was applied and the results are presented in Table 4. Prior to normality distribution testing, the assumption is that data were sampled from a normal distribution or at least from a distribution which is sufficiently close to a normal distribution (Zvi, Turel

and Zerom, 2008). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test compares the cumulative distribution of the data with the expected cumulative normal distribution, and bases its  $p$  value ( $p \leq .05$ ) on the largest discrepancy (Öztuna, Elhan and Tüccar, 2006). When normality

and homogeneity of variance assumptions are not satisfied, the equivalent non-parametric test must be applied to test mean differences. The results in Table 3 were significant ( $p \leq .001$ ) for all the sub-scales of the UWES.

**Table 4.** One sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

	N	Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>		Most Extreme Differences			Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Absolute	Positive	Negative		
Vigour	152	26.1513	5.27742	.103	.066	-.103	.103	.000
Dedication	153	22.5033	4.84785	.106	.061	-.106	.106	.000
Absorption	152	25.7961	5.89908	.098	.048	-.098	.098	.000

Note: a. Test distribution is Normal.  
b. Calculated from data.

At the level of significance depicted in Table 4 for all the sub-scales of the UWES, the normality assumption was not held. The null hypotheses that ‘the distribution of the sub-scales of the UWES is normal’ were rejected. Based on these results, it can be concluded that normality assumptions were

untenable and the non-parametric data analyses were justifiable. Consequently, a Mann-Whitney test was conducted to establish if there is a significant mean difference between male and female respondents in relation to their levels of work engagement and the results are depicted in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Mann-Whitney Test and Mean and Standard Deviation: Gender on UWES sub-scales (N = 154)

Sub-scale	Male		Female				Total			Mann-Whitney Test <sup>a</sup>			
	Mean	N	Mean	n	Std. Deviation	Mean	n	Std. Deviation	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Vigour	73.91	59	4360.50	78.15	93	7267.50	26.1513	152	5.27742	2590.500	4360.500	-.580
Dedication	75.96	60	4557.50	77.67	93	7223.50	22.5033	153	4.84785	2727.500	4557.500	-.234	.815
Absorption	70.92	59	4184.00	80.04	93	7444.00	25.7961	152	5.89908	2414.000	4184.000	-	.212
													1.2248

Note: a. Grouping Variable: Gender

It is clear in Table 5 that there are no statistically significant mean differences between male and female respondents in relation to their levels of work engagement. The results show that male and female employees demonstrate almost equal levels of engagement to their work activities.

### 5.4 Multiple regression analysis

In order to investigate the relationship between gender and the sub-scales of UWES, a multiple regression analysis was undertaken. Such an analysis however assumes variables to have been measured on interval, ratio or dichotomous scales (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001). The purpose was to test as to whether or not gender does predict respondents’ levels of work engagement and the results are depicted in Table 6. Gender was presented as an independent variable whereas the three sub-scales of UWES (Vigour, Dedication and Absorption) were presented as dependent variables.

The regression model depicted in Table 6 explained no presence of variance (Vigour;  $R^2 = .004$ ; Dedication,  $R^2 = .001$ ; and Absorption,  $R^2 = .015$  (no practical effect size)) in the dependent variables. In relation to the variance, the multiple regression

coefficient was found to be non-significantly different from zero in all three dependent variables (Vigour,  $R = .064$ , adjusted  $R^2 = -.003$  (no practical effect size),  $F (.616) = 17.214$  ;  $p \geq .05$ ; Dedication,  $R = .031$ , adjusted  $R^2 = -.006$  (no practical effect size),  $F (.145) = 3.437$ ;  $p \geq .05$ ; and Absorption,  $R = .124$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .009$  (no practical effect size),  $F (2.339) = 80.680$  ;  $p \geq .05$ ). Furthermore, the results show that gender does not explain the variance in vigour ( $\beta = .064$ ;  $p \geq .05$ ), dedication ( $\beta = .031$ ;  $p \geq .05$ ), and absorption ( $\beta = .124$ ;  $p \geq .05$ ). These results indicate that gender does not predict the work engagement of employees at a target university in South Africa.

### 6 Conclusion

Employee work engagement remains one of the most important aspects of organisational theory that employers should be concerned about globally. This is because engaged employees deliver positive outcomes in the organisation. By implication, an employer’s interest on employees’ work engagement redirects the energy, involvement and effectiveness that employees bring to the job. The focus of this study was on the examination of gender influence on the levels of work engagement of employees at a South African

university. The findings show that there is no statistically significant relationship between gender and all three sub-scales of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (that is, vigour, dedication and absorption). No

significant mean differences were found between male and female employees in relation to the three sub-scales of UWES.

**Table 6.** Multiple regression analysis for gender and the three sub-scales of UWES

<b>Model summary</b>					
	<b>Multiple R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Std. Error of the Estimate</b>	
Standardized data <sup>a, b, c</sup>	.064 <sup>a</sup>	.004	-.003	5.28413	
	.031 <sup>b</sup>	.001	-.006	4.86153	
	.124 <sup>c</sup>	.015	.009	5.87310	
<b>ANOVA<sup>a, b, c</sup></b>					
	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Regression <sup>a, b, c</sup>	17.214 <sup>a</sup>	1	17.214	.616	.434 <sup>d</sup>
	3.437 <sup>b</sup>	1	3.437	.145	.703 <sup>d</sup>
	80.680 <sup>c</sup>	1	80.680	2.339	.128 <sup>b</sup>
Residual <sup>a, b, c</sup>	4188.306 <sup>a</sup>	150	27.922		
	3568.811 <sup>b</sup>	151	23.635		
	5173.997 <sup>c</sup>	150	34.493		
Total <sup>a, b, c</sup>	4205.520 <sup>a</sup>	151			
	3572.248 <sup>b</sup>	152			
	5254.678 <sup>c</sup>	151			
<b>Coefficients<sup>a, b, c</sup></b>					
	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>		<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>		
	<b>b</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
(Constant) <sup>a, b, c</sup>	25.038 <sup>a</sup>	1.481		16.907	.000
	22.010 <sup>b</sup>	1.353		16.271	.000
	23.386 <sup>c</sup>	1.646		14.208	.000
Gender <sup>a, b, c</sup>	.691 <sup>a</sup>	.879	.064	.785	.434
	.307 <sup>b</sup>	.805	.031	.381	.703
	1.495 <sup>c</sup>	.978	.124	1.529	.128

$R^2 \geq .26$  (large practical effect size);  $R^2 \geq .13 \leq .26$  (moderate practical effect size);  $R^2 \geq .02 \leq .13$  (small practical effect size)

- a. Dependent Variable: Vigour
- b. Dependent Variable: Dedication
- c. Dependent Variable: Absorption
- d. Predictor: Gender

Furthermore, the findings show no presence of variance between male and female employees in relations to the three subscales of UWES. Thus, gender was found not to predict the level of work engagement of employees in a South African university where this study was conducted. These findings are consistent with Schaufeli et al. (2006) finding that there were no gender differences in the level of work engagement for the Canadian, Australian and French samples. However, the current findings contradict Schaufeli et al. (2006) finding that South African and Spanish women showed higher levels of work engagement than men. Banihani et al. (2013) assertion that it is easier for men to be engaged than women is also not supported by the findings of this study. Equally, Thome's (2013) claim that men are likely to be engaged in the workplace than women is also not supported by the findings of this study.

The findings of this study also do not support Kong's (2009) finding that male employees scored

higher than females on vigour and absorption while females scored higher than men on dedication. Furthermore, Williams et al. (2012) suggestion that organisations remain gendered to an extent that individuals' abilities to demonstrate work engagement get influenced is also not supported by the findings of this study. Accordingly, men and women in the target South African university have not showed differences with regards to their levels of work engagement. A positive and statistically significant relationship was found between dedication and absorption, meaning that, employees' positive and affective response to their ongoing interactions with significant elements of their jobs and work environment increase their levels of enthusiasm, pride, focus and absorption in their work which make it difficult for them to be detached from such work activities.

A conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of this study is that both men and women at the target South African university have demonstrated

no difference in their levels of work engagement, thus rejecting the notion of gendered work engagement in this particular workplace. A number of factors may be contributing to this, but the most notable is the robust legislative framework (Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998) which sought to create equal opportunities and prohibit any discriminatory practices in the South African workplace. All employees are to be treated equally across all spheres of work irrespective of gender and/or other attributes. All employees in South Africa have a legal recourse and can approach courts of law in the event where they perceive workplace discrimination. The level of literacy of participants in this study who are employees of a university might also be contributing to their understanding of their rights and the obligations imposed by law onto the employer. About 80% of the participants were academic employees and the remaining 20% were managers and support professionals.

Another possible contributing factor is the strength and militant stance of the trade unions which are very active in most sectors in South Africa. Because of the past racial segregation policies which polarized communities in South Africa, most workers have put their trust on trade unions to fight their battles collectively, hence the strength of trade unions. Trade unions are perceived to amass sufficient power to challenge employers in the event of unfair labour practices, and they also act as watchdogs to ensure proper implementation of government policies in the workplace.

Like other studies, this study has some limitations. Firstly, data was collected from employees in one South African university and this makes it improbable to extrapolate the findings of this study to the entire higher education sector or any other sector in South Africa. Secondly, this study focused on gender and its influence on work engagement, not on other demographic variables. Therefore, the interpretation of its findings should be limited only to gender influence in line with the purpose of the study.

Further empirical research is needed to explore the direct influence of employees' gender on their levels of work engagement in other different workplaces/sectors in South Africa and beyond. The notion of gender neutrality on the levels of employees' work engagement in the workplace as supported by the findings of this study prompts further scientific scrutiny into this relationship. A detailed study on ethnic and cultural connotations regarding gender may shed some light on the deeper meaning and interpretation that people attach to the construct of work engagement in a highly diverse South African workplace.

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