

## Work Engagement among Employees of Health Based NGOs: Do all its Dimensions Matter for Quality Service Delivery?

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### Abstract

*This paper examined whether all the dimensions of work engagement matter for quality service delivery among the health-based NGOs, using evidence from Uganda. The data was collected through a questionnaire survey of 410 employees of health-based NGOs in Uganda. The study employed a structural equation modelling (SEM) technique using partial least square (PLS) to test the hypotheses. The results indicate that, unlike absorption, vigour and dedication do matter for quality service delivery among the NGOs in Uganda. Therefore, it is likely that the results may not be generalised to other contexts. The results show that in order to enhance quality service delivery among the NGOs, the focus should mainly be put on vigour and dedication of employees. The study provides initial developing country evidence, the dimensions of work engagement that matter for quality service delivery in health-based NGOs.*

**Key words:** NGOs, Vigour, Dedication, Absorption, Work engagement, Quality service delivery

### Introduction

Globally, most organisations whether public, private or non-government organisations (NGOs) focus on service quality as one of their priority objectives (Cabedo *et al.*, 2018). As a result, both developed and developing countries have devoted resources to achieve service quality in the health sector (Hosseinpoor *et al.*, 2015) though indicators of health service delivery have shown deterioration in service quality between 2010 and 2018. The deterioration is evidenced by an increase in service provider absenteeism from 14.3 to 44.3 percent and 19 to 53 percent of drug stock outs and reduction in daily productivity from 17.4 to 5.2 patients (World Health Organisation, 2018). The case has also been manifested in Sub-Saharan African countries such as Uganda where service quality in the health sector continues to be a challenge (Bukonya, 2018). To encounter the situation, the government of Uganda has constructed more health facilities at the county, sub-county and referral levels (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Despite such efforts, less has been achieved due to persistent poor quality service delivery that is estimated at more than 54 percent (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Questions still arise with regard to what matters for quality service delivery among health based-NGOs. To the best of our knowledge there are no scholars testing whether vigour, dedication and absorption as dimensions of work engagement do matter for quality service delivery among health based-NGOs; we wish to provide such evidence in this study.

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The individual health care needs as a result of aging population, change in life expectancy and prevalence of endemic diseases undoubtedly have forced health facilities to innovate strategies to handle such challenges (Georgiadou & Maditinos, 2017). This has helped employees in organisations to change their behavior towards work and improve the level of service provision (Habib *et al.*, 2020). The interactions that are manifested between the supervisors and employees breed a sense of trust among them and stimulate service delivery (Ancarani *et al.*, 2018). Besides, the faith employees have in their managers, the level of commitment and willingness individuals attach to work (Ancarani *et al.*, 2018) and the characters supervisors portray, have all impacted on service delivery. The role of work engagement has been researched and documented in the business context (Fletcher, 2016). Researchers such as Bakker and Demerouti (2008), Al-Tit and Hunitie (2015), Saks (2006), and Deligero and Laguardo (2014) undertook empirical studies on work engagement models, the mediating effect of employee engagement between its antecedents, among others. However, most of these studies focused on work engagement and challenges of performance in public organisations and less attention was paid to the influence of the dimensions of work engagement on quality service delivery among health-based NGOs.

Existent literature is inadequate in explaining the dimensions of work engagement among employees of health-based NGOs especially in a developing country's perspective due to their nature of operation. Kossowska and Laguna (2018) further exemplified that; there is relatively little research on dimensions of work engagement among NGOs in developing countries. For this case, the purpose of this paper was to seek evidence on which dimension of work engagement matter (s) most in quality service delivery among NGOs in developing countries with a specific focus on Uganda. The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 elaborates the literature review. This is followed by Section 3, which provides a detailed methodology of the study. Results of the study are presented in Section 4, followed by discussion of the findings in Section 5 and lastly Section 6 presents conclusions, implications, limitations of the study and areas for further research.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theory**

This paper adopts the social exchange theory advanced by Homans (1958); Blau (1964); and Emerson (1976) as a framework for explanation of work engagement among employees of health-based NGOs. The theory assumes that, employees in an organisation are motivated to attain specific kind of rewards since they forfeit something of value or they incur a given cost (Redmond, 2015). The theory further postulates that, employees will reciprocate and change their attitudes if they are sure that firms are honest and ready to fulfil their demands. The SET is based on three foundational ideas; rules and norms of exchange, resources exchanged and social exchange relationships that emerge (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017). The rules and norms of exchange rotate around the reciprocity principles; the principle states that, if someone gives out something, he/she has to be reciprocated. This means, the actions of one party lead to a response by another (Redmond, 2015). In this perspective, scholars such as Cropanzano *et al.* (2017) have focused on the social relationships that exist between employees and their supervisors in organisations. Organisations develop relationships with employees when they continuously take care of their needs (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1999). This makes employees to believe that, they are valued and trusted by an organisation and reciprocate by changing their mindsets in terms of the vigour, absorption and dedication towards organisational work (Aryee *et al.*, 2002). Reciprocity produces good work

relationships since it allows employees to be committed and engaged to their work (Redmond, 2015).

### **Work Engagement**

Kahn (1990) was among the first scholars to theorise the term work engagement and described employees who are engaged in their work activities as being cognitive, emotional and physically connected to what they do. This conceptualisation emphasises that, engaged employees put effort to work and always associate themselves with it. Employees burst with energy, devote themselves and get immersed in their work activities (Bakker, 2011). Such employees are receptive to new information concerning their tasks, ready to adapt to the dynamic environment and stay focused on organisational goals. This elucidates why organisations need to establish an atmosphere that favours employee engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Such an environment would motivate employees to work hard to achieve their set targets. Engaged employees are characterised by high levels of energy, hard work and happily involved and absorbed in their tasks (Hakanen *et al.*, 2017). Work engagement is composed of vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010).

*Vigour.* This is composed of high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work and the persistence even in the face of difficulties (Bakker, 2017). *vigour* portrays a state of happiness that pushes an individual to put extra effort to achieve a given job target (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2014). When an individual realizes that, there is a discrepancy between the situation at hand and the target goal, individuals reconsider what should be done to deliver the desired service. However, employees feel vigorous and energetic if they possess the right skills and competencies to execute a given work (Shirom, 2003). Bakker and Demerouti (2009) in their study of 175 Dutch women and their partners working in different occupational sectors, found that *vigour* was positively related to both in-role and extra-role service delivery. Leung *et al.* (2011) expounded the results and argued that the desire and willingness to perform a certain task determine service delivery in an organisation. Hence, based on these arguments, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>1</sub>:* Vigour has a positive influence on quality service delivery.

*Dedication.* This has been conceptualised as a sense of strong involvement in an individual's work coupled with enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (Gorgievski *et al.*, 2010). Individuals within an organisation get embedded in the execution of the work; they feel part of the organisation and achieving customer satisfaction is their ultimate goal. They strive for the success of a firm at all costs (Lisbona *et al.*, 2018). Employees' allegiance to work is very important as it instills confidence in the clients of an organisation (Gülbahar, 2017). These employees who are enthusiastic about their jobs feel part of the organisation and find a way to achieve the set objectives through meeting customer demands. In support, Bakker and Bal (2010) established in their study among the starting primary teachers in six different teacher-training colleges in the Netherlands that, dedication and quality service delivery in terms of handling children's desires are related. In addition, Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2009) indicated that the level of dedication among employees of Greek Fast Food Company in responding to customer requests determined the quality of services delivered to clients. Lisbona *et al.* (2018) further expounded that; organisations

need employees who put in extra effort to get a service delivered to customers. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>2</sub>*: Dedication is positively related to quality service delivery.

*Absorption*. This is characterised by being totally immersed and happily engrossed in one's work, to an extent that it is difficult to detach oneself from it and an employee does not mind time in that it can pass without noticing (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Since absorption is part of a positive feeling on the side of an individual (Garcia-Sierra *et al.*, 2015), it calls for proactiveness and initiative to assume roles and commitment to the delivery of high standards of quality services (Bargagliotti, 2011). Schaufeli and Salanova (2008) argued that individuals who are absorbed in their work enjoy what they do, take work as part of them, and associate exhaustion to pleasantness because it is what leads to the desired achievement. This is further evidenced by Sharma and Nambudiri (2020) who revealed that personal characteristics of being highly absorbed with work, energetic, striving for creative accomplishments and perseverance in attaining challenging goals, make employees more engaged and focused to service delivery. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>3</sub>*: Absorption is positively related to quality service delivery.

### **The Research Methodology**

The study adopted an explanatory design to establish a cause effect relationship between the study variables (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015) as hypothesised from the literature review. The study population of 85,000 employees from NGOs in the central region of Uganda was composed of executive directors, project managers and other employees who are knowledgeable in the services offered by NGOs. Using the Yamane (1973) formula of sample size determination,  $n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$ , the required sample size of this study was 398 employees of NGOs. However, to hedge for non-response risk, 460 questionnaires were given out Sax *et al.* (2003) and of which 410 questionnaires were returned and used for data analysis. This accounted for a response rate of 89 percent. To obtain responses from employees in health-based NGOs, the researcher contacted NGO forum lists at the ministry of Internal Affairs and district leaders. These lists helped the researcher to reach all NGOs, which are health-based since the NGO forum and district leaders knew their locations and so their current contacts. Based on such NGO lists, employees from those organisations were selected using a simple random sampling technique.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data from respondents were arranged according to serial numbers, compiled, and edited before being entered into the SPSS v.23 and SmartPLS software for analysis. Descriptive statistics were generated to establish the characteristics of the respondents who participated in this study. Thereafter, partial least squares–structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) method was used for evaluating the measurement model and the structural model (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). At the end, the PLS model estimation and the bootstrapping procedure were run to establish the strength and the significance of the relationships (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

**Findings of the Study**

**Descriptive statistics.** The descriptive statistics of the variables presented in Table 1 show the level of perception on both dependent and independent variables. The average score for the quality of service delivery is 1.87 out of a maximum of 5. That suggests that on average, the level of quality service delivery among health-based NGOs is low. In addition, the maximum value of all responses is 2.04, confirming the low quality of service delivery. For dedication (independent variable), the results indicate a mean score of 1.26, which is very close to the median of 1.27 on a scale of 1 – 5 points suggesting that close to 50 percent of the respondents recognised that there is quality service delivery amongst their NGOs. Results in Table 1 also signify that, the observed mean values were highly represented since the standard deviation values are smaller compared to the mean values (Field, 2009).

**Table 1:** Summary of Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	St. Dev.	Median
Vigour	410	0.78	1.40	1.12	0.167	1.07
Dedication	410	0.85	1.40	1.26	0.105	1.27
Absorption	410	0.85	1.40	1.13	0.150	1.07
Quality service delivery	410	1.60	2.04	1.87	0.104	1.86

**Reliability and Validity (Measurement Model Evaluation)**

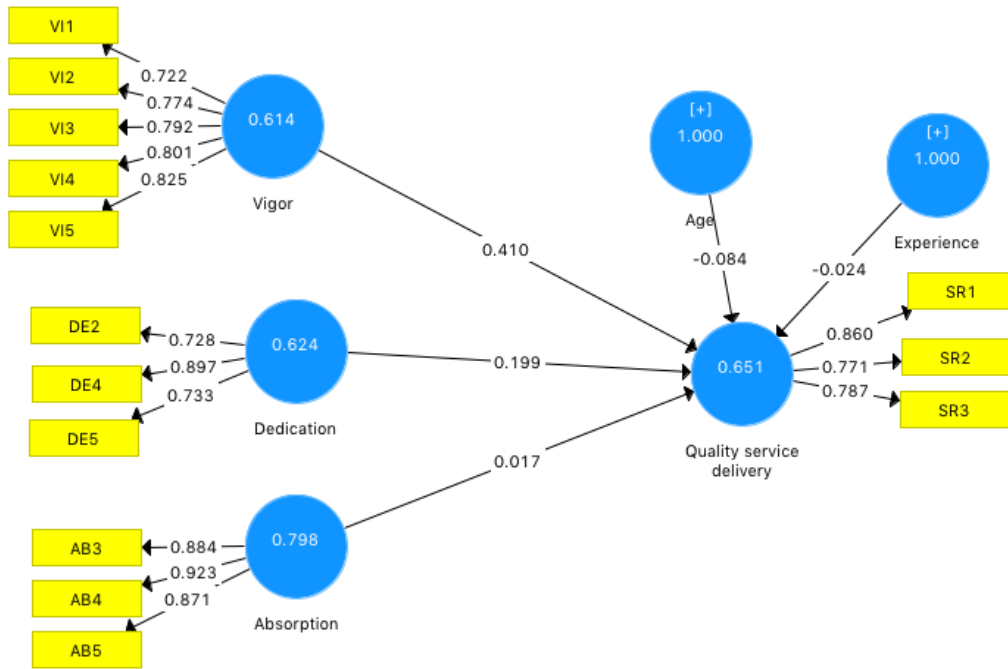
To test the reliability and validity of the measures, we ran a measurement model as recommended when using the partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) technique. A measurement model ran in PLS-SEM is equivalent to performing a confirmatory factor analysis (Richter *et al.*, 2016).

To establish the reliability of our measurement scales, we computed the composite reliability (CR) and all the construct values were above 0.7 (vigour = 0.888, dedication = 0.831, absorption = 0.922, quality service delivery = 0.848) as seen in Table 2, showing a sufficient degree of internal consistency among the measurement scales (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). While using PLS path models to ascertain the reliability of the scales, composite reliability is ideal as compared to Cronbach’s alpha coefficients since they tend to underestimate the internal consistency of the latent variables in the PLS path models (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). In addition, we tested for convergent validity to assess the extent to which the measures of the same constructs were correlated. This was done using average variance extracted (AVE) values that should be above the threshold value of 0.50 (Ali *et al.*, 2018). The results are demonstrated in Table 2 and in Figure 1.

**Table 2.** Summary of the measurement model

Construct	Items	Item loading (>0.5)	CR (>0.7)	AVE (>0.5)
vigour	VI1	0.722	0.888	0.614
	VI2	0.774		
	VI3	0.792		
	VI4	0.801		
	VI5	0.825		
Dedication	DE2	0.728	0.831	0.624
	DE4	0.897		
	DE5	0.733		

Absorption	AB3	0.884	0.922	0.798
	AB4	0.923		
	AB5	0.871		
Quality service delivery	SR1	0.860	0.848	0.651
	SR2	0.771		
	SR3	0.787		



**Figure 1.** The measurement model for the study variables

Thereafter we tested for discriminant validity to ascertain whether the study constructs were conceptually different from each other. The Fornell-Larcker criterion and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations approaches were used (Voorhees *et al.*, 2016). Existent research suggests that acceptable HTMT values can be lower than 0.85 or 0.9 (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). The results in Table 3 manifest that our model met the HTMT discriminant validity criteria since all the correlation values satisfied the recommended threshold ( $HTMT \leq 0.85$ ), showing that the variables were distinctively different from each other. Furthermore, we also applied Fornell Larcker criterion to assess discriminant validity of the measurement model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 4 shows that the square root of the AVE of each latent variable is higher than its correlation with all other variables, thus discriminant validity is verified.

Since a questionnaire was used to solicit for responses from the respondents, we controlled for the common method bias that always affects survey-based studies. This was done following the guidelines of (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). In this respect, we selected at least five respondents from each NGO to prevent single-respondent bias; we established that the independent and dependent variables are not similar content-wise and we considered mostly employees in management

positions of organisations since we presumed that they are knowledgeable about the services provided by health-based NGOs.

**Table 3:** Discriminant validity (HTMT)

Construct	Absorption	Dedication	Quality service delivery	vigour
Absorption				
Dedication	0.449			
Quality service delivery	0.558	0.416		
vigour	0.823	0.345	0.609	

**Table 4:** Discriminant validity (Fornell- Larcker)

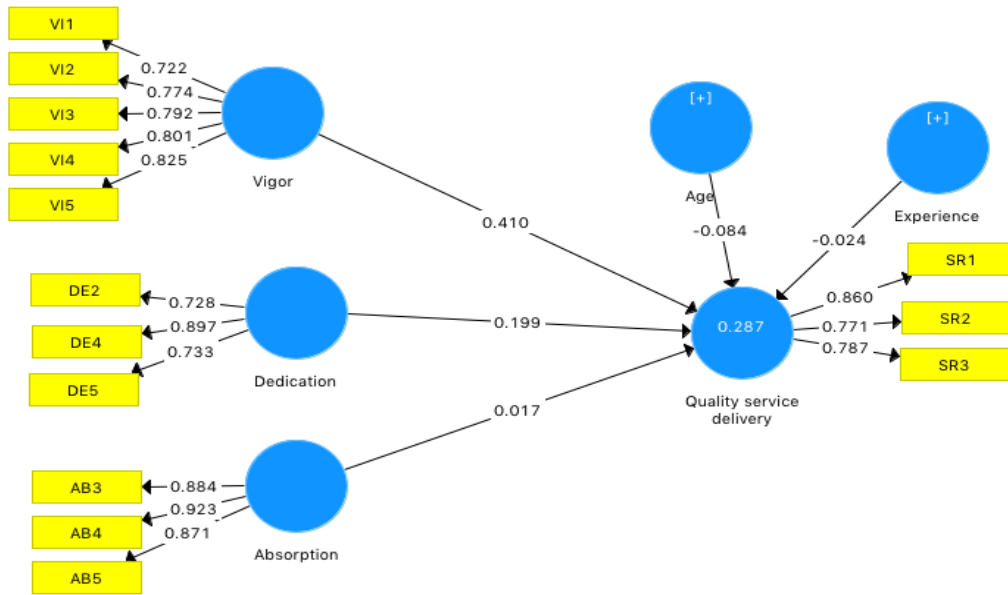
Construct	Absorption	Dedication	Quality service delivery	vigour
Absorption	0.893			
Dedication	0.375	0.790		
Quality service delivery	0.447	0.325	0.807	
vigour	0.848	0.276	0.488	0.784

**Hypothesis testing results (structural model estimation):** The PLS-SEM technique is adopted for testing the stated hypotheses. The structural model results in Table 5 indicate the strength and direction of the relationships. We went ahead to establish the predictive potential of exogenous variables on the endogenous variables as indicated in Figure 2.

**Table 5:** Summary of the structural model

Relationships	Std. Beta	t-values	p-values	Decision	R <sup>2</sup>
H <sub>1</sub> VI>>QSD	0.077	5.311	0.000	Supported	28.7
H <sub>2</sub> DE>>QSD	0.047	4.262	0.000	Supported	
H <sub>3</sub> AB>>QSD	0.078	0.221	0.825	Not supported	
Control variables					
Age	0.057	1.485	0.138		
Experience	0.054	0.448	0.654		

**Note(s):**\*\*\*p< 0.001



**Figure 2.** Partial least squares indicating the predictive potential of independent variables on dependent variables.

**Note(s):**  $R^2 = 28.7$

Table 5 and Figure 2 indicate the results extracted using the SmartPLS statistical package. The results indicate that vigour is related to quality service delivery ( $\beta = 0.077, t = 5.311, p < 0.05$ ). This means that a positive change in vigour leads to a positive change in quality service delivery among NGOs. Therefore, the researchers have failed to reject Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2, which states that dedication, is positively and significantly related to work engagement is supported ( $\beta = 0.047, t = 4.262, p < 0.05$ ). This signifies that a positive change in the dedication level of employees among NGOs leads to a positive change in quality service delivery among health-based NGOs. Hypothesis 3 is rejected ( $\beta = 0.078, t = 0.221, p > 0.05$ ) and this implies that, a positive change in absorption among employees of NGOs does not lead to a positive change in quality service delivery.

In regard to control variables, the results indicate that age ( $\beta = 0.057, t = 1.485, p > 0.05$ ) and experience ( $\beta = 0.054, t = 0.448, p > 0.05$ ) do not significantly influence quality service delivery among NGOs an indication that our model is not affected by confounding factors. In terms of age, this finding indicates that the age of an employee in an NGO is negligible in quality service delivery. For employee experience, the results indicate that it has no significant influence on quality service delivery. The findings show that the work experience accumulated by an employee is irrelevant to quality service delivery among NGOs. Therefore, any employee in an organisation is important notwithstanding the individual's work experience. The study established that the independent variables (vigour, dedication and absorption) predict about 28.7 percent of variance



in NGO's quality service delivery ( $R^2 = 0.287$ ) as indicated in Figure 2 and Table 5. This means that the rest of the variance can be explained by other factors that are not part of this study.

## Discussion

Contrary to previous studies that conceptualised work engagement as one whole variable influencing service delivery (Van Bogaert *et al.*, 2012; Sharma & Nambudiri, 2020; Salanova *et al.*, 2011), the present study sought to isolate the importance of each dimension of work engagement (vigour, dedication and absorption) in quality service delivery among NGOs. The results established a positive and significant relationship between vigour and quality service delivery hence providing evidence to support  $H_1$ . This suggests that an increase in the level of vigour among workers results in an increase in the level of quality service delivery among health-based NGOs in Uganda. In the context of this study, this finding indicates that, health-based NGOs that strive to initiate and develop a significant element in an individual's job that is comprised of cognitive liveliness; physical strength and emotional energy cultivate vigour among employees to deliver quality services to beneficiaries. The results of the study are confirmed by Bakker and Demerouti (2009) where in their study, vigour was positively related to both in-role and extra-role service delivery. Shirom (2003) further expounded that individuals with certain characteristics develop the pleasure and energy to act in a positive manner. This is consistent with Leung *et al.* (2011) who established that quality service delivery among Chinese hotels is driven by the courage and vigour supervisors developed among their subordinates to execute their tasks appropriately.

Furthermore, the results revealed a positive and significant relationship between dedication and quality service delivery thus failing to reject  $H_2$ . This implies that a positive change in employee dedication leads to an improvement in quality service delivery among NGOs. This suggests that, when supervisors improve the conditions of work in an organisation, employees will be motivated to get engrossed in their work and thus improve service delivery. The findings of the study concur with Bakker and Bal (2010) who found a positive and significant relationship between dedication and service quality delivered by teachers in terms of handling children desires and other clients. The results also confirm those of Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2009) who asserted that the level of employee devotion to work determines the financial returns of an organisation which come as a result of service quality.

Surprisingly, the effect of absorption on quality service delivery was not supported. This means that an increase in the level of absorption among employees with their work does not improve quality service delivery in NGOs. The findings imply that even though supervisors in NGOs establish an appropriate and conducive work environment that can stimulate employee commitment to work, such does not affect quality service delivery. There are instances where employees pretend to be absorbed with their work but when in the actual sense they aim at passing time. This does not mean that absorption is not important in organisations but for the case of this study, it does not affect quality service delivery as it may do in other organisations. The results of the study contradict those of Schaufeli and Salanova (2008) who argued that, individuals who are absorbed with their work enjoy what they do, take work as part of them and associate exhaustion to pleasantness because it is what leads to the desired quality service achievement. However, the findings of the study are consistent with Halbesleben *et al.* (2009) who argued that through investment in extra-role behaviors, employees who are engaged to their organisations may be at a higher risk of antagonising their family life and settings even though their engagement levels may

be fruitful to the organisation in a short period of time but negatively affect an individual's family life. This is further expounded by Bakker *et al.* (2011) who contend that, absorption inflicts damage on the health of individuals and even employees may become so much absorbed with work and forget to rest, which may impact negatively on service delivery in the following days.

### **Conclusion and Implication**

According to the present study findings, the contributions of the dimensions of work engagement such as vigour, dedication and absorption, which are the focus of this study, are now indicated. The structural model results of vigour and dedication provide the initial confirmation of the association between the independent and dependent variables. The findings also suggest that vigour and dedication matter most as drivers of quality service delivery unlike absorption as stipulated in Table 5 and Figure 2. The results of the study signify that independent variables (vigour, dedication and absorption) predict only 28.7 percent of variance in NGO's quality service delivery ( $R^2 = 0.287$ ) which means that the rest of the variance can be explained by other factors beyond this study.

This paper provides initial empirical evidence that dimensions of work engagement matter for quality service delivery among health-based NGOs from a developing country perspective such as Uganda. We explored the role played by the three dimensions of work engagement in quality service delivery and methodologically we segregate the contribution played by each individual dimension. Our results imply that supervisors in NGOs need to stimulate and develop vigour and dedication levels among employees if they are to achieve high quality service delivery. This can be done through establishing a favourable work environment as well as taking care of employee needs and valuing their presence in the organisation. Our study is limited in the direction we took of only focusing on quality service delivery among health-based NGOs in Uganda and it is highly possible that the results may not be generalised to other groups in different settings. This calls for further studies on quality service delivery among other NGOs that offer other development and social services other than health.

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