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**Article:**

George, O.J., Okon, S.E. and Akaighe, G. (2022) Emotional intelligence and work engagement : a serial mediation model. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 9 (2). pp. 193-211. ISSN 2051-6614

<https://doi.org/10.1108/joepp-02-2021-0025>

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**Emotional Intelligence and Work Engagement: A Serial Mediation Model**

Journal:	<i>Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance</i>
Manuscript ID	JOEPP-02-2021-0025.R2
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	emotional intelligence, work engagement, perceived organisational support, psychological capital, conservation of resources

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## Emotional Intelligence and Work Engagement: A Serial Mediation Model

### Abstract

**Purpose** – Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a vital role in work and non-work outcomes.

Gaps exist in the role of contextual factor (i.e., perceived organisational support; POS) and personal resource (i.e., psychological capital; PsyCap) in investigating employees' EI. This current research draws on the cognitive-motivational-reactional theory of emotions and conservation of resources theory in examining the serial explanatory pathways between EI and work engagement.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data was collected at three points of measurement from the public sector in Nigeria. We tested our serial mediation model with a sample of 528 public sector employees using PROCESS macro with a bias-corrected bootstrapping method.

**Findings** – The findings show that EI was positively related to work engagement. EI exerted an indirect effect on PsyCap via POS. The indirect effect of EI on work engagement was serially mediated by POS and PsyCap.

**Originality** – This paper addresses gaps in the literature on emotional intelligence and regulations in the changing and challenging world of work. In so doing, this paper contributes to the literature by deepening our understanding of the complex relationship between EI, POS, PsyCap, and work engagement. Theoretical and practical implications for employees' emotional appraisal and regulations are discussed.

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence, work engagement, perceived organisational support, psychological capital, conservation of resources.

**Paper type** – Research paper

## Introduction

Research has shown that emotional intelligence (EI) is an important individual difference (Schutte and Loi, 2014), a characteristic of great leaders (Goleman, 2003), and accounts for leader emergence (Hong, Catano, and Liao, 2011). For example, previous studies reveal that EI of leaders is related to leadership effectiveness and outcomes such as service climate, organisational commitment, turnover intention (Hur, Van Den Berg, and Wilderom, 2011; Wong and Law, 2002), and follower job satisfaction (Miao, Humphrey, and Qian, 2016). Beyond the influence of leader EI on followers, studies have examined EI as an individual-level construct and how it affects employee self-rated workplace behaviours. For example, research shows that EI influences knowledge-sharing behaviour (Naz, Li, Nisar, and Rafiq, 2019) and job performance (Pekaar, van der Linden, Bakker, and Born, 2017). Therefore, EI has implications for individual performance-related outcomes and organisational functioning.

Several studies have explored EI and work outcomes, for example, EI, self-efficacy, organisational citizenship behaviour, and performance (O'Boyle Jr, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, and Story, 2011; Weinzimmer, Baumann, Gullifor, and Koubova, 2017) and work-family outcomes, for example, EI, work-family conflict, work-life balance, and life satisfaction (e.g., Bedi and Bedi, 2017; Mahanta, 2015). However, little is known about the EI-work engagement link, with exception to the trait dimension of EI as a predictor of work engagement (e.g., Barreiro and Treglown, 2020; Li, Pérez-Díaz, Mao, and Petrides, 2018; Moroñ, and Biolik-Moroñ, 2021). The preponderance of trait EI in the literature is problematic because it limits our understanding of the dynamism of EI and how individuals can enhance their EI at work, with recent research showing that the management of self and other emotions is valuable for organisational leaders and employees (Drigas and Papoutsis, 2019). In order to provide meaningful policy recommendations to employees and

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2  
3 organisations, it is important to establish whether EI affects work engagement. For example,  
4  
5 Restubog, Ocampo, and Wang (2020) argue that employees can take control of their  
6  
7 emotions amidst the chaos, uncertainties, and other challenges in the workplace. Hence, the  
8  
9 explanatory processes for emotional regulation and utilisation of emotional information both  
10  
11 theoretically and empirically needs further investigation. This is important because there are  
12  
13 dynamics in the world of work that constantly challenges employees' ability for interpersonal  
14  
15 and intrapersonal emotional awareness, regulation, and management. Besides, there is  
16  
17 increasing understanding that EI helps employees' work-life interface better and can  
18  
19 influence their health and work outcomes (Yanchus, Eby, Lance, and Drollinger, 2010).  
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23

24 In addition, the theoretical lens in which EI have been examined in past studies have  
25  
26 been from human motivation and personality approach (e.g., social cognitive career theory;  
27  
28 Udayar, Fiori, Thalmayer, and Rossier, 2018; self-determination theory; El-Khodary and  
29  
30 Samara, 2019) or job-related approach (e.g., the job-demand resources theory; Levitats and  
31  
32 Vigoda-Gadot, 2020). These approaches impede our understanding of how emotions can be  
33  
34 monitored, regulated, and managed, with exception to the conservation of resources theory  
35  
36 (COR; Hobfoll 1989) that explains EI as an essential resource to employees' emotional  
37  
38 labour and outcome variables, such as job satisfaction (Wen, Huang, and Hou, 2019).  
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41

42 In our study, we extend previous research on employee EI on workplace outcomes by  
43  
44 exploring the relationship between EI and work engagement, the underlying processes of  
45  
46 perceived organisational support (POS) as a contextual factor in this relationship, given that  
47  
48 contextual factors provide an environment for employee resources to flourish (e.g.,  
49  
50 Cooper-Thomas, Gardner, O'Driscoll, Catley, Bentley, and Trenberth, 2013). We also  
51  
52 examine the mediating role of psychological capital (PsyCap) as an individual resource in the  
53  
54 relationship between EI, POS, and work engagement drawing on the cognitive-motivational-  
55  
56 reactional theory of emotions (CMR; Lazarus 1991) and integrating it with the COR theory  
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(Hobfoll 1989). Therefore, the objective of our study is to examine the mediating relationship of PsyCap and perceived organisational support (POS) in the EI-work engagement link and by so doing contribute to the literature in the following ways.

First, we contribute to the EI literature by exploring the EI as an ability or skill and its relationship with work engagement, defined as a “positive fulfilling, work-related state of mind, that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker, 2002). We consider employees' ability to manage their emotions through self-awareness, emotional regulation, monitoring and interpreting theirs and other emotions, to guide their thinking and actions, as a predictor of work engagement. Individuals with high EI have high cognitive abilities (Rode, Arthaud-Day, Ramaswami, and Howes, 2017) and require knowledge of their work environment and emotional appraisal, in line with the CMR theory. In proposing EI to predict work engagement, we contribute to the EI literature by highlighting the value of EI, thus requiring employees to pay more attention to their emotions in the way they interact with colleagues and other stakeholders in the workplace.

Second, we contribute to a better understanding of emotional awareness, regulation, and management by leveraging on the CMR theory of emotions (Lazarus 1991) which mirrors those emotions are influenced largely by an individual's knowledge of the work environment, relational skills, and appraisal of emotional experiences, leading to subsequent emotions and actions. Integrating this theoretical lens with the COR theory (Hobfoll 1989), we propose that emotionally intelligent employees contribute to workplace performance outcomes through managing their emotions and that of others, which guides their thinking and actions such that the expression of positive emotions becomes the standard in the workplace.

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2  
3 Third, we contribute to the literature by exploring the effects of PsyCap, an individual  
4 resource defined as “an individual’s state of development involving self-efficacy, optimism,  
5 hope and resilience” (Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio, 2007, p. 3), in the relationship between  
6 EI and work engagement. In so doing, we highlight psychological resources as a vital route to  
7 work engagement. Individuals with high PsyCap contribute significantly to high-performance  
8 work systems of organisations (Agarwal and Farndale, 2017) and can preserve their resources  
9 to achieve career success (Cenciotti, Alessandri, and Borgogni, 2017). This is consistent with  
10 the propositions of COR theory (Hobfoll 1989) and requires management to consider policies  
11 that support the development of employees’ PsyCap.  
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24 Last, we focus on POS as a mediating factor in the EI-work engagement link, thus  
25 deepening our understanding of POS as a contextual factor that supports employees  
26 flourishing at work (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013). Individuals who perceive that their  
27 organisations support their work are likely to be more committed to their work, with fewer  
28 withdrawal behaviours such as turnover and absenteeism (Bano, Vyas, and Gupta, 2015). We  
29 advance POS as a vital factor in influencing work engagement through testing the mediating  
30 role in the EI-work engagement link, signposting to organisations that supportive policies and  
31 programmes are critical for improving and sustaining work engagement. The remainder of  
32 this paper is divided into theory and hypotheses, method, results, discussions, theoretical  
33 implications, and practical implications. The study ends with limitations and suggestions for  
34 further studies.  
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## Literature Review, Theory, and Hypotheses

### Emotional Intelligence

EI can be defined as the “ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; the ability to regulate emotions, motivating oneself, empathy and handling relationships” (Mayer and Salovey, 1997, p. 10). EI is broadly conceptualised from two approaches; a trait (trait emotional self-efficacy) and an ability (cognitive-emotional ability; Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade, 2008; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Both approaches are complementary (e.g., Petrides, 2011; Liu, Wang, and Lü, 2013).

However, assessment based on both approaches do not highly correlate with each other, suggesting that they are measuring different things (Brackett and Mayer, 2003). Furthermore, the trait dimension of EI seems to dismiss the emotions in EI while the ability dimension focuses on the emotions in the EI and how individuals can improve their emotional awareness and regulations (Caruso, 2008). From this understanding and consistent with arguments that EI is malleable (Goleman, 1995; Restubog *et al.*, 2020), we approach EI as an ability. EI is described as “a set of interrelated abilities possessed by individuals to deal with emotions (Wong and Law, 2002, p. 13). EI can further be conceptualised as a type of social intelligence that involves the ability of an individual to monitor the emotions of others and oneself and, decipher between them and use the information to guide one’s thinking and actions (Salovey and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and Salovey, 1993). In the context of the workplace, EI is a set of skills that help individuals regulate their emotions, and others and plan and achieve tasks (Salovey and Meyer, 1990). Four important skills of EI to be examined includes, first, the perception and appraisal of emotions (e.g., learning about facial expressions). Second, assimilating basic emotional experiences into real-life scenarios (e.g., weighing emotions and thoughts). Third, understanding, interpreting, and reasoning about emotions (e.g., interpreting



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2  
3 happiness, fear, anger, and shame). Last, the management and regulation of emotions in  
4  
5 oneself and others, for example, knowing how to calm down after feeling angry about a  
6  
7 situation or de-escalating a tense situation at work (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sternberg,  
8  
9 2000). EI, therefore, is the ability of an individual to recognise emotions, interpret them,  
10  
11 apply them to situations, and solve problems (Mayer *et al.*, 2000; Salovey and Meyer, 1990).  
12  
13

#### 14 15 Work Engagement

16  
17 Work engagement is one of the most popular outcomes in occupational health  
18  
19 psychology (Lesener, Gusy, Jochmann, and Wolter, 2020). It is defined as a positive state of  
20  
21 the total investment of employees into a role as comprised of vigour, dedication, and  
22  
23 absorption (e.g., Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Vigour refers to a high  
24  
25 level of energy, dedication is characterised by strong enthusiasm at work while absorption is  
26  
27 full concentration and absorbed into one's role (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010). Engaged  
28  
29 employees are usually full of energy (vigour), actively involved in their work roles  
30  
31 (dedication) and happily concentrate or interested in the activities of the work (absorption;  
32  
33 Bakker and Schaufeli, 2015). For this study, we treat work engagement as a unidimensional  
34  
35 construct, to measure the overall investment of employees in their work roles. Work  
36  
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39 engagement is also conceptualised as an affective state of occupational health (Lesener *et al.*,  
40  
41 2020), facilitated by job resources (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Taris, 2008) and predicted  
42  
43 by personal resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008), e.g., the big 5 personality traits (high  
44  
45 openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and low neuroticism;  
46  
47 Akhtar, Boustani, Tsivrikos, and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2015). Employees who are positively  
48  
49 engaged are aware of their work roles and are likely to exhibit service-oriented performance  
50  
51 (Luu, 2019). Also, they are more productive, creative, and more willing to take on extra roles  
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56 for their organisations (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008).  
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## EI and work engagement

We explain the relationship between EI and work engagement using the CMR theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1991). This theory is useful in predicting the emotions of individuals concerning their (work) environment. It explains three aspects of emotions, namely, cognitive (relating to an individual's knowledge and evaluation of what is happening in an environment) relational (emotions relating to individuals and their environment that can change over time), and motivational (emotions relating to the status of one's goals). This theory proposes that the motivation of an individual's goal or investment into a role (e.g., work engagement) will be affected by the environment (i.e., perceived organisational support), cognitive appraisal of the environment, and subsequent emotions (Lazarus, 1991, 2000). Linking this theory to work engagement, individuals with emotional management, self-motivation, and emotional regulation experience higher levels of engagement (Barreiro and Treglown, 2020). To put this differently, how an individual interprets emotions and applies self-management in dealing with their emotions and that of others are vital skills and resources that facilitate work engagement experiences (Barreiro and Treglown, 2020). Drawing on this theory, we argue that an individual's emotions (emotional management and regulation) will lead to positive work engagement experiences. In other words, the ability of an individual to respond positively to his/her emotions will lead to higher work engagement. The reason why EI will lead to higher work engagement is the embedded in the emotional component of work engagement, such that work activities are sustained by the emotional experience (ability to manage one's emotions and that of others) which becomes a source of energy to achieve work tasks (Green Jr, Finkel, Fitzsimons, and Gino, 2017). When employees exercise emotional regulation in the face of emotional experience at work, it serves as energizing fuel for positive work behaviour (Elfenbein, 2007). EI has been useful in achieving positive work outcomes (e.g., work engagement) in emotional experiences at work

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3 such as conflict management (Aqqad, Obeidat, Tarhini, and Masa'deh, 2019), organisational  
4  
5 change (Klarner, By, and Diefenbach, 2011), business negotiations (Sharma, Bottom, and  
6  
7 Elfenbein, 2013) and to achieve a positive emotional climate (Elfenbein, Der Foo, White,  
8  
9 Tan, and Aik, 2007). Research shows that ability EI can be developed over time to regulate  
10  
11 oneself and that of others in the face of challenging times and experiences, and this increases  
12  
13 social work tasks (e.g., engagement, collaboration, cooperation, decision making, and dealing  
14  
15 with stress; Morrison, 2007). Research also shows that EI has positive effects on employees'  
16  
17 work engagement of civil servants in terms of social responsibility towards the social  
18  
19 community, engagement towards the organisation, and organisational citizenship behaviour  
20  
21 towards individuals (Levitats and Vigoda-Gadot, 2020). We draw from theory and past  
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23 research to argue that ability EI will influence work engagement and hypothesise as follows:  
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27  
28 Hypothesis 1: EI is positively related to work engagement.

#### 30 31 PsyCap mediating EI and work engagement

32  
33 PsyCap is conceptualised as an “individual’s positive psychological state of  
34  
35 development and is characterized by (1) having self-confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and  
36  
37 put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution  
38  
39 (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering towards goals and, when  
40  
41 necessary, redirecting path to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by  
42  
43 problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain  
44  
45 success” (Luthans *et al.*, 2007, p. 3). This individual resource is open to development and  
46  
47 critical for challenging times at work as well as combating workplace stressors (e.g., Avey  
48  
49 Luthans, and Jensen, 2009). COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) explains how individuals respond to  
50  
51 positive or negative situations, the process of emotion regulation, and coping processes  
52  
53 relating to job demands or job resources. This theory proposes that individuals are motivated  
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55 to acquire and preserve the resources (anything people value) they already have. In other  
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1  
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3 words, resources gained (e.g., organisational support) will help to achieve better workplace  
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5 outcomes while the loss of resources will cause strain and drained emotions (Hobfoll, 1989).  
6

7  
8 This theory is useful for explaining wellbeing-related constructs, e.g., burnout and work  
9  
10 engagement (Alarcon, Edwards, and Menke, 2011). For example, optimism, efficacy, and  
11  
12 hope (positive capacities) are resources that individuals can draw from, which in turn,  
13  
14 influences one's emotions and work outcomes, such as well-being and work engagement  
15  
16 (Alessandri, Consiglio, Luthans, and Borgogni, 2018; Siu, 2013). Drawing on this theory, we  
17  
18 argue that PsyCap is a vital personal resource to increase work engagement levels in the face  
19  
20 of job demands, especially in challenging times. To put it differently, individuals require high  
21  
22 PsyCap to be able to cope with challenging tasks and apply appropriate emotional  
23  
24 regulations. That is, the positive effect of EI on work engagement is dependent on individual  
25  
26 PsyCap. The reason why PsyCap can mediate the relationship between EI, and work  
27  
28 engagement is that PsyCap makes positive attribution from an emotional experience, which  
29  
30 helps an individual to interpret emotions (self and others) to guide the subsequent behaviour  
31  
32 into positive actions. This argument is based on the premise that individuals with higher  
33  
34 PsyCap draw on their psychological strength to counter obstacles at work (Avey *et al.* 2008),  
35  
36 and perseveres towards a goal, to achieve both in-role and extra-role performance (Gooty,  
37  
38 2009). Research shows that PsyCap is associated with attitudes, behaviours, and job  
39  
40 performance (e.g., Alessandri *et al.*, 2018; Choi, Noe, and Cho, 2019). For example, a recent  
41  
42 study shows that PsyCap had an indirect effect on the job performance of employees through  
43  
44 informal learning (Choi, *et al.*, 2019). We expect PsyCap to mediate the relationship between  
45  
46 EI and work engagement based on research evidence that individuals that are high in PsyCap  
47  
48 have more capital to pursue goals (Newman *et al.*, 2014), proactively plan for alternative  
49  
50 ways to get the task achieved, persevere in the face of daunting challenges (Choi, *et al.*, 2019)  
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3 and achieve high performance (Agarwal and Farndale, 2017). Based on the preceding, we  
4  
5 hypothesise that:

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8 Hypothesis 2: PsyCap mediates the positive effect of EI on work engagement.

9  
10 POS, PsyCap, and work engagement

11  
12 According to CMR theory (Lazarus, 1991), individuals appraise their emotions in  
13  
14 relation to the environment (e.g., organisational support) and motivation (i.e goals) and this  
15  
16 informs their subsequent emotions or work-related attitude and behaviours. Drawing on this  
17  
18 theory, we argue that POS will mediate the relationship between EI and PsyCap. POS is the  
19  
20 belief by employees that the organisation values their contribution, supports their social and  
21  
22 emotional well-being, and helps them in the discharge of their work (Rhoades and  
23  
24 Eisenberger, 2002). We expect POS to inform the cognition of employees about their  
25  
26 emotions in line with the proposition of CMR theory.  
27  
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30  
31 Research supports the relationship between POS and PsyCap, such that a supportive  
32  
33 work environment (colleagues and supervisors) will increase individuals' PsyCap (e.g.,  
34  
35 Kिरrane, Lennon, O'Connor, and Fu, 2017). A previous study shows that POS mediates the  
36  
37 relationship between perceived situational factors (procedural justice, distributive justice,  
38  
39 communication satisfaction with supervisor, and labour-management relationship climate)  
40  
41 and organisational commitment, such that POS fully mediated the relationship  
42  
43 (Moideenkutty, Blau, Kumar, and Nalakath, 2001). Similarly, there is evidence to show that  
44  
45 subordinates' POS mediated the relationship between relationship exchange and  
46  
47 organisational identification (Sluss, Klimchak, and Holmes, 2008). Consequently, there is a  
48  
49 reason to believe that POS will mediate the relationship between EI and work PsyCap. The  
50  
51 reason to believe that POS will mediate the EI-PsyCap link is that when employees perceive  
52  
53 that their organisational is highly supportive to them, it enhances their PsyCap (Wong, Wong,  
54  
55 and Ngo, 2012). POS is a social-emotional resource that increases employee's hope and trust  
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3 in their organisation (Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Wong et al. 2012),  
4  
5 which in turn, is likely to increase work engagement. Drawing on theory and past research,  
6  
7 we expect POS to mediate the relationship between EI and PsyCap. This is based on the  
8  
9 premise that POS will inform the employees' cognition about a supportive work environment,  
10  
11 and this will, in turn, stimulate higher PsyCap and positive emotions towards better  
12  
13 collaboration, and engagement with their colleagues, thereby leading to higher work  
14  
15 engagement. We, therefore, hypothesise as follows:  
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17

18  
19 Hypothesis 3: POS mediates the relationship between EI and PsyCap.

20  
21 Hypothesis 4: POS and PsyCap are mediating paths in the relationship between EI and work  
22  
23 engagement.  
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## 26 **Method**

### 27 *Sampling and procedure*

28  
29 We draw our sample from a large public sector organisation in Nigeria. The  
30  
31 organisation is a Federal Government Agency that deals with tax issues on a day-to-day basis  
32  
33 with the public. Our study employed self-reported data, however, we followed the traditions  
34  
35 of George and Pandey (2017), where they argued that self-reported data can be employed  
36  
37 under the following conditions. (1) When an individual perception and belief is being  
38  
39 studied- which is the focus of our study, for example, perceived organisational support (2)  
40  
41 when other sources are not readily available, (3) if potential common method bias (CMB) in  
42  
43 the data can be spotted employing one-factor test (4) if the variables in question have not  
44  
45 been known to be CMB sensitive.  
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50  
51 For our data, we controlled for CMB to establish if it is a potential issue by following  
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53 the traditions of Lee, Benoit-Bryan, and Johnson (2012) and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and  
54  
55 Podsakoff (2012). Both procedural and statistical approaches were employed. First, our  
56  
57 study included only prior-validated measures. Second, the participants' information sheet  
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2  
3 described the purpose of the study and assured the participants of the anonymity and  
4  
5 confidentiality of their responses. Ethical approval was sought and obtained for the research.  
6  
7 We employed a convenience sampling technique to elicit information from the respondents'  
8  
9 and gifts vouchers of NGN1,500 (the equivalent of £2.50) was offered to each respondent as  
10  
11 incentives to take part in the study.  
12  
13

14  
15 Third, we employed three points of measurements between the study latent variables.  
16  
17 At point 1, questions on the demographic information of participants (e.g, age, gender, and  
18  
19 experience) and EI were asked. Two months later (point 2) we measured work engagement.  
20  
21 Two months later (point 3) we measured PsyCap and POS. To match the responses in the  
22  
23 three points of measurements, participants were assigned unique code numbers and were  
24  
25 requested to provide the code numbers in their responses across the three waves. Out of 1200  
26  
27 sampled employees, 920 responses were received at point 1, yielding a response rate of 76.7  
28  
29 percent. At point 2, 680 responses were received out of the 920 participants, representing  
30  
31 73.9 percent, while 559 responses were received at point 3 (representing 82 percent of point 2  
32  
33 and 46.5 percent of sampled respondents). After matching the data from the three points of  
34  
35 measurement, 528 responses were deemed usable for our study. Finally, we employed  
36  
37 Harman's single-factor test and compared the result with the proposed model. The result  
38  
39 revealed that a single factor accounted for 18.33% of variance which is below the threshold  
40  
41 of 50%. This implies that CMB was not found to be a potential threat to our data.  
42  
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#### 47 **Measurement**

##### 48 *EI*

49  
50 We measured EI using 16-items EI scale (Wong & Law, 2002) with four sub-  
51  
52 dimensions (self-emotional appraisal, other emotional appraisals, regulation of emotions in  
53  
54 oneself, and use of emotion). Sample of the items are "I have a good understanding of my  
55  
56 own emotions" and "I am a good observer of others' emotions". For each of these statements,  
57  
58  
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1  
2  
3 participants responded on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 =  
4  
5 Strongly Agree. The scale is shown to have a good internal consistency of 0.82 (Wong &  
6  
7 Law, 2002).  
8  
9

#### 10 *POS*

11  
12 We measured POS using 6-item scale by Eisenberger *et al.* (1986). Participants  
13  
14 responded to the items on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 4  
15  
16 Strongly Agree. Sample items includes “my organisation cares about my opinion” and “my  
17  
18 organisation shows concern for me”, with an internal consistency of .95.  
19  
20

#### 21 *PsyCap*

22  
23  
24 PsyCap was measured using 24-items Luthans *et al.* (2007) PsyCap scale, consisting  
25  
26 of four facets (Self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience). The reliability measures for  
27  
28 each variable range from 0.82 to 0.87 (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). Participants responded on a six-  
29  
30 point Likert scale, ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree. Sample items  
31  
32 include “I feel confident helping to set targets/goals in my work area”.  
33  
34

#### 35 *Work engagement*

36  
37  
38 The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) was  
39  
40 employed to evaluate employees’ work engagement. The UWES scale consists of 9 items  
41  
42 (e.g., “at my work I feel bursting with energy”). Each item is responded to by employing a  
43  
44 seven-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = never to 6 = Always. The scale is shown to have an  
45  
46 excellent internal consistency of .90 (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006).  
47  
48

#### 49 *Control variables*

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51  
52 We controlled for employee age, gender, and work experience. These socio-  
53  
54 demographic variables have been found to influence EI and employee work engagement (see,  
55  
56 Akhtar *et al.*, 2015; Luu, 2019; Miao *et al.*, 2016).  
57  
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## Results

### *Sample description*

The socio-demographic result shows the sample description of the study has presented in Table 1.

-----  
Insert Table 1 about here  
-----

Table 1 shows the result of the respondents' socio-demographic profiles. The result revealed that 47% of the respondents were males while 53% were females, indicating that majority of the respondents were male. Also, 66.5% of the respondents were married; 30.9% were single; 2.1% were divorced, while 0.6% were widow(er). This indicated that the majority of the respondents were married; 22.3% were between 21 – 30 years; 51.3% were between 31 – 40 years; 21.8% were between ages 41 – 50 years, and 4.5% were 50 years and above. This indicated that most of the respondents were between ages 31 – 40 years. In terms of educational qualification, .4% had OND/ NCE, 53.6% had BSc/BA/BEEd/HND; 37.9% had MSc/MBA/MA; and 8.1% had other professional types of qualification, indicating that the majority of the respondents had at least a first degree. 21.8% had worked between 1 – 5 years, 45.6% had worked between 6 – 10 years, 15.2% had worked between 11 – 15 years, 10.8% had worked between 16 – 20 years, while 6.6% had worked for 21 years and above. This implies that most employees had worked for between 6 years and 15 years.

### *Preliminary analysis*

Preliminary analyses were carried out to compute descriptive statistics, composite reliability, discriminant validity, convergent validity, bivariate correlations, and hierarchical regression analyses using SPSS 23 and AMOS 23. To determine whether POS and PsyCap mediated the relationship between EI and work engagement, serial mediation analyses were

performed employing Model 6 in the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017). While a bias-corrected bootstrapping method with a 95% Confidence Interval (CI) set at 5,000 reiterations was employed to test for the significant indirect effect.

#### *Measurement model*

First, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test whether the variables were empirically distinct. Several the established fit index needs to be obtained before a model is deemed acceptable. A model is deemed acceptable if the Root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) is  $\leq .06$ , Comparative fit index (CFI)  $\geq .90$ , Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)  $\geq .90$ , and Standard root-mean-square residual (SRMR)  $\leq .08$  (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Also, having three to four of the indices is sufficient evidence for the model fit (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

The result revealed that our four-factor measurement model (EI, POS, PsyCap and work engagement) had a better fit with the data ( $\chi^2/df = 1.98$ , RMSEA = .04, CFI = .92, TLI = .92, SMRS = .05). We compared to the indices of other alternative models. The three-factor model that combined work engagement and POS into one latent factor ( $\chi^2/df = 3.32$ , RMSEA = .07, CFI = .79, TLI = .77, SMRS = .08), while the two-factor model combined POS, work engagement and EI into one latent factor ( $\chi^2/df = 5.95$ , RMSEA = .10, CFI = .51, TLI = .49, SMRS = .11). We also calculated a fit statistic of a model that combined all four latent variables as a single latent factor. Comparing the fit statistic result of the single-factor model to the proposed model a poor fit was obtained ( $\chi^2/df = 7.284$ , RMSEA = 0.11, CFI = 0.38, TLI = .35, and SMRS = 0.12). This result further indicates that CMB does not have a significant threat in the data set.

#### *Descriptive statistics*

The means and standard deviations of the study variables shows that EI (mean = 3.411; SD = .382), PsyCap (mean = 4.689; SD = .616), POS (mean = 2.651; SD = .978),

work engagement (mean = 4.471; SD = 1.084). In line with Field (2009), the relatively small SDs compared to the mean scores suggest that the calculated averages denote the observed data. The result of the skewness and kurtosis levels shows that the values of the variable were not greater than 10 (Kline, 2011).

From the measurement model, composite reliability, discriminant validity, convergent validity, bivariate correlations of the study variables are presented in Table 2.

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Insert Table 2 about here  
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From Table 2, the composite reliability (CR) of the study variables is above the recommended threshold of 0.70, in line with Fornell and Larker (1981). The result of the convergent validity, which measures how the indicators of the latent construct correlate with each other, reveals that the AVE for all the latent constructs of the study is above 0.5. While the discriminant validity, which demonstrates how indicators of each latent variable are unique was valid, since the square roots of the AVE, as indicated by the diagonal value of each latent variable were all greater than the correlations of each variable. Thus, the composite reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity for the study were confirmed. The correlation result shows that POS was positively significantly related to work engagement ( $r = .13, p < 0.01$ ), EI was also positively significantly related to work engagement ( $r = .20, p < 0.01$ ), and PsyCap was positively correlated with work engagement ( $r = .43, p < 0.01$ ). Based on the validity of the study instrument, we proceeded and analysed the study hypotheses.

### ***Hypotheses Test***

To test the hypothesized model, we conducted hierarchical linear regression analysis. Moreover, we followed the procedure by Taylor *et al.* (2008) to test for serial mediation. For

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2  
3 Hypothesis 1, we regressed EI on work engagement. To test Hypothesis 2 (indirect effect of  
4 EI on work engagement via PsyCap), we regressed work engagement on PsyCap, while  
5  
6 EI on work engagement via PsyCap), we regressed work engagement on PsyCap, while  
7  
8 controlling for EI. To test hypothesis 3 (indirect effect of EI on PsyCap through POS), we  
9  
10 regress PsyCap on POS, while controlling for EI. Finally, to test hypothesis 4 (indirect effect  
11  
12 of EI on work engagement via POS and PsyCap), we regressed work engagement on PsyCap  
13  
14 while controlling for EI and POS. The proposed indirect effects for hypotheses 2, 3, and 4  
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16 were examined by estimating bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) using bootstrap  
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18 analysis (5000 bootstrap samples). The hypotheses results are shown in Table 3.  
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24 Insert Table 3 about here  
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29 The result of hypothesis one revealed that EI significantly predicted work engagement  
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31 ( $B = .55$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This supports the stated hypothesis, given that the unstandardized  
32  
33 beta value of .55 is significant and  $p < .01$ . For hypothesis 2, the results of the bootstrapping  
34  
35 analysis supported the proposed indirect effect that EI was indirectly and positively related to  
36  
37 work engagement through PsyCap ( $B = .68$ ;  $p < .01$ ; 95% CI = [.4777, .9145]). The  
38  
39 unstandardized beta value of .68 is significant ( $p < .01$ ). The CI values of the lower limit  
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41 confidence interval (.4777) and the upper limit confidence interval (.9145) does not contain  
42  
43 zero, which according to Hayes (2013) shows the mediating effect of PsyCap in the  
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45 relationship between EI and work engagement  
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50  
51 The result of hypothesis 3 supported the proposed indirect effect of EI on PsyCap  
52  
53 through POS ( $B = .01$ ;  $p < .01$ ; 95% CI = [.0002, .0368]). Also, based on the findings, the  
54  
55 unstandardized beta value of .01 is significant ( $p < .01$ ). The CI values of the lower limit  
56  
57 confidence interval (.0002) and the upper limit confidence interval (.0368) does not contain  
58  
59 zero, which according to Hayes (2013) shows the mediating effect of POS in the relationship  
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3 between EI and PsyCap. The result of hypothesis 4 revealed that the indirect effect of EI on  
4 work engagement was serially mediated by POS and PsyCap ( $B = .01; p < .01; 95\% CI =$   
5  
6 [.0001, .0272]). Thus, confirming hypothesis 4. Also, based on the findings, the  
7  
8 unstandardized beta value of .01 is significant ( $p < .01$ ). The CI values of the lower limit  
9  
10 confidence interval (.0001) and the upper limit confidence interval (.0272) do not contain  
11  
12 zero, which according to Hayes (2013) shows that POS and PsyCap serially mediates the  
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14 relationship between EI and work engagement.  
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### 20 Discussion

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22 The study examined the link between EI and work engagement and extended previous  
23  
24 studies by investigating the serial explanatory pathway of POS and PsyCap in this  
25  
26 relationship. The study integrated CMR theory and COR theory to examine these  
27  
28 relationships. We examined EI as a malleable ability. The findings of this study revealed a  
29  
30 significant positive relationship between EI and work engagement, which is consistent with  
31  
32 previous studies on trait EI and work engagement (Akhtar *et al.*, 2015; Barreiro and  
33  
34 Treglown, 2020). In the model of Akhtar *et al.* (2015), personality traits including  
35  
36 extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, as well as trait EI  
37  
38 positively predicted work engagement, while neuroticism negatively predicted work  
39  
40 engagement. Research on personality theories (e.g., Borghuis, et al., 2017) shows the stable  
41  
42 nature of traits in individuals, implying that employee trait EI will largely remain the same.  
43  
44 Our study approached EI as a skill, drawing on the CMR theory to highlight the cognitive and  
45  
46 emotional aspects of EI that influences work engagement.  
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52 To extend previous research on EI and work engagement, we examined the indirect  
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54 effects of PsyCap in this relationship. PsyCap indirectly mediated the positive effect of EI on  
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56 work engagement. In other words, EI is associated with work engagement through PsyCap,  
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58 which reveals that employees' high in EI are likely to be high in PsyCap and, in turn,  
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3 expected to have higher work engagement. This finding is in line with previous studies which  
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5 demonstrated that PsyCap is positively related to work engagement (Alessandri *et al.*, 2018;  
6  
7 Tsaour *et al.*, 2019) and plays a mediating role in work engagement studies (Tsaour *et al.*,  
8  
9 2019). Applying the COR theory, this study establishes the importance of personal resources  
10  
11 which individuals draw from to influence their work engagement. In so doing, we highlight  
12  
13 that PsyCap is a mediating pathway to explain the relationship between EI and work  
14  
15 engagement.  
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17

18  
19 Also, POS indirectly mediated the relationship between EI and PsyCap, implying that  
20  
21 EI is related to PsyCap via POS. Consistent with the CMR theory, POS informs employees'  
22  
23 cognition about a supportive work environment and is expected to trigger personal resources  
24  
25 positively. Moreover, Kirrane *et al.*, (2017) opined that a supportive environment improves  
26  
27 individuals' PsyCap. This finding indicates that POS as a contextual factor allows employees  
28  
29 to flourish in their work roles (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2013) and aids their level of work  
30  
31 engagement. The result of the serial mediation model revealed an indirect effect of POS and  
32  
33 PsyCap in the link between EI and work engagement. The current study is the first to  
34  
35 establish this serial explanatory pathway between EI and work engagement.  
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### 40 **Theoretical Implications**

41  
42 We believe that our study contributes to the existing EI studies and the wider  
43  
44 literature in four ways. First, our study contributes to the literature by expanding how ability  
45  
46 EI influences work engagement, thereby strengthening our understanding that EI can be  
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48 developed by employees by paying attention to their emotional, cognitive, relational, and  
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50 motivational evaluations, in line with the CMR theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1991). Emotions  
51  
52 are extracted from the evaluation of experiences that informs subsequent behaviour  
53  
54 (Fredrickson, 2000). This point reflects EI as adaptable rather than fixed, thereby informing  
55  
56 organisations on the need to train their employees on EI. Second, this study applied the CMR  
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theory, integrating it with COR theory to explain how employees work engagement is influenced by EI and the mediating pathways of PsyCap and POS in these relationships, thereby strengthening our understanding of personal and contextual resources in enhancing organisational outcomes (Akhtar *et al.*, 2015; Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2013). Third, we contribute to the PsyCap literature by empirically establishing the mediating relationship of PsyCap in the EI-work engagement link, thereby highlighting the critical importance of PsyCap as a vital pathway to work engagement. Our study brings to light that the components of PsyCap including confidence, resilience, hope, and optimism can be developed for more effective work outcomes (Luthans, Luthans, and Luthans, 2004). Finally, we contribute to the literature by exploring the mediating role of POS in the EI-work engagement link, thereby deepening our understanding of the role of organisational support in enhancing employees' work engagement and building a high-performing work system. Prior research shows that individuals who perceive that their organisations are supportive of their work are likely to stay longer with the organisation (Bano *et al.*, 2015). This reflects that POS stimulates work engagement. As such, we contribute to the PsyCap and wider literature by highlighting that organisations need to support their employees and be perceived as doing so.

### **Practical Implications**

Valuable practical implications can be drawn from our study. First, the current study suggests that EI can be developed as a skill. Thus, organisations should invest in training and development programmes on EI. This will inform employees on the social intelligence of EI, how to appraise and regulate their emotions, that of others, and use the information to guide their thinking and action (Salovey and Meyer, 1990). Based on the findings of this study, EI training is likely to positively influence employee work and non-work outcomes. Second, organisations should provide more support to employees, for example, onboarding of new employees, mentoring scheme, social support, and strengthening of supervisor-subordinate



relationships as well as co-workers support. These support systems strengthen the perception of organisational support by employees, thereby increasing employees' engagement and reducing labour turnover. Third, managers need to pay attention to the PsyCap of employees as a vital resource to building an effective and sustainable work system. Employees with high PsyCap are assets to their organisations in how they deploy their capacities of resilience, hope, efficacy, and optimism. Recognising these and helping to build PsyCap in employees through employee-centered policies will increase the work engagement and performance indices of organisations. Last, based on the findings of this study, EI is a useful tool that organisations can leverage to maintain a healthy and thriving workforce. Line managers should encourage employees to demonstrate their EI in the workplace and building individual and team relationships with colleagues. Such understanding of peers' and others' emotions through organisational policies, thereby making the workplace healthier for employees to thrive.

### **Limitation and Future Research**

Despite the contributions of this study, it is without limitations. First, data was obtained from a public sector organisation, hence, the generalisation of findings should be done with caution. Second, this study examined EI and work engagement as unidimensional constructs, thus, not limiting the engagement of the literature and theoretical lens in the sub-dimensions of variables. Third, the study employed a cross-sectional design, albeit, collecting data in piece-meal (three waves) to limit the effects of CMB. Last, the study is limited by using self-reported measures of variables. The use of self-report raises concerns for CMB. Though our study aligns with the argument of Conway and Lance (2010), that self-reports are suitable in certain situations, it limits the reliability of the instruments. To address these limitations, we suggest that future research should include multiple organisations and a representative sample. Future studies should employ the sub-dimensions of EI in the serial



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2  
3 mediation process and its link with outcome variables. Besides, further studies should  
4  
5 examine other personal and contextual resources that can affect employee EI–work  
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7 engagement link using experimental and longitudinal designs. Last, future studies should  
8  
9 employ a multi-source approach involving leaders and followers in the rating of study  
10  
11 variables.  
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### 14 **Conclusion**

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16  
17 Our study explored the relationship between EI and work engagement. It further  
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19 examined the mediating relationship of PsyCap and POS in the EI-work engagement link.  
20  
21 Data was collected from a public sector organisation in Nigeria. The result of our study  
22  
23 shows that EI was positively related to work engagement. EI exerted an indirect effect on  
24  
25 PsyCap via POS, while the indirect effect of EI on work engagement was serially mediated  
26  
27 by POS and PsyCap. The findings suggest that EI helps employees to enhance their work  
28  
29 engagement. Our study contributes to the EI and wider literature by emphasizing the  
30  
31 importance of emotional awareness, regulation, appraisal, and management in achieving  
32  
33 work engagement. Our findings are relevant to the challenging work conditions in today's  
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35 workplace with high levels of uncertainty, and emergent changes in workplace practices.  
36  
37 Employees should pay closer attention to their ability EI towards better self-regulation and  
38  
39 organisations should be mindful of how the emotional appraisal and regulations of employees  
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41 can influence work engagement and a flourishing workplace.  
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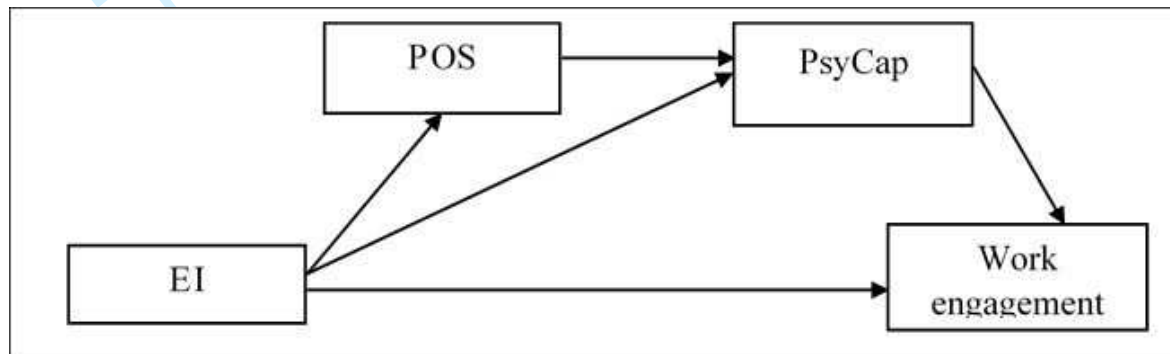
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Figure 1.

*Hypothesised Serial Mediation Model.*



**Notes:** EI: Emotional Intelligence; POS: Perceived Organisational Support; PsyCap: Psychological Capital

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of respondents

<b>Profile</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b><i>Gender</i></b>		
Male	248	47.0
Female	280	53.0
Total	528	100
<b><i>Marital Status</i></b>		
Married	351	66.5
Single	163	30.9
Divorced	11	2.1
Widow(er)	3	0.6
Total	528	100
<b><i>Age-Range</i></b>		
21 – 30 years	118	22.3
31 – 40 years	271	51.3
41 – 50 years	115	21.8
51 years & above	24	4.5
Total	528	100
<b><i>Educational Qualification</i></b>		
OND	2	.4
BSc./HND	283	53.6
MBA/ MSc	200	37.9
Others	43	8.1
Total	528	100
<b><i>Work Experience</i></b>		
1 – 5years	115	21.8
6 – 10years	241	45.6
11 - 15years	80	15.2
16 - 20years	57	10.8
21years and above	35	6.6
Total	528	100

**Table 2.***Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extract, Maximum Shared Variance, and Correlations*

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Work engagement	0.89	0.54	0.14	<b>0.74</b>						
2. POS	0.85	0.58	0.02	0.13**	<b>0.76</b>					
3. Emotional intelligence	0.87	0.62	0.23	0.20**	0.08	<b>0.79</b>				
4. PsyCap	0.90	0.69	0.23	0.43**	0.16**	0.57**	<b>0.83</b>			
5. Age	-	-	-	.14**	-.07	.01	.02	-		
6. Gender	-	-	-	-.14**	-.08	.05	-.06	-.14**	-	
7. Work Experience	-	-	-	.19**	-.01	.08	.12**	.48**	-.13**	-

**Notes:** n=528. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; POS: Perceived organisational support; PsyCap: Psychological Capital; Value on the diagonal are square roots of the AVEs



**Table 3.***Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, Direct and Indirect Effects*

	<b>Model 1</b>		<b>Model 2</b>		<b>Model 3</b>		<b>Model 4</b>	
	Work engagement		Work engagement		Psychological capital		Work engagement	
	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>
Intercept	2.53***	.43	1.17***	.43	1.62***	.22	1.03***	.44
Age	.08	.07	.10	.06	-.02	.03	.11	.06
Gender	-.27**	.09	-.19*	.09	-.09*	.04	-.18*	.09
Work Experience	.13**	.05	.10*	.04	.04	.02	.09*	.04
EI	.55	.12	-.13	.13	.87***	.06	-.13	.13
$R^2$	.09**		.22***		.34**		.22***	
Direct Effect <sup>a</sup>			-.13	.13	.87***	.06	-.13	.13
Indirect Effect <sup>b</sup>			.68**	.11	.01**	.01	.01**	.01
CI of Indirect Effect			[.4777 , .9145]		[.0002 , .0368]		[.0001 , .0272]	

**Notes:**  $n = 528$ . EI: Emotional intelligence; CI: confidence interval. <sup>a</sup> Direct effect of EI on work engagement and direct effect of EI on Psychological capital. <sup>b</sup> Indirect effect of EI on work engagement through Psychological capital (Model 2), EI on Psychological capital through Perceived organisational support (Model 3) and indirect effect of EI on work engagement through Perceived organisational support and Psychological capital (Model 4). \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$