

# **Decent work and work fulfilment: The mediating role of work engagement and the moderating role of psychological ownership**

Chantal Olckers<sup>1</sup> and Eileen Koekemoer<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Human Resource Management, Economic and Management Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of Human Resource Management, Economic and Management Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa

## **Corresponding author(s):**

Eileen Koekemoer, Department of Human Resource Management, Economic and Management Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa. Email: eileen.koekemoer@up.ac.za

## **Abstract**

This study explores the well-being (engagement) and work fulfilment of 628 blue-collar workers as outcomes of decent work, based on the Psychology of Working Theory and its target group. It takes a positive preventative approach and demonstrates the motivational role of work engagement and psychological ownership in contributing to the work fulfilment of blue-collar workers experiencing decent work. Data was collected from a South African-owned trailer manufacturing company. The results show a positive relationship between decent work and work fulfilment, with work engagement mediating this relationship. Additionally, psychological ownership positively moderates the relationship between decent work and work engagement. This study adds insights into the underlying mechanism (work engagement) that elucidates how decent work relates to work fulfilment. This study sheds light on how decent work contributes to work fulfilment through work engagement. Furthermore, suggesting that this relationship is stronger for blue-collar workers with higher levels of psychological ownership.

## **Keywords**

Blue-collar workers, manual workers, psychology of working theory, well-being, job satisfaction

## **Introduction**

The importance of work in the health and well-being of all individuals is evident in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations (UN) (United Nations [UN], 2015). The World Health Organization (WHO) also prioritises improving working conditions for all as part of its primary function. Achieving decent work and well-being (as outlined in SDG3 and SDG8) is crucial for businesses' sustainability and the livelihoods of individuals. SDG3 and SDG8 aim to promote well-being, healthy lives, full and productive employment, and decent work for all (UN, 2015, p.18, 21). However, creating healthier societies and promoting decent work (or healthy organisations) remains a significant challenge in today's labour markets, where employees face job insecurity, ongoing turbulence, and economic

instability (Di Fabio, 2017a). Hence, the increased scholarly interest in enhancing resources and building workers' strengths as a positive preventative approach (Di Fabio, 2017a; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016), toward the health of employees and the sustainability of organizations (i.e., positive organizational health psychology). This approach underscores the need for healthy organisations that prioritise promoting healthy business environments through the well-being of their workers rather than solely focusing on profits (Di Fabio, 2017b). Furthermore, scholars are advocating for decent lives, which emphasize the importance of individuals having a sense of meaning in their lives at work and also in their life in general. According to Kenny and Di Fabio (2023), it is through strength-based primary prevention approaches that healthy communities, healthy organizations and healthier societies are build to enhance access to decent work and decent lives for all.

In vocational psychology and from a positive psychological perspective, it has been shown that having access to work is essential for promoting psychological health (Blustein, 2008; Blustein et al., 2021). According to the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) by Blustein et al. (2016), having a job is a fundamental human right that significantly impacts workers' mental health and well-being. The theory suggests that decent work, which addresses the basic needs of survival, connection, and self-determination, can enhance all workers' psychological health and well-being (Blustein, 2006, 2013). Deranty and MacMillan (2012) also emphasise the psychological benefits of finding satisfaction, autonomy, and competence in one's work. The PWT highlights the significance of decent work in understanding individuals' work experiences and its impact on their overall well-being and fulfilment (Duffy et al., 2016, 2019). Many experts believe that attaining decent work is crucial for promoting inclusive and sustainable growth and improving the well-being of employees and societies (Blustein, 2017; Blustein et al., 2020; Duffy et al., 2016; UN, 2015). Specifically, the theory focuses on how work plays a vital role in the lives of marginalised individuals and those facing economic challenges, such as semi-skilled or blue-collar workers. (Blustein, 2006).

Moreover, scholars recently emphasised how the psychology of sustainability aligns with the PWT in various ways (Di Fabio et al., 2023). This alignment paves the way for sustainable efforts aimed at promoting the well-being of workers. Di Fabio (2017a) has proposed the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development as a new approach to promoting well-being in organisations. In this approach, meaningfulness is considered the intrinsic motivational energy that fosters genuine sustainability for employees, performance, development, and choices. Shifting from the motivational paradigm to a meaning paradigm (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016) is essential in understanding how individuals can establish meaningful lives and work experiences (Di Fabio, 2017a). Similarly, Blustein et al. (2023) postulates that decent work provides the basic conditions for creating opportunities to experience meaningfulness in one's work. Therefore, decent work allows for the satisfaction of basic needs, setting the stage for work to be experienced as meaningful. According to the PWT, attaining decent work directly affects workers' work fulfilment and well-being through the satisfaction of needs such as survival, social contribution, and self-determination.

Recent studies have confirmed that decent work is positively related to work fulfilment and mental well-being among samples in various countries (Duffy et al., 2020). Several studies have shown that providing employees with favourable work conditions or decent work increases work engagement. This means that individuals are more likely to be engaged in their

work (Chada et al., 2022; Ferraro et al., 2020; McIlveen et al., 2021). This aligns with Schaufeli et al.'s (2019) view that work engagement is achieved when workers enjoy their work and feel challenged or enthusiastic despite job pressures or repetitive tasks. Ilies et al. (2017) suggested that work engagement is a motivational factor that makes employees' jobs more meaningful, generating energy and increasing feelings of pride and meaningfulness. In terms of work fulfilment, several scholars have found that decent work predicts meaningful work (Allan et al., 2020) and job satisfaction (Kim et al., 2022; McIlveen et al., 2021).

In addition to the main outcomes of work fulfilment (e.g., job satisfaction) and well-being, as indicated in the PWT, some researchers also propose that meeting one's needs through decent work contributes to developing one's identity (Luyckx et al., 2009). In this context, how individuals perceive their identity has been closely associated with psychological ownership (Guarana & Avolio, 2022). Psychological ownership refers to a feeling of belongingness towards a specific ownership item or target of ownership (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004). According to Tsai (2021), employees who experience psychological ownership have a heightened sense of responsibility towards their work because they find their jobs meaningful and significant. Therefore, against the framework of the PWT, some studies have examined the role of psychological ownership in their research on decent work (El-Gazar et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2020).

Against this backdrop, our study aims to increase our understanding of the relationship between decent work, work fulfillment, and well-being among marginalized or economically constrained employees, such as semi-skilled or blue-collar workers. We will use a positive preventative approach, focusing on enhancing resources and building strengths, to show how achieving decent work leads to work fulfillment (job satisfaction) through work engagement. Additionally, we will explore the moderating role of psychological ownership in the relationship between decent work and engagement.

## ***Literature***

### *Decent work in the South African context*

Since the inception of the PWT (Blustein, 2006) and the Decent Work Survey (DWS) by Duffy et al. (2017), research on decent work has increased significantly, particularly from an individual well-being perspective (Duffy et al., 2020). Decent work from a vocational viewpoint includes safe working conditions, leisure time, support for social and family values, fair compensation, and access to healthcare (Duffy et al., 2017). These factors align with the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Decent Work Agenda, which aims to promote sustainable growth and access to work for all individuals (International Labour Office, 2017). In essence, the PWT (by implication decent work as the central variable of the PWT) highlights the importance of employee's psychological experiences of work, especially for those from lower economic backgrounds or marginalised groups. Furthermore, the PWT, underscores how access to work is largely restricted due to some form of economic constraints or marginalization, as is the case in many developing countries (Herr, 2008). As such, South Africa (SA) provides an extreme example of marginalization, as it is engrained in its history, with apartheid directly restricting the access to opportunities for non-white and female citizens (labelled as previously disadvantaged groups in SA). In this sense, the country's

historical marginalization and high inequality, dating back to the apartheid era, have led to significant challenges in accessing opportunities, education, and decent work (Statistics SA, 2024). Consequently, a large part of the SA population is considered “unskilled or semi-skilled” and employed in the blue-collar work group (Department of Employment and Labour, 2024; Statistics SA, 2018), with 49.2% of its population living in poverty (Statistics SA, 2015). In this sense, economic or country level indicators of decent work, paints a bleak picture of South Africa, as it has the world's highest Gini index for income distribution (63%), reflecting high inequality (Dyvik, 2024), with the second-highest unemployment rate in Africa (32.9%; Stats SA, 2024). Subsequently, SA workers (specifically blue-collar workers) experience the challenge of crippling poverty and compromised efforts for job creation and the promotion of productive employment and decent work (Kekana et al., 2023; Koekemoer & Masenge, 2024).

### *Decent work and work fulfillment*

One significant outcome postulated in the PWT is work fulfilment. In general, studies have shown that individuals with decent work are more likely to be satisfied with their job or overall life due to their basic needs being met (Duffy et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2022). Job satisfaction has been considered an indicator of work fulfilment, and refers to employees’ affective reactions toward their job (Duffy et al., 2016). By itself, job satisfaction is considered a psychological understanding of work in people's lives (Judge et al., 2017). Subsequently, several studies have illustrated that employees gain a sense of job satisfaction as a result of having favorable work conditions or experiencing decent work (Kim & Kim, 2022; Mcllveen et al., 2021; Wan & Duffy, 2022).

Against the backdrop of the PWT, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 1:** Decent work will be positively related to work fulfilment

### *Decent work, work engagement and work fulfillment*

Decent work plays a vital role in enhancing individuals’ well-being and work fulfilment through the satisfaction of the basic needs of survival, self-determination and social connection (Kim et al., 2022). As such, decent work is considered essential in promoting work motivation and contributing to engagement and job satisfaction (Ferraro et al., 2020; Mcllveen et al., 2021). From the Job-Demands-Resources perspective, it is well known that resources found in one’s job or how one perceives the qualities of one’s work influence work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). As such, decent work has been positively related to work engagement (Chada et al., 2022; Ferraro et al., 2020; Mcllveen et al., 2021). Work engagement is rooted in the notion that individuals can feel high levels of vigour, dedication and absorption at work (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). According to Bakker and Demerouti (2017), work engagement combines high work pleasure (dedication) with high activation (vigour and absorption) and, as a result, can be regarded as an alternative outcome of decent work, as opposed to the typical, more passive well-being outcome of job satisfaction. Besides, ample research has already shown positive relationships between work engagement and job satisfaction (Crawford et al., 2010). Considering the self-determination theory (a component reflected in the PWT), employees who have access to decent work are more likely to be

engaged in their work, as they are personally invested in their work tasks since their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are being met (Deci & Ryan, 2014), which will in turn lead to feelings of job satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2016). In this regard, access to decent work provides opportunities for individuals to meet their psychological needs (through the experience of work engagement), which stimulates and facilitates a positive motivational process resulting in work fulfilment. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 2:** Work Engagement will mediate the relationship between Decent Work and work fulfilment

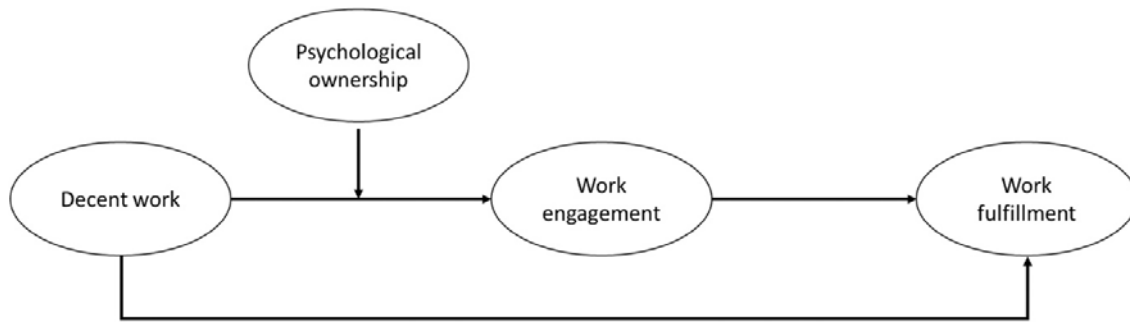
*Psychological ownership as moderator*

The psychological ownership theory suggests that an employee's connection to an organisation can be stronger when they identify with it (Pierce et al., 2001). This identification is based on feelings of possessing parts of the organisation, such as tasks, jobs, and working circumstances. Social identity theory indicates that workers who feel part of a larger whole, such as an organisation, or who can identify with a decent job experience a greater sense of belonging, pride and self-esteem. The more workers identify with an organisation or their job, based on the degree of psychological ownership, the more they feel that they have valuable possessions, which leads to positive behaviours (e.g., being more engaged) (Chai et al., 2020) and positive emotions, i.e., job satisfaction (Sharif et al., 2021). Research has shown that psychological ownership moderates the relationship between work-related factors such as organisational support and job satisfaction (Sharif et al., 2021) and work engagement. This, along with the literature confirming a positive relationship between decent work and engagement (Chada et al., 2022; McIlveen et al., 2021), suggests that the link between decent work and work engagement is expected to be stronger for those employees with high levels of psychological ownership.

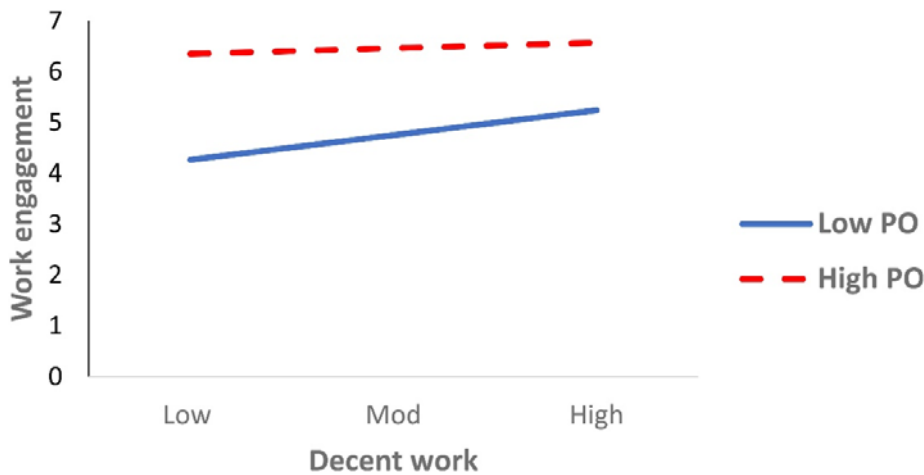
Additionally, the indirect relationship between decent work and work fulfilment, mediated by work engagement, would be stronger for those employees with high levels of psychological ownership. Therefore, employees who feel psychological ownership of their organisation due to their decent work may exhibit higher levels of work engagement, ultimately affecting their feelings of fulfilment. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 3:** Psychological ownership can positively moderate the relationship between decent work and work engagement such that the relationship is stronger when psychological ownership is higher

Our conceptual research model is displayed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual research model.



**Figure 2.** Moderating effect of psychological ownership on the relationship between decent work and work engagement.

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

The study sample was taken from a South African-owned trailer manufacturing company that employed manual workers known as blue-collar workers (unskilled or semi-skilled employees performing manual tasks such as picking, painting, welding, driving, cleaning, and general work). Data was collected from 628 manual workers out of 800 Blue-collar workers (BCWs) through a cross-sectional survey conducted on the company's premises using both hard copy and online surveys via Qualtrics software. Before administering the questionnaires, the participants and the organisation provided informed consent for the study. The workers were informed that their participation was voluntary and anonymous, and that their responses would be kept confidential. The results of the sample size calculator (<https://www.calculator.net/sample-size-calculator.html>) show that our sample of 628 manual workers from the population of 800 BCWs employed is sufficient for the analysis. A sample size of 260 was needed for a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error.

The study sample comprised of 88% Black, 10% White, 1.4% Coloured, and 0.2% Asian employees. The majority of the sample (94%) were males. Half of the sample (52%) were aged between 18 and 35, and the other half (49%) were older than 36. The majority of the sample

(86%) were African home language speakers, with 22,6% Sepedi, 17,7% Sesotho, 17,4% isiTsonga, 7,8% isiZulu, 6,2% isiNdebele, 5,3% Sesotho, 4,9% Tshivenda and 2,5% isiXhosa speakers. Only 2.2% spoke English or Afrikaans (11%). There are 11 official language groups in South Africa, and it was not possible to translate the various questionnaires. To participate in the study, participants had to be able to read, write and understand English, as this was the official business language spoken. The researchers were present during data collection and could assist those employees who had difficulty understanding some of the wording used in the questionnaires. Over half of the sample (61%) had obtained a Grade 12 qualification, 13% had a Grade 11, and the lowest qualification obtained was Grade 10 (9,4%). A small percentage of the sample (17%) held post-school qualifications, including a diploma, a 3-year degree, or certificates. Most of the sample (70%) were employed as permanent employees, with 12% having a fixed-term contract, and only 12.7% were temporary workers. More than half of the sample (57%) had between 3 and 10 years of work experience, with 20% less than two years and 10% more than 11 years of tenure.

## ***Measures***

### *Decent work*

The 15-item Decent Work Scale (DWS) developed by Duffy et al. (2017) assessed decent work. This scale comprises five dimensions measured by three items each: adequate compensation (“I am rewarded adequately for my work”), access to healthcare (“I get good healthcare benefits from my job”), safe working conditions (“I feel emotionally safe interacting with people at work”); free time and rest (“I have free time during the work week”), and organisational values that complement familial and social values (“My organisation’s values align with my family values). Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Recently, Koekemoer and Masenge (2024) reported a general omega score of 0.83 for the five-factor bi-factor DWS on a South African sample.

### *Work fulfilment*

Similar to the study conducted by Kim et al. (2022), we utilised a job satisfaction scale to assess work fulfilment. Hellgren et al.'s (1997) four-item Job Satisfaction Questionnaire measured workers’ overall satisfaction with their current jobs. Responses were captured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from disagree (1) to agree (5). An example item includes “I enjoy being at my job.” De Klerk et al. (2015) reported an acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ) for the JSQ in the South African context.

### *Work engagement*

The three-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-3) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2019) measured work engagement. An example item includes: “I am enthusiastic about my job”. Schaufeli et al. (2019) reported Cronbach's alpha above 0.70 for the scale across five national samples. Participants rated the items using a seven-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Koekemoer et al. (2021) reported a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.82 for the UWES-3 on a South African sample.

### *Psychological ownership*

Psychological ownership was measured by the unidimensional six-item scale from Van Dyne and Pierce (2004), who reported acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ) for the scale. Items were scored using a seven-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. An example item is: "I feel a very high degree of personal ownership for the work that I do." The composite reliability reported for this scale used on a South African sample, was 0.91 (Olckers et al., 2020).

### *Statistical analysis*

The data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 28 and Mplus version 8.7. Since self-report measures were used, we first checked for common method variance (CMV) using Harman's single-factor technique and a single latent factor approach (Tehseen et al., 2017). Next, we employed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test various measurement models to determine the factor structure of the DWS using the Maximum Likelihood Robust (MLR) estimator. To assess model fit, we considered several model fit indices with suggested cut-off criteria: the comparative fit index (CFI;  $\geq 0.90$ ), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI;  $\geq 0.90$ ), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA;  $\leq 0.08$ ), and standardised root mean square residual (SRMR;  $\leq 0.08$ ; Kline, 2016). Furthermore, we examined the measurement quality of the items (standardised factor loadings  $> 0.40$ ; McNeish et al., 2018). The reliability of the scales was assessed using both Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega values ( $> 0.70$ ; Flora, 2020). We used the regression method in Mplus to obtain a single-factor score for each scale. Factor scores were then used to study the distribution characteristics of the data. We reported the following descriptive statistics: skewness and kurtosis. Univariate and multivariate normality were tested for skewness and kurtosis and were evaluated according to the  $+2/-2$  range (Kim, 2013). Factor inter-score correlations were calculated and categorised as small (0.10), medium (0.30), or large (0.50) effects (Ferguson, 2009). To establish mediation, we employed bias-corrected bootstrapping with 1000 sample iterations to determine the significance of the standardised indirect effect ( $p < 0.05$ ). Moderation was tested by examining the interaction term (psychological ownership  $\times$  decent work) for its significance in relation to the dependent variable (i.e., work engagement).

### **Results**

In order to address the issue of CMV in our model, we first used Harman's single-factor technique. Then, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using a single-factor indicator. We loaded all the items of our variables and restricted them to a single factor using principal component factor analysis with no rotation. The findings indicated that the variance of the first principal component was 34.66%, which is less than the critical value of 50% (Tehseen et al., 2017). When all the items were loaded onto one factor using a CFA approach, we obtained a poor model fit: ( $\chi^2 = 3111.02$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ;  $df = 350$ ; CFI = 0.61; TLI = 0.58; RMSEA = 0.11 [0.11–0.12] SRMR = 0.10). In conclusion, this study did not present significant CMV.

Using a CFA approach, we employed a competing measurement modelling strategy to determine the factor structure of the multi-dimensional DWS on our data. These model-fit results are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Fit statistics per measurement model.

| Variable                           | Model           |  | Model fit indices |           |             |             |             |                    |             | Factor loadings |      |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|--|-------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|-----------------|------|
|                                    |                 |  | $\chi^2$          | df        | CFI         | TLI         | RMSEA       | 90% CI             | SRMR        | Min             | Max  |
| Decent work                        | Model 1         | Unidimensional                                   | 1329.88*          | 90        | 0.53        | 0.45        | 0.15*       | 0.14 ; 0.16        | 0.11        |                 |      |
|                                    | Model 2a        | Correlational model – five factors               | 360.08*           | 80        | 0.89        | 0.86        | 0.08        | 0.07 ; 0.08        | 0.11        |                 |      |
|                                    | Model 2b        | Correlational model – five factors + MF          | 580.89*           | 82        | 0.81        | 0.76        | 0.10*       | 0.09 ; 0.11        | 0.15        |                 |      |
|                                    | Model 2c        | Correlational model – four factors               | 125.058           | 48        | 0.96        | 0.95        | 0.05        | 0.04 ; 0.06        | 0.07        |                 |      |
|                                    | <b>Model 2d</b> | <b>Correlational model – 3 factors</b>           | <b>36.62</b>      | <b>24</b> | <b>0.99</b> | <b>0.99</b> | <b>0.03</b> | <b>0.00 ; 0.05</b> | <b>0.02</b> |                 |      |
|                                    | Model 3a        | Second-order model four-factor structure         | 254.78*           | 50        | 0.91        | 0.88        | 0.08*       | 0.07 ; 0.09        | 0.11        |                 |      |
|                                    | <b>Model 3b</b> | <b>Second-order model three-factor structure</b> | <b>36.62</b>      | <b>24</b> | <b>0.99</b> | <b>0.99</b> | <b>0.03</b> | <b>0.00 ; 0.05</b> | <b>0.02</b> |                 |      |
|                                    | <b>Model 4</b>  | <b>Bifactor – three factors</b>                  | <b>23.90*</b>     | <b>18</b> | <b>0.99</b> | <b>0.99</b> | <b>0.02</b> | <b>0.00 ; 0.05</b> | <b>0.01</b> |                 |      |
| Work-fulfilment (Job satisfaction) |                 |  | 9.30              | 2         | 0.99        | 0.96        | 0.08        | 0.03 ; 0.13        | 0.02        | 0.80            | 0.86 |
| Work engagement                    |                 |  | 0.00              | 0         | 1.00        | 1.00        | 0.00        | 0.00 ; 0.00        | 0.00        | 0.70            | 0.81 |
| Psychological ownership            |                 |  | 36.86*            | 9         | 0.97        | 0.96        | 0.07        | 0.05 ; 0.10        | 0.02        | 0.78            | 0.90 |

Note:  $\chi^2$  = chi-square statistic; df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CI = confidence intervals; SRMR = standardised root mean square residual; MF = Method factor. \* $p < 0.001$ .

Model 1: At the outset, we tested a unidimensional DWS model in which all 15 items were loaded onto a single factor. However, this model not only demonstrated poor fit but also revealed three items to be problematic (Q7, Q8, and Q10) with non-significant factor loadings (>0.05).

Model 2: For Model 2, we initially tested Model 2a, which included the five factors related to decent work: adequate compensation, access to healthcare, safe working conditions, free time and rest, and organisational values that complement familial and social values. However, Model 2a did not fit well, and Q9 showed a non-significant factor loading ( $>0.05$ ). According to Cho and Hong (2013), negatively phrased items may share a common (i.e., negative) method and tend to cluster together, regardless of their sub-factors. Consequently, in Model 2b, we included a method factor for the negatively phrased items (Q7, Q8, Q10, and Q11), but the fit was unsatisfactory. We then revised model 2a into model 2c and removed Q9 (due to its non-significant loading) to improve model fit. Additionally, Q7 and Q8 were deleted because according to Wang and Wang (2020) at least three items are needed per factor. This resulted in the compensation subfactor being excluded (measuring only four factors). Although model 2c displayed an acceptable model fit and all items displayed significant factor loadings ( $>0.50$ ), Q12 displayed a very low factor loading ( $\lambda = 0.25$ ). McNeish et al. (2018) suggested factor loadings  $>0.40$  be removed, consequently, Q12 was deleted. As a result, the remaining two items (Q10 and Q11) of the free time and rest dimension were also deleted, as suggested by Wang and Wang (2020). This resulted in model 2d, a three-factor correlational model which displayed a good fit with significant factor loadings ranging between 0.65 and 0.91.

Model 3: We tested a second-order DWS factor model. In this model, the items were regressed onto the respective subscales, and the five subscales were loaded onto a second-order decent work factor. However, the model failed to converge because of an issue with Q11 (from the free item and rest dimension), which exhibited a negative residual variance known as a Heywood case (Farooq, 2022). Consequently, we removed the remaining items, Q9 and Q10, from this dimension (Wang & Wang, 2020). The four-factor second-order model (Model 3a) did not show an acceptable fit, and all the items (Q7, Q8, and Q9) from the compensation subdimension were non-significant. Therefore, we removed these items from the model, estimating a three-factor second-order model (Model 3b). This final model demonstrated an acceptable fit, with all factor loadings being significant ( $>0.05$ ) and above 0.65.

Model 4: Duffy et al. (2017) proposed that a bi-factor model should represent decent work. Other studies have also supported a bi-factor model for the DWS (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2019; Koekemoer & Masenge, 2024). We examined a five-bi-factor model in which all the items were linked to their specific factors and a general factor. In bi-factor models, the latent factors are not correlated. While the model showed a reasonable fit for the DWS, the general factor was poorly defined. This was evidenced by low, non-significant factor loadings ( $<0.30$ ) on the general factor, especially when compared to the loadings on the specific factors. This was particularly noticeable for all items related to compensation (Q7, Q8, and Q9) and free time and rest (Q10, Q11, and Q12) subfactors. Consequently, we excluded these items and we assessed a three-factor bifactor model (Model 4). This model showed an acceptable fit and a well-defined general factor; all factor loadings were significant and above 0.40 (McNeish et al., 2018).

We compared Models 2d (the best fitted three-factor correlational model), 3b (the best fitted three-factor second order model), and 4 (best fitted bi-factor model) to determine the best-fitting measurement model. All three models showed acceptable fit, and we used the Satorra-

Bentler  $\chi^2$  difference test to determine any differences between the models. The test indicated no significant difference between the models (Satorra-Bentler  $\chi^2$  difference test = 9.16;  $df = 6$ ;  $p = 0.16$ ). In the original development of the DWS, Duffy et al. (2017) suggested that a bi-factor model within a latent framework would ideally represent decent work. Since the bi-factor model for the DWS provided the best fit, we proceeded to calculate the factor strengths indices. These included the explained common variance (EVC = 0.53), omega hierarchical for the general factor ( $\omega_H = 0.71$ ), for the specific factors ( $\omega_S$ ), which ranged between 0.28 and 0.46, percentage of uncontaminated correlations (PUC = 0.75), and Factor Determinacy coefficient (FD = 0.85) (Rodriguez et al., 2016). These results suggested that the DWS may be essentially unidimensional. As a result, we used the general factor score in our SEM analysis.

Table 1 provides an overview of the measured study variables and their fit. Since all scales are well-established, we used a CFA approach to assess the model fit. Since all the items showed significant factor loadings greater than 0.50 and  $> 0.40$ , we removed none. The work engagement model was just identified. We obtained manifest factor scores for each measured latent variable using the regression method in Mplus. These scores were then used to analyse the distribution characteristics of the data.

Table 2 shows the reliability of the factor scores. All Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega values were greater than 0.70, which suggests that the reliability of all the factor scores is acceptable (Wang & Wang, 2020). The overall factor determinacy values ( $FD > 0.80$ ; Wang & Wang, 2020) indicated strong correlations between the factor scores and the latent factor. Additionally, the  $\omega_S$  values for the subscales, ranging between 0.28 and 0.46, were significantly smaller than the general factor ( $\omega_H = 0.71$ ), indicating that the specific factors are insignificant after accounting for common variance in the general factor.

**Table 2.** Reliability and factor determinacy.

| Variable                | $\omega$          | FD   | $\alpha$ |
|-------------------------|-------------------|------|----------|
| Work-fulfilment         | 0.90              | 0.95 | 0.90     |
| Work engagement         | 0.78              | 0.89 | 0.78     |
| Psychological ownership | 0.93              | 0.97 | 0.93     |
| Decent work             | $0.71^{\omega_H}$ | 0.85 | —        |
| Safe                    | $0.41^{\omega_S}$ | 0.76 | —        |
| Health                  | $0.28^{\omega_S}$ | 0.72 | —        |
| Values                  | $0.46^{\omega_S}$ | 0.83 | —        |

Note:  $\omega$  = McDonald's omega; FD = factor determinacies;  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha.

The descriptive statistics and factor inter-correlations are presented in Table 3. The skewness and kurtosis values for the manifest scores fell within the recommended critical values of  $+2/-2$  (Kim, 2013). The inter-correlations of factor scores indicated significant correlations ( $p < 0.01$ ) among the variables. A statistically significant relationship was identified between decent work and work fulfilment ( $r = 0.55$ ; large effect) and between decent work and work engagement ( $r = 0.48$ ; medium effect). Similarly, a significant relationship was observed between work engagement and work fulfilment ( $r = 0.65$ ; large effect) and between psychological ownership and work fulfilment ( $r = 0.63$ ; large effect).

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics and factor score inter-correlations.

| Variable                | Skewness | Kurtosis | Work-fulfilment | Work engagement | Psychological ownership |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Work fulfilment         | -0.89    | -0.33    | —               |                 |                         |
| Work engagement         | -1.20    | 0.70     | 0.65            | —               |                         |
| Decent work             | 0.05     | -0.66    | 0.55            | 0.48            | 0.48                    |
| Psychological ownership | -0.57    | -0.77    | —               | 0.63            | —                       |

Note: All correlations significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

### *Mediation results*

The factor scores were utilised to estimate the structural path of the mediation model using maximum likelihood (ML) as an estimator with bias-corrected bootstrapping and 1000 sample iterations. This mediation model was just identified: ( $\chi^2 = [0, N = 628]; = 0; p < 0.01; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.00; RMSEA = 0.00 [0.00-0.00] SRMR = 0.00$ ). Decent work had a statistically significant direct effect on work fulfilment ( $\beta = 0.31, p < 0.01$ ), which supports hypothesis 1. Statistically significant direct effects were also detected between decent work and work engagement ( $\beta = 0.40, p < 0.01$ ) and between work engagement and work fulfilment ( $\beta = 0.50, p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, the results indicated that work engagement significantly mediates the regression path from decent work to work fulfilment ( $\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01$ ), thus supporting hypothesis 2. The model explained 51% of the variance in work fulfilment ( $R^2 = 0.51$ ).

### *Moderation results*

Factor scores were used for the moderation model; therefore, psychological ownership and decent work were not centred. The moderation model was also just identified ( $\chi^2 = [0, N = 628]; = 0; p < 0.01; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.00; RMSEA = 0.00 [0.00-0.00] SRMR = 0.00$ ). The results revealed that psychological ownership significantly influenced the relationship between decent work and work engagement, as indicated by the statistically significant interaction effect (decent work  $\times$  psychological ownership;  $\beta = -0.23, p < 0.01$ ). Both psychological ownership ( $\beta = 0.49, p < 0.01$ ) and decent work ( $\beta = 0.19, p < 0.01$ ) had direct significant effects on work engagement. This supports hypothesis 3, indicating that psychological ownership can strengthen the positive relationship between decent work and work engagement. The relationship between decent work and work engagement is significantly strengthened when BCWs experience higher levels of psychological ownership, as shown by the single slope test in Figure 2. Therefore, workers that experience decent work, together with high levels of psychological ownership are expected to be more engaged. The model explained 49% of the variance in work engagement ( $R^2 = 0.49$ ).

### **Discussion**

This study considers a positive preventative approach (Di Fabio, 2017a; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016) towards studying well-being and work fulfilment as outcomes of decent work. By emphasising the development of resources and strengths, the study demonstrates the motivational role of work engagement and psychological ownership in contributing to work fulfilment for BCWs experiencing decent work. In line with the PWT, our findings confirmed strong positive relationships between decent work, work fulfilment (i.e., job satisfaction) and well-being (i.e., work engagement) for our sample of BCWs. These findings show that despite

facing marginalisation and economic constraints (Duffy et al., 2016), our sample of BCWs experienced work fulfilment and were engaged in their work, as they perceived their work conditions as decent (specifically pertaining to three of the DWS dimensions namely having safe working conditions, experiencing value congruence, and having access to healthcare).

Our research findings supported two hypotheses: first, that work engagement mediates the relationship between decent work and work fulfilment, and second, that psychological ownership positively moderates the relationship between decent work and work engagement. These results expand our understanding of the PWT and shed light on the experiences of working-class employees, such as BCWs. This is especially significant as the majority of the sample were black employees (usually considered as previously disadvantaged) from a country which are characterised by high inequality and high unemployment.

### ***Theoretical contributions***

According to the PWT, when employees experience their work as decent, they feel their psychological needs have been met, and as a result, they experience job satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2016). According to Saari et al. (2021), satisfying psychological needs can be a source of meaningfulness for BCWs. We go beyond this idea by showing how work engagement can be considered a positive motivational process for meeting psychological needs. This ultimately results in work fulfilment for our sample of BCWs. In this regard, our findings show how decent work can contribute to work fulfilment for working class individuals and individuals from marginalized groups (blue-collar workers), who are often forced to focus on survival needs rather than on meaningful jobs. Several studies have shown that work is the primary means to meet these needs and consequently enhance well-being (Deci et al., 2017). In this regard, our findings provide new insights into the established PWT relationships by illustrating work engagement (considered a well-being concept among many scholars) as the underlying mechanism (mediator) linking decent work to work fulfilment.

In this regard, our findings are considered novel from the originally proposed relationships in the PWT, which postulated work fulfilment and well-being as separate decent work outcomes (Duffy et al., 2016). Although these outcomes correlated in the original PWT model, our study is significant as it indicates how decent work conditions contribute to BCWs being engaged and, as a result, experiencing work fulfilment (feeling satisfied with their job). Our findings suggest that BCWs who view their work as decent will most likely experience work fulfilment (the main PWT outcome of decent work) due to their psychological needs being met through their engagement in their work. Put another way, finding mediation in our study implies that when BCWs experience their work as decent, they are likely to be more engaged and likely to have increased levels of work fulfilment.

Furthermore, our research provides new insights by confirming the moderating influence of psychological ownership when considering the connection between decent work and work engagement. This result is interesting as psychological ownership strengthens the positive relationship between decent work and work engagement. Consequently, BCWs who feel a deep psychological connection to their organisation due to the decent work environment are more likely to be engaged and experience greater work satisfaction (Chai et al., 2020). This is because ownership feelings allow employees to fulfil their identity and belongingness through

the decent work provided, leading to a heightened sense of responsibility towards their work as they find their jobs meaningful. This aligns with social exchange theory, suggesting that employees are more likely to be engaged when they perceive their organisation as treating them well through various dimensions of decent work. (El-Gazar et al., 2024). Therefore, in our sample, BCWs who experienced decent work and exhibited high levels of psychological ownership tended to be more engaged in their work. The impact of decent work on work fulfilment (i.e., job satisfaction), mediated by work engagement, is more pronounced for those BCWs experiencing higher levels of psychological ownership, suggesting that their psychological ownership level influences their work fulfilment.

### ***Practical implications***

In general, our study suggests that workplaces that fostering a sense of psychological ownership among their employees (especially among lower skilled employees such as blue-collar workers), might enhance employee work engagement and fulfilment. Consequently, it is imperative that BCWs experience their work as decent, as it allows them the opportunity to be engaged in their work and ultimately feel fulfilled by their work. BCWs value a safe work environment and feeling congruence in the values of the organisation and their own needs. In this sense, should BCWs feel their values are aligned with their work, they are more likely to identify with their work, take ownership and be engaged in their work. Creating a workplace environment where employees feel psychologically connected to the organisation by promoting decent work can help them recognise their value and impact on the workplace. This addresses their need for identity, belonging, and engagement with their job, leading to a sense of fulfilment at work. In line with the self-determination theory, offering ownership to BCWs of tasks can empower them and satisfy their needs for autonomy and at the same time can allow them to take ownership of their work.

### ***Limitations of the study***

The study has some limitations. The data stemmed from self-reported measures and cross-sectional data. Therefore, confirmation bias or common method bias may be problematic, so we employed Harman's one-factor test. However, no significant CMB was found, and as such causality cannot be established. Therefore, we recommend that future studies conduct longitudinal studies to better understand the relationships in the PWT. The trailer manufacturing company primarily employs black male workers for tasks such as painting, welding, and driving. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies focus on industries or work environments with a higher representation of female workers. In the South African context, approximately 83% of unskilled and semi-skilled labour, typical blue-collar work, is carried out by black males, while 68% is done by black females (Department of Employment and Labour, 2024). When accounting for gender and ethnicity, about 51% of blue-collar work in South Africa is performed by black males.

### **Conclusion**

Our study contributed to the literature on decent work by exploring the decent work-work fulfilment and well-being relationships proposed in the PWT among a sample of BCWs. This study makes a theoretical contribution by illustrating the positive relationship between

decent work and work fulfilment, with work engagement (usually postulated as a well-being outcome of decent work) mediating this relationship. Additionally, psychological ownership positively moderates the relationship between decent work and work engagement. The study also took research forward by addressing the gap in the literature regarding the moderating role that psychological ownership could play in the relationship between decent work and work engagement so that psychological ownership strengthened the positive relationship between decent work and work engagement.

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### **ORCID iDs**

Chantal Olckers <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5592-3951>

Eileen Koekemoer <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3234-4532>

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