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Social support as a mediator between selected trait engagement and employee engagement

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement construct has become well-known among scholars, practitioners, researchers, and consulting bodies to improve employee productivity, help organisations achieve set goals, and remain competitive globally. However, many studies on employee engagement have mainly concentrated on organisational factors, focusing less on individual factors. Also, despite prominent literature on personality, studies on how specific personalities affect individuals' engagement levels at work are still limited. By examining the relationship between autotelic personality, proactive personality, and employee engagement with an emphasis on the mediating effect of social support, this study aims to bridge the gap. A cross-sectional survey approach was adopted for this study to collect information from a sample of 260 registered nurses working in public hospitals in Lagos, Nigeria. The data was analysed using AMOS-27 statistical software. The results demonstrated that proactive favourably connects to employee engagement, while the association between autotelic personality and employee engagement was insignificant. Also, the mediating effect of social support on proactive personality and employee engagement was significant. While testing the structural model, one regression path was removed because, apart from being insignificant, it was also affecting the significance level of other variables. Removing the insignificant variables is acceptable in the regression path to establish the dependent variables and strengthen the mode. This paper adds to the present knowledge that trait engagement (proactive personality) may predispose employees to be engaged or disengaged. Also, through social support, proactive individuals will show more personal initiative to work and solve challenges through perceived social support in the organisation.

1. Introduction

The rising level of tension in the business environment of modern organisations requires organisations to adjust to imminent changes regularly, invest in the workforce, provide different needs of the workforce, manage their talents, and encourage creative practice among employees (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). As such, human resources management is pressurised to develop effective strategies and approaches in building engaged workforces. Employee engagement construct has become well-known among scholars, practitioners, researchers, and

consulting bodies to improve employee productivity, help organisations achieve set goals, and remain competitive globally (Saks, 2022). Engaged employees contribute positively to their organisation by attracting and retaining new customers and supporting co-workers (Gallup, 2020). However, global employee engagement levels are declining, with disengaged employees outnumbering engaged ones at a ratio of 2:1 (Gallup, 2020). In Nigeria, low engagement among health workers poses significant implications for the public health sector, where the nursing profession is endangered (Okafor & Chimereze, 2020).

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Therefore, seeking to increase employee engagement is considered crucial. However, achieving this goal requires a comprehensive study of the organization and individual factors that might influence employee engagement. This is because both the organisational and individual factors have active roles to play in enhancing employee engagement (Saks, 2022). As such, this study will examine how individual factors, such as selected trait engagement, relate to employee engagement. However, studies on the relationship between selected trait engagement, such as autotelic personality and proactive personality on employee engagement are still limited as previous studies mainly focused on state-like personal resources like self-efficacy, emotions, and optimism, religiosity (Abualigah & Koburtay, 2023) and personal resources like the Big Five personality trait (Ansari, 2020). This has led to limited studies on how autotelic personality, proactive personality and employee engagement are related and the mechanisms responsible for the relationships. Therefore, in line with the Conservation of resource theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989), this study will examine how autotelic personality and proactive personality relate to employee engagement.

According to the conservation of resource theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989) social support plays a significant role in underpinning an individual's positive image in fostering a positive work outcome. Therefore, it will be fascinating to identify social support as an underlying mechanism that links selected trait engagement, such as autotelic personality and proactive personality to employee engagement among registered nurses in public hospitals in Nigeria. Most previous research on social support has focused more on the direct effects of social support congruent with autotelic (Macey & Schneider, 2008), positive affectivity (Asim, 2015), proactive personality (Lin et al., 2022), and employee engagement (Wang & Lei, 2021). Also, previous studies on social support as a mediator between personality traits to work outcomes focused on other personality traits to other work outcomes, such as the Big five and subjective well-being (Okojie et al., 2023), Big five and mental health (Lewis et al., 2014), and Personality and Physical Functioning (Clark et al., 2022).

This study generally contributes to research on personality, employee engagement, and social support. First, the study's result will align with the view that trait engagement or individual differences may prompt employees to be engaged or disengaged at work (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Second, this study will add to the existing knowledge of employee engagement literature by identifying social support as an underlying mechanism under which autotelic personality and proactive personality relate to employee engagement. Third, this study extends the COR theory to explain why autotelic personality and proactive personality relate to employee engagement.

2. Literature review

The literature reviewed was arranged according to the study's objective. The following subheadings are used as a starting point for the theory used in this study and literature by various authors relating to the purpose of the study, developing hypotheses: an overview of earlier research on the theoretical underpinning's framework and research components.

2.1. The conservation of resources theory

The conservation of resources theory (COR) is a motivational theory that helps to explain a wide range of human behaviour that is based on the need that humans have had throughout evolution to acquire and conserve resources for their own survival (Hobfoll, 1989). The COR theory implies that individuals can build sophisticated tools to guarantee their survival and have the benefit of creating a language to communicate, which helps in social connection and interaction. Furthermore, the acquiring and retaining of material, personal, and social resources make individuals, families, and organisations to have the feeling that they are equipped to address stressful challenges

(Hobfoll, 2001).

Resources are those personal characteristics, social support, energies or conditions that are esteemed by the individual or function as a way to accomplish and be engaged at work (Hobfoll, 1989). Personal characteristics, such as personality traits, act as personal resources helping stress resistance and may influence how employees react and meet the needed performance. Social resources such as social support refer to social interaction or relationship that offers employees real help or a feeling of connection to a person, group or organisation. Social resources also serve as instrumental and self-defining functions necessary to protect a stable self-awareness.

Furthermore, in accordance with the COR theory, there is a high correlation between the presence of one resource and the presence of other resources, and the absence of one resource enhances the possibility that other resources will exist. This idea denotes that resources cannot be viewed as independent from each other or act in isolation but instead are connected through a protective influence (Hobfoll, 2001). COR theory explains how personal resources, job resources and employee engagement are related. According to the theory, personal resources and job resources function as antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement. Also, employee engagement functions as the outcome variable of both personal resources and job resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). In line with this, COR theory supports that personal resources enable employees to utilise job resources towards engagement (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

2.2. Employee engagement

Although Kahn (1990) suggested the original definition of the construct of employee engagement, most academic research has drawn on a closely connected definition of Schaufeli et al. (2002). According to Schaufeli et al. (2002), engagement is a favourable and satisfying mental state regarding work, embodied by three essential elements: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour is mental resilience and a high degree of energy an employee brings and puts to work. Dedication is being deeply involved in a job with fulfilment, passion, and challenge. Absorption is the concentration and focus directed towards a specific objective without being mindful of time. The amount of employee engagement does not entirely depend on any event, object, or individual's action, as stated by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Employee engagement levels may be impacted by several factors, including their prior experiences, personal attributes, and job and organisational-related factors, such as social support (Albrecht et al., 2023; Saks, 2022).

2.3. Autotelic personality

Trait engagement is designated as employees who tend to carry out work positively, passionately, and energetically. It is a wide dispositional construct consisting of four basic personalities to experience and maintain engagement, namely, conscientiousness personality, autotelic personality, proactive personality and positive affectivity personality (Macey & Schneider, 2008). This present study focuses on autotelic personality and proactive personality.

Autotelic personality is a concept that has emerged from the flow model, which describes individuals who engage in activities for their own sake and intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Autotelic individuals possess a combination of receptive and active qualities, including openness, perseverance, engagement, and competence in balancing challenge and skill-building. An autotelic personality is desirable as it is associated with higher self-esteem, lower anxiety, and greater engagement in activities. In addition, autotelic individuals are incredibly motivated and often known to be well-adjusted (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Furthermore, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) stated that autotelic individuals are mindful and engaged in conscious activities. This, in turn,

will allow them to be more open-minded to balance challenges and their skills. Also, autotelic personality relates to subjective well-being, such as life satisfaction (Wu et al., 2021). Hence, there is a high likelihood that they possess a more meaningful sense of well-being than those individuals who do not have an autotelic personality. Furthermore, Tse et al. (2021) opined that confidence and intrinsic motivation are linked to autotelic personality. As such, individuals with an autotelic personality are internally motivated to establish and attain set goals and often are observed to have high confidence.

2.4. Proactive personality

Proactive personality was first introduced as a dispositional construct that recognises variances among individuals and their different actions to influence their place of work (Bateman & Crant, 1993). It is a relatively stable behavioural propensity to cause a change in a work environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993). This is consistent with the organisational behaviour and psychology field, in which an individual's behavioural and environment continuously interact and impact one another. Individuals with proactive personality recognise and use opportunities to show initiative and continue it until significant changes are attained. These individuals are motivated to take personal initiative to impact organisational success, create a positive relationship among employees and display positive work behaviour and attitudes (Wang et al., 2021). Proactive individuals are known to be relatively unrestricted by situational forces and have a significant effect on changing the environment. They search for change opportunities (i.e., set change-oriented, effective goals; anticipate and prevent problems). Also, they carry out tasks uniquely (i.e., take the necessary action and persist until results are achieved (Lin et al., 2022; Wang & Lei, 2021).

Studies have concluded that proactive personality is a significant antecedent of a positive workplace, such as employee engagement. Also, positive correlations were reported on outcome variables like achievement, career outcomes, individual job performance, leadership, organisational innovation, team performance and entrepreneurship (Bateman & Crant, 1993). This indicates that proactive personality is an essential variable of employee engagement (Sheoran et al., 2023). Therefore, this study will examine how proactive employees relate their personality to achieve employee engagement.

2.5. Social support

Social support is resources provided by others that an individual can access to cope with stress (Li et al., 2021). Individuals can access resources such as emotional support, which involves receiving expressions of love and concern, or instrumental support, which involves receiving tangible assistance or advice (Lu et al., 2020). These resources can be perceived as providing comfort, care, appreciation, or assistance to individuals. Appraisal support, emotional support, instrumental support, and information support are the four types of social support. These forms of social support positively associated with well-being outcomes.

Some researchers have described that social support provided by work colleagues and supervisors will generate a sense of meaningfulness, such as security, general motivation, resilience and socialisation. When employees socialise and support each other, this will help in sharing both positive and negative setback views which, in turn, help employees to learn and gain from each other. As such, employees will be protected from the pathological effect of a stressful experience. Employee engagement is a direct consequence of social support, which is a vital element in the accomplishments of individuals and organisations (Li et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021). In addition, Zhenjing et al. (2022) found that social support significantly predicts job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and stress in the workplace and employee engagement. The role of social support as a mediator between two additional variables can also be investigated. Hence, the mechanism underlying of social support in the context of autotelic personality and proactive

personality on employee engagement will be examined in this research. This is because of lack of studies on social support as a mediator in the context of autotelic personality and proactive personality on employee engagement.

2.6. Research model and hypotheses development

The development of hypotheses is discussed in the following sub-headings. This research proposes a relationship between autotelic personality and employee engagement. The mediating role of social support on autotelic personality and employee engagement. Also, the relationship between proactive personality and employee engagement. Also, social support as a mediator between proactive personality and employee engagement. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 represents the conceptual.

2.6.1. Autotelic personality and employee engagement

As stated by the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), individual personality is an essential predisposition of employees to deal with their resources and adapt to job demands effectively to generate positive work outcomes. This study expects autotelic personality to be positively related to employee engagement. This is because autotelic personality predisposes individuals to a different job and shapes employees' nature, affecting their capacity to personally be engaged or disengaged at work (Kanten & Arda, 2021; Macey & Schneider 2008; Begum et al., 2020). Also, autotelic individuals are perceived to be confident in setting and achieving potential goals. As such, they are more likely to be engaged and inclined to enjoy work in a positive, active and energetic way (Callea et al., 2022; Macey & Schneider 2008).

Empirical evidence has shown that autotelic personality and employee engagement are positively related. For example, individuals with autotelic personality are crucial in an organisation due to their involvement and engagement in meaningful activeness in the workplace (Akbari et al., 2023; Mills & Fullagar, 2008). Also, Hirschfeld and Thomas (2008) stated that autotelic individuals participate more in behaviours and activities that lead to employee engagement, like setting personal challenging goals, taking up challenging tasks, and seeking developmental feedback. These behaviours make the employees adjust to work demands and resources, resulting in higher employee engagement. Autotelic individuals are expected to be engaged because they identify challenges and develop skills to solve the identified difficulties, leading to employee engagement (Kanten & Arda, 2021). Autotelic employees are equipped to enjoy challenging activities, accomplish challenging goals, and get engaged (Young & Steelman, 2017). Based on these perspectives, this study proposes that autotelic predisposes individuals to be more engaged at work.

H1. Autotelic personality and employee engagement are positively related

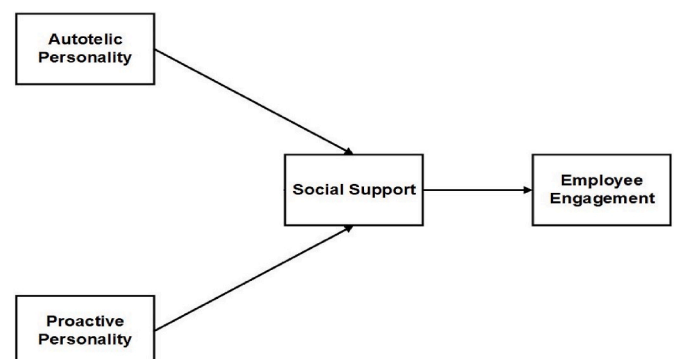


Fig. 1. Research framework.

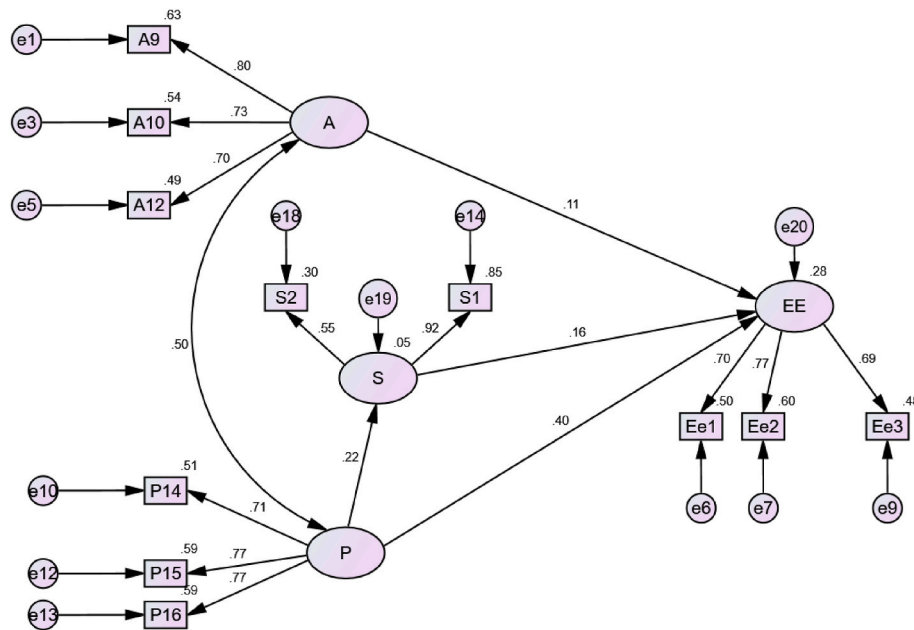


Fig. 2. Measurement model.

2.6.2. Mediating role of social support between autotelic personality and employee engagement

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) suggests that job resources, such as social support, may stimulate personal resources, including individual personality, and lead to positive work outcomes. This model implies that individual personality is a crucial resource that assists the employee in setting goals and managing work lives, and the availability of social support will help achieve achievement work outcomes. Employee will exhibit a positive attitude when they perceive support from a supervisor, and together, these resources relate to positive work outcomes (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Cont reras et al., 2020). Therefore, it seems reasonable to surmise that autotelic personality is related to social support. This is because autotelic influences the quality of one's social interactions.

The characteristics of autotelic personality include information-seeking behaviour, broad-mindedness, and openness to novelty, and imaginativeness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). These characteristics empower autotelic individuals to be more prone to engage in new challenges and have open discussions concerning work-related tasks with their supervisor and co-workers to contribute to the organisational goals (Abuhamdeh, 2020; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2020). Also, autotelic individuals are inclined to have a strong working attitude and perform tasks that require support from their supervisors.

Some empirical studies revealed that social support can account for the relationship between autotelic personality and employee outcomes. For example, a study by Young and Steelman (2017) stated that certain individuals who thrive and face potential threats would perceive support as a general predisposition to influence and foster engagement at work. Autotelic employees see a supportive work environment as a resource that helps their natural inclinations influence their workplace. Therefore, to advance the literature, this study contends that social support will mediate autotelic personality and employee engagement.

H2. Social support mediates autotelic personality and employee engagement.

2.6.3. Proactive personality and employee engagement

The COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) states that personal resources such as proactive personality will enhance work plans and increase intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, which, in turn, increases the employee engagement level in organisations. The theory indicates that proactive

personality can help employees improve their potential to cope with the job demands and be engaged successfully. Lin et al. (2022) revealed that proactive employees would do better at work and be engaged because they take personal initiative and involve themselves in network-building.

Furthermore, proactive individuals are dedicated to their work and consistently provide high-quality results, which benefit their level of engagement (Zahoor 2020). Also, Zhang et al., 2021 found that employees whose personalities tended towards the proactive were more engaged at work. This was because the proactive employees took the initiative to create a demanding work environment that fostered the focus and enthusiasm that are hallmarks of engagement. Young et al. (2018) stated that proactive employees are committed to tasks assigned and occupational commitment, which, in turn, influences job engagement positively.

Being proactive positively affects employee behaviours and attitudes because a proactive employee recognises and builds opportunities that create favourable working conditions for engagement. Lin et al. (2022) stated that employees with proactive personality are expected to be more engaged because they usually immersed in their work. Proactive personality would lead to an increase in engagement by taking personal initiative and improving work circumstances. Also, Zhao et al., 2020 stated that a proactive personality positively predicts employee engagement among Chinese employees. In taking personal initiative to influence the work conditions, a proactive employee will become highly engaged and committed to work (Xuehui et al., 2021). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3. Proactive personality is positively related to employee engagement.

2.6.4. Mediating role of social support between proactive personality and employee engagement

Proactive employees consistently implement positive organisational changes; these changes require other support shared among employees, which prompts and promotes proactive behaviour. Proactive individuals will effect changes in their environment through social support. Proactive individuals leverage these benefits by vigorously pursuing and creating connections with people who can help them pursue initiatives beyond their ability (Wang & Lei, 2021).

Following COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), job resources, such as social

support, are expected to serve as a motivational process through which proactive personality influences employee engagement. The theory implies that employees will activate personal initiative through social support, which may lead to constructive results for the business, such as employee engagement. This idea is consistent with Wang and Lei (2021), who argued that employees who improve their initiative and generate ideas are contingent on the availability of a supportive work environment and vital information toward positive work outcomes. Also, Grant and Ashford, 2008 stated that proactive individuals deal with challenges on an assigned task or general activities at work through the availability of social support to achieve a positive work outcome. As such, an employee who possesses proactive personality sees social support from the supervisor as a motivation to be more involved and engaged at work. Also, employees are more likely to be engaged in their jobs if they believe their supervisors will support their initiatives. Therefore, drawing from COR theory, this study expects proactive employees, through social support, to become engaged at work.

H4. Social support will mediate proactive personality and employee engagement.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Data collection and respondent characteristics

Data was collected and analysed using a descriptive research approach with a cross-sectional design and a survey method, which is more suitable for systematically and accurately describing the characteristics of a given population of interest and discovering the relationships between selected variables (Saunders, 2011). Data were gathered from 348 registered professional nurses working in 26 public hospitals using a self-administered questionnaire and 272 public healthcare centres through stratified random sampling, which ensures that the selected sample sufficiently represents the research population. The survey retrieved 289 completed questionnaires, with an 83.05% response rate. After data cleaning, the remaining dataset comprised of 260 respondents. Thus, a total of 260 samples of registered professional nurses were used in the data analysis. A sample size of more than 200 is considered appropriate for SEM analysis by Kline (2016). This study's sample size exceeds the required sample size specified by other studies and represents the relevant population for SEM analysis (Kline, 2016).

Most of the respondents were female ($n = 212$, 81.5%), while only a small proportion was male ($n = 48$, 18.5%). Most of the nurses fell within the age range of 18–44 years (74.2%). About 63.5% of the registered nurses have a qualification of bachelor's degree in nursing. Only 20% of the nurses ($n = 52$) had work experience of 20 years or more, compared to a majority of the nurses ($n = 208$, or 80.0%), who had less than 20 years of experience. The distribution of the nurses across the different ranks of Nursing Officer is aligned with the normal distribution of nurses found along the hierarchy of work in public hospitals in Nigeria. The majority of the nurses are in the junior ranks of Nursing II or Nursing I, while only a small proportion are at the top level of their career. The distribution of the nurses' qualifications and years of work experience is typical of the public healthcare sector in Nigeria.

3.2. Employee engagement

Employee engagement was evaluated using the 17-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006). The scale evaluated three aspects of employee engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. The responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Always", as selected by the respondents. Cronbach's alpha for this study was 0.79.

3.3. Autotelic personality

Autotelic personality was measured using the Tse et al. (2020) autotelic personality scale. The scale contains 26 items. Example of item: e.g. I care more about enjoyment of a task than rewards associated with it). All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Cronbach's alpha for this study was 0.77.

3.4. Proactive personality

The 17-items short version scale by Bateman and Crant's (1993) was utilized to measure proactive personality. Respondents indicated their responses on a Likert scale of 5-point, varying from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Cronbach's alpha was 0.80.

3.5. Social support

The four items item of support obtained from the employee's supervisor by Caplan et al. (1975) were utilized to measure social support. Respondents indicated their response on a Likert scale of 5-point varying from 'Never to 'Always. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.68.

3.6. Data analyses and results

The first stage in data analysis is to assess the model's measurement to check the constructs' validity and reliability. Also, the structural model was utilized to examine the hypotheses. There is a normal distribution regarding skewness and kurtosis, except for proactive personality and autotelic personality whose kurtosis and skewness values range from benign to about 3.339. While a strict threshold for skewness and kurtosis ranges between +1 and -1, a more relaxed threshold at ± 3.3 is also used. Also, the KMO index measure for sampling adequacy for employee engagement, autotelic personality, proactive personality and social support is $KMO = 0.808$ with $p < 0.001$, which reflects good and fit for outcome variables. All communalities are above 0.3 (Pallant, 2007). The four-factor model accounted for more than 57.33% of the total variance. Furthermore, there are 15% non-redundant residuals. The correlations of the study and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

3.7. Measurement Model: reliability and validity

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to confirm the discriminant, and convergent validity of the variables using SPSS-27. The values of Relative chi-square, CFI, IFI, TLI, RMSEA, PCLOSE, SRMR, should be closer to or higher than 0.90 (Hair et al., 2016). The model fits in this study are close to 0.90. Relative chi-square = 1.557; CFI = 0.992; IFI = 0.993; TLI = 0.990; RMSEA = 0.025, PCLOSE = 0.938 SRMR = 0.0393. The Cronbach's alphas are above 0.7 except for social support whose CR is around 0.684 (refer to Table 1). According to Hair et al. (2014), composite reliability value ranging from 0.60 to 0.70 is acceptable.

For each construct, the discriminant validity of the constructs was confirmed by an average variance extracted (AVE) higher than 0.5. All four estimates of Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) are also smaller than the AVE, suggesting that they are all distinct. In Table 1, we observe each of the variables' descriptive statistics, correlations, and AVEs.

3.8. Multivariate assumptions

A Cook's distance greater than 1 is indicative of outliers (Hair et al., 2016). The results of the analysis indicated that the Cook's distance was less than 0.334, as such, no actual outliers or influential observations. Also, Multicollinearity was assessed using tolerance and Variable Inflation Factor (VIF) to ensure that the regression weights are not erratic, invalid, or unable to detect redundancy in the model. A

Table 1
Descriptive statistics, correlations, squared correlations and AVEs of study variables.

	CR	AVE	MSV	Mean	Std. Deviation	A	EE	P	S
A	0.79	0.56	0.248	4.064	0.031	0.746			0.200 ^a
EE	0.77	0.53	0.241	30.870	00.092	0.336***	0.725		0.298***
P	0.80	0.57	0.248	4.035	0.031	0.498***	0.491***	0.75	0.204 ^a
S	0.68	0.53	0.089	3.592	0.120				0.724

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

tolerance value of at least 0.1 and a VIF value below 3.00 are commonly used (Hanafiah, 2020). For this study, the obtained tolerance value is 0.643 and VIF is 1.560. Thus, the level of multicollinearity is considered acceptable.

3.9. Structural model: hypotheses testing

While testing the structural model, one regression path (Involving H2) was found to affect the model. Besides it insignificant outcome, it was also affecting the significance level of other variables and was therefore removed. According to Draper and Smith (2014), removing the insignificant variables in establishing the dependent variables and strengthening the model is acceptable. Thus, the new hypotheses of this study are discussed in Table 2.

The hypothesized relationship between autotelic personality and employee engagement, as hypothesized in H1, was insignificant ($\beta = -0.107$, $p = 0.224$, $CR < 1.96$). On the other hand, H2's predicted association between personality traits and employee engagement was supported by the data and significant ($\beta = 0.408$, $p = 0.032$, $CR > 1.96$). H3's hypothesis that social support would mediate the connection between a proactive personality and high levels of employee engagement was also supported and significant too ($\beta = 0.037$, $p = 0.091$, CI 95% 0.001, 0.109). The confidence interval (0.001, 0.109) shows a significant difference even though the lower bound of the confidence interval is closer to zero, making it a marginal significant difference. Hence, the results showed that autotelic personality and employee engagement are not related, while proactive personality and employee engagement are related. Also, social support mediates proactive personality and employee engagement.

4. Discussion

The discussion is grounded on the newly proposed integrated model of the result. The result indicates that autotelic personality and employee engagement are not significantly related. The result is inconsistent with the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which states that individual personalities are an essential predisposition of employees to be engaged at work. Also, this study is inconsistent with past research that states that the higher the autotelic personality an employee possesses, the higher he or she will become more equipped to enjoy challenging activities that lead to employee engagement (Kanten & Arda, 2021; Young & Steelman, 2017). This result does not support the view that trait engagement, such as autotelic personality, inclines individuals to be more engaged at work (Macey & Schneider, 2008). This study's result implies that nurses' autotelic personality does not affect the level of their engagement in the hospital. An autotelic individual may be confident to set and achieve potential goals, but this does not result in being more engaged at work. The variation between this study's results

Table 2
Standardized direct and mediation effect estimates.

Regression Path	Standardized Estimate	Lower	Upper	P
A → EE	0.107	-0.041	0.317	0.224
P → EE	0.404	0.151	0.570	0.032
P → S → EE	0.037	0.001	0.109	0.091

and the findings from other studies may be attributable to cultural distinctions within Nigeria's population; for example, people from different ethnic groups may view their work environments and interpersonal relationships differently or may respond to organizational challenges in different ways (Hofstede, 1980). Future research should consider these cultural differences when applying the current study design to cross-cultural investigations with populations with similar characteristics.

Also, the result revealed that proactive personality and employee engagement are significantly correlated. This result supports COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which suggests that personal resources (i.e., proactive personality) can help employees improve their potential to cope with the job demands and be engaged successfully. Also, this study supports previous studies (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Contreras et al., 2020), which revealed that employees with higher proactive personality are more engaged as they reflect personal initiative and create challenging work environments. Young et al. (2018) concluded that individuals are immersed in work due to their higher proactive personality traits. Also, Xuehui et al. (2021) stated that proactive personality would increase engagement by taking personal initiative and improving work circumstances. Also, this study corresponds with Wang and Lei (2021), who concluded that high tendencies of proactive personality among employees promote work engagement. The finding of this study suggests that employee engagement could be strengthened or dampened due to fluctuations in proactive personality. Nurses in Lagos public hospitals with proactive personality who take personal initiative are more likely to be engaged because they are more likely to create a demanding work environment that promotes engagement.

Furthermore, the study revealed that social support mediates the relationship between proactive personality and employee engagement. This result supports prior studies (e.g., Hobfoll et al., 2018), which stated that employees would activate personal initiative and implement positive organisational changes through social support, which may lead to positive organisational outcomes like employee engagement. Also, this study supports COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which states that job resources, such as social support, will serve as a process through which individual personality influences employee engagement. The findings reveal that nurses with proactive personalities who work in the mentioned hospital will perceive social support as a desire to become more or less engaged.

4.1. Theoretical implications

This study extends the COR theory to explain how proactive personality relates to employee engagement. First, this result supports the view that trait engagement or individual differences factors may predispose employees to be engaged or disengaged at work (Macey & Schneider 2008). Also, previous studies on proactive personality and employee engagement used different underpinning theories, such as the JD-R model (Omar Mohammed Ali Ababneh, 2021; Young & Steelman, 2017) and the Big Five Model (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Second, this study indicated that social support would mediate the link between proactive personality and employee engagement. The study aligns with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which states that social support will serve as a motivational process through which individual personality influences employee engagement. This study indicates that

proactive nurses in the hospital in implementing positive changes may seek social support towards engagement.

4.2. Practical implication

Practically, it is essential to study the efficacy of Western concepts of employee engagement in a developing nation like Nigeria. According to [Okafor and Chimereze \(2020\)](#), Nigeria and other African public hospitals fail to meet hospitals' expectations owing to the absence of organized support for the employees and the development of organizational outcomes. Therefore, contributions from this study may benefit policy-makers, particularly the HR departments, in making suitable decisions regarding how they could engage the workforce toward achieving the hospitals' goals. Also, by examining proactive personality in relation to employee engagement, this study will assist health practitioners and managers to understand the most proficient method to identify, select, and recruit workers with the right personality traits to help foster an engaging work environment. If human resource management has a basic understanding of the effects of personality attributes on employee engagement, this will prompt a more effective recruitment and selection process, job design, training and development practices. In turn, it helps public hospitals to bring in nurses who will show enthusiasm and personal initiative and create a challenging work environment that promotes engagement.

4.3. Limitations and future research

Limitations of this study include its reliance on self-reported measures, potential common method bias, and the limited generalizability of findings due to the use of a sole industry sample and the small sample size. Future studies should employ multiple sources of data and expand the sample to include different industries and cultures to increase the generalizability of the findings. Second, this study used a cross-sectional research design; it is likely to establish some level of causal relationship from the cross-sectional analysis. In the future, researchers might choose to study the causal correlations between the variables using a method known as longitudinal investigation. Also, this study is quantitative. Future researchers can use qualitative and innovative methods such as Online Photovoice (OPV) ([Armiya'u et al., 2022](#); [Doyumgaç et al., 2021](#)). Online Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (OIPA) and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) ([Dari et al., 2021, 2023](#)) to research the same or similar topics. This will give a deeper understanding of the topic in view.

4.4. Conclusion

This study examines the mediating role of social support on selected trait engagement (autotelic personality and proactive personality) and employee engagement among nurses in public hospitals in Nigeria. During the structural model evaluation, the mediating role of social support on autotelic personality and employee engagement has to be removed to establish the dependent variables and strengthen the model. The result shows that autotelic personality and employee engagement were insignificant, while proactive personality and employee engagement were significant. Also, social support mediates proactive personality and employee engagement. Therefore, to upsurge nurses' engagement, hospitals should always call for a proactive individual who will show personal initiative and create a challenging work environment that promotes engagement. Also, health sectors should provide more social support to help nurses show more inventiveness and bring about vicissitudes.

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Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request. The dataset consists of responses from 260 registered professional nurses collected through a cross-sectional survey conducted in Lagos, Nigeria. The survey was then used to compile the dataset. Interested parties may contact the corresponding author for access to the dataset. However, access will be granted to the researchers for non-commercial purposes only, after taking into account any pertinent ethical, legal, and privacy concerns.

Ethical approval statement

All the authors reviewed and approved the study protocol and research procedures. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the UKM-Graduate School of Business, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia. All participants provided informed consent, and their confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study.

Institutional review board statement

All information will only be used for learning purpose, where the numbers will be reported only in aggregate form/in totality and all facts and information identifying your organisation's name and personnel, will be kept strictly confidential (The Ethics Committee of the UKM-Graduate School of Business, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia).

Informed consent statement

It is to be informed that the paper entitled "Mediating role of social support on selected trait engagement and employee engagement" identified the findings based on the survey questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in this study. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequences. Written consent was obtained from each participant prior to their participation.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Glory Okojie: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **A.S.A. Ferdous Alam:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration. **Halima Begum:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration. **Ida Rosnita Ismail:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Investigation. **Elkhan Richard Sadik-Zada:** Funding acquisition.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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