

Hardiness, Supervisor Support and Work Engagement: Empirical Evidence from Tertiary Institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract In times past, researchers have studied different variables that predict work engagement of employees but few of such studies have looked at the influence of hardiness and supervisor support on employees' work engagement especially in Ogun State, Nigeria. This study therefore, examined the extent to which hardiness and supervisor support influence the work engagement of employees in public and private tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. A sample of 476 employees selected through stratified random sampling technique was used. Hardiness, supervisor support and work engagement of employees were measured with standardized scales while three hypotheses postulated were analyzed with multiple regression and correlation analysis at .05 level of significance. Findings reveal that 43% of the variance in work engagement were accounted for by hardiness and supervisor support showing that hardiness and supervisor support jointly contributed to employees' work engagement ($F_{(2, 473)} = 181.496, p < .05$). Specifically, supervisor support (Beta = .658, $t = 19.021, p < .05$) contributed more to the prediction of employee work engagement than hardiness (Beta = .014, $t = .402, p > .05$) which had no significant contribution. Finally, there was a significant positive relationship between supervisor support and work engagement ($r = .659, p < .05$), and non-significant positive relationships between hardiness and work engagement ($r = .038, p > .05$), and hardiness and supervisor support ($r = .037, p > .05$) These findings stress the important role of hardiness and supervisor support on the work engagement of employees. Implications of these findings is that managers need to create and boost needed managerial support at the various levels of employment to enhance employee engagement to meet organisational goals. Although hardiness is found to have no significant influence on work engagement, yet it is noted that individuals who are high in hardiness may be more likely to build and maintain a social network compared to those who are low in hardiness, hence the result of this research may be significant to employers on manpower development for better work commitment and engagement. It would therefore, be beneficial to provide hardiness trainings to new hires in the work place since previous researches has established that hardiness training may increase levels of hardiness in workers improving their job performance while leading to a reduction in attrition rate.

Keywords: work engagement, hardiness, supervisor support, employees, tertiary institutions

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1. Introduction

Work engagement has become an important aspect of today's organizations due to the quest for survival, competitiveness and desire to make profits [1]. Employees are regarded as engaged when they are emotionally attached and committed towards their jobs, colleagues and organization [2] and this to an extent determine their performance and loyalty. Engaged employees are optimistic, focused, enthusiastic and eager to work extra hours to ensure organizational effectiveness [3] in addition to having passion for their work [2]. Work engagement is

"the expression of self through work and other employee-role activities" [4]. When an employee is engaged, he uses all his skills, talents, abilities and energies to ensure his organization's success and profitability. Several authors have looked at employee work engagement from different perspectives. While some authors see it in relation to organizational commitment and behaviour [5,6] others see it as being made up of three components namely cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects which are linked to an employee's role performance [3,7]. Contrary to the three components of cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects, Mazzetti, Vignoli, Petruzzello and Palaretti [8] postulated work engagement as having three positive aspects of vigour, dedication and absorption. The vigour

aspect involves high level energy and mental resilience during work [9] expressed as determination to keep working and persist even in the face of adversities [10]. Dedication is the strong involvement in one's work characterised by a sense of significance, through morale, pride, inspiration and challenge while absorption is about concentrating happily and being engrossed in one's work [11]. Consequently, it then implies that work engagement is a positive way of showing that an employee is satisfied with his job. Jones, Ni and Wilson [4] discovered that work engagement is negatively related with turnover. This therefore, implies that engaged employees love their jobs and may not like quitting in a haste.

Employees' engagement could be to the job or to the organization. According to Janietius, Padmanabhan and Mini [1], organizational engagement refers to the extent to which a worker associates himself to the goals and values of the organization and expresses willingness to channel all his efforts to assist the organization achieve its set goals while engagement to the job refers to an employee's level of dedication to his job. However, Aktar and Pangil [12] observed that while employees who are organizationally engaged experience more job satisfaction, those that are job engaged are more dedicated. Hence, Saks [7] see employee work engagement as an employee's attentive absorption in the performance of his job. Schaufeli and Bakker [13] posit that work engagement is a positive state of mind that is work related, expressed through vigour, dedication and absorption. It is not a momentary occurrence but it is persistent and not focused on any object, event, person or behaviour. Kahn [14] see work engagement as the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles and that engaged workers employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances. It is also an individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work [6] and an indication of how employees think, feel and react to their work [10].

From the foregoing, it is evident that employee engagement is a very important work variable that demands attention especially in this modern era when organizations desire improved productivity and job performance from their workers in order to showcase the needed sense of responsibility, professionalism, initiative and innovation needed to remain in business. Organizations cannot survive competition without an engaged workforce. Since employee engagement reflects the level of commitment and involvement of employees to the organization and its values [9,15], it then means that an engaged employee is not just that worker that completes his assigned duties successfully but an employee that is mentally and psychologically committed to the organizations and its values [16], engage in extra-role behaviours and unlikely to quit their jobs [4]. When an organization is filled with employees who are not engaged to their jobs or organization, it then means that the organization may not achieve its set goals and objectives. It is based on the above that Ahmad [17] posit categorically that employees are machines and bus locomotives that are able to carry out and implement organizational plans.

One aspect that determine employee work engagement is hardiness. This is because how employees process their work life may affect their attachment to the job or the organizations [18]. In work organizations today, employees face several challenges that may pose a problem to their level of engagement to work and to their organization. It has been observed that many individuals are not satisfied in their jobs due to a lot of stress and pressure emanating from their work roles [19]. These undue work demands make employees feel alienated from their jobs without the desired commitment and engagement demanded by their employers. When employees are not engaged in their jobs or organizations that constitutes detachment. According to Jones, Ni and Wilson [4], detachment is a state in which a worker is mentally disconnected in addition to literal absence. This situation has led many employers to place more emphasis on work engagement of their employees. It is along this line that the issue of hardiness comes in. Research has shown that occupational hardiness is an attribute that is crucial to organizational success [20]. Hardiness is a personality trait that determines how employees carry out their assigned duties. Moreno-Jimenez, Garrosa, Rodriguez-Munor and Blanco-Donoso [21] established that occupational hardiness influences employees' engagement in completing their work processes.

Hardiness is a construct involving three dimensions of commitment, control and challenge [21,22]. Commitment means the ability of an individual to find meaning in the events that happen to them. Hence, committed people are actually part of and involved in situations around them. They place value in the truth and place value on what they do [21]. Control describes the fact that people can put up effort in order to influence happenings in their lives [20], therefore such people do not see themselves as helpless. Challenge on the other hand is that aspect that predisposes one to gain from wisdom and experience rather than trying to run away from mistakes of daily living by staying put in a safe and secure environment [23]. Based on these, hardiness reflects how individuals believe and perceive stressful events and the determination to be courageous in the face of difficulties. From McCalister, Dolbier, Webster, Mallon and Steinhardt's [24] point of view, hardiness involving three components is the ability to see change as a challenge, being able to have a sense of purpose and deep commitment to the people and activities in which they are involved, and to see a sense of personal control in handling events and activities that life brings.

Moreno-Jimenez, Garrosa, Rodriguez-Munor and Blanco-Donoso [21] opine that hardiness is a belief system that is important in assisting workers perform optimally even in the face of difficult job situations. They further stressed that hardiness as a personality construct serves as a key that help individuals overcome the negative effects of stressful event in areas of health and occupational stress. Hardiness have been found to be associated with positive outcomes like job and life satisfaction [25] and indirectly related to job stress [26]. It is a resource that bridges the gap on the negative consequences of high level stress [27] and a reflection of an individual's reaction to life events both personally and professionally [20]. Britt, Adler and Bartone [26] found

that hardy employees are more likely to see stressful situations as less threatening and easier to control, have more confidence in themselves and their work, less likely to fall sick or sustain injuries while at work, see fewer experiences as unsatisfactory, adapt better to situations and are likely to use more positive adaptive mechanisms when faced with challenges.

Schaufeli and Baker [13] rightly discovered the relationship between hardiness and work engagement when they pointed out that employees who are engaged display energetic dispositions that enable them become effectively connected with their jobs and they also see themselves as able to handle the challenges of their jobs.

Supervisor support is another determinant of employee work engagement. Today's economic downturn puts a lot of pressure on employees due to the quest for survival in the midst of unfavourable working conditions. Mean supervisors and unfavourable working conditions may negatively impact employee attitude to work resulting to lower job involvement and engagement, reduced task performance and turnover intentions [20]. Several authors have found that different types of support in the workplace can result to positive consequences for the organization such as organizational commitment, employee retention, job performance and engagement [28]. Jones & Harter [18] opine that employee engagement is directly linked with workers work experiences like relationship with co-workers and managers. Employee work engagement is affected by the job, roles and work context in line with task performance [29]. Therefore, perceived supervisor support is the extent at which the supervisor or manager expresses care to the employees or subordinates, making them feel valued and seeing their well-being as paramount.

Supervisor support has a positive relationship with job performance and increased supervisor support may likely lead to higher performance and increased employee engagement [30] since employees who feel that they have the support of their supervisors are more satisfied with their jobs hence supervisor support improves employees' job involvement and engagement [14] while lack of supervisor support may negatively affect job engagement [25].

Various studies in other climes have looked at work engagement in connection with other variables like Britt, Adler and Bartone [26] who looked at work engagement in connection with stress and hardiness; McCalister, Dolbier, Webster, Mallon and Steinhardt [24] who studied hardiness in connection with job satisfaction and supervisor support and Ahmad [17] who studied work engagement factors in higher education institution and several other studies. In Nigeria, few studies have been focused on employee work engagement in relation to supervisor support and hardiness, hence there is dearth of research in Nigeria where work engagement is studied in connection with hardiness and supervisor support in the tertiary institutions in South-west, Nigeria, hence the justification for this study.

1.1. Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine if there are combined contributions of hardiness and supervisor

support to work engagement of employees in tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims at:

1. Examining if there is any combined influence of hardiness and supervisor support on work engagement of employees in tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria
2. Assessing if there is any significant relative influence of hardiness and supervisor support on work engagement of employees in tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria
3. Determining if there are any significant relationships among hardiness, supervisor support, and work engagement of employees in tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

1.2. Hypotheses

1. There is no significant combined contribution of hardiness and supervisor support to employees' work engagement.
2. There is no significant relative contribution of hardiness and supervisor support to employees' work engagement.
3. There are no significant relationships among hardiness, supervisor support, and employees' work engagement.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

The descriptive survey research design of the *ex post facto* type was adopted in this study since variables were not manipulated by the researchers in the determination of the influence of the independent variables (hardiness and supervisor support) on the dependent variable (work engagement).

2.2. Population

The target population comprised of employees in the public and private tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

2.3. Participants

A sample of 476 employees of these educational institutions was selected through the proportional stratified random sampling technique. Stratification was based on the three Senatorial Districts in Ogun State: Ogun East, Ogun Central, and Ogun West.

2.4. Instruments

The instruments used for data collection in this investigation included the UTRECHT Work Engagement Scale (UWES), Occupational Hardiness Questionnaire (OHQ), and Perceived Supervisor Support Scale (PSS). Further information on each of these instruments is given below.

2.4.1. UTRECHT Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

The UTRECHT Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was developed by Schaufeli and Baker [13] to measure the extent to which employees are attached to their job. This scale assessed the three dimensions of work engagement, namely vigour, dedication, and absorption. It consists 17 items in a Likert-type format having seven points and responses ranging from 0 = Never to 6 = Always. Sample items on the UWES are: “I am enthusiastic about my job” and “It is difficult to detach myself from my job”. The developers reported a Cronbach alpha of .88 indicating strong internal consistency reliability. The construct validity of the scale was confirmed by the results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) which agreed with the original three-factor structure underlying the UWES: Dedication, vigor, and absorption.

2.4.2. Occupational Hardiness Questionnaire (OHQ)

The Occupational Hardiness Questionnaire (OHQ) was developed by Moreno-Jimenez, Garrosa, Rodriguez-Munor, and Blanco-Donoso [21] to measure hardihood and resoluteness among employees. It is a 5-point Likert-type scale with 17 items and responses range from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. This scale assessed the influence of the three aspects of employees’ hardiness, namely, commitment, control, and challenge. Sample items on the OHQ are: “I do everything I can to make sure I control the results of my work” and “In my job I feel attracted to tasks and situations involving a personal challenge”. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients for the three sub-scales of this scale as reported by the developers were .78, .73, and 0.72 respectively for commitment, control, and challenge. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale as a whole was .75, indicating strong internal consistency reliability. The construct validity of the scale was established through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by the authors.

2.4.3. Perceived Supervisor Support Scale (PSS)

The Perceived Supervisor Support Scale (PSS) was developed by Burns [10] to measure the extent to which employees perceive that they receive support from their supervisors at work. The scale has 13 items in a Likert-type format with five points and possible responses ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Higher scores indicate that respondents perceived their organization to be more supportive. Sample items on the OHQ are: “My supervisor supports my professional growth and development” and “My supervisor gives me the right amount of autonomy I need to do my work

successfully”. The developer reported a high Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of .94 indicating that the items on the scale are highly internally consistent with one another. This researcher examined the concurrent or factorial validity of the PSS through measuring its correlation level with the criterion question and found a validity of .55.

2.5. Data Collection Procedure

Five hundred (500) copies of the instruments were administered personally by the researcher. Four hundred and seventy-six (476) copies were retrieved, giving an attrition rate of 4.8%. The administration was carried out after the purpose of the study and the benefits realizable from it have been communicated to the participants and they have been assured about the confidentiality of information they may volunteer. The data collection exercise lasted for a period of two weeks.

2.6. Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Multiple Regression Analysis and Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficients. All tests were carried out at the .05 level of significance.

3. Results

3.1. Hypothesis One

Ho1: There is no significant combined contribution of hardiness and supervisor support to employees’ work engagement.

Table 1 revealed that with all the variables entered into the model simultaneously, there was a significant result ($F_{(2, 473)} = 181.496, p < .05$). The null hypothesis was subsequently rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis, leading to the conclusion of a significant combined contribution of hardiness and supervisor support to employees’ work engagement among university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria. Table 1 further indicated that the predictor variables (supervisor support and hardiness) accounted for 43.2% of the variance in employees’ work engagement.

3.2. Hypothesis Two

Ho2: There is no significant relative contribution of hardiness and supervisor support to employees’ work engagement.

Table 1. Model Summary and Coefficients of the Multiple Regression Analysis for the Combined Contribution of Hardiness and Supervisor Support to Work Engagement

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	45548.476	2	22774.238	181.498	.000 ^b
	Residual	59351.818	473	125.480		
	Total	104900.294	475			
Model Summary		R = .659; R Square = .434; Adj R Square = .432; Std. Error = 11.20176				

a. Predictors: (Constant), Supervisor Support, Hardiness.

Table 2. Coefficients of the Multiple Regression Analysis for the Relative Contribution of Hardiness and Supervisor Support to Work Engagement

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	14.018	3.429		4.088	.000
	Hardiness	.024	.061	.014	.402	.688
	Supervisor Support	.896	.047	.658	19.021	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Work Engagement.

Table 2 revealed both significant and non-significant results. Specifically, there was a significant relative contribution of supervisor support to employees’ work engagement (Beta = .658, t = 19.021, p < .05), but a non-significant relative contribution of hardiness to employees’ work engagement (Beta = .014, t = .402, p > .05). Table 2 further revealed that work engagement could be predicted from hardiness and supervisor support by means of the regression equation given below. Although the impact of hardiness in the prediction is not significant, this non-significant contribution is still recognized.

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \text{Work Engagement} \\
 & = (0.24 \times \text{Hardiness}) \\
 & + (0.896 \times \text{Supervisor Support}) + 14.018
 \end{aligned}$$

3.3. Hypothesis Three

Ho3: There are no significant relationships among hardiness, supervisor support, and employees’ work engagement

Table 3. Correlation Matrix for the Interrelationships among Hardiness, Supervisor Support, and Work Engagement

	Hardiness	Supervisor Support	Work Engagement
Hardiness	1.000	.037	.038
Supervisor Support		1.000	.659**
Work Engagement			1.000

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

Table 3 revealed both significant and non-significant results. Specifically, there was a significant positive relationship between supervisor support and work engagement (r = .659, p < .05). However, there were non-significant relationships between hardiness and supervisor support (r = .037, p > .05) and hardiness and work engagement (r = .038, p > .05).

4. Discussion

The examination of hardiness, supervisor support and work engagement was carried out in recognition of the need to make employees more emotionally attached and committed to their jobs since this would increase productivity and success of the organization. Few studies have also examined the influence of hardiness and supervisor support on work engagement. An examination

of the potential impact of hardiness and supervisor support on work engagement could therefore go a long way in proffering solution to the problem of employees’ engagement and job performance. Consequently, three null hypotheses were formulated to guide the search for evidence.

The first null hypothesis stated that there is no significant combined contribution of hardiness and supervisor support to employees’ work engagement. This hypothesis was tested for significance and found to be unsupported by data. It was consequently rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis leading to the conclusion that there is a significant combined contribution of hardiness and supervisor support to employees’ work engagement. This finding was in agreement with Baran *et al.* [29] who found, among other things, that manager support in the workplace results in positive organizational outcomes such as organizational commitment, employee retention, job performance and engagement. This finding was also in line with Jones and Harter [18] who opined that employee engagement is directly linked with workers work experiences like relationship with co-workers and managers and they went further to identify hardiness as one aspect of the predictors of employee work engagement because how employees process their work life may affect their attachment to the job or the organizations. This finding also agreed with Azeem [20] who concluded that occupational hardiness contributes to organizational success.

The second null hypothesis stated that there is no significant relative contribution of hardiness and supervisor support to employees’ work engagement. This hypothesis was subjected to statistical test of significance and found to be partly acceptable and partly unacceptable. While supervisor support was found to contribute significantly to employees’ work engagement, hardiness made no such contribution. In other words, the contribution of supervisor support to work engagement was significant, but the contribution of hardiness to work engagement was not significant. The finding of significant contribution of supervisor support to work engagement was in line with employee motivation theories. Supervisor support is used by many organizations as a strategy for employee motivation. The finding is therefore consistent with rational expectations. This finding agreed with Kahn [14] and Chan [25] who, in separate studies, found that employees who enjoy the support of their supervisors have greater job satisfaction; hence, supervisor support improves employees’ job involvement and engagement, while lack of supervisor support decreases job engagement [25].

However, the non-significant impact of hardiness clashed with theoretical expectancies. This could be due to the prevalence of the challenge dimension of hardiness. Although hardiness increases the ability to withstand challenges, employees can be so overwhelmed by challenges, stress and difficulties associated with the work that they may become frustrated and disengage psychologically from work. This finding however contradicts Jones and Harter [18] who averred that hardiness enhances employees’ attachment to the job and commitment to the organization. The finding also clashed with Akeem [20] who opined that occupational hardiness

is an attribute that is crucial to organizational success and should, by extension, contribute to employees' work engagement.

The third null hypothesis stated that there are no significant relationships among hardiness, supervisor support, and employees' work engagement. The analysis of this hypothesis revealed a significant relationship between supervisor support and work engagement, but non-significant relationships between hardiness and work engagement and hardiness and supervisor support. The observed non-significant relationship between hardiness and work engagement could be because the challenge component of hardiness overwhelms the other components, leading to extreme job stress and frustrations, and making affected employees to disengage from the work. This finding corroborated Babin and Boles [31] who found that supervisor support is positively related to job satisfaction and ultimately, employee engagement. The observed non-significant positive relationship between hardiness and work engagement clashed with the findings of Schaufeli and Baker [13] who found a significant relationship between hardiness and work engagement. The finding also conflicted with Moreno-Jimenez *et al.* [21] whose conceptualization of hardiness integrated the dimension of commitment, which is closely associated with engagement: Committed people are actually part of and involved in situations around them.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the extent to which hardiness and supervisor support contribute to work engagement of employees in tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. The research findings revealed a significant combined contribution of hardiness and supervisor support to employees' work engagement. It also revealed a significant relative contribution of supervisor support to employees' work engagement and on the other hand a non-significant relative contribution of hardiness to employees' work engagement. Further findings indicated a significant positive relationship between supervisor support and work engagement but there were non-significant relationships between hardiness and supervisor support and hardiness and work engagement. Hence, supervisor support contributed more to the prediction of employee work engagement than hardiness.

This finding has a significant implication for managers of organisations, employees and researchers. Managers need to create and boost needed managerial support at the various levels of employment to enhance employee engagement to meet organisational goals and for ultimate productivity. Although the impact of hardiness in the research prediction is not significant, this non-significant contribution is acknowledged given the commitment aspect of hardiness which is associated with engagement. It is noted that individuals who are high in hardiness may be more likely to build and maintain a social network compared to those who are low in hardiness, hence the result of this research findings may be instructive to employers on areas of manpower development for better work commitment and engagement. It would therefore, be beneficial to provide hardiness trainings to new hires in

the work place since previous researches has established that hardiness training may increase levels of hardiness in workers improving their job performance while leading to a reduction in attrition rate.

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