

THE ROLE OF DIMENSIONS OF JOB ENGAGEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE



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Abstract

Job engagement is about the degree of connection employees have with their work. Engagement theories suggest that employees experience engagement cognitively, emotionally, and physically. If and the extent to which this is the case, specifically within South African municipalities, remains largely indeterminate.

This study therefore investigates the relationship between dimensions of job engagement and perceived organizational performance in South African municipalities. A quantitative research approach was followed, and data was collected through an online survey administered to a non-probability sample of municipal employees.

The study reveals that of the three dimensions of job engagement, emotional and physical engagement demonstrated statistically significant relationships with perceived organizational performance although physical engagement turned out as a stronger predictor. Surprisingly, the relationship between cognitive engagement and perceived organizational performance was not statistically significant.

Consequently, it is imperative for jobs in municipalities to be better designed with a clear intention to foster job engagement.

1. Introduction

Job engagement (JE) refers to the level of enthusiasm and involvement that specific employees have in their job. This involvement typically stems from their awareness of the organization's business and a resolve to work with others to improve performance (Saratun, 2016). Remarkably, research on JE shows that while employees feel engaged when they start a new job, the proportion of engaged employees drops drastically, afterwards (Marrelli, 2011). This may be attributable to unpalatable episodes at the workplace, such as workplace aggression (Ford, Myrden & Kelloway, 2016), perceptions of job insecurity (Jung, Jung & Yoon, 2021), work-family conflict

(Labrague & Obeidat, 2022) and decreasing resources (Hu, Schaufeli & Taris, 2017).

In effect, it is possible that many organizations harbour disengaged employees. For instance, a 2018 Gallup study reported that while 34% of employees in the United States of America (USA) are actively engaged, only 13% of the world's employees fall in a similar category (Orlowski, Bufquin & Nalley, 2020). Disturbingly, in the specific case of South Africa, the cohort of actively engaged employees constitutes only a paltry 9% of the entire workforce (Staff Hire, 2018), which is below the global average, and this is unlikely to augur well for organizational performance.

According to Johnson (2020), JE can benefit organizations and so it is worth to invest efforts in human resource practices that support the chosen strategy and fundamental values to develop a competitive workforce. Maylett and Nielsen (2012) observe that there is a connection between JE and return on investment in profit-seeking organizations. This is further supported by Kumar (2019) who declared that JE stimulates organizational effectiveness by improving performance metrics related to profitability and productivity. Findings of a study on the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) public sector by Ibrahim and Al Falasi (2014) showed that JE was positively linked to employees' organizational commitment. Similarly, Jaharuddin and Zainol (2019) found that JE and employee turnover intention were significantly but inversely correlated. On a different note, frontline employees working in a politically charged environment displayed negative emotions which was possibly consequent upon low JE levels (Karatepe Osman, 2013). This resonates with the assertion of Jain and Ansari (2018) that toxic organizational politics can endanger JE among employees.

While these observations related to JE are based on empirical evidence, the contextual nature of the construct of JE means that inaccurate deductions concerning the nature of JE and its relationship with organizational performance may be made, if findings from other countries or contexts are relied upon to infer what the situation in South African municipalities could possibly be. Besides, the absence of congruence in research findings focused on JE and its role in organizations, is a pointer to the fact that organizational outcomes that pivot around JE are likely to be subject to specific organizational or environmental nuances. This makes each case, not only limited to South African municipalities, unique and worthy of empirical investigation.

Despite some evidence that JE enhances business practices, according to Taneja, Sewell and Odom (2015) there is no clear link between JE and perceived organizational performance. This position is not necessarily in alignment with the positions advanced in the studies of Chen (2015) and Bin Shmailan (2015). The absence of a consensus as it pertains to the relationship between JE and organizational performance in extant literature is indicative of the effect of context on such relationships. In other words, the contextual nature of the constructs and their projected relationships mean that results in different environments cannot be relied upon to determine what might be the case in South African municipalities. To lend credence to this assertion, Bin Shmailan (2015), posits that employee engagement can vary from country to country.

Interestingly, a comparative study conducted in Ghana by Agyemang and Ofei (2013), found that private sector employees

had a higher level of JE than employees from the public sector. To highlight the gulf between JE among employees in the private sector and those in the public sector, Martins and Ledimo (2016) drew parallels between poor service delivery characterising municipalities and the world class performance by the private sector in South Africa. Similarly, Pepra-Mensah and Kyeremeh (2018) assert that generally, public sector employees are less engaged when compared to private sector employees. This is partly because according to Borst, Kruyen and Lako (2019), public sector employees are motivated by work characteristics instead of organizational characteristics and resultantly, they tend to be more engaged when satisfied by work-related resources. On this score, Byrne and MacDonagh (2017) opine that employee engagement in the public sector can be dictated by their perceptions of organizational support, the premium placed on employee voice and the ability to participate in the decision-making process.

This notwithstanding, Byrne and MacDonagh (2017) also highlighted that studies on JE have mostly been conducted within the private sector thereby leaving a gap for similar studies to be carried out in the public sector. The current study therefore complements previous research on JE by filling some of the gaps in extant literature. Notably as well, most studies tend to consider JE as a consolidated construct and so how its component dimensions specifically relate with selected organizational outcomes, remains largely unknown. Consequently, the primary purpose of this quantitative study is to determine if there is a relationship between dimensions of JE, as a disaggregated construct and perceived organizational performance (POP) in South African municipalities.

The significance of this study cannot be over-emphasized because municipalities in South Africa's public sector are primarily responsible for the delivery of basic services to the citizenry. Furthermore, the value of this study is amplified by the reality that several studies on JE (see Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Vincent-Höper, Muser & Janneck, 2012) tend to be conducted in the developed world and so according to Anne Sambrook, Jones and Doloriert (2014), an examination of the JE concept in different contexts is apposite. In addition, research on JE in South Africa has largely concentrated on the private sector (Martins & Ledimo, 2016). Therefore, a study of South African municipalities contributes to the scholarly discourse on JE by providing a public sector perspective on the nexus of dimensions of JE and POP in municipalities.

2. Literature Review

JE refers to a psychological and motivational state where employees are devoted to their work and therefore contribute

meaningfully to the attainment of organizational goals (Hansen, Byrne & Kiersch, 2014). Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined JE as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Kahn's (1990) JE theory outlined the psychological conditions and dimensions of engagement, whereas Saks' (2006) social exchange theory (SET) highlighted the importance of social aspects of work that enable engagement. In a complementary manner, Zinger's (2009) model introduces the key elements that must be satisfied for engagement to happen. It is noteworthy that there is a level of connectedness amongst these extant theories in their attempt to explain JE.

Kahn's (1990) theory of JE implies that psychological conditions shape how people inhabit their roles and according to Soane et al., (2012), it is founded on the tenets of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Kahn's theory of JE proposes that there are three psychological conditions that must be met for individuals to be engaged: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. An employee's work characteristics contribute to meaningfulness which then results in enhanced engagement. Positive interpersonal relationships make it possible for an employee to experience psychological safety which then leads to improved engagement. Therefore, a study of South African municipalities contributes to the scholarly discourse on JE by providing a public sector perspective on the nexus of dimensions of JE and POP in municipalities. In accordance with the theory, individuals can be engaged to various degrees along physical, emotional and cognitive dimensions (Zaidi et al., 2013). These dimensions mirror the JE dimensions of vigour, dedication, and absorption, respectively as identified by Schaufeli et al. (2002).

Saks' (2006) SET mainly discussed reasons why employees feel engaged with their work. The SET views JE as a multidimensional construct that has cognitive, behavioural, and emotional aspects (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010) and this aligns with the three dimensions in Kahn's theory of JE. The SET draws attention to the role of the relationship between employees and their organizations (Yin, 2018) and its ramifications for JE. It is against this background that Saks (2006) contends that JE has a positive impact on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviour while it negatively affects the intention to quit. According to Saks (2006), a strong theoretical rationale for explaining JE can be found in the SET as it asserts that individuals make social conclusions that are grounded on supposed costs and benefits. In essence, the SET advocates the existence of a give-and-take relationship between employers and employees (Jose, 2012) and delivers a hypothetical justification for why individuals may or may not be engaged in their work or organization.

Zinger's (2009) model of JE introduces keys that a manager must follow to achieve significant results. For instance, the model indicates that JE is predicated on the employee having a connection with the job and the organization, that must be authentic (Nasution & Absah, 2019). This manifests when employees feel served by the organization such that they, in turn, feel obligated to invest in the pursuit of organizational goals. The Zinger model also suggests that employees must experience both personal and specialized development through work by learning to enhance their own strengths, value, visibility, and engagement (Kaur, 2017). Remarkably, the Zinger (2009) model attempts to balance the effort from organizations, management, and employees in establishing and nurturing JE. In this regard, it is important for employees and managers to have roles that fully satisfy obligations while engaging to become star performers (Zinger, 2012). In accordance with the model, for this to happen, the engagement must span the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions so that employees feel engaged enough to perform optimally.

2.1. Job Engagement and Organizational Performance

According to Darvishmotevali and Ali (2020), job performance is a collection of individual behaviours in relation to the given job. Job performance significantly influences the organization's success (Swanson et al., 2020) which then makes it an important element for organizations striving for success. In the light of this, to achieve efficient and sustainable service delivery in municipalities in South Africa, employee job performance is a critical dependency (Mhlanga, Mjoli & Chamisa, 2019). This is a proposition which further highlights the importance of job engagement in the context of municipalities of South Africa.

There is considerable interest in the connection between organizational financial results and JE (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014), considered as a consolidated construct. The reference to financial results could be indicative of the difference in context between the private sector and public sector, as most public sector entities like the municipalities, are driven by objectives other than financial gains. Nonetheless, in a study of employees in a higher education institution in South Africa, Bhana and Suknunan (2021) found that high levels of disengagement led to increased employee stress and high job turnover. This certainly lends itself to poor organizational performance, an unsatisfactory situation which Munzhedzi (2021) observes is rife in municipalities in South Africa. The poor performance of municipalities in South Africa is further exacerbated by poor corporate governance (Chirau & Blaser-Mapitsa, 2020) which is likely to affect the extent of JE among employees.

As an antidote to poor performance, Sundaray (2011) asserts that when efforts are invested in strategies to improve JE, organizations tend to reap the rewards of high productivity and profits. Congruent with this assertion, Kaushik and Guleria (2019) declare that an organization's performance and productivity are linked to JE. Similarly, JE, which is at the heart of workplace relationships between employers and employees has been identified as the key that unlocks productivity (Mylswamy & Gayatri, 2014). Rameshkumar (2020) also argues that JE is critical for organizational success because it stimulates organizational effectiveness, innovation, and competitive advantage. It is important to note that these positions as reflected in extant literature are based on the perspective of JE as a consolidated construct. The current study takes a different approach and adopts a disaggregated view so that it can specifically examine the three dimensions of cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement and how they relate to organizational performance in South African municipalities.

Invariably, JE, despite the pluralism of its dimensions, is associated with organizational success (Pham-Thai et al., 2018). The cognitive engagement (CE) dimension of JE is based on employees' beliefs about organizational factors and conditions (Pepra-Mensah & Kyeremeh, 2018). Employees who are cognitively engaged tend to have positive thoughts and attitude towards their work (Kuok & Taormina, 2017). In affirmation, Hernandez and Guarana (2018) state that JE is not only determined by employees' understanding of their job requirements but is also influenced by their anticipation of opportunities within the work environment. This suggests that different work environments and scenarios can influence JE differently. In a study involving medical practitioners, van Mol et al., (2018) note that cognitive demands of work have a negative relationship with JE. On the other hand, employee work cognition has a positive relationship with CE (Joo et al., 2017).

Zehir et al., (2017) argue that CE has a positive effect on performance. In addition to that, Knoll and Redman (2016) submit that employees who are cognitively engaged tend to focus more on their work tasks contrary to their disengaged counterparts. In a study involving teachers, Adil and Khan (2020) found that CE had a positive relationship with teacher performance but that the relationship is weakened by occupational stress. Comparably, while investigating the role of employee engagement in organizational effectiveness, Singh and Singh (2021) found that CE was a strong predictor of productivity. Recognizing the value of these favorable dispositions in literature with respect to employees that are cognitively engaged, this study hypothesizes that in the context of South African municipalities:

H1: *There is a positive association between employees' cognitive engagement with their jobs and perceived organizational performance.*

JE also finds expression in the emotional engagement (EE) that employees have with their organization and its goals (Imandin, Bisschoff & Botha, 2015). EE directly affects the health of the association that employees have with their jobs and the people they interact with at work (Rich et al., 2010). It is, therefore, possible that when individual employees feel emotionally engaged at their organizations, they may become more involved with their work, and this could lead to increased performance.

EE as a dimension of JE is defined as the willing attachment to organizational tasks and activities (Kuok & Taormina, 2017). This view aligns with Jha, Sareen and Potnuru's (2019) view that EE reflects the employee's attitude towards the supervisor and the organization, and it can be enhanced by various factors including upward employee voice (Ruck, Welch & Menara, 2017). Instructively, organizations with emotionally engaged employees tend to experience low employee turnover (Kuok & Taormina, 2017), a scenario which could engender organizational performance. Walden, Jung and Westerman (2017) echo the same sentiment by stating that emotionally engaged employees tend to be committed to the organization thereby reducing their chances of leaving.

Furthermore, Reina et al., (2018) argue that inspirational appeals by management to employees can breed employee loyalty because they enhance EE. It is therefore unsurprising that Singh and Karki (2015) found a positive correlation between EE and performance. Nguyen et al., (2021) also found that EE has a significant positive influence on job performance. These positions gleaned from extant literature encourage the projection that in the specific case of South African municipalities:

H2: *There is a positive association between employees' emotional engagement with their jobs and perceived organizational performance.*

Although JE is highly regarded as a key aspect of organizational sustainability (Vila-Vázquez et al., 2018), its dimensions can have different impacts on organizational performance. Physical engagement (PE) is the most obvious form of JE (Shuck & Reio, 2014) as it causes workers to dedicate a lot of energy to work execution. PE fosters the employees' willingness to exert full effort, resulting in added value to the organization (Furst, 2018) which in turn, culminates in improved organizational performance. In a study investigating JE and work outcomes among expatriate academics, Lauring and Selmer (2015) found

that PE had a positive relationship with work performance and this finding is corroborated by Chhajer, Rose and Joseph (2018) who also found that higher levels of PE typically led to improved work performance.

Furthermore, physically engaged employees tend to accept higher volumes of work and strive to fulfil designated tasks (Knoll & Redman, 2016) which could drive organizational performance. In harmony with this opinion, Zhong, Wayne and Liden (2016) declare that PE is positively correlated with performance and negatively related to an employee's intention-to-quit. Similarly, Bakker (2017) argues that employee PE stimulates work performance as engaged employees tend to put extra effort into their work. Against this backdrop but in the specific context of

municipalities in South Africa, this study elects to hypothesize that:

H3: *There is a positive association between employees' physical engagement with their jobs and perceived organizational performance.*

The formulated hypotheses which are deductively derived from positions in extant literature constitute the conceptual framework for the study, as presented in Figure 1. This conceptual framework theorizes that cognitive, physical, and emotional engagement are all associated, albeit positively, with perceived organizational performance.

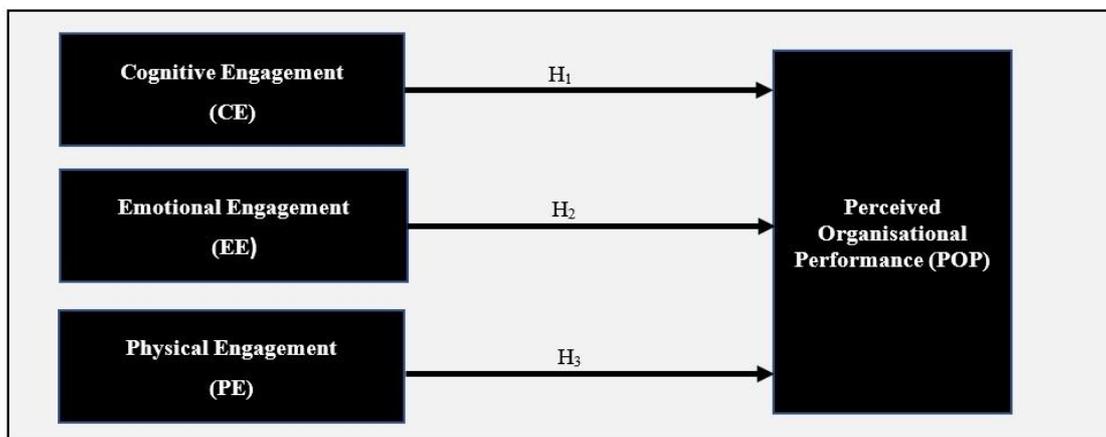


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Research Methodology

This is a quantitative study and so it was executed from the philosophical position of positivism. The target population of the study comprised employees currently working in South African municipalities. Knowing that it was impractical to reach all respondents in the target population, the study resorted to the use of a sample. A non-probability sampling method was considered appropriate for the study because the researchers could not access a comprehensive sampling frame of municipal employees in South Africa. Specifically, snowball sampling was utilized as it permitted the researchers to ask for assistance in identifying potential respondents.

An online self-administered questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics was used for data collection and invitations to fill out the questionnaire were sent out by email. In some cases, the questionnaire was directly emailed to respondents in a bid to improve the response rate for the study. This approach was deemed appropriate because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the fact that respondents were vastly geographically dispersed. It is worth highlighting that the Covid-19 pandemic posed challenges

to the quest to reach potential respondents because social restrictions dissuaded them from being physically present at their offices. Nonetheless, while approximately 1000 were contacted with the questionnaires, only 226 responses were received, though 17 were excluded as they were incomplete.

Primarily, the questionnaire contained two scales to measure JE and POP, respectively. For the dependent variable of POP, a Likert type scale was employed. The scale which was adapted from the study of Delaney and Huselid (1996) sought to determine how employees rated their organization's performance relative to other municipalities. The POP scale comprised six items in the form of statements with six associated answer options ranging from 'much worse' to 'much better'. It is noteworthy that the questions in the original scale were converted to statements so that respondents were able to use a 6-point rating scale to reflect their responses. The decision to use the POP scale was partly because, as observed by Sinclair, Wang and Tetrick (2012), it has an excellent internal consistency reliability of 0.88. The Job Engagement Scale (JES) developed by Rich et al. (2010), was utilized to measure the cognitive, emotional, and physical

dimensions of JE. The JES is a measuring instrument that fully echoes Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of JE as the extent to which people invest cognitive, emotional, and physical energy into job performance (Rich et al., 2010). Internal consistency reliabilities for the three dimensions in the scale are typically from 0.89 to 0.94 (Rich et al., 2010). The scale had 18 items, and each was accompanied by six answer options ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

4. Presentation of Results

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 illustrates the demographic profile of the respondents. The gender question was used to check the balance in the data collected. The sample was well balanced in terms of employee gender.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Gender	N	%
Male	97	46
Female	96	46
Other	7	3
Prefer not to answer	9	5

4.2. Assessment of Measuring Scales

The reliability analysis assessed the precision of the POP scale in measuring perceived organizational performance and the JES in measuring job engagement. A Cronbach's alpha (CA) of 0.750 was attained for the seven items on the POP scale. The JE scale had three constructs (PE, EE, and CE), all with six items each. As shown in Table 2, the CA results obtained for the EE and PE dimensions of JE are 0.857 and 0.829 respectively. An item (2.16) in the CE sub-dimension had a low loading of 0.443 and was removed. The removal improved the CA of the CE scale from 0.766 to 0.781. The CA results for the POP scale and the scales for the three dimensions of JE indicate acceptable levels of scale reliability.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis and scale reliabilities

Scale	Item loadings	Alpha if item deleted	Cronbach alpha for scale
Organisational Performance			0.750
Q1.1	0.726	0.698	
Q1.2	0.618	0.722	
Q1.3	0.649	0.716	
Q1.4	0.601	0.727	
Q1.5	0.653	0.717	
Q1.6	0.572	0.733	
Q1.7	0.614	0.724	
Physical Engagement			0.829
Q2.1	0.723	0.804	
Q2.2	0.750	0.798	
Q2.3	0.738	0.800	
Q2.4	0.745	0.799	
Q2.5	0.696	0.811	
Q2.6	0.759	0.796	
Emotional Engagement			0.857
Q2.7	0.769	0.832	
Q2.8	0.694	0.847	
Q2.9	0.787	0.828	
Q2.10	0.745	0.837	
Q2.11	0.765	0.833	
Q2.12	0.817	0.820	
Cognitive Engagement			0.781
Q2.13	0.768	0.726	
Q2.14	0.747	0.735	
Q2.15	0.774	0.729	
Q2.17	0.724	0.745	

Q2.18	0.656	0.770	
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4.3. Descriptive Statistics

Mean scores were used to gauge the sample's mean perception on a given questionnaire item. Results as presented in Table 3 show that for the items in the POP scale, the mean scores associated with scale items were in the range of 3.66 to 4.35. These results show that respondents considered their municipalities' performance 'slightly better' or indeed 'better' than those of other

municipalities. For the PE dimension of JE, item means ranged from 4.42 to 4.74. The lowest mean score for items in the EE dimension of JE was 3.73 while the highest was 4.15. With respect to the CE dimension of JE, the lowest and highest means scores associated with scale items were 3.92 and 4.56 respectively. At a composite level, the means for POP, PE, EE, and CE were 3.96, 4.54, 3.98 and 4.33 respectively.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of questionnaire items

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
	Perceived Organizational Performance		3.96	1.105
1.1	Quality of training and development programs	203	3.98	1.355
1.2	Development of new employee involvement programs	205	3.66	1.432
1.3	Ability to attract essential employees	205	4.01	1.281
1.4	Ability to retain essential employees	204	3.85	1.446
1.5	Satisfaction of customers or clients	204	4.11	1.521
1.6	Relations between management and employees	208	3.79	1.418
1.7	Relations among employees in general	203	4.35	1.336
	Physical Engagement		4.54	1.181
2.2	I work with intensity on my job	207	4.42	1.348
2.2	I exert my full effort to my job	203	4.43	1.424
2.3	I devote a lot of energy to my job	206	4.51	1.353
2.4	I try my hardest to perform well on my job	206	4.74	1.241
2.5	I strive as much as I can to complete my job	206	4.59	1.448
2.6	I exert a lot of energy on my job	205	4.60	1.275
	Emotional Engagement		3.98	1.348
2.7	I am enthusiastic in my job	206	4.15	1.432
2.8	I feel energetic at my job	206	3.98	1.390
2.9	I am interested in my job	206	3.97	1.498
2.10	I am proud of my job	205	4.13	1.494
2.11	I feel positive about my job	207	3.97	1.494
2.12	I am excited about my job	205	3.73	1.503
	Cognitive Engagement		4.33	1.100
2.13	At work, my mind is focused on my job	207	4.18	1.29
2.14	At work, I pay a lot of attention to what is expected of me	205	4.56	1.42
2.15	At work, I concentrate on my job	205	4.42	1.18
2.16	I am captivated by my job	202	3.92	1.34
2.17	At work, I focus on my tasks	204	4.50	1.24
2.18	I am dedicated to my job	204	4.38	1.47

4.4. Inferential Statistics

Prior to undertaking tests of the study's hypotheses, it was necessary to determine if multiple linear regression assumptions were met by the data. The scatter graph in Figure 2 shows that standardized residuals have a linear relationship with the

dependent variable. This indicates that the linearity assumption was met (Rivera, 2020) which then makes it permissible to examine the hypothesized relationships in the study with the use of multiple regression analysis.

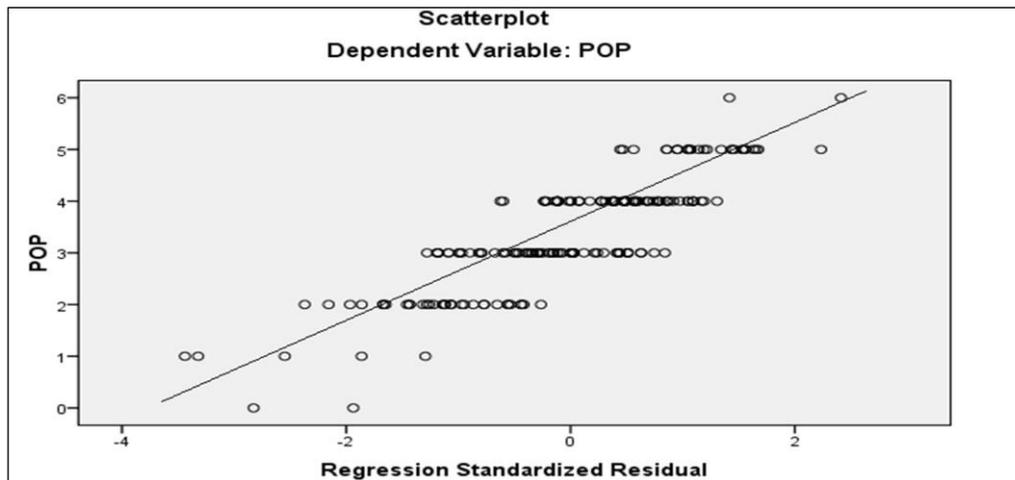


Figure 2. Scatter plot-test for linearity

The scatter plot also depicts the consistency of the independent variables' standardized residuals across all levels of POP. This indicates that the variance of residuals was the same for all values of the independent variable. The implication is that the assumption of homoscedasticity was therefore met. Furthermore, for multiple regressions, observations ought to be normally distributed. Normality of the observations is confirmed by skewness and kurtosis scores of the dataset that were within a -2.58 to 2.58 range (see Loerts et al., 2020). This is reflective of a data distribution pattern that is close to normal albeit with minor variations.

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis that was undertaken to examine the study's hypothesized relationships. The results show that statistically significant relationships exist between PE and POP as well as between EE and POP given that the p-values associated with these hypothesized relationships are less than 0.05. Conversely, the relationship between CE and POP is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). On the strength of these results, it can be concluded that H1 is not statistically supported while the reverse is the case for H2 and H3.

Table 4. Multiple regression results

Independent variables	Std. Coeff.	Std. Error	t-stat	P-value
Physical Engagement (PE)	0.286	0.093	3.082	0.002
Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.238	0.076	3.136	0.002
Cognitive Engagement (CE)	0.110	0.104	1.060	0.290
R ²	0.303			
F statistic	29.666***			
Number of obs.	208			

The beta values in Table 4 are standardized. A one-standard-deviation increase in PE will result in an expected increase of 0.286 standard deviations in POP, holding EE and CE constant. Similarly, a one-standard-deviation increase in EE will result in an increase of 0.238 standard deviations in POP, holding PE and CE constant. Although a one-standard-deviation increase in CE will result in an increase of 0.110 standard deviations in POP, the impact is not significant or may be due to chance. From Table 4, though both PE and EE are positively and significantly related to POP, an increase in PE increases organizational performance relatively more than would be the case for EE. In other words, based on the sample of the study, both PE and EE significantly improve POP, but PE is relatively more important for POP than EE. The regression model in its entirety shows that the predictors

in the model can explain 30.3% of the variation in the dependent variable – POP. The model, therefore, has considerable power given the existence of many other factors outside this relationship.

4. Discussion

The study investigated the associations between JE dimensions (PE, EE, and CE) and POP. Results of hypotheses tests indicate that statistically significant positive relationships exist between PE and POP as well as between EE and POP. Notably though, PE is a stronger predictor of POP relative to EE. With respect to PE, this finding resonates with the opinion of Furst (2018) who argues that the physical aspect of engagement fosters employees' willingness to exert full effort, resulting in added value and

performance to the organization. The study's finding of a significant positive correlation between EE and POP corroborates the view of Rich et al., (2010) that employees that are emotionally engaged contribute substantially to effectiveness and improved organizational performance.

Notably, CE did not display any statistically significant association with POP. It is curious why this has been the case and it may be because much of the work undertaken in municipalities is largely routine in nature and is guided by standard operating procedures. Such jobs are therefore generally not cognitively tasking. Furthermore, it is possible that employees in top management positions, who would ordinarily place substantial premium on CE may not have participated sufficiently in the study. These notwithstanding, the result of the study as it concerns the relationship between CE and POP is in contrast with the finding of Adil and Khan (2020) that, among teachers, cognitive engagement is associated with improved performance. This contrast draws into focus the reality that context can influence the nature of the relationships between JE dimensions and performance. The implication of this is that caution must be exercised in generalizing results across contexts or relying on results of prior studies to make inferences about the situation in specific work environments like South African Municipalities.

5. Recommendation and Conclusion

The study focused on municipal employees rather than all government employees to explore a specific portion of the public sector, that is supposedly the critical vehicle for the delivery of services to the local population. The respondents attested to their physical, emotional, and cognitive engagements but judging by the mean scores obtained through descriptive statistical analysis, the respondents were mostly physically engaged with their work. The lowest level of engagement, identified in the studied sample of municipal employees, was associated with EE.

Against this backdrop, management should strive to improve their relationships with employees in a bid to increase JE across all dimensions. In practical terms, there is a need for management to show a higher level of interest in the well-being and development of their employees if engagement is to increase at all levels. Additionally, the need for the creation of incentives that engender JE by making work at municipalities more interesting, challenging and fulfilling cannot be over-emphasized.

Cognizant of the 30.3% predictive strength of the regression model in the study, it is necessary for management at the municipalities to invest in the improvement of the three dimensions of engagement among their employees. More specifically though, with the empirical evidence of an association

between the predictor variables of PE, EE and the dependent variable of POP, higher levels of investment should be made in enhancing PE and EE in the studied population of employees in South African Municipalities as a means of bolstering organizational performance.

6. Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation of the study was the use of a non-probability sampling method which made the results impossible to be generalized to a larger population. The study exclusively focused on municipal employees and excluded other public service workers. This meant that the sample was limited to the lowest stratum of the public sector governance structure in South Africa and results thereof are not generalizable. Additionally, there was limited access to data, and this was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic as organizations were operating with minimum staff.

It is recommended that future research should prioritize the use of actual performance scores in measuring organizational performance rather than doing so based on perceptions. An extensive focus on JE across different strata in the public sector is still needed if research gaps, particularly from the context of a developing economy, are to be addressed. Given the contextual influence on the relationships between JE dimensions and organizational performance, the body of knowledge would be enriched by research conducted in different industrial sectors in the developing world, owing to the dearth of research emanating from such parts of the world.

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Declaration of Interests

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

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