


# Relationship between demographic groupings, work engagement and performance management systems

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**Orientation:** The performance of the public sector, which refers to the efficiency and effectiveness of government departments and their employees, is one of the primary concerns for the organisation and its employees.

**Research purpose:** This study aims to determine the relationships between three ordinal demographic factors (age, years of service, education), work engagement (WE) and the performance management system (PMS) in the public sector.

**Motivation for the study:** While PMS and WE are widely studied, there are limited studies on the association between ordinal demographic groupings, WE and PMS within the South African public sector.

**Research approach/design and method:** The study adopted a comprehensive and reliable quantitative research approach. A questionnaire was utilised to collect data. The population was 10660, 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 355 questionnaires were completed successfully. A non-probability, purposive sampling method was applied.

**Main findings:** The correlation analysis results revealed some intriguing insights. As an example, it showed that age and years of service do not necessarily correlate with WE. However, the results do indicate a positive relationship with the PMS. Similarly, education does not seem to influence WE but shows a favourable correlation with the PMS.

**Practical/managerial implications:** The goal is not only for academic understanding but also to provide helpful guidance that the public sector management and human resource professionals can directly apply in their roles, thereby enhancing the performance of the public sector.

**Contribution/value-add:** This study provides valuable insights for public sector management and human resource professionals, particularly in the South African public sector, where such research is scarce.

**Keywords:** performance management system; work engagement; employees, public sector and demographic grouping.

## Introduction

The performance of government departments and their employees has been criticised and perceived as ineffective and inefficient by the general public and the media. This is because of poor service delivery caused by inadequate performance management (PM) in government departments (Thusi, 2023). In the current competitive and dynamic working environment, an effective performance management system (PMS) has emerged as a noteworthy instrument to foster support, accountability and cultural transparency. Performance management system is an excellent instrument developed to monitor employees' performance and effectiveness and to keep employees highly motivated to fulfil organisational and employee goals (Almulaiki, 2023; Tyokwe & Naicker, 2021). Performance management system is essential to ensure that decisions about the employees and organisation are made based on the correct information (Kaupa & Olusegun Atiku, 2020).

Performance management is when managers and employees work together to set expectations, analyse results and recognise exceptional performance (Modika et al., 2023). Performance management systems in the private and public sectors is based on planning, reviewing, rewarding, punishing and developing individual performance systems in the workplace (Ndevu, 2022). Performance management establishes goals for employee performance and encourages employees to be diligent and persevere when executing their duties in accordance with the organisation's

standards (Muhammad et al., 2021). According to Al-Jedaia and Mehreza (2020), PM is where managers and supervisors ensure that the given tasks and employees' performance are achieved and carried out in line with organisational goals. One of management's most crucial responsibilities is meticulously identifying and selecting pertinent performance criteria that help a business achieve its goals and objectives (Al-Jedaia & Mehreza, 2020). Employers can monitor and improve performance in the workplace by using a PMS, which is a good service delivery instrument (Khotsa & Sebola, 2020).

Although the application of PMS is intended to be beneficial for an organisation, there are significant challenges associated with its implementation. The public sector should ensure that the performance review process is impartial and efficient because its main objective is to encourage improved performance and reward high-performing employees. The effectiveness of performance evaluation has exposed significant flaws in its implementation, such as biases, rating errors and various accuracy flaws (Thusi, 2023). Organisational culture, lack of management commitment, poor performance feedback, biases in assessing employee performance, internal office politics and poor judgement by supervisors are some of the challenges associated with the implementation of PMS (Panda, 2011). Performance management system could be perceived as being biased and does not measure the performance of the employees (Muhammad et al., 2021). Many performance assessments are merely a process of completing a form annually rather than being used as a valuable resource (Mdhlalose, 2023). Performance management system is one of the most critical human resource organisational roles. Organisations use various ways and solutions to improve productivity, operational efficiency and work quality (RSI Concepts, 2024). The concern is that 70% of all adopted PMSs have failed (Bhole et al., 2023). Objectives and evaluation criteria must be consistent to correctly utilise the performance management principle (Almulaiki, 2023).

Employee dynamism, attitude towards work and movement are essential in organisational management. Addressing demographic challenges at work should be a priority for any organisation (Amegayibor, 2021). Demographics are taken into account by human resource and management choices as they influence how employees behave at work and how productive they are. To thrive, an organisation must effectively manage and utilise its demographic workforce (Amegayibor, 2021). Today's government departments and the private sector value high work engagement (WE) (Alamri, 2023). Work engagement is vital for employees to connect emotionally to their work; therefore, WE in the workplace is considered to lead to well-motivated employees and improved performance. According to the literature, empirical data show that WE has a favourable and significant impact on employee performance (Perangin-Angin et al., 2020). A poor WE level is a severe threat to the organisation's success. Employee engagement in the organisation's jobs allows employees to contribute to the success of operations because it is based on a mutual commitment between organisations and

employees (Engidaw, 2021). Most organisations are looking at strategies to enhance WE as it is a critical component of well-being in today's workplace (Oksa et al., 2021). According to Rozman and Strukelj (2021), engagement is characterised by a strong emotional connection employees have to their work. Hence, engagement indicates an employee's desire to exert discretionary effort (Jason & Geetha, 2021). A healthy work environment is crucial for engagement (Žnidaršič & Bernik, 2021). Therefore, organisations should prioritise understanding their employees' needs in the workplace. Work engagement is a positive force that motivates employees to excel in their jobs (Oksa et al., 2021).

While PMS, WE and demographic factors are essential for maintaining organisational success, examining the correlation between PMS, job engagement and demographic characteristics, including age, years of service and education, is necessary. The study by Hall et al. (2018), referenced in Makumbe et al. (2025), suggests that age-related characteristics, including experience, knowledge, abilities and motivation, may affect individuals' engagement and performance at work. On the contrary, the research by Makumbe et al. (2025) indicates that age has a minor moderating influence on WE. Furthermore, WE increases with age, facilitated mainly by enhanced emotional regulation (Mori et al., 2024). Moreover, the relationship between demographic groupings, WE and PMSs within the South African context has yet to be determined. Hence, this study sought to determine the relationships between demographic factors, WE and the PMS in the public sector.

## Research gap and purpose

There are limited investigations on the association between ordinal demographic groupings, WE and PMS within the South African public sector. This study, however, has the potential to fill a crucial gap by providing a deeper understanding of the association between ordinal demographic groupings, WE and PMS. What is the crucial relationship between demographic groupings, WE and PMS in the public sector? This question holds significant implications for the management and decision-making processes in government departments, researchers and human resource (HR) professionals. This study specifically seeks to determine the following:

- Describing the demographic profiles of respondents to understand the characteristics of respondents who provided perspectives on PMS and WE.
- Determine the correlation between age and WE and PMS.
- Determine the correlation between years of service and WE and PMS.
- Determine the correlation between education and WE and PMS.

## Literature review

As part of the literature review, this section focuses on previous studies on WE, PMS and demographic variables such as age, years of service and education.

## Demographic groupings

The definition from Ugwu and Ugwu (2017) suggests that the term 'demographic' refers to the features of a specific population. It is common knowledge that this could entail education, gender, marital status, income and years of service. These qualities indicate each aspect of the demographic characteristics of a population within the organisation. Based on existing studies, these demographical characteristics have been proven crucial to running an organisation's day-to-day operations, and managers should not undervalue these elements to achieve the best results (Amegayibor, 2021). The reference to Hendrawijaya (2019) indicated that employees' performance is significantly influenced by their demographical characteristics. According to existing research, age, gender, education and years of service are essential factors inherent in every employee that affect how well an employee performs (Ravichandran & Dua, 2022). According to the evidence, the importance of other demographic characteristics should not be discounted, even though education level and years of work experience significantly impact employees' performance (Omori & Bassey, 2019). Although there are many demographic characteristics, to achieve the study's primary objective, this research focuses on three demographic variables, namely age, years of service and education.

According to Tandon et al. (2020), an employee's age in the working environment creates a critical paradigm representing employee differences. The literature revealed that age determines how people change, which may impact performance over time (Omori & Bassey, 2019). Age as a demographic profile can be described as the years an employee has lived since birth (Hendrawijaya, 2019). According to Robbins and Judge (2017), the age of the employees is categorised based on their demographic qualities. Years of service is the total number of years employees have worked for the organisation or the number of years of experience gained during a specific period (Amegayibor, 2021). Years of service affect an employee's technical implementation mastery level, which determines the level of experience (Hendrawijaya, 2019). Education is crucial because highly educated employees exhibit fewer detrimental work behaviours, such as workplace hostility, substance usage and absenteeism (Omori & Bassey, 2019). Education is defined as academic qualifications or degrees a person has attained (Ravichandran & Dua, 2022).

## An overview of the performance management system concept

Currently, organisations prioritise employee performance (Muhammad et al., 2021). Employee performance is a critical element determining an organisation's success (Almulaiki, 2023). To see the benefits of PMS, managers need to understand that PMS involves various stages and is not a once-off process. Performance management is the procedure that encourages genuine employee development through ongoing monitoring and feedback (Van Waeyenberg et al., 2022). As the central element of measuring the performance

process, PMS is essential in supporting the performance management process, which has a broader approach (Frederico et al., 2021). Performance management system includes all the solutions an organisation looks for in managers, and operation managers as the leaders must be accountable for the employees' performance (Muhammad et al., 2021). It is evident that PMS provides managers with methods and processes that the organisation can use to hold employees accountable and enhance employee performance. The literature indicates that managers search for creative methods within the PMS to inspire employees and assess their performance efficiently and effectively (Almulaiki, 2023). It is the process through which an organisation fits its mission, goals and objectives with the processes, set priorities and readily available resources such as labour and material (Bhole et al., 2023). Continuous employee performance reviews are the only way to keep employees updated on performance. As a result, employees will be encouraged to improve their performance. Performance management is a constant communication procedure between employees and managers that maximises the employees' potential and increases organisational effectiveness (Kaupa & Olusegun Atiku, 2020). This implies that the organisation cares about its employees' performance.

Owing to the competitive working environment, the use of PMS is compelling. Performance management system is necessary to ensure organisations are on the right track and that all systems run smoothly (Altomonte, 2023). Performance management is beneficial to an organisation because it encourages employees to optimise their efforts to their primary goals and objectives (Muhammad et al., 2021). Performance management encompasses planning, guiding, diagnosing, developing and improving (Almulaiki, 2023). It is an opportunity for decision-makers to review the PMS framework to ensure transparency and accountability. An effective PMS should include enhancing employee performance, creating powerful managers, eliminating weak links, ensuring employees' happiness and engagement, offering employees a clear career path, encouraging and guiding employees and increasing organisational financial performance (Bhole et al., 2023). This will also provide the organisation with the opportunity to identify employees who are underperforming and require the necessary training to enhance their performance. When appropriately and adequately implemented, it can be pivotal in the organisation to improve employees and organisational performance. Performance management system provides managers with an integrated framework to meet the organisation's primary objectives. Performance management system is 'a strategic and joined method of communicating continued success to institutions by developing the employees in a way that enhances team as well as individual performance' (Tahiri et al., 2020). Performance management improves overall organisational performance by understanding and managing performance within an agreed-upon framework of planned goals, standards and competency criteria (Kaupa & Olusegun Atiku, 2020).

According to Chandra and Saraswathi (2018), PMS is a strategic tool that significantly impacts organisational and employee performance in achieving goals. Employee performance plays an important role in determining an organisation's success. Employee involvement, devotion and inspiration are critical in helping an organisation achieve its goals and objectives (Nduati & Wanyoike, 2022). The PMS is the main instrument that may be utilised to assess and monitor the performance of the employees in the organisation (Vyas et al., 2021). Performance management system is considered an essential tool that the organisation may use to ensure that employees work diligently to help meet its primary goals and objectives (Muhammad et al., 2021). As a result, when PMS is implemented well, it increases employee productivity and encourages communication between managers and employees (Almohtaseb et al., 2020). The best practices for PM include goal setting, goal alignment, goal monitoring, offering feedback and reviewing employees' targets (Abane & Brenya, 2021).

Performance management system can help the organisation function better (Hartono et al., 2023). In any organisation, the objectives of PMS are to attain excellence in achieving their intended goals, inspire employees to perform at a high level, develop their talents and eliminate any inefficiencies and inferior performance of specific individuals (Muhammad et al., 2021). In addition, PMS will assist the organisation in improving public service provision and strengthening employee performance sustainability (Okero, 2021). The PMS is a crucial component that evaluates employees' performance regarding the organisation's vision, mission and developmental objectives regardless of the sector or type of organisation (Mangipudi et al., 2020). Other evidence has shown that PMS is an instrument for discovering competencies that can be used to the advantage of both employees and the organisation as a whole rather than being used just as a tool to measure employee performance (Khotsa & Sebola, 2020). According to Almohtaseb et al. (2020), a PMS fosters a more dynamic workplace culture and boosts employees' psychological commitment. This system incorporates actions that impact employee performance, such as performance contracts, communication and feedback (Okero, 2021).

### The dimensions of performance management system

There are five critical emphasis areas for PMS. De Waal (2004) identified five critical emphasis characteristics of PMS: organisational employees' understanding, organisational employees' attitude, performance management alignment, organisational culture and performance management focus. This dimension defines procedures to ensure that employees give services to customers in accordance with standardised procedures (Mphahlele & Dachapalli, 2022). These focus areas determine the success of the PMS implementation. Effective communication between employees and supervisors is crucial for understanding expectations and organisational processes (Velimirović et al., 2011). This can be accomplished using key performance areas (KPA) to show staff how to

carry out their responsibilities (Mabe & Bwalya, 2022). Key performance areas is widely used in the public sector to evaluate employee performance and maintain integrity and good governance (Abdullah et al., 2022). On the contrary, KPA helps the organisation guarantee that individual and organisational objectives are aligned. Employees frequently have a negative attitude about PMS because of its standardised processes, which are perceived as biased and unfair. As a result, implementing a PMS should be based on justice, and all reasonable attempts to emphasise and explain the system's fairness, together with consistent policy execution, can boost employee work satisfaction (Mphahlele & Dachapalli, 2022). To improve organisational culture towards PMS, the organisation should use PMS to continuously assess employee performance. The overarching goal of PM is to create a high-performance culture in which individuals and teams accept responsibility for the ongoing improvement of business processes and their talents and contributions within a framework given by successful leadership (Fatile, 2014).

### An overview of the work engagement concept

Employees' state of mind and behaviour at work play a vital role in organisational success. Work engagement have increased because of focusing on employees' strengths and positive conduct (Ye et al., 2024); organisations must pay attention to the employees' state of mind. Highly engaged employees tend to perform to the best of their ability, unlike disengaged employees, who are more likely to disconnect from their employment (Kahn, 1990).

Employees are vital to the organisation, and it is imperative for managers to recognise the significance of work engagement as a means to enhance the good corporate atmosphere and attain organisational objectives. The term WE has different definitions. According to Schaufeli et al. (2002), WE is generally understood in academic literature to be a good psychological state of vigour, dedication and absorption in work duties. Work engagement is essential to ensure that employees are motivated, remain focused and are willing to put effort into their daily activities. Employee engagement can be defined as employees' cognitive, emotional and physical connection with their work (Aboramadan, 2022). Work engagement ensures employees perform their work purposefully and in a positive state of mind. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) defined WE as a 'positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption'. Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined vigour as having high levels of energy and mental resilience while working. They defined dedication as being intensely engaged in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm and challenge, and absorption was defined as concentrating and immersing oneself in one's work. From the strategic perspective, WE is a significant human resources management factor that benefits employees and organisations (Rozman & Strukelj, 2021). Enhancing employee WE is encouraged by organisations that care about organisational outcomes (Wood et al., 2020). Owing to WE, innovative work practices indirectly impact task performance

(Van Zyl et al., 2021). The empirical investigation findings indicate a relationship between WE and organisation outcomes (Rozman & Strukelj, 2021). At the organisational level, when employees see their work as necessary, they place a higher value on their work and believe that they contribute to society through their work. They will also be passionate about it, have much more energy and be so engrossed in their tasks that time passes quickly (Khusanova et al., 2021). Work engagement is a broad term encompassing various organisational effects and other factors that could help the organisation achieve its objectives (Sulistyo & Suhartini, 2019). Work engagement is one of the most important elements that influence the amount of effort workers are willing to put forth when performing their jobs (Kahn, 1990). Disengaged workers act defensively and withdraw, whereas engaged employees pay attention, connect, integrate and accomplish tasks with focus (Lai et al., 2020). Managers can influence employee engagement through their environments and by providing inspiration, support and connections (Navickas et al., 2023). One of the most important elements influencing work performance is people's level of involvement in their work. Prieto-Díez et al. (2022) found that personal and organisational factors determine the level of WE.

No matter how modern technology is used or how much funds are invested, without professional resources, everything becomes meaningless (Perangin-Angin et al., 2020). There is no organisation without employees, and these employees work together to perform the organisation's operational tasks to reach a specific goal (Perangin-Angin et al., 2020).

Work engagement is the capacity to commit emotionally and intellectually to the organisation (Hendrik et al., 2021). According to Hendrik et al. (2021), there are three components to WE, namely (1) vigour, which is a high level of energy and mental fortitude at work; (2) dedication, which is a strong involvement in work and experiencing a sense of meaning towards work and (3) absorption, which is total concentration and enjoyment in one's work that makes time pass quickly. Work engagement is the personality individuals bring to their jobs, allowing them to be enthusiastic about their work and perform well (Puspitasari & Darwin, 2021).

Work engagement affects employee performance and job satisfaction (Yandi & Havidz, 2022). Work engagement is a person's internal and external or mental and physical devotion to work (Ali et al., 2021). Several organisations need to pay more attention to the organisational environment, which may result in low WE and productivity (Rozman & Strukelj, 2021). Employees or individual team members with WE perform more efficiently and effectively than employees without WE (Ali et al., 2021). Organisational failure can be seen in the decrease in employee involvement, which can be seen in the poor behaviour of employees in a company, such as being lazy at work, frequently being late at work, not obeying organisational rules and a lack of concern for work and colleagues (Yandi & Havidz, 2022).

## Underpinning theories

In modern business models, new public management (NPM) is a public administration method that leverages management and other disciplines to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in modern bureaucracies (Indahsari & Raharja, 2020). The NPM has substantially impacted PM in the public sector (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021). In this case, performance-oriented rather than policy-oriented public sector management is the main focus of NPM (Indahsari & Raharja, 2020). The NPM approach examines inadequacies in the performance of the public sector over time and also investigates obstacles in traditional public administration procedures and operations (Ferdous, 2016). The theories of Schaufeli and Bakker's Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, Kahn's Theory of Engagement, Locke and Latham's (1990) Goal Setting Theory and Kaplan and Norton's (1992) Balanced Scorecard are more relevant, and they shape the direction for this study.

Schaufeli and Bakker's JD-R Model posits that WE is impacted by the balance between job demand and resources. Job demands are physical, psychological, social or organisational characteristics that need persistent effort or expertise, resulting in bodily and psychological consequences. On the contrary, job resources include physical, psychological, social and organisational factors such as reaching job objectives, reducing occupational demands that include physiological and psychological expenses and promoting personal growth, learning and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This means that employees will be engaged in their work if there is a balance between resources and demands. High job demands and low employment resources might cause job stress and burnout (Bakker & De Vries, 2021). On the contrary, Kahn's (1990) theory proposes that WE theory be separated into cognitive engagement, emotional engagement and physical involvement. This theory insists that organisations should create a conducive working environment where employees are appreciated and valued.

This study is also guided by Locke and Latham (1990), who claimed that challenging goals improve performance by increasing self-sufficiency and a person's sense of self-satisfaction. The organisation must ensure that goals are specific so that employees understand exactly what they are looking for and how well they are doing (Gkizani & Galanakis, 2022). In practice, PMS should ensure that employees and organisational goals are aligned, inspiring employees to fulfil their obligations. In the competitive working environment, organisations rely on intangible assets like staff skills and knowledge, customer and supplier relationships and creative culture to provide a competitive edge to the corporation (Akbarzadeh, 2022). Therefore, the balanced scorecard system theory is more relevant to shaping the direction of this study. Kaplan and Norton (1992) broadened PMS to include financial and non-financial rewards, such as customer satisfaction, internal procedures and learning and growth, to attain a more comprehensive performance perspective.

Management needs to include elements of WE in the PMS to achieve a holistic view of performance. NPM will cultivate higher employee engagement levels. Performance management system provides employees with continuous feedback, training and development for underperforming employees and rewards for good performance, which will undoubtedly enhance employee engagement. Finally, when employees feel valued and recognised, they are more willing to go above and beyond to improve the organisation's performance.

## Research design

### Research approach

The approach and design adopted in this study are a cross-sectional survey research design and a quantitative research methodology ensuring the study's credibility. The approach and design of this study were appropriately used to accomplish the research goals of this study.

### Research method

#### Research participants

This investigation focused on permanently employed employees in the public sector at job levels 1–12 (DPSA, 2007). Mainly because PMS within the public sector is designed to assess employees' performance at job levels 1–12. Employees who had been employed for five years or more were targeted because these employees had a long-term partnership with the PMS and would be more likely to answer the questions. The sample size included 400 employees from a population of 10660 from eight national departments. The sample size was determined using the Raosoft® sample size calculator (Raosoft® Inc. US, 2004), with a margin of error of 5% and a confidence interval of 95.85% ( $p \geq 0.5$ ). Non-probability purposive sampling was employed to choose participants as the goal was to create a sample that could plausibly represent the population. For the study, 400 questionnaires were hand delivered by a field worker, and 355 questionnaires were returned yielding a response rate of 89%.

#### Measuring instruments

A structured questionnaire was utilised to gather data. The study utilised an existing questionnaire from De Waal (2004) for PMS and from Schaufeli et al. (2006) Utrecht for WE. The PMS questionnaire measured five dimensions: understanding the PMS, attitude towards PMS, performance management alignment, performance management culture and focus. On the contrary, the WE questionnaire measured three dimensions: Vigour, dedication and absorption. The respondents were required to complete 49 closed-ended and Likert-scale questions. To ensure the validity of the measuring instrument, the instrument was evaluated by experts in human resource management and statisticians. To determine content validity and reliability, pilot testing was conducted to identify any possibility of issues related to the measuring instrument. The pilot testing was performed on 10 respondents.

### Research procedure

Following the distribution of a consent form and an information brochure to several national departments, the researcher got approval from eight of them to perform the study. All study respondents were allowed to participate and informed that participation was optional. To ensure confidentiality in this study, respondents were assured that all of the information they provided would be treated with strict confidentiality and that the study data would be coded so that it would not be associated with their names. To protect anonymity, respondents were not asked to reveal their names.

### Statistical analysis

The data for this enquiry were processed using Excel and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The data were displayed using Microsoft Excel graphs and tables for frequency analysis. The data were presented using Microsoft Excel graphs and tables. This investigation was based on correlation analysis. Correlation analysis examined the relationship between demographic grouping, PMS and WE. Cronbach's alpha tests of internal consistency were also used to assess the reliability of study variables.

### Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Tshwane University of Technology's Faculty of Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee with ref. no: FCRE2018/FR/05/008-MS.

## Results

This section presents data analysis and an interpretation of the research findings. This research sought to identify the relationships between ordinal demographic factors (age, years of service and education) to understand how WE and the PMS are related. Including years of service provides insight into how long employees have been with the public sector and the level of experience the employees have had in a partnership with the PMS. Age was included to capture generation perspectives, as different age groups might have preferences influencing their WE and PMS. Additionally, employees' educational backgrounds were included to capture the foundational knowledge and skills employees had to perform their roles.

### Validity and reliability

A pilot study was carried out to determine the validity and reliability of the research tool. Necessary amendments were made to the questionnaire to enhance the research approach before distributing the final questionnaire. With the assistance of a statistician, Cronbach's alpha was used to confirm the internal consistency of the measuring tool. All subscales were above the value of 0.7, and the range of Cronbach's alpha was between 0.726 and 0.872. The measurement tool utilised in this research complied with Gefen et al.'s (2000) recommendations and was acceptable and consistent. Gefen et al. (2000) recommended

that Cronbach's alpha values of 0.70 and above show good internal reliability. A summary of the reliability results is provided below.

## Background information of the respondents

The responses were from 355 respondents from various South African public sector national departments. The demographic profiles in this study were gender, race, marital status and educational background. The results revealed the demographic characteristics of the respondents as 57.2% female and 42.5% male. The investigation revealed that most of the respondents (75.5%) in this study area were black, 13.5% were white, 8.2% were Mixed race, 1.7% were Asian and 1.1% did not answer. The evidence from the descriptive statistics presented indicated that the majority of the respondents in this study were married (54.4%), followed by 27.3% of the respondents who were never married, 10.7% were living together, 3.9% were divorced or separated, 0.6% were widowed and 3.1% of the respondents never responded to the questions. Regarding educational level, those with a bachelor's degree are the majority, with 29.3%, whereas 27.9% of the respondents have a diploma. Only 14.6% have an honours degree, and 7.9% were grade 12 holders. Evidence also indicated that 7.6% of the respondents had a certificate, while the minor respondents were doctoral degree (6.5%) holders and 3.7% of the respondents had an education lower than grade 12.

## Correlation analysis

The results of the correlation level tests are shown in Table 1. It shows whether there is a correlation between the study's factors of WE and PMS and the respondents' ordinal demographic variables (age, years of service and education). According to the correlation coefficient effect size criteria,  $r = 0.10$  is considered small,  $r = 0.30$  is considered medium and  $r = 0.50$  is considered high (Cohen, 1988).

Results from Table 1 reveal a 0.028 correlation between vigour and age and a 0.032 correlation between age and dedication. As can be seen in Table 1, there was a 0.055 correlation between age and absorption. These results indicate no correlation between age and WE, according to Cohen's (1988) recommendations. These results imply that age has no bearing on organisational WE because there is no meaningful correlation between age and WE based on the study's results. According to this study, relationship results through the correlation technique showed a strong negative correlation between the age variable and most of the factors related to PM, namely attitude towards the PMS ( $-0.112$ ), PM alignment ( $-0.114$ ), PM culture ( $-0.127$ ) and PM focus ( $-0.125$ ). This means that as one variable increases, the other decreases and vice versa. According to Cohen's (1988) recommendations, there is a significant correlation between age and PMS. In practical terms, the relationship between age and PM factors, namely attitude towards the PMS, PM alignment, PM culture and PM focus, is inconsistent. This implies that age has some bearing on PM procedures, especially for older employees.

**TABLE 1:** Correlation analysis statistics.

Study variables	Age	Years of service	Education
<b>Vigour</b>			
Pearson correlation	0.028	0.033	0.016
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.600	0.534	0.763
<b>Dedication</b>			
Pearson correlation	0.032	0.048	0.021
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.554	0.364	0.692
<b>Absorption</b>			
Pearson correlation	0.055	0.092	0.015
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.307	0.084	0.784
<b>Understanding of the PMS</b>			
Pearson correlation	0.032	0.070	0.138
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.553	0.189	0.010
<b>Attitude towards the PMS</b>			
Pearson correlation	-0.112	-0.085	0.110
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.035	0.108	0.041
<b>PM alignment</b>			
Pearson correlation	-0.114	-0.135	0.061
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.032	0.011	0.260
<b>PM culture</b>			
Pearson correlation	-0.127	-0.157	-0.063
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.016	0.003	0.241
<b>PM focus</b>			
Pearson correlation	-0.125	-0.111	0.009

PM, performance management; PMS, performance management system; Sig., significance.

According to Table 1, the results show that the correlation between years of service and vigour was 0.0331, and the correlation between years of service and dedication was 0.048. The study found a 0.092 correlation between years of service and absorption. These results show no correlation between years of service and WE following Cohen's (1988) recommendations. As a result, the number of service years affects WE. According to the study, years of service also demonstrated negative relationships with minor practical effects for PM alignment ( $r = -0.135$ ), PM culture ( $r = -0.157$ ) and PM focus ( $r = -0.111$ ). These results suggest that one variable decreases as the other variable increases and vice versa. However, the strength of years of service in these three variables is weak. These correlations were following Cohen's (1988) recommendations. According to the results, there is only a weak correlation between PMS and years of service. We can conclude that employees who had been with the organisation for a longer time tended to feel a little better about the PMS.

Following Cohen's (1988) recommendations, Table 1 indicates that there was no correlation between education and vigour (0.016) and no correlation between education and dedication (0.021). However, the correlation between education and absorption was not present (0.015). There is no correlation between education and WE in the workforce. According to Table 1, it could be concluded that there is a significant relationship between education and attitudes about the PMS, notably understanding of the system ( $r = 0.138$ ) and attitude towards the system ( $r = 0.110$ ). It can be inferred that there is a positive relationship between education and PMS. It can also be assumed that educated employees had a slightly better understanding of the PMS and a more favourable attitude towards it.

In conclusion, this study found no association between demographic groupings and WE. There is a slight correlation between PMS and specific demographic groups. It can be confidently concluded that workers with the organisation tended to have slightly more favourable emotions regarding PMS.

## Discussion

Performance management system and WE factors are essential as they align organisational and employee goals to the organisation's success. This significance has led to assessing the relationship between ordinal demographic characteristics such as age, years of service and education in relation to WE and PMS in the public sector. These findings provide valuable insights into the relationships between demographic factors, WE and the PMS in the South African public sector. The researcher discusses the significant investigation results in the following order of objectives.

## Outline of the results

### **The first objective was to describe the personal characteristics of respondents from the national departments**

According to the descriptive statistics, most respondents (57.2%) were female, 75.5% were African, 54.4% were married and 29.3% had bachelor's degrees. This result implies that most of the respondents in this study were married African females who had completed undergraduate qualifications.

### **The second objective was to examine the relationship between age, work engagement and performance management system**

The study found no evidence of a favourable relationship between age and WE. This evidence concludes that age will not influence WE. In other words, management in the public sector should pay attention to factors other than individual age to enhance WE. This finding suggests there is no guarantee that employees become more engaged and committed to their work as they grow older. The results of this study contrast with those of a study by Douglas and Roberts (2020), which indicated that employees over 50 showed more significant levels of WE and more dedication to and absorption in their jobs than employees under 50. According to the study's results, age and PMS were found to have a positive relationship. This shows how age significantly impacts the whole PMS and vice versa. This may be because the organisation's PMS is a vital and significant component of managing employees daily. It is not unexpected because PMS raises employee productivity levels, identifies skills shortages that need to be filled through training and helps employees create personal goals connected to the more significant company objectives (Almulaiki, 2023).

### **The third objective was to assess the relationship between years of service and work engagement and performance management system**

The results showed no significant relationship between years of service and WE. This signifies that years of service are unimportant in determining WE and vice versa. These results dismiss the idea that employees who have been in the organisation for many years are more engaged and committed to their daily work than those with fewer years of service. The management in this sector should consider other influential factors to improve WE except for years of service in the studied population. Work engagement is a psychological phenomenon that affects each employee personally. It includes cognitive, emotional and behavioural components but is primarily characterised by vigour (strength), dedication (dedication) and absorption (attachment) to the work that they do (Hendrik et al., 2021). Employees will get involved and express themselves physically, mentally and emotionally if they perform their jobs properly and correctly. It is significant to notice that PMS and years of service are related. This indicates that employees who had been with the organisation for a more extended period tended to feel slightly more favourably about PMS. For employees to feel comfortable carrying out their duties, managers must forge strong bonds with them and create a welcoming work environment (Arimie & Oronsaye, 2020).

### **The fourth objective was to examine the relationship between education, work engagement and performance management system**

The results demonstrated no relationship between education and WE. This evidence does not support the idea that qualified employees are inherently more engaged than those with lower qualifications in the studied population. For management to enhance WE, the educational level of the employees should not be considered.

### **Finally, according to the results obtained in the research, there is a positive relationship between education and the performance management system**

This result supports the idea that employees with education will have a more positive contribution towards the success of PMS than employees without education. It is generally known that the organisation's success depends on the employees' skills, which influence its performance. Accordingly, it can be said that PMS is a comprehensive process that integrates several activities to guarantee that employees and teams are managed successfully to achieve high levels of organisational performance (Meddiah & Wui, 2022).

## Practical implications

The South African public sector management needs to understand the relationship between demographic characteristics affecting WE and PMS to decide which

relationships they should focus on in their organisation. The results revealed no relationship between WE and demographic factors, namely age, years of service or education. Therefore, management should not consider demographic criteria like age, years of experience or education to enhance WE. This study has enough information to conclude that demographic and PMS characteristics may be successfully influenced. Managers must distinguish between demographic factors that affect PMS. Management in the selected government departments should not solely rely on demographic profiles when devising strategies to enhance WE. The findings of this study suggest that while demographic factors play a role in WE and PM, they are not the sole determinants. Therefore, management should adopt a holistic approach that considers various factors to effectively enhance WE and PM. These findings provide valuable knowledge for the public sector department management, enlightening them on the complex interplay of factors affecting WE.

### Limitations and recommendations

Even though the study was conducted in South Africa, not all national departments could participate, so the results cannot be applied to all government agencies in South Africa or other nations. As the study focused on employees in job levels 1 through 12, its results and opinions cannot accurately reflect those of employees in job levels 13 and higher. To get rich data, it is essential to undertake a study of a comparable nature using a qualitative research methodology. To find additional relevant variables, it will be helpful to undertake a comparison research in both private and public institutions. As the research has shown a positive correlation between demographic characteristics and PMS, managers in the organisation must track and evaluate employee performance using PMS.

### Conclusion

The study aimed to ascertain whether there was any meaningful relationship between the PMS, WE and the three ordinal demographics. Referring to relevant sources has enabled this study to get essential data about demographics, WE and PMS. This study concludes that there is a relationship between PMS and demographic characteristics, namely education, age and years of service. Conversely, there is no relationship between WE and demographic groups. According to the research, these three factors are crucial for any organisation's success. The results of this study confirmed that the PMS is influenced by age, education and years of experience. It also confirmed that factors like age, education and years of experience had no bearing on employees' engagement at work. The public sector must use this research report to evaluate the relationship between demographic characteristics, WE and the PMS. Given that no other studies of a similar nature have been done on the same in the South African public sector, this one adds essential knowledge to the body of knowledge.

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### Competing interests

The author declares that there are no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

### Author's contributions

G.M. is the sole author of this research article.

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### Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, G.M., upon reasonable request.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this study's results, findings and content.

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