




Determinants of employee engagement and job satisfaction in a local municipality



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Orientation: Employee engagement and job satisfaction are crucial for the efficiency and sustainability of public-sector organisations.

Research purpose: This study investigated the factors that influence employee engagement and job satisfaction among administrative employees in an eMalahleni local municipality.

Motivation for the study: Administrative employees are critical for the effective functioning of local municipalities. However, limited research has explored the factors that influence engagement and satisfaction within the eMalahleni local municipality.

Research approach/design and method: A quantitative cross-sectional research design was employed, using a structured questionnaire distributed to 184 administrative employees. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, including a confirmatory factor analysis, were used to analyse the data. A response rate of 100% was achieved.

Main findings: This study revealed moderate levels of engagement and satisfaction with leadership, learning and development opportunities and organisational support identified as key influencers.

Practical/managerial implications: Organisations are encouraged to prioritise leadership effectiveness, investment in professional development opportunities and enhancement of the work environment, all of which play a crucial role in increasing employee engagement and satisfaction. For municipal governments sectors, prioritising these areas can lead to higher retention rates, improved performance and greater organisational commitment among staff.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributes to the understanding of employee engagement and satisfaction in the public sector by providing insights relevant at the local government level.

Keywords: employee engagement; job satisfaction; administrative employees; work environment; organisational culture; leadership and public-sector management.

Introduction

Many employees in different organisations have become disengaged because of constant changes in the workplace (Bhebhe, 2020; Yadav et al., 2022). Employee engagement and job satisfaction are recognised as significant factors that affect organisational effectiveness, especially in municipalities where efficient service delivery is essential (Sibonde & Dassah, 2021). Administrative employees play a crucial role in organisational efficiency by managing communication, maintaining records and supporting decision-making (Bucăța & Rizescu, 2017). In the eMalahleni local municipality, these roles are essential because of the prevalent challenges encountered by public-sector organisations, including political interference, resource limitations, inequitable workloads, inadequate career development opportunities and elevated public expectations (Thusi et al., 2023).

Previous studies emphasise the significance of supportive leadership, recognition systems and work-life balance; however, a notable gap persists in comprehending the specific dynamics within South African municipalities (Haricharan, 2023). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model offers important insights into how workplace demands and resources influence employee outcomes (Demerouti & Verbeke, 2004). The model suggests that elevated job demands, including workload pressures and role ambiguity, may result in burnout and disengagement if not sufficiently countered by job resources, such as leadership support, professional development opportunities and a positive work environment (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). The JD-R model has been extensively utilised in organisational research; however, its application to administrative staff within South African municipalities has not been sufficiently examined.

Research purpose and specific objectives

This study investigated the factors that influence employee engagement among administrative employees in the eMalahleni local municipality. Key objectives include:

- *Determining the levels of employee engagement and satisfaction*
- *Identifying factors influencing employee engagement and job satisfaction*
- *Examining the relationship between engagement and satisfaction.*

This study presents valuable insights and addresses the gap in employee engagement and satisfaction in the public sector and municipalities across South Africa. The approach identifies key factors influencing engagement and satisfaction, contributing to the development of more effective management strategies for the municipality.

The flow of research in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

Literature review

Employee engagement and job satisfaction have been widely researched, particularly in organisational psychology and management sciences (Musevenzo et al., 2024). Employee engagement refers to employees' emotional commitment and psychological investment in their work, whereas job satisfaction pertains to the extent of the contentment derived from their job (Truss et al., 2013; Wushe & Shenje, 2019). Guided by the JD-R model, this study examined how job demands, resources and personal factors contribute to these constructs.

Underpinning theory

The JD-R theory underpins this study. It explores the relationship between employees' job characteristics, performance and well-being (Han & Wang, 2024). Essentially, this theory is based on the distinction between two types of job characteristics: job demands and job resources. To foster the well-being, productivity and commitment of employees, organisations must possess a comprehensive grasp of the foundational ideas behind the JD-R theory. Kwon and Kim (2020) claim that the JD-R theory of engagement serves as a theoretical construct employed to comprehend and elucidate employee involvement within organisational settings. This theory

has proven to be an effective tool for organisations seeking to improve employee motivation, well-being and overall job satisfaction. The integration of components from the JD-R theory and the construct of engagement is evident in Wibawa et al. (2021). According to Luzipho et al. (2023), employees encounter job strain when job demands surpass available resources, resulting in a decline in their engagement, satisfaction and performance. However, when there is equilibrium between job resources and demands, employees undergo job enrichment, resulting in heightened levels of employee engagement, job satisfaction and performance (Achmad et al., 2023; Kotzé & Nel, 2019).

As a result, the JD-R theory highlights that employee engagement is not solely the individual's responsibility but is also influenced by the work environment. In the current context and competitive business landscape, organisations have the opportunity to foster mutually beneficial outcomes by implementing the concepts of the JD-R theory. It is believed that the JD-R theory indirectly affects the amount of revenue generated by an organisation through employee performance and well-being (Scholze & Hecker, 2024). In addition to improving employee productivity and performance, providing employees with adequate resources will facilitate better financial outcomes for the organisation (Almaamari, 2023). Tummers and Bakker (2021) reported that organisations focusing on employee well-being and resources often experience increased financial turnover because of improved employee productivity and lower absenteeism and turnover costs. According to Batubara and Wahyuni (2020), there is a positive correlation between employee engagement, well-being, satisfaction and the overall success of the organisation. This relationship is also associated with lower employee turnover and can facilitate a competitive advantage for the organisation.

Employee engagement

Employee engagement refers to the emotional and cognitive connections that employees have with their work roles and organisations. Schaufeli et al. (2002) described it as a fulfilling state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption. Kahn's theory of employee engagement emphasises the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability as precursors to engagement. Leadership, communication and workplace culture are pivotal drivers of engagement in organisational contexts.

Engagement has gained widespread recognition as a paradigm that explains how organisations attempt to communicate with stakeholders. According to Riyanto et al. (2021), many aspects of employee engagement are linked to long-term employment and changes in people's working habits, work environments and workplace expectations. Lee and Jo (2023) posit that employee engagement has recently been recognised as a multidimensional concept; for instance, an employee has a work role and a role as an

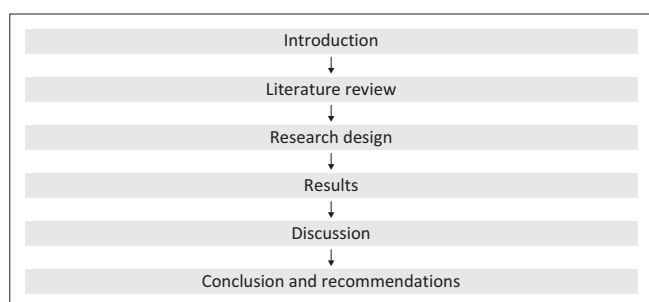


FIGURE 1: An overview of the study's research flow.

TABLE 1: Employee engagement dimension.

Dimension	Characteristics	Key insights and references
Vigour	High energy, mental resilience and persistence in effort	Employees put considerable effort into their work and remain committed despite challenges (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). Vigour is closely linked to Kahn's model of engagement (Young et al., 2018). Higher vigour leads to sustained effort (Botha & Coetzee, 2022).
Dedication	Enthusiasm, sense of significance, pride and challenge	Employees find their jobs stimulating, challenging and perform duties enthusiastically (Zhang et al., 2017). Dedicated employees contribute to organisational success by maintaining focus (Verčič, 2021).
Absorption	Deep involvement in work, inability to disengage and time passes quickly	Influenced by manager behaviour, trust and workplace relationships (Rana et al., 2019). High absorption leads to happier employees (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). Employees with strong absorption struggle to disengage from work (Zhang et al., 2017).

Note: Please see the full reference list of this article Masuku, N.G., Esterhuyzen, E., & Ramajoe, M.G. (2025). Determinants of employee engagement and job satisfaction in a local municipality. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 23(0), a2988. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.2988> for more information.

organisational member. Organisational leaders and managers have become increasingly concerned with the concept of employee engagement. An important component of human resource management that is often overlooked is employee engagement (Moufakkir & OuakOuak, 2022; Opoku et al., 2023). Alam et al. (2024) emphasise that establishing a strong relationship between HR, employers and employees is crucial for achieving effective employee engagement.

Employee engagement can be measured by employee commitment, motivation and emotional involvement at work. Furthermore, a successful organisation benefits when employees not only focus on their assigned tasks but also contribute to their expertise and innovation. In addition to an excellent work environment, employees' sense of purpose, good communication and the prospect of professional development are essential elements of employee engagement (Graham et al., 2023). Table 1 highlights key dimensions of employee engagement, such as vigour, dedication and absorption, each of which plays a crucial role in shaping job satisfaction among administrative staff in local municipalities. The table aligns with the research topic by demonstrating how employee energy, commitment and deep involvement in work contribute to overall job satisfaction and workplace performance. These dimensions are critical in understanding how administrative staff remain engaged and motivated despite workplace challenges.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction reflects an employee's sense of fulfilment derived from their job. Herzberg's two-factor theory categorises job satisfaction into hygiene factors (e.g. salary and job security) and motivators (e.g. achievement and recognition). Satisfied employees are more likely to demonstrate higher productivity and loyalty and lower turnover intention. In municipalities, intrinsic rewards, such as meaningful work, and extrinsic rewards, such as recognition, significantly influence satisfaction levels. Employees are largely motivated by values rather than the external elements associated with their jobs and workplaces. Intrinsic factors drive individuals to properly engage in professional tasks. Factors inherent to the job, such as participation in decision-making, accountability, acknowledgement, possibilities for career progression and

personal development, motivate employees and promote job satisfaction (Buonomo et al., 2024; Gad et al., 2022). According to a study conducted by Chen et al. (2024), employees with a greater degree of internal motivation are more likely to express higher degrees of job satisfaction.

By contrast, employees often express dissatisfaction with external factors, commonly known as hygiene issues or basic job conditions. Extrinsic factors encompass elements such as compensation, policy and supervisory or management styles (Thant & Chang, 2021). According to Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), the key to boosting staff retention is to address both internal and extrinsic factors in order to reduce unhappiness. To improve staff retention and decrease attrition, HR managers should focus on optimising job settings by developing effective rules, procedures, supervision and favourable working conditions (Koncar et al., 2022). In an endeavour to align Herzberg's theory with this study – that is, to deal with the challenging issues of employee dissatisfaction in the work environment – the public sector must assess employee morale and the atmosphere at work to establish aspects that are both hygienic and motivating. Effectively, the public sector must seek to establish a link between employees' calibration of work and their attitudes by observing how they interact with one another.

Interrelationship between engagement and satisfaction

Scholars argue that engagement and satisfaction are closely linked, with overlapping predictors such as supportive leadership and opportunities for growth (Mansor et al., 2023). While engagement focuses on enthusiasm and active involvement, satisfaction captures contentment and happiness with the job conditions. Studies suggest that engaged employees often exhibit higher satisfaction, forming a virtuous cycle of motivation and performance (Solomon & Sandhya, 2024). Job satisfaction acts as a precursor to employee engagement when a job is interesting, motivating or challenging (Ekhsan, 2019).

Maleka et al. (2022) proposed that employee engagement serves as a fundamental factor in nurturing job satisfaction, employee commitment and organisational civic conduct. From a human resource management perspective, the relationship between elements influencing job satisfaction and employee engagement is of considerable significance. Given the competitive nature of today's labour market, it is crucial to focus on retaining both satisfaction and motivation (Saks, 2019).

Employee engagement promotes job satisfaction, involvement and organisational commitment (Pongton & Suntrayuth, 2019). According to Rameshkumar (2020), employees who are highly engaged in their work and have a strong belief in their abilities experience a higher level of satisfaction. Enhanced job satisfaction leads to increased productivity and improved quality, responsiveness and recognition. According

to a study conducted by Rasool et al. (2021), job satisfaction influences organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB).

Rasool et al. (2021) asserted that incentives are of paramount importance in advancing employee motivation and exerting an impact on job performance. Shabane et al. (2022) posited a positive correlation between employee satisfaction and engagement. The human resource management literature provides evidence that supports a favourable correlation between employee engagement and organisational performance results (Riyanto et al., 2021). Numerous organisations encounter challenges regarding inadequate employee engagement. The employees' lack of participation in governance and decision-making processes undermines the effectiveness of many initiatives and policies. Maake et al. (2024) found a significant correlation between employee engagement and job satisfaction. Researchers have identified working conditions as the most influential factor in employee engagement.

The consistent implementation of employee-centric policies facilitates increased employee engagement, as higher-level authorities and capable leaders consistently offer ongoing support, resources and assistance to ensure the successful completion of job responsibilities (Kumar & Bagga, 2024). Enhancement of employee engagement may be observed when organisations empower employees and offer suitable recognition and rewards (Suyono et al., 2024). To foster optimal engagement, firms must establish connections between their leaders and employees.

According to a study conducted by Jiang and Luo (2024), organisations that exhibit a high level of employee engagement are more likely to recruit skilled individuals and reduce employee turnover rates. Furthermore, such organisations tend to have higher levels of productivity, employee happiness and overall sustainability. The advantages associated with a high level of employee engagement necessitate that organisations possess the knowledge and skills required to improve and sustain it (Hammon et al., 2023). It is important to bear in mind that the enhancement of employee engagement is a continuous endeavour that necessitates unwavering dedication from organisational leadership and the active involvement of employees at all levels within the organisation.

Context of administrative employees in municipalities

Administrative employees in public-sector settings, such as the eMalahleni local municipality, encounter unique challenges. These include high workloads, limited professional development opportunities and inequitable resource allocations. The JD-R model provides a useful lens for examining how job demands (e.g. workload and time pressure) and resources (e.g. organisational support and training opportunities) shape engagement and satisfaction.

Understanding the employee engagement and job satisfaction of administrative staff in a municipal context is important for this study. Engagement among municipal administrative employees typically encompasses emotional and cognitive dedication to work, along with the inclination to put more effort into their roles. According to Marin (2021), a small percentage of global employees, including public-sector employees, are actively engaged in their work. This emphasises the necessity for specific interventions to improve engagement levels.

Understanding the connection between job satisfaction, employee engagement and organisational performance is crucial for maintaining high employee retention rates. Recent studies have uncovered a range of factors that impact job satisfaction among municipal administrative staff. Research by Vinarski-Peretz and Kidron (2023) indicates that several factors, such as leadership support, work-life balance, career development opportunities and recognition, significantly influence job satisfaction levels within the municipal administrative environment. In addition, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has greatly affected job satisfaction among municipal administrative staff members. Remote work arrangements, heavier workloads and concerns about job security influence how employees view their roles (Gajendran & Harrison, 2021). A clear grasp of these dynamics is crucial for municipal leaders to successfully implement strategies that support administrative staff and ensure a high level of job satisfaction.

Municipal administrative employees frequently encounter obstacles affecting their engagement and job satisfaction. Studies have demonstrated that administrative staff in municipalities frequently encounter bureaucratic inefficiencies, political pressures and resource constraints, which can result in burnout and frustration (Masiya et al., 2021). Furthermore, the hierarchical structure of municipal governance can occasionally restrict the autonomy and innovation of administrative employees in decision-making, which can negatively impact their engagement and empowerment (Hassan et al., 2019). The fact that numerous municipalities operate under financial constraints further exacerbates this issue, as it affects not only the provision of essential resources and training but also opportunities for professional growth and career advancement.

On an international scale, administrative staff in municipalities in numerous countries encounter comparable obstacles in terms of job satisfaction and engagement. For example, a study conducted in European municipalities found that public perceptions and trust in local governments have a substantial impact on the job satisfaction of administrative employees (Önder & Ayhan, 2022). In addition, municipal administrative employees in developing countries encounter challenges such as inadequate salaries, inadequate working conditions and a lack of professional development opportunities, which impede their engagement and job satisfaction (Marie & Khumalo, 2024).

Municipal administrative employees frequently encounter obstacles that influence their job satisfaction and engagement. Administrative employees in municipal environments frequently encounter bureaucratic constraints and red tape, which can interfere with their capacity to be responsive and effective. These constraints frequently lead to a sense of powerlessness, reduced morale and frustration among employees, which in turn affect their overall engagement with their work. The perception that administrative employees have limited control over decision-making processes can have a detrimental effect on job satisfaction (Brezicha et al., 2020).

Adams and Ama (2024) discovered that municipal administrative employees' performance and satisfaction were significantly influenced by the absence of sufficient resources and support from higher management. Insufficient training and development opportunities, which are essential for career advancement and skill development, are frequently accompanied by a lack of support. Disengagement and decreased job satisfaction may result from this lack of recognition (Wang et al., 2020).

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA, 2023) indicates that administrative personnel in South African municipalities encounter additional challenges because of political interference, potentially resulting in a hostile work atmosphere. Political dynamics frequently influence staffing decisions, performance evaluations and resource distribution, resulting in perceptions of unfairness and inequality. The ongoing need to navigate these political complexities hinders employees' ability to concentrate on their primary responsibilities, ultimately affecting their job satisfaction and engagement levels.

Locally and globally, municipal staff encounter comparable obstacles related to work–life balance. For example, the International City Management Association (ICIMA, 2023) conducted a survey revealing that over 60% of administrative employees in US municipalities have high levels of stress because of their lengthy workdays and excessive workloads. Burnout and decreased engagement frequently result from limited flexibility in work arrangements, which exacerbates these pressures. Municipal leaders must address increasing concerns about their inability to balance work demands with personal life responsibilities to enhance job satisfaction among their administrative staff (Aruldoss et al., 2021).

In addition, Lin et al. (2021), who conducted research on municipal administrative employees in Southeast Asia, indicated that job security concerns continue to be substantial. Many employees experience uncertainty regarding their employment status because of economic fluctuations and evolving government policies, which directly impact their motivation and engagement. Therefore, it is imperative to establish consistent policies and transparent communication to cultivate a sense of engagement and security among municipal administrative staff.

Research design

Research approach

This study adopts a quantitative approach to explore the relationships between job-related factors and employee outcomes. Quantitative research allows for systematic measurement and analysis of variables using structured tools (Mohajan, 2020). This approach ensured data consistency and provided a robust framework for testing. The design also enabled the study to produce generalisable insights applicable to broader public-sector contexts. A cross-sectional research design was used to capture the current state of employee engagement and job satisfaction. This design was chosen because of its efficiency in collecting data within a defined period, offering actionable insights into the factors that influence administrative employees in the eMalahleni municipality (Ghanad, 2023).

Research method

Research participants

The study population consisted of 184 administrative employees working in the eMalahleni local municipality when this study was conducted. This study excluded administrative employees with less than 1 year of work experience. Because of the limited exposure to the workplace, their responses to the research might have been incomplete and less reliable. The eMalahleni local municipality had seven administrative employees with less than 1 year of experience in their current positions. A pilot study was conducted before the main survey, involving 10 respondents who were not included in the main survey. Therefore, the population for this study was $201 - 7 - 10 = 184$ ($N = 184$). Participants were selected using a census sampling technique, given the manageable size of the population. The sample size of the study was, therefore, $N = 184$. This method ensures inclusivity and enhances the reliability of the findings.

Table 2 provides the demographic profiles of the respondents, highlighting their gender distribution, age groups, educational qualifications, positions and years of service.

The biographic information of the sample population reveals several key characteristics. There were 63.04% of female respondents, 35.87% of male respondents and 1.09% of others identifying themselves as 'Other'. According to age distribution, the majority of respondents were between 29 years and 40 years (35.33%), followed by those aged 41 years to 50 years (23.37%), and only 3.8% were over 60 years. The majority of respondents (30.43%) held a Bachelor's degree, Bachelor of Technology or Advanced Diploma, followed closely by Diploma holders (28.26%); only 2.17% had less than Grade 12 education. The majority (42.39%) of respondents held other jobs, followed by office managers (13.59%) and administrators (11.96%). There were 75% of permanent employees, while 21.74% were contract workers. Furthermore, most respondents (34.24%) had 1–4 years of experience, while 5.43% had 31+ years. A majority of

TABLE 2: Demographic profile of respondents.

Variable	Frequency (n)	%	Cumulative (%)
Gender			
Female	116	63.04	53.04
Male	66	35.87	98.91
Other	2	1.09	100
Total	184	100	-
Age (years)			
18–28	38	20.65	20.65
29–40	65	35.33	55.98
41–50	43	23.37	79.35
51–60	31	16.85	96.2
60 or older	7	3.8	100
Total	184	100	-
Highest education qualification			
Lower than Grade 12	4	2.17	2.17
Grade 12 or Matric	14	7.61	9.78
Certificate (1-year qualification)	33	17.93	27.72
Diploma (3-year qualification)	52	28.26	55.98
Bachelor's degree, Bachelor of Technology or Advanced Diploma	56	30.43	86.41
Honours degree or Postgraduate Diploma	18	9.78	96.2
Master's degree or Master of Technology	7	3.8	100
Total	184	100	-
Position			
Administrative Assistant	15	8.15	8.15
Administrator	22	11.96	20.11
Clerk	22	11.96	32.07
Office Manager	25	13.59	45.65
Personal Assistant	7	3.8	49.46
Receptionists	5	2.72	52.17
Secretary	10	5.43	57.61
Other	78	42.39	100
Total	184	100	-
Employment status			
Permanent employee	138	75	75
Contract	40	21.74	96.74
Other	6	3.26	100
Total	184	100	-
Years of service			
1–4	63	34.24	34.24
5–10	37	20.11	54.35
11–15	27	14.67	69.02
16–20	24	13.04	82.07
21–25	10	5.43	87.5
26–30	13	7.07	94.57
31 and more	10	5.43	100
Total	184	100	-

employees are female, mid-career and highly educated, with most of them holding stable, permanent jobs. Participants ranged in age, educational qualifications and tenure, reflecting the municipality's diverse workforce.

Measuring instruments

It was necessary to conduct a reliability test in this study to ensure the consistency and reliability of the measurement instrument. In this study, the measurement instrument used was a questionnaire. There were 66 items in the questionnaire tested for reliability; all have an average of 0.93 coefficient,

which indicates very good reliability. The structured questionnaire comprised multiple sections addressing demographic information, levels of engagement, job satisfaction and influencing factors. The five existing questionnaires that were adapted included 'Minnesota Satisfaction questionnaire – psychometric properties and validation in a population of Portuguese hospital workers' by Martins and Proença (2012), 'Investigating influencers of employee engagement in travel agents in Egypt' by Soliman and Wahba (2019), 'The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: a cross-national study' by Schaufeli et al. (2006), 'Employee engagement: a strategic tool to enhance performance' by Jha and Kumar (2016) and 'Job Satisfaction Survey' by Spector (1994). The instrument employed a 4-Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) to measure participants' perceptions. The questionnaire was pretested through a pilot study involving 10 employees, ensuring clarity and alignment with the research objectives. When completed, the respondents stated that they had not encountered any difficulties with the survey and provided feedback regarding their experience.

Research procedure

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants, emphasising their confidentiality and voluntary participation. Data collection involved distributing questionnaires via a trained fieldworker, who ensured timely responses and adherence to ethical standards. Participation was anonymous and no personally identifiable information was collected. All data were stored and used exclusively for research purposes.

Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods to draw meaningful insights from participants' responses. Descriptive statistics, including means, medians and standard deviations, summarised the key trends in engagement and satisfaction levels. Inferential statistics were employed to evaluate the strength and direction of the correlation and explore the relationships between the variables. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) assessed the validity of the constructs, ensuring that the survey items accurately reflected the underlying dimensions, such as leadership, work environment and rewards. Spearman's rank-order correlation measures the strength and direction of the associations between key variables, whereas regression analysis identifies the predictors of engagement and satisfaction.

Table 3 illustrates the descriptive statistics for employee engagement, highlighting that dedication had the highest mean (4.1).

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Tshwane University of Technology Research Ethics Committee (No. REC2024=03=016 [MS]).

Results

The results of the study are presented in this section.

Relationship between employee engagement and job satisfaction

Spearman's correlation coefficient test was conducted to ascertain whether there was a substantial correlation between job satisfaction and employee engagement. These results indicate numerous significant relationships.

Employee engagement and leadership

The correlation between employee engagement and leadership indicated a strong relationship ($r = 0.473, p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that good leadership positively influenced employee engagement. Moreover, effective leadership had a significant impact on job satisfaction ($r = 0.437, p < 0.001$). As leadership quality increased, employee satisfaction also increased ($r = 0.645, p < 0.001$).

Employee engagement and learning and development

The correlation between employee engagement and learning and development opportunities indicated a strong relationship ($r = 0.565, p < 0.001$). The results suggest that providing ample learning and development opportunities significantly enhances employee engagement. Additionally, as these opportunities increased, employee satisfaction increased ($r = 0.585, p < 0.001$).

Employee engagement and rewards and recognition

A strong correlation existed between employee engagement and rewards and recognition ($r = 0.515, p < 0.001$). The data indicate that when employees are rewarded and recognised, their engagement levels increase. Furthermore, as the levels of rewards and recognition increased, employee satisfaction also increased significantly ($r = 0.628, p < 0.001$).

Employee engagement and work environment

The relationship between employee engagement and the work environment was also strong ($r = 0.430, p < 0.001$). This outcome suggests that a positive work environment enhances employee engagement. Furthermore, as the quality of the work environment improved, employee satisfaction levels increased ($r = 0.628, p < 0.001$).

Interpretation of significant loadings in confirmatory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis establishes the relationships between observed variables (items) and their latent factors (constructs) by identifying significant loadings. A higher

loading indicates a stronger relationship between the item and the factor being measured. The results were interpreted as follows to illustrate the significant loadings for each construct

Figure 2 compares the standardised loadings of key predictors for both employee engagement and job satisfaction, illustrating how factors such as leadership, learning and development and work environment contribute to each construct.

Figure 3 presents a factor analysis for employee engagement, identifying critical dimensions with high loadings, such as personal drive and organisational commitment.

High loadings (0.59–0.85) were indicated for the factor analysis of employee engagement. The item 'I feel personally driven to help the organisation succeed' had a coefficient of 0.85. The significant loading suggests that employee engagement is contingent upon both personal motivation and alignment with organisational objectives. Employees who demonstrate personal commitment are more likely to be highly engaged. A reliable indicator of full involvement and commitment is the strong inclination to surpass expectations. The item 'I will go beyond what is expected of me to ensure that the organisation succeeds' had a coefficient of 0.82. Strong motivation to surpass expectations is a reliable indicator of full involvement and commitment. Based on these data, it is clear that employees who are highly engaged demonstrate a greater degree of effort than those who are not engaged. The high loadings of personal dedication and voluntary effort on the engagement factor have a significant impact on employee engagement. Consequently, it is crucial to encourage individual accountability and supplementary efforts as part of the initiatives to enhance engagement.

Figure 4 highlights the factor analysis results for job satisfaction, emphasising factors such as creativity and independence as significant contributors.

High loadings (0.49–0.77) were indicated in the factor analysis of job satisfaction. The item 'I get the chance to instruct people what to do at work' had a coefficient of 0.60. This loading suggests that, when one is granted authority or responsibility, it is crucial to provide instructions to others to increase job satisfaction. The item 'I get the chance to be

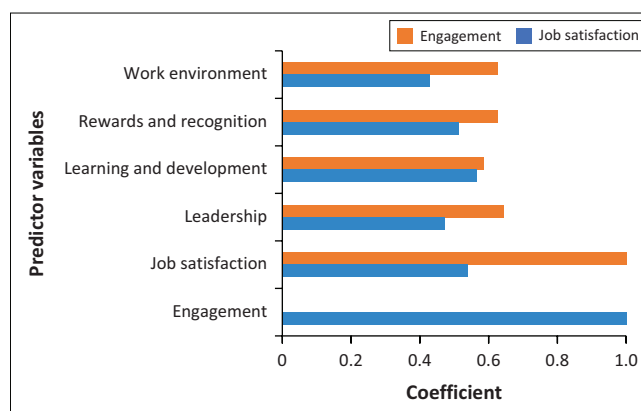


FIGURE 2: Interpretation table of Spearman's Rank-Order correlation coefficients.

TABLE 3: Descriptive statistics for employee engagement.

Dimension	Mean	SD
Vigour	3.8	0.65
Dedication	4.1	0.72
Absorption	3.6	0.59

SD, standard deviation.

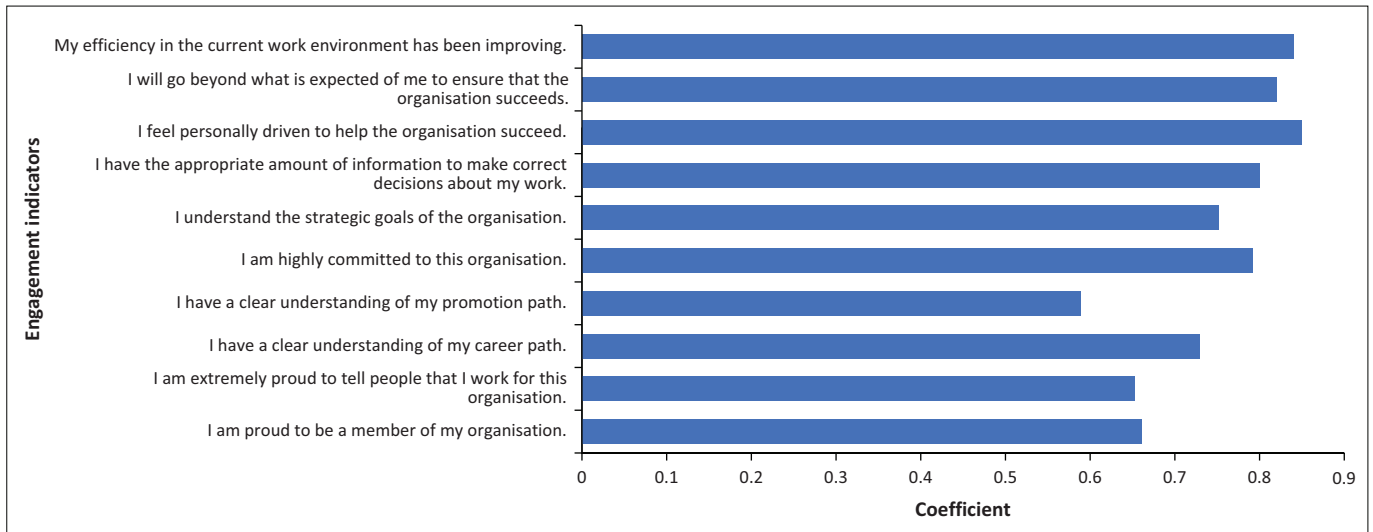


FIGURE 3: Factor analysis on employee engagement.

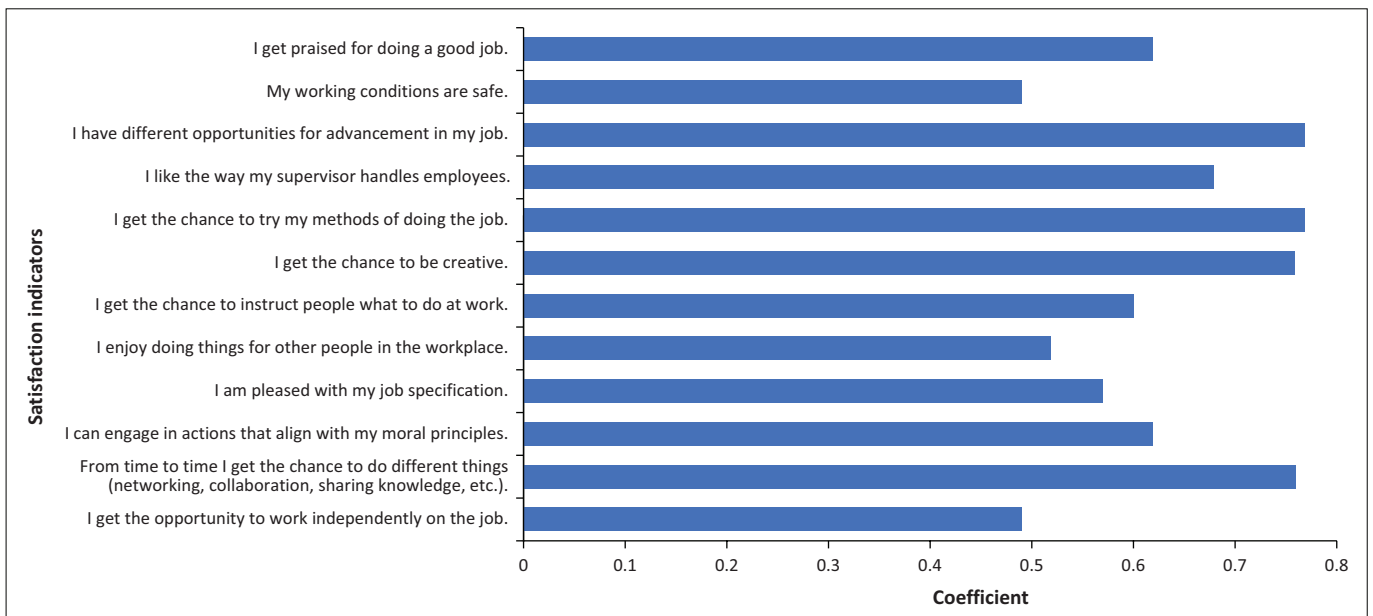


FIGURE 4: Factor analysis on job satisfaction.

creative' with a coefficient of 0.76, was another significant factor that influenced job satisfaction. Research has demonstrated that employees with the capacity to apply creativity are considerably more content in their occupations. A close correlation exists between the degree of autonomy an employee has to make decisions and be innovative in the work environment and the level of satisfaction they experience at work. These findings suggest that positions that provide employees with opportunities for creative input and decision-making are more likely to result in higher levels of employee satisfaction. Employers must consider developing positions that incorporate these components to improve employee satisfaction.

Figure 5 analyses rewards and recognition, identifying supervisory acknowledgement and fairness as pivotal factors.

The factor analysis for 'Good work is rewarded by supervisors' showed a high loading of 0.90. This implies that it is crucial to receive supervisory recognition as this high loading underlines. Direct supervisors who perceive a reward and recognition system as efficient are those who acknowledge and reward employees' efforts. The loading of 0.82 suggests that supervisors place a high value on good performance in the reward system as it contributes to the perception of fairness and effectiveness. Rewards are directly associated with performance, which enhances the perception of fairness and the effectiveness of this system. Supervisors' implementation of recognition programmes significantly impacts the efficacy of the reward and recognition systems. It is crucial for organisations to guarantee that supervisors acknowledge and encourage employee performance to advance these systems.

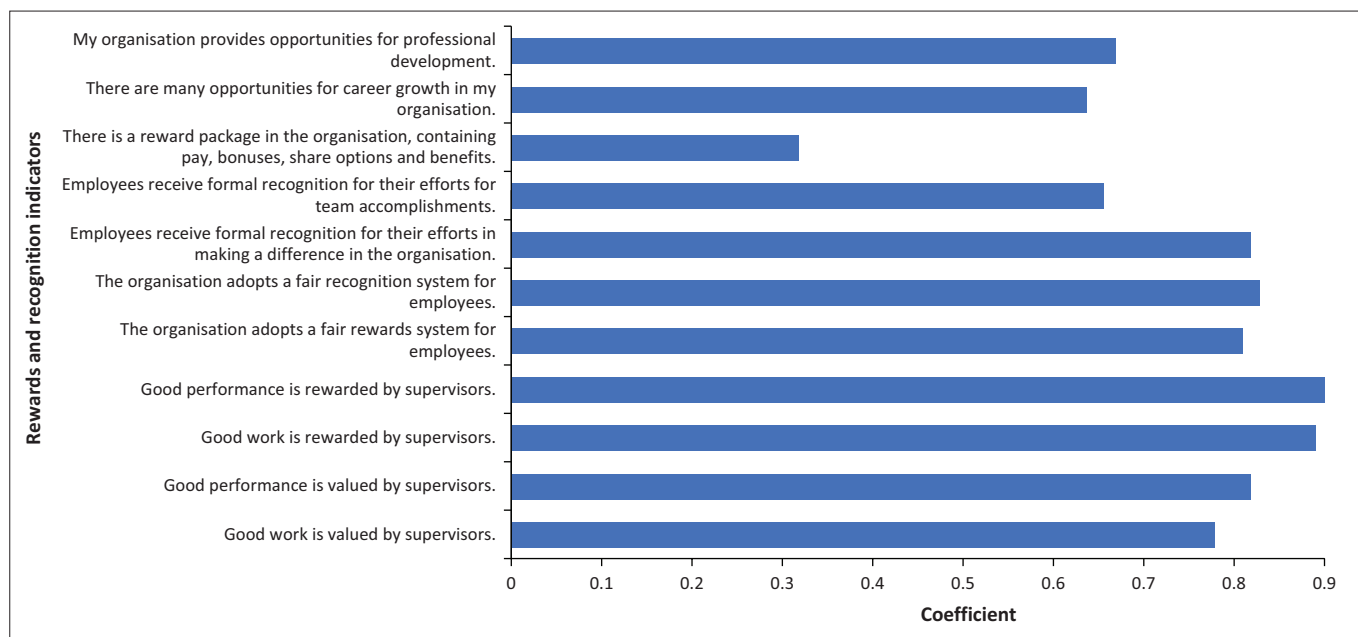


FIGURE 5: Factor analysis on rewards and recognition.

Substantial loadings served as evidence of a distinct correlation between each construct and its key items. It is imperative to have ambitious and motivated employees to surpass expectations and cultivate employee engagement. Job satisfaction and autonomy were significantly correlated, whereas effective leadership required integrity and transparent communication. Career advancement and diverse training opportunities play a crucial role in learning and development. Gumede et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of continuous learning opportunities for career advancement as well as the need for adaptable and diverse training programmes for career advancement. The efficacy of rewards and recognition systems is contingent on supervisors' active participation in reward and recognition of exceptional performance. Employees perceive rewards as more meaningful when recognised by their managers, reinforcing a sense of value and organisational support (Aldabbas et al., 2025). Organisations should prioritise employee performance areas to improve the effectiveness, satisfaction and engagement of employees as well as leadership, development and reward programmes.

A summary of findings

The study identified moderate levels of employee engagement, with vigour and dedication emerging as strong dimensions. Job satisfaction also scored moderately, with participants highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivators, such as autonomy and recognition. Leadership quality, learning opportunities and organisational support were significant predictors of both engagement and satisfaction. However, the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the reward system and workload distribution.

Key influencing factors

Leadership emerged as the most influential factor, with employees emphasising the importance of supportive and transparent management practices. Access to professional development opportunities is another critical determinant of growth and competence.

The regression coefficients of key predictors of job satisfaction and engagement are presented in Figure 6 and Figure 7.

Challenges

Inequitable workload distribution and inadequate reward systems have been identified as critical challenges that undermine employee morale. These issues suggest the need for policy reviews to ensure fairness and the recognition of employees' contributions.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the engagement and job satisfaction levels of administrative employees within the municipality. The study revealed that while a significant portion of employees demonstrated moderate to high engagement, a notable percentage remained neutral or disengaged. This aligns with broader trends observed in public-sector environments, where bureaucratic structures and limited resources often impede motivation and efficiency. Leadership emerged as a crucial determinant of engagement, reinforcing existing literature that highlights the role of supportive and visionary leadership in fostering employee commitment. The study also found that job resources such as autonomy and emotional support positively influenced engagement, as employees who perceived greater control over their work exhibited higher levels of motivation

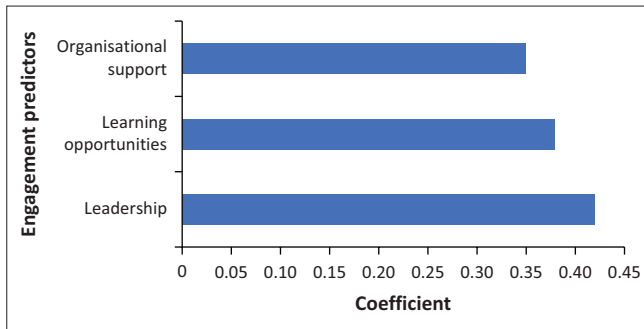


FIGURE 6: Key predictors of engagement.

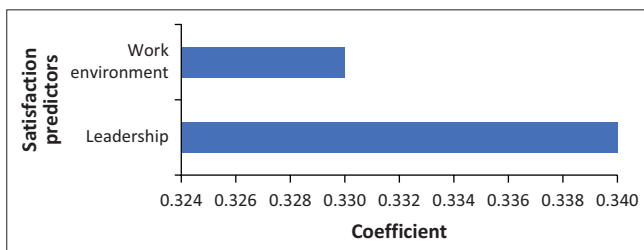


FIGURE 7: Key predictors of job satisfaction.

and job satisfaction. However, the presence of job demands, including excessive workloads and role ambiguity, acted as constraints, highlighting the need for balanced job design to sustain engagement levels.

Similarly, job satisfaction among administrative employees was found to be relatively high, although variations existed based on tenure and recognition. Employees with longer service periods reported lower satisfaction, suggesting the need for continuous career development opportunities and improved recognition strategies. The study confirmed the applicability of Herzberg's two-factor theory, demonstrating that factors such as workplace safety and a cooperative environment serve as essential hygiene factors that mitigate dissatisfaction but do not necessarily enhance satisfaction. The role of leadership in job satisfaction was particularly significant, as employees who felt supported and valued by their supervisors reported higher levels of satisfaction and engagement. This finding supports goal-setting theory, which underscores the importance of feedback and recognition in driving motivation.

A strong correlation was identified between engagement and job satisfaction, reinforcing the notion that employees who find meaning and purpose in their work tend to experience higher satisfaction levels. Likewise, satisfied employees are more likely to be engaged, leading to a self-reinforcing cycle that benefits both employees and the organisation. This reciprocal relationship underscores the importance of fostering an organisational culture that prioritises employee well-being and professional growth. The study also highlighted that while demographic factors such as gender and education level did not significantly influence engagement and satisfaction, organisational

factors such as leadership quality, work environment and job resources played a pivotal role. The findings suggest that investing in leadership development, enhancing recognition systems and creating a psychologically safe work environment can contribute to increased engagement and satisfaction levels.

The next section provides the outline of the results, practical implications, limitations and recommendations and conclusions of the study.

Outline of the results

This study underscores the interplay between organisational factors and employee attitudes. The role of leadership in fostering a positive work climate significantly affects engagement and satisfaction.

Practical implications

Implementing leadership development programmes and enhancing career advancement opportunities can improve employees' outcomes. Addressing inequities in workload distribution and revising reward systems are also crucial. This research provides organisations with strategies to boost administrative employees' job satisfaction and performance by identifying the key drivers of employee engagement. These drivers include supervisor support, job clarity and development opportunities. Local governments and other organisations can use this information to create programmes that specifically target employees to boost their performance, happiness and job retention. In addition, the results highlight the significance of fostering an emotionally supportive work environment and acknowledging employees' efforts, which are vital in lowering burnout rates and raising organisational output.

Limitations and recommendations

This cross-sectional design limits causal inferences. Future studies should adopt longitudinal methods to explore these changes. Further research could examine how digital transformation affects employee engagement, especially in remote or hybrid work environments, which have become more common since the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The study may have missed insights from new employees, who often have fresh perspectives on the organisation. This limits the study's employee experience coverage. This study suggests several future research directions. Initially, as this study only examined one organisation, future research could examine how different leadership styles affect employee engagement and job satisfaction across sectors. This may reveal industry-specific trends and workforce-wide lessons. Longitudinal studies could also examine how organisational policies, leadership, and work environments affect employee engagement and satisfaction.

Further research could examine how digital transformation affects employee engagement, especially in remote or hybrid work environments, which have become more common since the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative studies may also enhance quantitative findings by revealing employee experiences, job satisfaction and engagement factors. Cross-cultural comparisons could reveal how cultural differences affect engagement and satisfaction, helping global organisations adapt their management strategies to diverse workforces.

Conclusion

This study highlights the moderate levels of engagement and satisfaction among administrative employees in the local eMalahleni municipality. Addressing the identified challenges could enhance these constructs and contribute to improved organisational performance.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

N.G.M. conceptualised the study, conducted data collection and drafted the manuscript under the supervision of E.E. and M.G.R.

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Data availability

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

Disclaimer

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