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**Examining The Relationship Between Job Characteristics and
Work Engagement in Mission-Oriented and Non-Mission-
Oriented Roles Within the Public Sector**

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
PhD in Leadership and Management

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Academic Year: 2024 - 2025

Supervisor: Dr. Monica Franco-Santos
Associate Supervisor: Prof. Clare Kelliher

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the degree of PhD

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been growing academic interest in understanding how contextual features shape employee work engagement, particularly within the public sector where job roles and motivations are highly heterogeneous. While substantial literature has explored engagement through the Job Demands-Resources (JDR) theory, the influence of contextual variation across occupational roles remains under-theorised. This thesis focuses on the heterogeneity of public sector work and examines how differences between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles influence the relationship between job characteristics and employee engagement.

Building on longstanding criticisms that engagement research has often neglected context or reduced it to a statistical control, this study draws on Johns' (2006) framework to conceptualise context as an integral theoretical element. The research empirically investigates how contextual variation interacts with job demands and resources to shape engagement and exhaustion. Using data from the 2021 European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS), this study applies Multigroup Structural Equation Modelling (MG-SEM) and Moderated Structural Equation Modelling (MSEM) to a stratified sample of public sector employees across Europe. The analysis tests the differential salience of job characteristics and the buffering role of resources in mitigating the negative effects of job demands.

This study finds that employees in mission-oriented public sector roles experience both higher work engagement and higher exhaustion than their non-mission-oriented counterparts, showing the importance of context in shaping psychological experiences at work. Emotional demands function as challenge demand but primarily as hindrance demands in mission roles, being strongly associated with exhaustion but not significantly with engagement. Contrary to expectations, work intensity and work-life interference showed similar effects across both role types. Among job resources, social support had greater significance for engagement in mission-oriented roles, while autonomy and voice were beneficial across roles. Only autonomy demonstrated a significant buffering effect, mitigating the impact of work intensity on exhaustion, but only in mission-oriented roles.

Theoretically, the study advances JDR theory by integrating role context as a central explanatory mechanism, using Johns' (2006) contextual framework. It challenges assumptions of motivational homogeneity in public sector work and illustrates that the

effect of job demands and resources is contingent on role type. Methodologically, it employs Multigroup Structural Equation Modelling (MG-SEM) to test the moderating role of context, positioning it as a central variable rather than a control variable. Practically, the study provides a foundation for more tailored, role-sensitive engagement strategies in public sector human resource management.

Keywords:

Work engagement, mission-oriented roles, non-mission-oriented roles, contextual framework, heterogeneity, public sector, job demands and resources theory.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Yeshua HaMashiach, you gave me your word and you kept it. Thank you!

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List of Abbreviations

AGFI	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CMB	Common Method Bias
CMIN	Chi-Square Index
CMIN/DF	Relative Chi-Square Index
CMV	Common Method Variance
CR	Construct Reliability
EWCS	European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS)
EUROFOUND	European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
GFI	Goodness of Fit Index
HRM	Human Resource Management
IFI	Incremental Fit Index
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
JDR	Job Demands-Resources Theory
MBI	Maslach Burnout Inventory
NFI	Normed Fit Index
PSM	Public Service Motivation
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
UWES	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale
χ^2	Chi-Square Statistic

1 Introduction

Work engagement has been hailed by academic researchers and practitioners as an important employee work state, which can potentially increase and improve organisational effectiveness, competitiveness, and innovation (Schaufeli, 2021; Saks et al., 2021; Wittenberg et al., 2023). Work engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, absorption and dedication” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). Employees who are engaged at work are reported to be intrinsically motivated (Schaufeli, 2012), perform their job with great enthusiasm (Markos and Sridevi, 2010), are proactive (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2008), display innovative and creative behaviour at work (Chang et al., 2013; Bakker, 2015), and are also said to be healthier than their less engaged co-workers (Halbesleben, 2010). Therefore, researchers have reached a consensus that an organisation's competitive edge in terms of productivity, low turnover rates, customer happiness and loyalty, and profitability depends heavily on employees' work engagement (Bakker, 2022; Borst et al., 2018). In addition, research has shown work engagement to be correlated positively with superior business performance (Mueller, 2019), increased financial returns (Mazzetti et al., 2023), and business growth (Albrecht et al., 2015). Despite the well-established benefits of work engagement, research and practice evidence show that less than 30% of employees are engaged at work (Albrecht et al., 2015; Harter, 2022).

The consistently low engagement levels highlight a significant disconnect between the well-documented benefits of work engagement and its practical implementation in organisations. This persistent gap has prompted ongoing interest among scholars and practitioners in understanding how engagement can be effectively fostered (Bakker, 2022; Rahmadani et al., 2019). One potential reason for this gap lies in the insufficient attention paid to the role of context, that is, the organisational, occupational, and institutional settings in which engagement occurs (Fletcher et al., 2020; Wittenburg, 2023). Given that engagement does not unfold in a vacuum, understanding its variation across different contexts is essential for both theoretical refinement and practical application.

1.1 Problem Statement

1.1.1 Contextual Study of Work Engagement

A growing body of research highlights the fundamental role of context in shaping organisational dynamics and influencing theoretical advancement in management research (see Johns, 2006; 2018; Farndale et al., 2022; Cooke et al., 2018; Fletcher et al., 2020). Acknowledging that organisational phenomena are deeply rooted in specific settings, scholars have increasingly advocated for more context-sensitive approaches that account for the environmental and situational factors influencing behaviours, attitudes, and outcomes. For instance, Cappelli and Sherer (1991) emphasized that understanding unique patterns of behaviour within organizations is not possible without directly accounting for the influence of context. Similarly, Rousseau and Fried (2001) argue that organisational behaviour research frequently neglects the embeddedness of constructs in real-world settings, thereby limiting theoretical development. Similarly, Bamberger (2008) argues that stronger theorising requires closer attention to the role of context in specifying boundary conditions and uncovering hidden causal pathways. More recently, Farndale et al. (2022) highlight that this issue is particularly salient within the HRM and organisational behaviour field where the role of context has often been portrayed more as an afterthought than as a key driver for undertaking research. They argue that this has led to the slow development of new context dependent theory. The conceptual and empirical treatment of context as a background condition rather than a constitutive element of the model results in what Whetten (2009) calls theoretically incomplete research. He asserts that robust theories must address not only the "what" and "how," but also the "where" and "when" of phenomena. This critique is particularly evident in the work engagement literature, where interest in the topic has grown rapidly, yet contextual influences remain underexplored.

Although work engagement has received considerable interest in research and practice, less attention has been paid to the effect of context on work engagement (Fletcher et al., 2020). Only a few studies have indicated that context could potentially influence work engagement whether through direct or indirect pathways (e.g. Fletcher et al, 2020; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Borst et al., 2019; Wittenberg

et al., 2023). Scholars have increasingly pointed to the limitations of work engagement research that overlooks the influence of contextual variables stating that this has led to an acontextual understanding of work engagement and a simplistic view of the concept, which they argue could hinder the effective application of work engagement theories to practice (Purcell, 2014; Fletcher et al., 2020; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Wittenberg et al., 2023; Shuck et al., 2021). Over a decade ago, Bakker, Albrecht, and Leiter (2011, p. 23) emphasized the need to move beyond individual and job-level predictors, urging researchers to "pay more attention to the broader contextual factors that impact on engagement." Despite this early call, subsequent research has often continued to treat work engagement as a context-independent construct. Fletcher et al. (2020) echo this concern, noting that the expanding body of engagement literature has yet to fully examine how organisational, institutional, sectoral, or occupational contexts shape work engagement. This point is further reinforced by Wittenberg et al. (2023), who in a recent systematic review, argue that much of the engagement literature adopts a decontextualized lens, limiting our ability to understand the conditions under which employees choose to invest themselves in their work. As Johns (2018) points out, the assumption that work environments are uniform is problematic; context matters, and the factors that foster or inhibit engagement can vary significantly depending on the organisational and sectoral setting in which employees are situated.

Empirical research to date has tended to treat contextual phenomena primarily as control variables, without adequately theorising how such factors may directly influence work engagement (Fletcher et al., 2020; Wittenberg et al., 2023; Farndale et al., 2022). A common research objective has been to explore the association of a set of antecedents, work engagement and a set of outcomes while statistically controlling for the effect of various context variables (e.g., age, occupation, work tenure, gender, industry, sector, economic conditions) (this is for example the case of Farndale and Murrer, 2015; Mazzetti et al., 2023). Johns (2006, p.389) explains this approach as "controlling context away" rather than assessing its impact. He argues that control variables alone are insufficient for adequately accounting for context in a research model because contextual effects cannot be captured comprehensively by relying solely on control variables, a point later reinforced in his

subsequent work (Johns, 2017; 2018). Practitioners have also criticised academics for over emphasising the psychological theorisation of engagement, arguing that this focus often ignores situational and environmental influences, and offers less practical value or applicability in real-world settings (Fleck and Inceoglu, 2010; Kaufman et al., 2020). This disconnect highlights the need for more integrative frameworks that bridge psychological constructs with contextual realities, ensuring that engagement research remains both theoretically robust and practically relevant.

The importance of context particularly sectoral and institutional context in understanding psychological and behavioural processes in organisations has been widely recognised within HRM research (e.g., Cooke, 2018; Dewettinck and Remue, 2011). In relation to engagement, characteristics of the broader industry environment can shape how engagement is formed and experienced, as these conditions influence both the expression of organisational behaviour and the relationships between key variables (Johns, 2006, p. 386). One of the earliest studies to explicitly investigate the role of contextual factors in shaping engagement was conducted by Jenkins and Delbridge (2013). Their study provided evidence that industry sector and market conditions shape both human resource management practices and broader managerial strategies aimed at promoting engagement within organizations.

More recently, a meta-analysis by Borst, Kruijen, Lako, and de Vries (2019) demonstrated that the associations between work engagement and other work-related attitudes are generally stronger among public sector employees compared to those in the private sector. These findings point to the need for a more context-sensitive approach to studying engagement, as such an approach allows for a clearer understanding of the specific factors that influence engagement and the varied ways in which it is experienced across different organisational environments. Purcell (2014) notes that the absence of consideration of context could lead to a distorted and misleading mirror of the world of work, resulting in simplistic and ineffective initiatives. A key problem emerges when such generalised academic findings are applied uncritically across diverse organisational settings (Dundon and Rafferty, 2018), often overlooking the need for context-specific adaptation. This is particularly problematic in sectors experiencing significant structural change, such as public services affected by austerity and regulatory reform. For example, an inquiry

into performance management practices in the public sector found that performance-related pay (often associated with positive work attitudes in the private sector) was detrimental to the work attitudes and performance of public sector workers (Bryson et al., 2017). The study showed a decline in positive work attitudes following the adoption of private sector managerial practices. Makris (2009) also demonstrated how the naive application of the private sector model to the public sector worsened public service delivery in their paper. Paradoxically, an initiative aimed at improving work attitudes ended up having the opposite effect.

Furthermore, neglecting to consider the context has implications not only for the specific sector or industry but also for the employees whose engagement practices are being targeted. Researchers have raised concerns about how the psychological view of work has overshadowed employees, thereby making the workforce seem like subjects that follow simple rules of behaviour and creating a skewed view of the behaviours and attitudes that occur in the workplace (Fletcher et al., 2020; Dillard and Osam, 2021). By focusing on antecedents without considering the effect of context, the extent to which various contextual factors affect an organisation's capacity to foster engagement may be generally overlooked (Fletcher, 2020; Farndale, 2022; Wittenberg et al., 2023). Given these concerns, this study narrows its focus to the public sector, where contextual influences on work engagement are particularly pronounced and underexplored (Borst, 2018; Fletcher et al., 2020). This sets the stage for the following section, which examines the specific dynamics of the public sector context.

1.1.2 Public Sector Context

The public sector presents a compelling context to examine, considering its distinctive characteristics (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Wittenberg et al., 2023; Fletcher et al., 2020; Borst, 2019). Public services such as healthcare, education, transportation, and law enforcement play a central role in societal well-being, yet they have come under significant strain in recent years. Rising public dissatisfaction, service delivery challenges, and a perceived decline in quality have contributed to growing concern about the performance and sustainability of public institutions (Elliot et al., 2021).

The public and private sectors are guided by fundamentally different purposes, which in turn shape their organisational structures, cultures, and employee experiences. While private sector organisations are typically driven by profit maximisation, competition, and shareholder value, public sector institutions are primarily concerned with delivering public goods and services, promoting social welfare, and operating under principles of equity, accountability, and transparency (Furnham et al., 2014). These differing aims produce distinct organisational logics that influence how work is designed and managed. Public sector employees often operate under conditions that markedly differ from those in the private sector (Furnham et al. 2014). The presence of bureaucratic hierarchies, politically influenced leadership, and limited autonomy in decision-making can restrict employees' capacity to shape their work environment (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). These constraints are particularly significant when considered through the lens of work engagement, which is known to be fostered by job resources such as autonomy, feedback, task significance, and transparency (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). In many public institutions, however, such resources are either underdeveloped or difficult to access.

In addition, public sector employees are expected to perform better with the availability of fewer resources while facing challenges such as cost saving strategies, emotionally demanding environments, demand for efficacy and critical public opinions, which may negatively affect work engagement and organisational performance (Borst et al. 2020; Zahari and Kaliannan, 2023; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). Given the criticism of inefficiency often levied on public organisations, New Public Management (NPM) was introduced, emphasising performance improvement, adopting new managerial practices, accountability, and a result-oriented culture (Fletcher et al. 2020). However, the impact of this reform on job characteristics has been reported to undermine the experience of engagement in the public sector by reducing autonomy, giving less room for development and increasing workload (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Esteve et al., 2017; Bauwens et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2020). These developments highlight the complex and often conflicting realities of public sector work. Employees are expected to uphold foundational public values such as equity, transparency, and accountability while navigating systems that increasingly prioritise performance targets and cost

reduction (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). This creates a tension that can affect service quality as well as employee morale, motivation, and engagement (Truss et al., 2013; Bakker et al., 2014).

Despite the growing focus on improving public services, relatively little attention has been paid to how these structural and administrative reforms influence the job characteristics that support or hinder engagement (Borst et al., 2020; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). Much of the existing literature treats the public sector as a uniform setting, overlooking the variation in institutional goals, occupational roles, and political-administrative conditions that shape the work experience (Flecher et al., 2020; Borst, 2018; Bauwens et al., 2021). There is need to move beyond generic frameworks and adopt a more differentiated perspective. Recognising the diversity of the public sector enables a more nuanced analysis of how specific job characteristics influence work engagement across various roles and organisations. The following section builds on this argument by exploring the role of job characteristics in more detail.

1.1.3 Rethinking Job Characteristics in The Public Sector

The distinctiveness of the public sector context, shaped by public values, civil service regulations, and institutional mandates, may affect the availability and perception of job characteristics within the sector (Lavigna, 2015). These characteristics shape the structure and distribution of resources within the sector (Bauwens et al., 2021). Structurally, formal rules, standardised procedures, and limited managerial discretion can restrict the availability of job resources while also shaping the nature and intensity of job demands (Bauwens et al., 2021).

While job characteristics such as autonomy, recognition, rewards and development opportunities are commonly identified as antecedents of work engagement, recent studies suggest these relationships may not be consistent across all public sector contexts (Fletcher et al., 2020; Borst et al., 2019). For example, Borst (2018) found no significant link between autonomy and engagement among healthcare and education professionals, contrary to common assumptions in engagement literature. Conversely, some job demands, like work intensity, have been associated with increased engagement in specific public service roles (Bauwens et al., 2021). These

inconsistencies call for a more context-sensitive understanding of how job characteristics function in the public sector.

These contradictory findings may be attributed to existing public sector-engagement literature being dominated by research examining the general framework of job demands and resources, where individual motivational drivers within the public sector are assumed to be homogenous (Borst et al., 2019; Ancarani et al., 2021; Bauwens et al., 2021). This assumption implies employees across diverse public roles are influenced by a similar set of job demands and resources, and that engagement outcomes should be consistent across occupational groups. The mixed findings may indicate that this assumption needs to be re-evaluated. Interestingly, empirical research has highlighted that antecedents of work engagement, i.e., the specific job characteristics that influence it, may differ significantly across the public sector depending on the type of role and organisation (Bauwens et al., 2021). Much of the literature continues to treat the public sector as a cohesive entity. In contrast, in practice it comprises a wide range of occupational roles, institutional settings, and service functions that distinctly shape employees' work experiences and levels of engagement.

Although much of the public sector work engagement literature assumes a relatively uniform institutional context, this assumption has been challenged in other disciplines, particularly in economics and behavioural economics and public administration (Besley and Ghatak, 2005, 2008; Borst, 2018; Barigozzi and Manna, 2020). The notion of a homogenous public sector fails to account for the significant diversity in organisational missions, role types, and institutional arrangements that shape employee experiences. As the dimensional publicness approach argues, “it is rather naive to think that the public sector is a homogeneous institutional context without differences between organizations” (Borst, 2018, p. 292).

Scholars such as Besley and Ghatak (2005, 2008), Borst (2018) Barigozzi and Manna (2020) have demonstrated that the public sector is far from homogenous, especially in terms of the motivational structures and institutional missions significantly differentiate roles within it. Drawing on the foundational work of Besley and Ghatak (2005) a key distinction within the public sector lies in the type of roles

and the mission they are committed to, specifically, whether the roles are mission-oriented which are closely tied to the delivery of public goods or services with a strong societal or moral purpose or non-mission oriented which are more transactional, routine or administrative in nature (Besley and Ghatak, 2005, 2008). Within the public sector there are mission-oriented roles that deal with job conditions requiring high intrinsic motivational drives or vocation (i.e., teachers, nurses, doctors etc.) and other that are non-mission oriented and akin to the private sector roles (i.e., tax agents, accountants, clerks). While both types of roles serve public objectives, the nature of the work and the motivational dynamics involved differ substantially (Besley and Ghatak, 2005).

This internal differentiation within the public sector may have important implications for how job characteristics influence work engagement. Dierdorff and Morgeson (2007), building on Johns (2006), argue that roles are not static or universally defined; instead, they are constructed through the demands, expectations, and constraints of the context in which they exist. Work engagement may be more strongly influenced by the type of institution and the services it provides, while the broader context of the public sector can shape the extent to which these relationships manifest. Rather than operating uniformly across all public roles, the motivational power of resources and the depleting effects of demands may be filtered through the institutional logic and category of roles. As Borst (2018, p. 292) argues, “The behaviour and attitudes of public employees are determined by the amount of contact with clients and the nature of service provided to these clients.” Additionally, Fletcher et al. (2020) argue that engagement is not solely a function of universal job resources (e.g., autonomy, feedback), but also of how these resources interact with mission alignment and role demands. In mission-oriented roles, job characteristics may be amplified by a strong sense of public service motivation. In contrast, in non-mission-oriented roles, the same characteristics may be less effective due to constraints on discretion, limited contact with service users, and lower perceived social impact. Therefore, it is important to examine the relationship between the job characteristics available in these roles and work engagement of the people who work in these roles. Occupational role as well as organisational mission proximity, are likely to influence the degree of work engagement experienced by

employees within the public sector, alongside the interactions of the job characteristics available within these roles (Fletcher, 2014).

In light of these insights, it is essential to reconsider the blanket application of traditional engagement models in public sector contexts. A more nuanced, role-sensitive analysis is needed, one that recognises how occupational role, mission alignment, and the availability of job resources interact to influence engagement outcomes. Understanding this complexity can help policymakers and managers design more effective strategies for enhancing engagement that are tailored to the specific needs and motivations of different public sector groups.

1.2 Research Question and Core Objectives

The purpose of this research is to develop a contextually grounded understanding of work engagement by examining how variation in job roles within the public sector shapes the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement outcomes. Drawing on Johns' (2006, 2016) framework of context and the Job Demands and Resources (JDR) theory (Demerouti et al., 2001), this study addresses a critical gap in the literature regarding the role of context in shaping work engagement.

Johns (2006) conceptualises context through two lenses: omnibus context, which refers to broad environmental features such as the institutional setting, and discrete context, which captures more specific situational variables that influence behaviour directly. In this study, the public sector serves as the omnibus context, a broad institutional environment with shared regulatory and normative structures. Within this overarching context, roles (mission versus non-mission oriented) defined by their purpose, structure, and proximity to the mission of public service function as specific contextual expressions that shape individuals' work experiences. These roles differ in their tasks, goals and also in their potential to influence employees' psychological engagement and exposure to job-related strain.

Building on Dierdorff et al. (2009), this research treats occupational roles as both carriers of contextual meaning and distinct domains of work enactment, shaping how job demands and resources are experienced. Although the original research

question focused solely on work engagement, the literature review revealed that exhaustion constitutes a critical complementary outcome within the JDR theory. As such, this study adopts a dual-outcome perspective to capture how context influences both the motivational and strain-related pathways of organisational behaviour. Accordingly, the central research question guiding this study is:

How does the heterogeneity of job roles within the public sector (mission-oriented vs non-mission-oriented roles) influence the relationship between job characteristics and the dual outcomes of work engagement and exhaustion?

This study posits that roles as a contextual factor can interact with other variables to influence work engagement, directly or through moderating or mediating effects. By addressing the stated research problem, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To conceptualise and empirically examine the role of context defined through role orientations (mission and non-mission) as a boundary condition shaping the experience of work engagement among public sector employees.
2. To investigate whether work engagement and exhaustion differ across mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles in the public sector thereby capturing the role-based variability in engagement outcomes.
3. To examine the influence of job demands and resources in shaping work engagement and exhaustion within mission and non-mission-oriented roles in the public sector, identifying which characteristics are more salient in each roles.
4. To assess the buffering effect of job resources on the relationship between job demands and both engagement and exhaustion, within different role contexts.

1.3 Research Methods

To address the research questions posed in this study, a positivist paradigm was adopted, enabling a deductive approach for testing theoretically derived hypotheses. This philosophical stance supports the use of a quantitative research strategy, allowing for objective measurement and empirical evaluation of relationships between the core variables of interest. Guided by the JDR theory, this study aims to

assess how job demands and resources influence work engagement and exhaustion among public sector employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles. In line with deductive reasoning, hypotheses were formulated in advance and tested using statistical methods, ensuring that conclusions logically follow from the theoretical framework. This approach reflects established methodological practices in the field, where positivist, quantitative research designs are commonly used to confirm theoretical propositions through measurable and generalisable evidence (e.g., Schaufeli et al., 2002; Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Saunders et al., 2023).

Following a narrative literature review research methods were developed in line with Saunders et al. (2023) for conducting research in management. First research question was developed. Next, the research design was constructed, specifying the variables to be measured, the hypotheses to be tested, and the analytic strategy appropriate for assessing the proposed relationships. The choice of a cross-sectional survey design using secondary data was driven by the need to capture a wide and diverse sample of public sector workers across varying occupational roles, thereby enhancing the generalisability of findings.

The European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS, 2021) was selected as the data source due to its comprehensive coverage of job characteristics, work outcomes, and occupational classifications across European public sector institutions. The dataset includes validated measures relevant to the JDR theory, including items capturing job demands (e.g., work intensity, emotional demands), job resources (e.g., support, autonomy), and outcomes such as engagement and exhaustion. The survey also includes indicators of employment sector, occupational role, and main work tasks, allowing for the classification of roles into mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented categories. From the broader dataset, a sub-sample comprising public-sector employees was extracted (N = 8,250). Mission-oriented roles such as those in healthcare, education, and emergency services were distinguished from non-mission-oriented roles in administration, finance, and regulatory functions, using ISCO-08 occupational codes and sector classifications. To examine the moderating role of occupational context, the study employs Multigroup Structural Equation Modelling (MG-SEM) and Moderated Structural Equation Modelling (MSEM). MG-SEM is used to operationalise context as a

categorical moderator, distinguishing between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles. This enables a direct test of whether the structural relationships between job demands, resources, and engagement differ significantly across these occupational groupings.

1.4 Findings

Consistent with expectations, employees in mission-oriented roles reported higher levels of both work engagement and exhaustion compared to those in non-mission-oriented roles. Thus, confirming the importance of context in shaping psychological experiences at work. Next, the findings reveal that emotional demands are more strongly associated with exhaustion in mission-oriented roles, while their link to work engagement though positive is not statistically significant, based on the hindrance versus challenge demands hypotheses, the data show emotional demands function more as hindrance demands in this context. Furthermore, while work intensity and work-life interference were hypothesised as differentially impactful based on role type, the results show that these demands now exert a broadly similar influence on both mission and non-mission-oriented roles. Similarly, the role of job resources appears to be contextually variable: social support is significantly more important for work engagement in mission-oriented roles while autonomy and voice were similarly positively associated with work engagement and negatively with exhaustion.

The findings show that social support did not significantly buffer the relationship between job demands and exhaustion in either mission or non-mission-oriented roles. Autonomy significantly buffered the relationship between work intensity and exhaustion, but only among employees in mission-oriented roles. In non-mission-oriented roles, autonomy did not exhibit a significant buffering effect. Employee voice did not significantly moderate the relationship between work-life interference and exhaustion in either role type. These results indicate that among the job resources examined, only autonomy demonstrated a significant strain-buffering effect, and this effect was specific to mission-oriented roles.

1.5 Research Contributions

In line with the aim of this research, this study has practical, empirical and theoretical contributions. Theoretically, this study provides a deeper understanding of the impact of context on work engagement by providing evidence of the effect of contextual factors, distinct roles on the employee work engagement. First, it addresses a persistent gap in engagement theory by placing context at the centre of analysis. While much of the existing literature often operationalised context through control variables this study draws on Johns' (2006) framework to conceptualise context as a constitutive element of theory. In doing so, it responds to longstanding criticism (e.g. Johns, 2006; Bakker et al., 2011; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2020; Farndale et al., 2022) that engagement research has prioritised technical precision over contextual understanding.

This conceptual integration provides a clearer theoretical foundation for incorporating context into the JDR theory (Bakker et al., 2014; Demerouti et al., 2001), responding to critiques about its acontextual orientation (Bailey et al., 2015; Fletcher, et al., 2020). By employing Johns' multi-layered approach to context, the study distinguishes between the broader public sector environment and the distinct role orientations mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented that shape engagement in meaningful ways. This distinction challenges the prevalent assumption in existing engagement literature of motivational homogeneity across public sector roles, highlighting instead the critical importance of role-specific characteristics. In extending the JDR theory, the research demonstrates that job demands and resources do not have uniform effects but vary significantly depending on occupational role context within the public sector. This study provides evidences that mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles differ in which job characteristics are most salient for fostering or hindering engagement. This differentiation enriches JDR theory by illustrating the conditional nature of engagement antecedents and calling for more context-sensitive applications of the model.

The use of Multigroup Structural Equation Modelling (MG-SEM) in this study makes a substantive methodological contribution, particularly in advancing a contextualised understanding of work engagement in the public sector. Specifically, MG-SEM is

employed to model context as a moderator operationalised through the distinction between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented public sector roles. This allows for direct empirical testing of whether the structural relationships between job demands, job resources, and work engagement differ significantly across these occupational contexts. In doing so, the study moves beyond treating context as a statistical control and instead positions it as an active explanatory mechanism that shapes how engagement is experienced and influenced within the public sector. This approach responds to growing calls within engagement research (e.g. Bakker et al., 2011; Fletcher et al., 2020; Wittenberg et al., 2023) to move away from universalist models that assume homogeneity in employee experiences. Through MG-SEM, the research demonstrates that context does not merely co-exist with engagement processes it fundamentally alters them either through the strength or the direction of the relationship between variables. This analysis strategy thus validates the core theoretical proposition of the study: that job characteristics interact with the nature of public roles to shape work engagement in distinctive ways.

Lastly, this research contributes to public sector human resource management practice by offering a more differentiated understanding of how engagement strategies should be tailored to the diverse roles within public service organisations. Rather than applying one-size-fits-all engagement interventions, public sector leaders and human resource practitioners are encouraged to design role-sensitive models, tools, and engagement strategies that reflect the unique demands and motivational structures of mission- and non-mission-oriented employees. In addition, this research provides a new foundation for scholars seeking to build more refined, contextually grounded extensions of the JDR theory especially those interested in theorising context as a moderator or mediator in shaping employee engagement outcomes.

1.6 Thesis Structure

This section outlines the organisation and content of each chapter. Specifically, it addresses the under-theorisation of context in engagement research, the assumption of motivational homogeneity across public sector roles, and the limitations of the JDR theory in accounting for role based contextual variation. The

thesis is divided into seven chapters, the chapters and sections contained in them are summarised below.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature, beginning with the conceptual foundations of engagement and the rationale for focusing specifically on work engagement. It then examines key theoretical perspectives underpinning engagement, followed by an exploration of the role of context and the application of Johns' contextual framework. The chapter also considers the distinct characteristics of the public sector and introduces the conceptual distinction between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, which is central to this study.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework and hypotheses that underpin this research. It begins by outlining the Job Demands Resources (JDR) theory, highlighting its relevance to the study of work engagement and its limitations particularly its limited attention to contextual influences. To address these limitations, the chapter integrates Johns' (2006) framework of context, demonstrating how it complements the JDR theory by emphasising the dynamic role of context in shaping engagement processes. The concept of exhaustion is also introduced as a key outcome variable, with discussion of how it interacts with job demands, job resources, and contextual factors. Building on this theoretical foundation, the chapter then presents the hypotheses that guide the empirical investigation. These are developed in response to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and reflect the study's central aim of examining how contextual factors specifically, differences between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles influence the relationships between demands, resources, and employee outcomes. The chapter identifies key constructs, articulates expected relationships, and provides justification for each hypothesis, setting the stage for the research design and analysis in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 4 presents the research design and methodology applied to empirically test the proposed conceptual model of the study. This chapter discusses the philosophical foundation of research and the research strategy that is undertaken. It also provides an analytical discussion of the steps taken to data collection, sampling issues and the ethical considerations in this research.

Chapter 5 reports the data analysis and the results of the study using the data analysis tools, which are explained and justified in Chapter 5. Results reported include data screening methods, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and multigroup structural equation modelling (MGSEM) analysis. This chapter also reports the reliability and validity of constructs together with hypothesis testing.

Chapter 6 offers an in-depth analysis of the statistical results related to the research hypotheses, situating them within the broader context of existing literature and the theoretical framework. It assesses the study's contributions to both theory and practice. Additionally, the chapter provides practical recommendations for practitioners and outlines directions for future research, taking into account the study's limitations.

Chapter 7 summarizes and concludes the research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to understand existing knowledge on work engagement and examine how it is influenced by job characteristics and contextual factors. This literature review is guided by the following research questions: How has the concept of employee engagement evolved, and in what ways has work engagement been operationalised and measured in empirical research? How do contextual factors affect perceptions and impacts of job characteristics that influence work engagement? To address these questions, the chapter explores foundational theories and frameworks that have shaped employee engagement studies, including need-satisfying, burnout-antithesis, satisfaction-based, and multidimensional approaches. It then narrows and justifies the focus to work engagement, characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption.

Recognising the limitations of existing research particularly its tendency to overlook contextual influences this chapter emphasises the importance of situating work engagement within specific organisational and sectoral settings. Drawing on Johns' (2006) framework, it categorises contextual factors into omnibus and discrete dimensions, offering a structured lens through which to examine engagement in the public sector. Special attention is given to the distinction between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, arguing that role heterogeneity within the public sector significantly shapes the experience and drivers of engagement.

2.2 Literature Review Method

A narrative review method was chosen for this study due to its flexibility in synthesising diverse bodies of literature (Baumeister and Leary, 1997). Unlike systematic reviews, which adhere to rigid protocols, or integrative reviews, which focus on developing new frameworks, a narrative approach is well-suited to exploring theoretical foundations and contextual nuances. The literature reviewed was sourced through keyword searches in academic databases such as ABI/INFORM and EBSCO. No time restrictions were imposed on publication date to capture both foundational and current debates in the field. Inclusion criteria required

that sources be published in English, peer-reviewed, and directly relevant to employee engagement, context, the public sector context, or distinctions in engagement across occupational roles. Excluded materials included opinion pieces, non-scholarly reports, and articles without a clear theoretical or empirical basis. Preference were given to review articles, papers with theoretical contributions and empirical studies. The selected articles were critically read and integrated into the writing process. Insights were summarised and synthesised with attention to the historical definitions of engagement, the evolution of theoretical frameworks, and the influence of public sector contexts on engagement experiences. Additional relevant sources were identified through citation tracking and reference mining during the review process.

2.3 The Concept of Engagement: Its Origins and Definition

The concept of employee engagement has gained significant attention in both professional practice and academic research, achieving what Halbesleben (2011) describes as "buzzword status" since its initial introduction by Kahn (1990). While early interest was driven primarily by practitioners, with researchers following suit (Harter et al., 2002), the field has since experienced substantial academic growth (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Practitioner literature often promotes engagement as a driver of client satisfaction, retention of personnel and output efficiency, contributing to its widespread appeal (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010). This enthusiasm is fuelled by the notion of a "dual promise," suggesting that engagement benefits both employee well-being and organisational performance (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Shuck, 2011; Truss et al., 2013). The popular press has further positioned employee engagement as a strategic tool for boosting profitability and achieving institutional distinctiveness in performance (Rich et al., 2010). However, Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) caution against uncritical acceptance of such claims, noting practitioner literature, while often rich in experiential insight, frequently falls short of the analytical depth and empirical robustness expected in academic inquiry.

While engagement is a widely studied topic among practitioners and academics, its inconsistent usage makes the term somewhat problematic. Historically, the field faced criticism for a lack of rigorous thorough investigation

(Saks, 2006). Several scholars associate engagement with an employee's job role, exploring how interest in a job drives extra-role performance, fostering enhanced productivity (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006). Others define it in terms of an individual's connection to their employer, focusing on identification with and attachment to the company (Saks, 2006). Guest (2014) differentiates between work engagement, which emphasises well-being, and organisational engagement, which centres on productivity. The expanding scholarly and practical interest in engagement has led to multiple conceptualisations, including employee, organisational, work, and job engagement, each reflecting distinct aspects of the phenomenon. This range of definitions shows that engagement is not a single construct but a broad category that captures different relationships between individuals, their work, and their organisations.

The distinction between work engagement and the wider ranging conceptual interpretations of employee engagement often centres on the discourse between trait and state perspectives (Macy and Schneider, 2008). Earlier research viewed engagement as a static trait linked to personality factors like optimism, self-efficacy and stable affective disposition (Bakker, 2009), emphasising an individual's inherent disposition to be engaged (trait). However, more recent studies suggest that engagement is better understood as a fluctuating condition, reflecting an employee's dynamic experiences (Bakker, 2014; Fletcher et al., 2018). This perspective resonates with Kahn's (1990) foundational insights, which suggest that engagement is a dynamic construct subject to both intra-individual and inter-individual variation. It also corresponds with Schaufeli and Salanova's (2007) conceptualisation of engagement as a psychological state rooted in motivation. Importantly, this state-based view also allows for the consideration of exhaustion as a core component of burnout, which can fluctuate similarly and inversely affect engagement. As individuals experience high job demands or emotional strain, their energy levels may deplete, leading to exhaustion and a corresponding decline in engagement (Maslach and Leiter, 2008), recognising both engagement and exhaustion as dynamic states highlights how employees' experiences can shift over time depending on their work environment.

While numerous definitions of engagement exist, there is a broad consensus that it represents something desirable, often linked to energy and effort. Engagement research has since expanded significantly and remains a topic of active debate (Christian et al., 2011; Shuck, 2013). Although criticisms about the lack of a universally agreed-upon definition persist, recent developments suggest increasing convergence, which is explored in the following discussion.

2.3.1 Various Approaches to the Study of Engagement

This section traces the evolution of academic approaches to the study of engagement, from its initial inception and definition by Kahn in 1990 to more recent theories and research. Shuck's (2011) typology of employee engagement offers a valuable framework for distinguishing among the diverse strands of engagement research and for identifying the principal scholarly contributions within the field.

2.3.1.1 The Need Satisfying Approach

The first perspective—often referred to as the needs-satisfaction approach—originates from the seminal work of Kahn (1990, 1992), who was among the earliest scholars to examine engagement within organisational settings. Drawing on qualitative data from interviews with summer camp counsellors and employees at an architectural firm, Kahn illuminated the conditions under which individuals experience both engagement and disengagement at work. He defined engagement as the extent to which individuals invest themselves into their role performance, describing it as the integration of one's identity with work tasks (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). In essence, engagement entails the authentic expression of self through task-related behaviour, enabling individuals to establish meaningful connections with their work, interact purposefully with colleagues, maintain a strong sense of presence, and participate actively and holistically in their roles (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). This state of connection is understood to encompass cognitive, emotional, and physical components.

Drawing on Goffman's (1961) role theory, Kahn posits that employees' engagement or disengagement with their work is influenced by the extent to which they identify with their roles, with disengagement representing a form of withdrawal from one's responsibilities. Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement is underpinned by three psychological conditions: meaningfulness, safety, and availability, which are

informed by foundational theories such as Alderfer's (1972) existence, relatedness, and growth theory, and Hackman and Oldham's (1980) job characteristics theory. When all three conditions are satisfied, individuals experience a state of full engagement. Kahn identified meaningfulness as the strongest predictor of engagement, which is further enhanced where work is perceived as stimulating, diverse, and creative, offering a degree of autonomy, clear role expectations, and positive interpersonal dynamics.

Viewed through this lens, engagement is understood as a dynamic psychological state marked by the continuous interplay between self-expression and the purposeful execution of one's work role. It captures the extent to which individuals devote their cognitive, emotional, and physical energy to remain fully present in their roles. Although Kahn's early conceptualisation provided the foundational framework for understanding engagement, it lacked a concrete method for empirical measurement (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). This limitation was subsequently addressed by May et al. (2004), who introduced a 13-item instrument to assess engagement across three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and physical, using a sample of 213 employees from an American-based insurance company. Their study represented the first empirical application of Kahn's theoretical model and demonstrated that the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability significantly influence engagement levels. Specifically, factors such as job enrichment and alignment between the individual and their role were associated with enhanced meaningfulness; interpersonal relationships with colleagues and supervisors contributed to perceptions of psychological safety; and the availability of organisational resources was linked to psychological availability. Among these conditions, meaningfulness consistently emerged as the most potent predictor of engagement, as shown in both Kahn's (1990) theoretical work and the empirical findings of May et al. (2004).

Subsequent research has sought to translate Kahn's conceptual model into measurable constructs. Expanding upon his original framework, Rich et al. (2010) developed an 18-item instrument termed the "job engagement" scale, which incorporates dimensions such as work intensity and positive affect. This measure was initially validated with a sample of 245 firefighters in the United States and was

later adapted into a shorter form for use in the UK context (Alfes et al., 2013). Findings from these applications have consistently linked job engagement to key organisational outcomes, including organisational citizenship behaviours, task performance, and employees' intentions to leave (Rich et al., 2010; Alfes et al., 2013).

In more recent developments, Soane et al. (2012) introduced the Intellectual, Social, and Affective (ISA) engagement scale, composed of nine items, and tested it with 683 retail employees in the UK. Preliminary evidence suggests that the ISA scale may offer superior predictive validity for individual-level outcomes such as discretionary work behaviour, performance within core tasks, and turnover intentions when compared to more established measures like the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). While promising, the study is based on a specific occupational context, which limits broader claims about its applicability. Kahn's (1990) work has profoundly shaped engagement research, yet the existence of multiple measures reflects continued uncertainty around how engagement should be operationalised. This variability complicates attempts to capture the full scope of what drives self-expression at work, particularly the importance attached to meaningful interactions and support from colleagues and supervisors.

2.3.1.2 The burnout antithesis approach

The burnout antithesis approach comprises two distinct theoretical positions. It interprets burnout as a manifestation of declining engagement over time (Maslach and Leiter, 1997). Within this framework, initially meaningful and energising work becomes increasingly aversive as the fundamental dimensions of engagement efficacy, energy and involvement are eroded, giving way to exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of ineffectiveness (Maslach and Leiter, 1997; Maslach et al., 2001). Engagement and burnout are thus viewed as bipolar constructs, positioned at opposing ends of a continuum, with their intensity captured through inverse scoring on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, 1996; Maslach et al., 2001). Moreover, both phenomena are seen as mediating responses to six key aspects of the work environment: autonomy, workload demands, recognition,

collegial support, value congruence, and perceptions of organisational justice (Maslach et al., 2001).

Diverging from earlier views that positioned engagement and burnout as opposite ends of a single continuum, a school of thought within the burnout-antithesis approach argues that they are related but distinct constructs, best assessed using separate instruments (Schaufeli et al., 2002). From this perspective, engagement and burnout are seen as different forms of employee well-being, each defined along two dimensions: activation (ranging from exhaustion to vigour) and identification (from cynicism to dedication). Engagement is characterised by high levels of both activation and identification, while burnout reflects low levels of each (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). Importantly, research has shown that components like absorption and a sense of competence do not lie at opposite ends of a single continuum, further supporting the argument that engagement and burnout are not mirror images. Consequently, engagement came to be reconceptualised as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption.” It became widely referred to as work engagement (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002, p. 74). While some scholars argue that engagement and exhaustion may overlap (Taris et al., 2017), others provide evidence to show they are empirically distinct constructs (Bakker et al., 2014; Sonnentag, 2017). This reinforces the view that engagement should not be understood merely as the absence of burnout, but as a separate and meaningful psychological state in its own right.

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) is the most widely utilised instrument for measuring work engagement, framing the construct as comprising three core dimensions: vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The development of the UWES marked a significant shift in engagement research, responding to earlier criticisms of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which was initially designed to measure burnout rather than engagement. By offering a dedicated and psychometrically sound tool, the UWES helped establish engagement as a distinct construct rather than simply the absence of burnout. Comparative studies have shown that the UWES demonstrates stronger convergent and

predictive validity than the MBI (Viljevac et al., 2012), and it has since become the most widely used instrument in the field (Albrecht, 2010; Knight et al., 2017).

With other constructs such as organisational commitment, job performance, and occupational stress exhibiting conceptual similarities to the components of the UWES, scholars have questioned whether the scale sufficiently distinguishes engagement as a unique construct (Byrne, Peters, & Weston, 2016). Despite its extensive application, the UWES has thus attracted criticism concerning its discriminant validity. Nonetheless, its consistent use across studies has contributed to greater coherence in engagement research, which had previously been fragmented and inconsistent (Knight et al., 2017).

The development and application of the UWES also laid the groundwork for theoretical advancements in understanding the antecedents of engagement. Research has shown that different factors drive burnout and engagement: burnout is primarily associated with excessive job demands, while engagement is fostered by access to job resources (Schaufeli et al., 2009). This distinction is central to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, which outlines two parallel processes influencing employee well-being: the health-impairment process, which leads to burnout, and the motivational process, which promotes engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker, 2010; Hakanen et al., 2008). These dual pathways offer a more comprehensive understanding of how workplace conditions shape employee experiences. This topic will be explored further in a subsequent section.

2.3.1.3 The satisfaction-engagement approach

The third approach, known as the satisfaction-engagement approach, the meta-analytic work of Harter et al. (2002), which analysed data from close to 8000 business units across 36 organisations within the database of Gallup. In this study, engagement was defined as “the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with, as well as enthusiasm for, work” (Harter et al., 2002, p. 417). Their findings revealed that employee engagement and satisfaction were significantly and positively associated with key business outcomes, including customer satisfaction, productivity, and profitability. Moreover, their findings highlighted employee satisfaction as a significant antecedent to engagement. This work is considered among “most read

and cited" studies in engagement literature (Shuck, 2011, p. 311) and stands as the sole practitioner-oriented scholarship to achieve broad acknowledgement and dissemination through peer-reviewed academic publications (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010). Its popularity is primarily attributed to its practical implications, particularly the idea that "changes in management practices that increase employee satisfaction may increase business-unit outcomes, including profit" (Harter et al., 2002, p. 268). This linkage between employee wellbeing and organisational success has been influential in shaping engagement practices and research.

Developed in 1998 by the Gallup Organisation, the 'Q12' instrument had been administered to over 7 million employees in 112 countries by 2006 (Harter et al., 2006). The tool covers analyses spanning several industries, categorised into five sectors: transportation, retail, manufacturing, financial and services (Harter et al., 2002). Designed to simplify the implementation of workplace changes and management interventions (Macleod and Clarke, 2009), the Q12 aimed to promote actionable insights for improving employee engagement. Despite these intentions, the Q12 has faced significant criticism for assessing overall employee attitudes or organisational attachment rather than specific work engagement, which it claims to measure (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010). Critics argue that it mixes engagement with related constructs like job involvement and satisfaction (Guest, 2014; Bailey et al., 2015). Furthermore, the Q12 has been criticised for failing to differentiate factors that precede engagement from those that may result from it (Briner, 2012; Truss et al., 2015). According to Guest (2014) this approach lacks discriminant and construct validity.

These concerns suggest that while the Q12 may be helpful for organisational benchmarking and broad employee feedback, it is limited in its ability to capture the core features of work engagement as defined in academic literature. As Guest (2014) points out, the tool lacks both discriminant and construct validity, which weakens its contribution to theory development. Therefore, although the Q12 has had a strong influence in practice, it does not provide a reliable foundation for advancing research on engagement.

2.3.1.4 The multidimensional approach

The fourth approach is considered multidimensional (Saks, 2006). According to Saks (2006, p. 602), engagement is defined as a “unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance.” Saks (2006) built on Kahn's (1990) earlier work by focusing on fulfilling role-based tasks, but expanded the concept to suggest that engagement extends beyond the job itself. His study was the first to test the antecedents and the consequences of employee engagement and distinguish between job and organisational engagement.

In 2006, Saks introduced a dual-framework approach to measuring engagement, comprising two separate six-item scales. Drawing on data from a Canadian sample, the study differentiates between engagement expressed in relation to specific job tasks and that directed more broadly toward the organisation itself. These two forms of task-focused and organisation-focused engagement highlight different loci of employee investment. Saks anchors his conceptual model in social exchange theory, suggesting that when employees perceive meaningful support from their organisation, they are more inclined to reciprocate through heightened involvement both in their immediate work and in organisational life more generally. The study emphasises engagement as a socially embedded response, shaped by perceptions of mutual obligation and fairness. This approach emphasised the mutual nature of the relationship as “engaged employees are also more likely to have higher quality relationships with their employer, leading them to also have more positive attitudes, intentions and behaviours” (Saks, 2006, p. 607).

In his empirical investigation, Saks (2006) demonstrated that perceived organisational support (POS) contributes to both job-focused and organisation-directed engagement, though different antecedent factors shape each. Engagement at the level of job tasks was primarily influenced by the nature and quality of job characteristics, whereas organisational engagement was more closely tied to perceptions of procedural justice. Notably, both forms of engagement exhibited positive relationships with key outcomes, including job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviours. Among the two,

engagement directed toward the organisation proved to be a more robust predictor of these attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. Despite its contributions, the multidimensional approach has faced significant criticism (e.g., Griffin et al., 2008; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010) for its lack of clarity and complexity. Saks (2008, p. 42) himself acknowledged these shortcomings, noting that by combining older, more established constructs, researchers “have ended up exactly where they began – an imprecise definition and repackaging of other constructs.”

In 2019, Saks revisited the data from his 2006 study and reanalysed it using the UWES measure of engagement. This updated analysis identified two primary drivers of job engagement: skills variety and perceived organisational support (POS), with POS playing a key role in organisational engagement. Regarding outcomes, job engagement was most strongly linked to job satisfaction and the intention to quit, while organisational engagement was more closely associated with organisational commitment and citizenship behaviour.

This reanalysis also supported Saks’s revised theoretical framework, developed with Gruman (Saks and Gruman, 2014). Together, they expanded the multidimensional approach into what they termed an ‘integrative’ employee engagement theory. This theory synthesised elements of Kahn’s (1990) engagement theory with Bakker and Demerouti’s (2007) Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory. Saks and Gruman (2014) mapped specific engagement antecedents to distinct psychological conditions and connected these conditions to various forms of employee engagement. Saks (2019) acknowledged, after reviewing several studies utilising his measures, that our understanding of organisational engagement remains insufficient. Additionally, critics argue that organisational engagement primarily emphasises benefits for the organisation without offering reciprocal advantages for employees (Akingbola and van den Berg, 2019; Guest, 2014). This undermines the core principle of Saks’s reciprocity theory, as Guest contends that employers must provide compelling reasons for employees to engage.

Schaufeli (2014) and Kwon and Park (2019) also observed that empirical evidence supporting Social Exchange Theory (SET) as a basis for engagement is limited. Despite its conceptual appeal, the multidimensional approach has not gained

significant traction within the research community. However, while academic support for Saks's framework may be limited, Bailey et al.'s (2015) meta-analysis found that it remains the second most widely used framework for explaining engagement. Although this conceptualisation has faced criticism for its limited adoption and practical application (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010), Saks made a significant contribution by bridging earlier research and advancing the understanding of engagement as a multidimensional state. As Fletcher and Robinson (2014) noted, this "approach is of value and could be useful in future development of employee engagement theory and practice."

Although the discussion presented here does not claim to comprehensively capture all strands of employee engagement research, given the scope of the current study, it highlights the evolving nature of research in this field. The sustained interest and conceptual ambiguities surrounding employee engagement emphasise its complex and multifaceted character. Each approach has contributed to building a broad and diverse body of work. Overall, the literature demonstrates a field rich in theoretical models, yet lacking a unified framework, with ongoing debate on how best to conceptualise and measure engagement. This fragmentation highlights the need for greater clarity and consistency in both academic and practical approaches to engagement.

While some studies present themselves as investigations of engagement, they may be examining its precursors or measuring an employee's general disposition toward work, rather than the lived experience of engagement itself. (Guest, 2014). This blurring of boundaries between drivers of engagement, the authentic experience of being engaged, and the effects that follow has created conceptual ambiguity within the literature (Bailey et al., 2015). To address this, it is crucial to differentiate between the perspectives offered by academic research and those from practitioner-focused or consultancy-based literature (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007). By narrowing the focus from the overarching concept of employee engagement to the more specific construct of work engagement, this review aims to provide a clearer and more actionable understanding of engagement as experienced directly within the workplace.

2.4 Focusing Specifically on the Construct of Work Engagement

While no universally accepted definition of engagement exists among practitioners and academics, the evidence points to a growing conceptual clarity regarding work engagement, which offers a more structured and theoretically grounded approach (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Although there is widespread approval alongside substantial literature surrounding engagement, critiques have emerged regarding practitioner and organisational conceptualisations of engagement. Such approaches have frequently been challenged on the grounds that they depict constructs like affective commitment, job involvement, or satisfaction with one's role more closely than they represent the actual phenomenon of engagement (Truss et al., 2013; Briner, 2012). This confusion makes it harder to clearly identify how engagement, as a distinct concept, influences outcomes in the workplace.

Critiques have drawn attention to the inconsistencies in how engagement is used, particularly in organisational settings where definitions tend to be overly expansive or strategically vague. Macey and Schneider (2008, p. 4) pointed out that many definitions of engagement have come to encompass aspects such as "involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy." A lack of clear distinctions in both definition and measurement, along with insufficient empirical evidence, has been highlighted as a significant issue for organisational engagement, particularly when compared to work engagement (Guest, 2014). As a result, the value of engagement is often discussed without a clear or consistent theoretical basis.

From a research perspective, this ambiguity presents some limitations as it undermines the validity of measurement tools and restricts the development of cumulative knowledge. Contributing to this ambiguity, certain scholars have used "employee engagement" and "work engagement" interchangeably (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010), making it difficult to compare findings across contexts or assess the effectiveness of engagement interventions.

This study adopts the term work engagement, as defined by Schaufeli et al. (2002), to help address these concerns. Their definition, emphasising vigour, dedication, and absorption, offers a more precise and operationalizable construct that distinguishes

engagement from broader affective states. Importantly, it also links engagement to action and sustained effort, rather than merely to positive sentiment. This provides conceptual clarity and allows for more targeted analysis of how work engagement is influenced by contextual factors. Focusing on work engagement rather than broader or less defined versions of engagement strengthens the theoretical grounding of this research. It also supports more accurate measurement and interpretation, particularly when comparing across organisational settings.

Work engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterised by *vigour, dedication, and absorption*” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). *Vigour* refers to the physical and mental activation of an employee characterised by a high level of energy and mental resilience in role performance. *Dedication* refers to personal identification and strong involvement characterised by enthusiasm, pride in work and being passionately involved one’s work. *Absorption*, the third dimension, is characterised by being fully engrossed and concentrated in one’s work such that time passes quickly and employees may experience difficulties detaching themselves from work (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Bakker et al., 2011). As indicated by its three dimensions, work engagement is a pervasive and enduring state that involves both affective and cognitive elements (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This implies that work engagement is not limited to a particular occurrence, entity or person but rather enabled by context including physical, environmental, social, and organisational context (Bakker, 2022). Emerging studies also give insight into the potential value of context for work engagement (see Banihani and Syed, 2017; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2020; Borst et al., 2019, 2020). For instance, Jenkins and Delbridge (2013) highlighted that industry sector and market conditions can shape an organisation's approach to engagement, suggesting that what drives engagement in one sector may not apply in another.. Similarly, Borst et al. (2019) observed that the relationships between work engagement and other work-related attitudes were stronger among public-sector employees compared to those in the private sector. These findings emphasise the importance of a contextualised analysis of engagement, as examining engagement within specific contexts allows for a deeper understanding of the factors influencing it and the unique ways it is experienced (Fletcher et al., 2020).

The relevance of context and findings from empirical research pertaining to context and work engagement will be discussed in the upcoming sections.

2.4.1 Empirical Research on Engagement

Much of the existing research on engagement has focused on its antecedents and outcomes, producing a well-established body of evidence that links engagement to positive workplace effects. On the outcome side, there is consistent evidence that engagement is positively linked to desirable workplace results at both individual and organisational levels. For instance, studies have shown that individual-level engagement is positively related to high-performance ratings (Bakker et al., 2004). At the organisational level, evidence shows engagement correlates positively with superior business performance and increased financial returns (Schneider et al., 2018; Mueller, 2019). These findings position engagement as a valuable organisational asset, thereby attracting attention from both researchers and practitioners. Given these benefits, understanding what drives engagement is essential.

While many empirical studies have focused on how job characteristics i.e., job resources and job demands, explain work engagement (Mazzetti et al., 2023), these models assume generalisability across contexts, but rarely theorise the role of contextual variation, treating it instead as a control variable (Fletcher et al., 2020; Cooke et al., 2019; Wittenberg, 2023; Farndale et al., 2022). Researchers have raised the concern about the manner in which the psychological view of work has overshadowed employees, thereby making the workforce seem like subjects that follow simple rules of behaviour and creating a skewed view of the behaviours and attitudes that occur in the workplace (Fletcher et al., 2020; Dillard and Osam, 2021).

Meta-analyses have consistently shown that resources such as autonomy, feedback, and opportunities for development are strong predictors of engagement, while job demands such as work overload tend to show weaker or more variable effects (Christian et al., 2011; Halbesleben, 2010; Crawford et al., 2010). For instance, Halbesleben's (2010) meta-analysis revealed that feedback had the strongest correlation with the core dimensions of work engagement vigour and dedication followed by job autonomy or control. In contrast, social support and organisational

climate were associated with work engagement to a lesser degree, while job demands like work overload showed only minimal connections to work engagement. Similarly, Crawford et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis found that job variety, work-role fit, and opportunities for development exhibited the highest correlations with work engagement, whereas social support and a positive organisational climate were moderately correlated. Additionally, Christian et al. (2011) identified task variety, task significance, and proactive personality as the strongest predictors of work engagement, with somewhat lower correlations observed for social support, leader-member exchange, and transformational leadership. Lesner et al. (2020) also found that job resources such as job control and development opportunities, have the most substantial impact on work engagement. While these findings are often statistically robust, they remain decontextualised. However, they seldom account for how organisational form, role type, or sectoral logic might mediate the accessibility or efficacy of these resources. The repeated observation that certain variables are only “moderately” associated with engagement such as social support or organisational climate raises important questions about whether these effects are truly weaker or merely more context dependent. This suggests that context may not simply moderate but fundamentally shape the nature of these predictors an insight largely absent from existing models.

In the same vein a longitudinal study have reinforced these associations. A study conducted in Belgium by De Lange et al. (2008) explored the relationship between job resources and work engagement among employees categorised as 'stayers' and 'movers', revealing that employees experiencing limited departmental resources and low autonomy were less engaged and more likely to leave their organisations. Conversely, for those who remained, autonomy had a positive relationship with work engagement, mostly in employees classified as 'external movers' or 'promotion makers' (De Lange et al., 2008). Hakanen, Schaufeli, and Ahola (2008) showed that resources such as skill utilisation, performance feedback, and autonomy predicted future engagement, while job demands had a negative influence. Similarly, a longitudinal study conducted across revealed autonomy as a strong predictor of future work engagement (De Lange et al., 2008). Numerous studies have identified social support as a key predictor of work engagement

(Othman and Nasadin, 2012; Xanthopoulou et al., 2008). However, despite their methodological strength, these studies often treat job resources as stable and universally applicable constructs, overlooking the contextual conditions that shape how such resources are interpreted, distributed, and experienced.

In terms of negative predictors, physically taxing work conditions, stressful job tasks, and quantitative workload were found to diminish work engagement over time (Hakanen, Schaufeli, et al., 2008). Similarly, job insecurity has been shown to undermine the dedication aspect of work engagement (Mauno et al., 2007). Nevertheless, other researchers argue that findings in this area are mixed, as not all job demands have a negative impact. They propose distinguishing between hindrance stressors, which are detrimental, and challenge stressors, which can have positive effects (LePine et al, 2005; Bailey et al., 2015). This approach creates justification for the consideration of context given that what counts as a challenge in one setting may constitute a hindrance in another, depending on norms, expectations, and institutional arrangements.

Recent scholars have advanced stronger arguments for embedding engagement research in context. Authors such as Veldhoven et al. (2020) have challenged the universality of these resources and demands, as well as the context in which they exist. They call for a more contextualised approach of different individual, meso and macro contextual factors to aid our understanding of why, when and for whom these resources and demands are detrimental or beneficial. The lack of contextual considerations in the study of work engagement restricts our understanding and limits the effectiveness of work engagement initiatives and strategies (Dillard and Osam, 2021; Fletcher et al., 2020). Practitioners tend to ignore the insights extracted from engagement scholars and emulate engagement strategies from other organisations, even those from unrelated sectors, without adequate consideration of the initial contexts for which they were designed (Osam and Shuck, 2020). For example, an inquiry into performance management practices in the public sector found that performance-related pay (often associated with positive work attitudes in the private sector) was detrimental to the work attitudes and performance of public sector workers (Bryson et al., 2017). The study showed the decline of positive work attitudes from adopting private sector managerial

practices. Makris (2009) also demonstrated how the naive application of the private sector theory to the public sector worsened public service delivery in their paper. Paradoxically, an initiative aimed at improving work attitudes ended up having the opposite effect. Furthermore, neglecting to consider the context has implications not only for the specific sector or industry, but also for the employees whose engagement practices are being targeted.

Researchers have argued that dominant psychological models tend to abstract employees from their organisational realities, portraying them as predictable actors operating under universal behavioural laws, thereby overlooking the complexities of workplace meaning-making and institutional embeddedness (Fletcher et al., 2020; Dillard and Osam, 2021). By focusing on antecedents without considering the effect of context, the extent to which various contextual factors affect an organisation's capacity to foster engagement may be generally overlooked (Fletcher, 2020; Farndale, 2022; Wittenberg et al., 2023).

Accounting for context in work engagement literature can add value to the engagement literature in several ways. First, the considerations of context can help explain the variability and diversity of engagement across different settings, groups, and individuals. Second, researchers can identify and understand factors that enhance or hinder work engagement in different setting and develop more valid and reliable instruments that can capture the dynamic nature of engagement (Farndale et al., 2022; Fletcher 2020). Third and most crucial, more effective and inclusive interventions can be designed and implemented with adequate knowledge of contextual influence, and organisations can tailor their strategies and practices to suit the preferences and needs of their employees. Considering this weakness in our current understanding, this research aims to examine the impact of contextual factors on work engagement.

In conclusion, although the engagement literature has successfully demonstrated the positive outcomes of work engagement and identified many of its key antecedents, it remains limited by a lack of focus on context. The limited focus on context in studying work engagement highlights the need to understand the underlying theories. The following section will explore these theories to provide a

clearer understanding of what drives engagement and how it operates in different situations.

2.4.2 Theoretical Underpinnings of Engagement

Work engagement has been examined through various theories, with the most commonly used being the job demand and resource (JDR) theory (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Other theories include social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964), the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), and self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 1989). This section discusses three of the most prominent theories related to study and engagement: JDR, SDT, and SET. Reviewing these theories is important for this study because they provide the conceptual foundation for most empirical research on engagement.

2.4.2.1 The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory

Research findings indicate that the JD-R theory (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) is a highly effective framework for exploring the nature of engagement and the mechanisms that drive it. It has gained significant popularity and is among the most widely cited theories in the study of engagement (Bakker et al., 2023). The JD-R theory serves as an integrative framework for job design, combining insights from various theories on job stress and motivation (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Van Veldhoven et al., 2020). It explains how job demands and resources shape job performance by influencing employee well-being, encompassing aspects like burnout and work engagement. Additionally, it highlights how employees actively manage job demands and resources through proactive and reactive behaviours (Bakker et al., 2014). Originating in research on burnout and engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001), the JD-R theory has evolved over the past two decades to incorporate elements from other influential frameworks, including Herzberg's two-factor theory (1966), Hackman and Oldham's job characteristics theory (1976), Karasek's job demands control theory (1979), Siegrist's effort reward imbalance theory (1996), and Hobfoll's conservation of resources theory (2018). This synthesis provides a comprehensive perspective on employee well-being and performance, addressing both stress and motivation in workplace contexts.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory suggests that work engagement is shaped by the interplay between job demands and the resources provided by the organisation (Schaufeli, 2014). Job demands refer to the physical, social, or organisational aspects of a job that require sustained physical, cognitive, or emotional effort, often leading to physiological or psychological strain (Demerouti et al., 2001). Examples include factors such as role ambiguity, high workloads, emotional exhaustion, and time pressures. In contrast, job resources are the physical, psychological, social, or organisational elements that help employees achieve their work goals, alleviate job demands and their associated costs, or foster personal growth, learning, and development (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). These resources include salary, job security, role clarity, and opportunities for decision-making participation (Hakanen and Roodt, 2010; Hakanen et al., 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

While job resources are recognised as key drivers of engagement, job demands are often associated with burnout when left unmanaged (Bakker et al., 2014; Maslach and Leiter, 2016). Therefore, optimizing job resources while addressing excessive demands is essential for fostering sustained engagement and well-being in the workplace. A key strength of the JD-R theory lies in its flexibility, as it can be applied across various occupational settings regardless of the specific demands and resources involved (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011). This adaptability, combined with its potential to enhance employee well-being and performance, makes it a valuable tool in organisational research and practice (Bakker, 2022; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007b, 2017b; Lesener et al., 2018; Saks and Gruman, 2014; Taris and Schaufeli, 2018). Substantial empirical evidence supports the JD-R theory. For instance, Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) demonstrated that personal resources predict engagement, while Crawford et al. (2010) found that while job demands were positively linked to burnout, challenging demands were positively associated with engagement. Similarly, Kwon and Kim (2020) identified connections between the JD-R framework and innovative behaviour. These findings underscore the theory's relevance in explaining work engagement across contexts.

The JD-R theory is widely recognised as the most prominent framework for studying engagement (Crawford et al., 2010; Rich et al., 2010; Saks and Gruman,

2014) and has inspired hundreds of studies (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). In a meta-analysis, Bailey et al. (2015) highlighted that 38% of reviewed studies used the JD-R theory to explain engagement. Its popularity stems from its heuristic value, broad scope, and practical flexibility, as noted by Schaufeli et al. (2014) and Bauer et al. (2014). Overall, the JD-R theory's versatility and evidence-based approach make it an indispensable tool in understanding the factors that influence work engagement.

Although the JD-R theoretical framework is widely regarded for its merits and popularity, it has faced criticism for oversimplifying the complex processes of motivation and health impairment. One critique is that it does not account for demands that might have a neutral impact, focusing instead on their classification as either negative hindrances or positive challenges (Crawford et al., 2010).

Additionally, the framework has been criticised for neglecting broader contextual factors. For instance, Bailey et al. (2015, p. 7) highlight its failure to incorporate diverse micro- and macro-level influences, such as interpersonal dynamics, emotional and irrational responses, workplace power structures, and control over resources and demands. These omissions imply a linear and rational response by individuals to resources and demands, which does not reflect the complexity of real-world workplace interactions. This lack of consideration for nuanced factors such as organisational politics and emotional variability suggests that the JD-R theory may oversimplify engagement and burnout dynamics, potentially limiting its explanatory power in certain contexts.

2.4.2.2 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Theorists propose that, at its core, Social Exchange Theory (SET) revolves around A sequence of exchanges that generates a feeling of duty in one individual to return a benefit to another individual (Gouldner, 1960; Emerson, 1976; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Blau (1964) distinguished between economic and social exchanges, aligning his concept of social exchange with Gouldner's (1960) emphasis on the "norm of reciprocity." This central idea highlights an ongoing reciprocal relationship governed by specific rules, including Gouldner's (1960) universal rule of reciprocity. This rule suggests that individuals are motivated to participate in reciprocity relationships because they expect a reciprocated benefit later. Following these rules,

parties demonstrate fairness, thereby increasing their mutual obligations and ensuring the association continues to develop as time progresses (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, and Werner, 1998).

This reciprocal interaction is a defining feature of workplace relationships, where such exchanges underpin ongoing collaboration and mutual commitment. Greenberg (1980) argues that individuals who receive benefits from others experience a psychological state of indebtedness, which reflects their sense of obligation to reciprocate. This feeling is influenced by the donor's intentions, the perceived value and necessity of the benefit, the circumstances of the exchange, and the presence of witnesses. For example, altruistic acts elicit greater indebtedness than self-serving actions, while benefits solicited by the recipient amplify feelings of obligation compared to those freely offered by the donor. In organisational contexts, public recognition of rewards can heighten indebtedness by incorporating social cues. Relatedly, norms of reciprocity, central to social exchange theory, outline expectations for fair exchanges, fostering trust and mutual commitment in relationships (Gouldner, 1960; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). These norms take various forms, including interdependent exchanges requiring mutual participation, folk beliefs about karmic justice, and moral expectations of fairness. Together, these frameworks highlight how reciprocal obligations and fairness sustain organisational and interpersonal interactions.

As much as the social exchange theory offers the potential in explaining multiple relationships within an organisation, it has received several criticisms. This perspective suggests that engagement may not always be a positive experience for employees. Social exchange theory implies that employees might exert greater effort not out of joy or enthusiasm but due to the psychological strain of feeling indebted. In such cases, employees may display certain behaviours not out of genuine desire but from a sense of obligation to reduce their perceived debt to the organisation (Soane et al., 2012). Consequently, increased effort stemming from indebtedness might reflect a coping mechanism for alleviating the stress of obligation rather than a satisfying or enjoyable experience (Greenberg et al., 1974). This challenges the notion of engagement as inherently positive for employees.

Finally, despite the varied theoretical approaches, a recurring theme emerges in the form of several consistent factors that influence engagement. These include job characteristics, organisational support, rewards, and perceptions of fairness all supported by empirical research (Saks, 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

2.4.2.3 Self-determination theory (SDT)

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2011) posits that human behaviour is driven by three fundamental and universal psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Psychological need fulfilment is considered essential for fostering employee engagement (Deci et al., 2001). Autonomy involves the sense of directing and controlling one's own actions, competence refers to succeeding in optimally challenging tasks and achieving desired outcomes, and relatedness pertains to forming meaningful connections, expressing care, and feeling accepted within one's social environment.

According to SDT, it is the fulfilment of these needs, rather than merely the desire for them, that predicts engagement levels. While the needs are universal, individuals vary in their ability to satisfy them (Deci and Ryan, 2011). The theory distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation, which stems from choice and volition, promotes persistence, adherence, and psychological well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2008), while controlled motivation arises from external pressures or demands, lacking the same positive outcomes. Satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhances autonomous motivation and supports engagement (Rothmann, 2014).

One key critique centres on the theory's limited contextual flexibility. SDT primarily emphasises intrinsic motivation as the most effective driver of engagement, often sidelining the role of extrinsic motivators like financial rewards, promotions, or recognition. Authors argue that this focus risks oversimplifying motivational dynamics in workplaces where extrinsic incentives are integral to engagement, particularly in high-demand or resource-constrained environments (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Moreover, SDT may undervalue the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, which can jointly foster sustained engagement depending on organisational contexts.

Another substantial criticism lies in SDT's universality claim regarding the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. While these needs are deemed essential across contexts, evidence suggests their relative importance may vary by culture and organisational structure. For instance, in collectivist cultures, relatedness often takes precedence over autonomy, potentially challenging the applicability of the SDT framework in non-Western settings (Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Chirkov et al., 2003). Additionally, in some organisational environments, fulfilling competence or relatedness may not correlate directly with engagement due to differing workplace dynamics or job roles (Ng et al., 2012).

2.4.2.4 Summary of theoretical approaches to the study of work engagement

Taken together, the JDR theory, SET, and SDT offer valuable yet partial insights into the nature and drivers of work engagement. Each theory focuses on different mechanisms - structural (JDR), relational (SET), and psychological (SDT) but all tend to overlook the role of context in shaping how engagement is experienced, enabled, or constrained.

A recurring theme across these theoretical perspectives is that engagement is seen as beneficial to both the organisation and the individual employee. A unifying element in these approaches is the emphasis on energy, enthusiasm, and satisfaction that characterise an engaged employee's experience. It is generally assumed that employees who willingly invest themselves fully in their roles do so not out of compulsion but because they derive positive emotions from their work. The elevated energy levels observed in engaged employees are attributed to their happiness at work. Therefore, even though not all approaches explicitly state this, engagement is intrinsically linked to the experience of positive emotions in the workplace.

However, this consensus is challenged by interpretations drawn from Social Exchange Theory, particularly the concept of indebtedness. In this view, engagement may emerge not from joy, but from a psychological obligation to reciprocate organisational resources (Saks, 2006). Employees might exert effort not because they are energised or motivated, but because they feel they "owe" the organisation. This perspective complicates the prevailing notion of engagement as

universally positive, revealing a tension between intrinsic fulfilment and externally imposed expectations.

The JDR theory, while primarily structural in its focus, appears to capture and synthesise many of the motivational elements addressed in other theories. Its inclusion of job and personal resources parallels the autonomy, competence, and relatedness outlined in SDT, while its emphasis on organisational support and reward aligns with SET's focus on reciprocity. This conceptual reach has led some scholars to view the JDR theory as offering a unifying framework across the otherwise fragmented engagement literature. It accommodates both motivational and strain-based processes and encompasses a broad range of job characteristics, making it empirically useful and widely applicable.

Despite its limitations, the JD-R theory is chosen as the core theoretical lens for this study due to its flexibility, empirical grounding, and relevance to the research question. While it has been critiqued for insufficient attention to contextual influences, its structure allows for the integration of broader organisational and institutional factors as either demands, resources, or moderating conditions. This study builds on the JD-R model's strengths while explicitly addressing its blind spots by incorporating context as a central analytical dimension, making it a suitable and adaptable foundation for examining how engagement operates across different settings.

In summary, the theoretical literature on engagement offers robust frameworks. Each contributes valuable insight into the mechanisms that drive engagement, yet all fall short in accounting for context. This may limit their explanatory range and their practical usefulness. Addressing this oversight is necessary for developing more situated and realistic models of engagement ones that reflect what engages employees, and where, when, and under what constraints.

2.5 Contextual Factors and Work Engagement

Authors have begun to highlight the importance of context in the engagement literature (Fletcher et al., 2020). This section aims to categorise contextual variables that have been identified in engagement literature, using John's (2006) framework as

a foundation. Specifically, it will explore how these contextual factors are instrumental in shaping work engagement. By categorising these factors, this section provides a structured understanding of how context influences engagement, thereby offering a more comprehensive perspective on what drives employees to be engaged in their work.

Several scholars have acknowledged that contextual considerations are important to the study of work engagement (i.e., Fletcher et al., 2020; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Akingbola and Berg, 2019). In prior management theoretical research, **context can be defined as “situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organisational attitudes as well as functional relationships between variables” (Johns, 2006, p.386)**. Studies have extensively focused on the antecedents of work engagement to critically explain their importance in fostering engagement; however, not enough has been done to empirically study the effect of context on work engagement. Rousseau and Fried, (cited in Johns, 2006, p.386) explain that "contextualisation entails linking observations to a set of relevant facts, events, or points of view that make possible research and theory that form part of a larger whole".

The influence of context is not limited to the antecedents of engagement. While the work engagement literature has identified some contextual factors, there is a critical need to explore additional factors and develop a systematic categorization of their influence. We know that context shapes the way engagement manifests itself (and affects its outcomes), and yet, engagement research often overlooks or under-theorizes these factors. A comprehensive classification could help us to better understand how different contextual factors uniquely impact engagement, thereby enhancing the precision and applicability of engagement theories across various settings. To help categorise the contextual factors shaping work engagement, Johns' (2006; 2017) research is particularly helpful.

2.5.1 Understanding John's Contextual Factors Framework

Johns (2006) proposed a framework for understanding the role of context in shaping organisational behaviour, arguing that contextual factors should not be treated as peripheral variables to be controlled but as central to the interpretation of human

conduct within work settings. This framework is grounded in the assertion that an organisation's internal characteristics provide situational opportunities and constraints that influence the behaviour and experiences of its members, including aspects such as their engagement. At the same time, the external environment exerts parallel influences on the organisation itself, shaping its structural conditions and strategic responses. In this way, Johns presents context as an active structure, shaping both the organisation and the individuals within it through interdependent layers of influence. To capture the complexity of these influences, Johns introduces two interrelated dimensions of context: the omnibus and the discrete context.

The omnibus context encompasses broad situational and environmental features that define the research setting. This includes who is involved, where the activity takes place, and when it occurs. These elements are not neutral descriptors but carry explanatory weight. For example, the occupational and demographic characteristics of the actors involved, such as gender, age, or professional role, shape the expectations, resources, and limitations they encounter. Johns highlights that men and women often experience work and nonwork conditions so differently that separate theoretical frameworks may be necessary to explain their behaviours, such as attendance or career progression. Similarly, the location of the study, including national culture, economic conditions, and industry-specific norms and conditions, both the forms of behaviour deemed appropriate and the organisational responses they generate. Temporal aspects also matter: whether the data is gathered during periods of stability or crisis, early or late in an organisational change process, or at a particular historical juncture, all influence the meaning and consequences of action.

What Johns calls omnibus context thus plays a constitutive role in organisational life. It creates the macro-level structures within which behaviour is enacted, influencing individual engagement and organisational dynamics in ways that are often under-theorised in mainstream research. Crucially, Johns argues that these contextual forces should not be statistically controlled out of analysis, as doing so strips organisational behaviour of the very situational logic that gives it form. Instead, they should be analytically foregrounded as generative conditions that help explain variation in outcomes across settings. For instance, without accounting for cultural

and economic differences, empirical findings may appear universally valid but lack explanatory depth when applied elsewhere.

By explicitly incorporating the omnibus context into research, scholars gain a more comprehensive understanding of how broader social, cultural, and temporal structures interact with individual and collective behaviour. This perspective moves organisational analysis away from abstract, decontextualised models toward a more situated and theoretically robust account of workplace phenomena, including constructs like work engagement. In short, Johns' contextual framework insists that any serious inquiry into organisational behaviour must begin with, and remain attentive to, the situational forces that shape both action and interpretation.

The discrete context refers to the “specific situational variables that influence behaviour directly or moderate relationships between variables” (Johns, 2006 p. 393) it signifies distinct contextual factors including social, task, temporal, and physical context. The *task* context includes resources, autonomy, accountability, and uncertainty. The *social* context includes social structure, direct social influence, and social density. The *physical* context includes light, décor, temperature, and the built environment. According to Johns (2006) discrete context can be seen as a subset of omnibus context in a way that it influences the effects of omnibus contexts, or it interacts with omnibus contextual variables to critically examine targeted behavioural outcomes. For instance, by examining a person's role or occupation, conclusions can be drawn about their physical and social organisational environment which can be used to understand conducts and attitudes. According to Johns, contextual variables often have opposing effects on each other, and this is demonstrated by looking at discrete context such as direct social influence which has frequently been found to counteract another important contextual variable: the access to valuable resource.

Given the increasing call for incorporating context into work engagement research (Fletcher et al., 2020), Johns's (2006) categorical framework could provide much-needed structure by offering a taxonomy of the context in which engagement occurs, and by explaining how contextual factors shape the work engagement process and its resulting outcomes, for at least two reasons. Firstly, Johns's (2006)

categorical framework for context has already been applied in other areas of organisational behaviour research. For example, Dierdorff, Rubin, and Morgeson (2009) utilised this categorical theory to examine the extent to which managerial roles vary across the different contexts in which they are actually performed. Additionally, other studies have used elements of Johns's framework to comprehensively describe the contexts of extreme teams (Bell, Fisher, Brown, and Mann, 2016) and social media environments (McFarland and Ployhart, 2015), and their effects on a wide range of outcomes. Secondly, Johns's (2006) conceptualisation of context aligns with multilevel theorising and principles. Specifically, conceptualising context in a nested manner, where discrete context is subsumed within the omnibus context, will enable engagement researchers to better understand how top-down effects take place, and to represent work engagement as a multilevel phenomenon.

2.5.2 Categorising Contextual Factors Shaping Work Engagement

Considering the role of context in work engagement literature, the framework provided by Johns (2006) could provide work engagement research with the theoretical apparatus to study the context in which work engagement occurs and explain the manner through which contextual factors shape the process of engagement because of its provision for multi-level theorising. The discrete context subsumed within the omnibus context can potentially help researchers to better identify the manner in which top-down effects happen and to portray engagement as a multilevel system. This matters because the discrete context is expected to have more impact on engagement than the omnibus context, as the discrete context will interact more strongly with engagement. This multilevel approach is consistent with work engagement literature that argues that work engagement is multilevel, contextual, and processual (Boccoli and Corso, 2022).

Specific macro/omnibus and micro/discrete level characteristics may influence individual work engagement (Fletcher et al., 2020). These factors include national culture, types of industry/sector/organisation, gender demographics, economic conditions and societal trends as omnibus context as well as task orientation, task and job characteristics, social networks, physical characteristics (Fletcher et al.,

2020).. Although not explicitly stated, some work engagement researchers have examined how factors which have been categorised as omnibus context may affect work engagement for example Banihani and Syed (2017) demonstrated that work engagement is influenced by gender, as women face significant disadvantages in job opportunities, experience unfair treatment, and are restricted in how they can express themselves. These limitations create barriers to the conditions necessary for engagement, such as meaningfulness, availability, and support, when compared to men. More broadly, Dillard and Osam (2021) found that identity, shaped by social categories such as race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality, influences both the conditions that lead to engagement and the way in which engagement is experienced.

Researchers have emphasised the relevance of context, particularly sectoral and institutional context in understanding attitudinal and psychological phenomena within organisations (Fletcher et al 2020; Cooke, 2018; Boccoli and Corso, 2022; Shuck et al., 2021). This is because the broader features of a sector, industry or organisation are likely to shape the experience of engagement (Shuck et al., 2021). Sectoral characteristics, such as those found in public sector organisations, can substantially shape the experience of engagement (Fletcher et al., 2020).

Jenkins and Delbridge (2013) in one of the first attempts to specifically analyse the influence of context on work engagement discovered evidence to show that industry and sector has an impact on engagement and that sector and market factors have an impact on HRM and the overall managerial approach employed to foster work engagement. Scholars in public sector human resource management have highlighted the unique nature of the public sector context due to the presence of public values and civil service rules that shape how public sector organisations operate and manage their staff (i.e. Leisink et al., 2021; Borst, 2018).

The public sector context can be seen as both an omnibus factor (broad structural features) and a discrete factor (specific job roles and activities). Considering these distinctions is vital for understanding work engagement in the public sector. For example, Borst et al. (2019) in their meta-analysis highlighted public sector workers tend to have stronger connections between their work

engagement and other work-related attitudes than private sector workers. This suggests that there is need to analyse work engagement in a more context-specific way, to better identify and understand the factors that influence it and how it is experienced in different situations.

Given that the nature of the public sector is to provide public goods and services and the assumption that employees who work in this sector are motivated by the notion of 'doing good' for the public sector is a particularly interesting setting to focus on. The roles that employees fulfil within the public sector can also be viewed as discrete/situational contextual factors (Dierdorff et al., 2009). Previous research into roles as a contextual factor has highlighted the need to consider how job responsibilities, job scope, and role expectations differ and how they shape organisational behaviour (Dierdorff et al., 2009; Borst, 2018). The roles within the public sector have been argued as being shaped by a commitment to providing public goods and services and by the motivational aspect of "doing good" for society. This commitment is likely to impact both the experience and expression of engagement (Borst, 2018). According to Fletcher et al. (2020), it is more advantageous to distinguish between what is inherent to a job role itself and what is influenced by the broader context in which that role is situated.

Work roles are typically defined based on the responsibilities and requirements involved in performing particular jobs (Ilgen and Hollenbeck, 1991). These responsibilities and requirements include both role-related activities and the attributes of the role holder, encompassing "specific acts, things that the person should do or avoid doing as well as personal characteristics or style" (D. Katz and Kahn, 1978, p. 190). Thus, work role requirements encompass not only the tasks an individual must complete but also the relevant traits needed for effective role fulfilment, such as knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics (Dierdorff and Rubin, 2007). Importantly, similarities in work role requirements facilitate the meaningful grouping of individual roles into occupational categories that share a common overarching goal or purpose (Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2007).

Following John's (2006) argument, it can be inferred that roles as discrete context are subject to a variety of diverse demands, constraints, and opportunities

which are shaped in the omnibus context in which they exist. Further distinction of roles is discussed in another section of this chapter.

2.6 Public Sector Context and Work Engagement

This section aims to examine how the distinctive features of the public sector shape work engagement. The session begins by giving a brief overview of the public sector. It will discuss sector-specific characteristics, such as public service motivation, and will also review previous research on work engagement within the public sector. By doing so, this section highlights the unique factors that influence employee engagement in public sector settings and demonstrates why a tailored approach is essential for understanding engagement dynamics in this context.

2.6.1 The Public Sector Context

The public sector is a term connoting an aggregated sector of government-funded activities (Fletcher et al., 2020). It includes diverse organisations operating within the public sector, delivering specialised services to the public, including but not limited to healthcare, security, and education. The public sector is a major employer, investor, and spender in most countries, and its performance and efficiency significantly impact the well-being of citizens and the competitiveness of the economy (Besley and Ghatak, 2005). Organisations are termed as public based on three characteristics, namely authority, ownership, and funding (Rainey, 2009). Public organisations are owned by the government and receive their funding from public sources. In these organisations, political authority takes precedence over economic authority, which means that the control exercised by public administrators is contingent upon and regulated by the decisions made in the political sphere (Leisink et al., 2021).

While contextual differences exist across countries, recent research has highlighted a growing perception of underperformance within the public sector, often attributed to constrained resources and the implementation of cost-reduction strategies (Halinski and Harrison, 2021). Public organisations operate under high levels of public visibility and accountability, which result in a high degree of formalisation, standardisation, and centralisation of their structures and processes.

This formalisation may have adverse effects on some aspects of their human resource management (Borst et al., 2019). For instance, the ability of public sector managers to provide sufficient resources to enable employees to carry out their duties effectively. The availability of limited resources and the increasing demand for services provided by the public sector may limit the motivation and ability of public employees to carry out their duties effectively.

Public sector organisations are often guided by a mission that outlines “the value that the organisation intends to for its stakeholders and society at large” (Moore, 2000 p 189). Given that the public sector is often associated with a mission and providing specialised goods or services for the public good, some authors argue that people who choose to work in the public sector are specifically inclined to make the world a better place through their service (Bakker, 2015; Vandenabeele, 2007). In other words, they are prosocially and altruistically motivated to serve society or humankind through public institutions, which is known as public service motivation (PSM) in public sector literature (Perry and Wise, 1990). Perry and Wise (1990) further argue that people who choose to work in the public sector do not work for their own benefit but for the purpose of improving the conditions of others. The public service motivation comprises of three main motives, affective, rational, and normative motives. These three motivational bases were proposed by Perry and Wise (1990) to distinguish between the motivation exclusively associated to the public sector and other forms of motivation. The rational motive implies that individuals may engage in public policymaking to fulfil their power, and esteem needs or to advance their personal agendas, this is also known as attraction to public policy. The normative dimension of reflects the individual’s commitment to the public good and the public interest, which stems from their sense of duty or responsibility towards the government or society. The affective dimension of captures the individual’s attraction to specific public programs or services that they perceive as having positive and meaningful effects on people and contribute to greater good, which they value highly, this dimension involves compassion and self-sacrifice. Vandenabeele (2008) argues that individuals with high levels of public service motivation are most likely to choose jobs in the public sector while individuals with low public service motivation are most likely to choose jobs in the other profit-

oriented sectors. Vallerand et al. (2003) argue that this motivation is likely to impact the way employees perform their duties, make them more invested in their jobs and inspire them to give their best.

However, researchers argue that the sustainability of conventional public service motivation is being called into question by government reforms centred around marketisation and austerity (Esteve et al., 2017; Fletcher et al., 2020). The main focus of these reforms has been the adoption of the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm, which stresses the enhancement of performance and accountability, the cultivation of outcome-based cultures, and the incorporation of private-sector managerial techniques (Verbeeten and Spekle, 2015). While the traditional management system in the public sector was focused on organisational needs, the NPM is aimed at efficiency in public service delivery. In many public sector organisations, however, this performance-oriented, market-driven rationale has widened the gap between managers and employees, leading to a perception among public sector workers that they are supervised by people who lack the understanding or appreciation of public sector work and its values (Fletcher et al., 2020). These reforms, along with the spending cuts across the public sector in various countries, have required public sector workers to do more with fewer resources. Consequently, enhancing service delivery through a motivated workforce has emerged as a key challenge for the public sector in many nations (Esteve et al., 2017).

Researchers have argued for the importance of work engagement in the public sector (Borst, 2018; Fletcher et al., 2020; Ancarani et al., 2021). Particularly, work engagement has been proclaimed as a way through which employees can harness their psychological resources and motivation in order to maintain good performance and well-being in a changing and demanding environment (Bakker, 2015). Public managers are beginning to embrace work engagement as an individually focused motivational approach, expecting that fostering work engagement will improve public service performance (Esteve et al., 2017).

2.6.2 Work Engagement in The Public Sector

Research situating work engagement within the public sector is gradually beginning to emerge (Esteve et al., 2017; Borst, 2018; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Borst et al. 2020; Zahari and Kaliannan, 2023). Current studies have examined some factors which may foster or hinder work engagement in the public sector. Regarding the motivational components that are more prevalent in the public services context, some studies have indicated that pro-social motives or public service-oriented values and intrinsic motivational factors are associated with higher levels of engagement (de Simone et al., 2016; Tadic et al., 2017; Borst, 2018; Borst, 2019). These studies have shown that public service motivation (PSM), the motivation to serve the interest of community is positively associated with work engagement in the public sector. However, this relationship may be subject to some intricate nuances. For instance, the nature of the institution and the service offered may have an impact on work engagement.

Hasenfeld (1972) suggests that a distinction can be made based on the services provide for instance, people processing institutions that have brief and infrequent interactions with a diverse set of service users, such as the police and people changing institutions that have prolonged and frequent interactions with a specific segment of service users, such as schools and hospitals. In a study by Borst (2018) commitments and attraction to public policy dimensions of PSM was found to have a positive relationship with work engagement in people changing institutions while the relationship between compassion (PSM) and work engagement was stronger in the people changing institution sample. These findings indicate the need to further examine factors relating to work engagement in the public sector based on the services or roles provided and to move away from the assumption of homogeneity in the public sector.

Examining job characteristics in the public sector, a number of studies show support for the positive relationship between job resources and work engagement (i.e., Borst et al., 2020; Borst, 2018; van den Broeck et al., 2017). Resources such as autonomy, social support, skill utilization and opportunity for learning and development have been linked to work engagement. However, these studies tend to

apply the general framework of job resources (van den Broeck et al., 2017) to the public sector without accounting for the type of institutions within the sector, the services rendered or the individuals who work in these services. Exploring the distinct types of resources, such as personal, job, organisational, and relational resources, and examining the variations across public service settings may also contribute to advancing our contextual knowledge of the most important resources.

The presence of job demands is mostly predicted to reduce or hinder work engagement. Brough and Biggs, (2015) show that the negative relationship between engagement and demands becomes mostly insignificant when considering the effects over time. Although traditional work engagement research has found that the negative association between demands and engagement is most pronounced when resources are limited, some authors argue that this interaction is elusive or weak (Brough and Biggs, 2015), others found the relationship inconclusive in their sample (i.e. Borst et al., 2019).

The mixed findings on the impact of demands on engagement may arise because not all demands are entirely negative. An idea that some scholars have explained by the distinction between challenge demands, which can be motivating, and hindrance demands, which can impair performance (Crawford, Lepine, and Rich, 2010). Fletcher et al. (2020) argue that given the implications of New Public Management (NPM) and fiscal constraints, public sector employees may face more frequent and prominent hindrance demands that impede their work performance and well-being. The effects of resources may vary depending on their level of classification, as Borst et al. (2017) demonstrate that job-specific resources, such as autonomy, enhance engagement when red tape (a hindrance demand) is present, but this demand also weakens the positive relationship between organisation-specific resources, such as development opportunities, and engagement. Additionally, it may be difficult to categorise some demands as these demands may vary based on the institution or occupation within the sector (Fletcher et al., 2020). The application of the JDR general principles to the public sector may not be as clear-cut as it appears. More research is needed to understand the demand that may vary across different institutions, roles, and categories of the public sector.

2.6.3 The Importance of Exhaustion in the JD-R Theory

Prior research has found that when empirically investigating engagement, it is advisable also to investigate its counterpart, exhaustion, to provide a more holistic and nuanced view of how work environments influence employees and to be able to recommend more effective organisational interventions. Thus, in the research literature, it is increasingly evident that studying engagement in isolation fails to capture the full complexity of work experiences.

Engagement and exhaustion represent complementary but distinct outcomes: engagement embodies the energising, fulfilling aspects of work, while exhaustion reflects the draining effects of excessive demands. Together, they allow for a more comprehensive view of how job demands and resources shape both positive and negative work outcomes (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Demerouti et al., 2001). Empirical studies show that high engagement does not necessarily prevent exhaustion, especially in high-demand environments, underscoring the importance of managing demands alongside promoting engagement (Mazzetti et al., 2023; Crawford et al., 2010). Examining engagement and exhaustion together aligns with a balanced approach to well-being research, supporting interventions that foster sustainable engagement by addressing both the motivational and health impairment processes central to the employee experience (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Decades of research on burnout have significantly enhanced our comprehension of its complexities. Burnout is now widely recognised as a negative psychological response resulting from the ongoing interaction between employees and their work environment (Leiter and Bakker, 2010; Maslach, 1982). This response typically manifests through two primary dimensions: emotional exhaustion and cynicism (Bakker et al., 2014). Exhaustion involves feeling mentally, emotionally, and physically depleted, while cynicism is characterised by a detached, overly critical attitude toward one's work. Exhaustion arises as a result of sustained physical, emotional, and cognitive strain that employees experience from prolonged exposure to high job demands (Demerouti et al., 2010). The cognitive effort required to process and cope with these demands through problem-solving and making sense of complex tasks can add significant emotional and physiological stress (Bakker and

Demerouti, 2017). This prolonged engagement in high-stress environments can lead to both mental and physical fatigue, further intensifying the strain on employees over time.

Exhaustion is particularly relevant to the public sector, where employees often face unique pressures that make them highly susceptible to burnout (Borst and Knies, 2021). Research shows that public sector roles typically involve high emotional labour, complex decision-making, and limited resources, all of which contribute to chronic stress and, ultimately, exhaustion. For example, the nature of public sector work often involves intensive interactions with citizens, handling sensitive information, and managing societal challenges that are beyond individual control. This combination of high job demands, and often inadequate resources aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, where the imbalance is a strong predictor of exhaustion (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

The impact of exhaustion in the public sector extends beyond individual well-being to have broader implications for public service delivery and organisational efficiency. Research indicates that exhaustion in public sector roles can lead to reduced job satisfaction, lower organisational commitment, and increased absenteeism and turnover rates, ultimately affecting service quality and the public's perception of governmental institutions (Bakker et al., 2003). Public sector employees may face additional stress from navigating bureaucratic constraints, which often hinder their ability to respond flexibly to high demands and thus exacerbate feelings of exhaustion (Perry et al., 2010).

2.7 Mission and Non-Mission-Oriented Roles

This section explores the existing classifications of roles within the public sector. It presents a case for a new classification into mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, highlighting their conceptual distinctiveness and underlying assumptions. Existing classifications based on hierarchy, function, or professional grouping have provided important insights into organisational structure and role differentiation; however, they do not fully account for how roles vary in their proximity to, and alignment with, the public service mission. By differentiating between mission- and non-mission-oriented roles, the analysis can better account for how

role-based contextual factors shape the perception and impact of job characteristics. It also distinguishes between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, clarifying their differences with concepts such as calling and profession. By doing so, this section provides a deeper understanding of how different types of roles contribute to variations in work engagement within the public sector.

Public organisations have a varied workforce which includes a diverse range of professionals who perform different tasks (Bossu et al., 2019). The classification of roles within organisations is essential for understanding the structure and function of different positions. The classification of roles within organisations has been a subject of extensive research, with various terminologies and frameworks proposed to delineate the functions and importance of different positions. Traditionally, roles have been categorised into professional and support staff (Bossu et al., 2019), academic and non-academic staff in higher education (Stage and Aagaard, 2019), and frontline, essential, and non-essential workers (Blau et al., 2021). However, a shift towards using the terms “mission-oriented” and “non-mission-oriented” may, offer a more nuanced understanding of organisational roles. According to Besley and Ghatak (2005) considering workers as mission-oriented and non-mission oriented is logical when the output of the mission-oriented organisation is regarded as the production of collective goods.

The terminology “mission-oriented” and “non-mission-oriented” roles provides a clearer distinction based on the alignment with the organisation’s core mission and objectives. Mission-oriented roles are directly involved in achieving the primary goals of the organisation, such as faculty members in educational institutions or healthcare providers in hospitals (Besley and Ghatak, 2005). In contrast, non-mission-oriented roles support these core activities without being directly involved in them, such as administrative staff and IT personnel. The use of terms like “non-essential” can carry negative connotations, suggesting that these roles are less important. This can affect the morale and perceived value of employees in these positions. By adopting the terms “mission-oriented” and “non-mission-oriented,” organisations can acknowledge the importance of other roles without diminishing their value, fostering a more inclusive and respectful work environment. The terms “essential” and “non-essential” can vary significantly depending on the context, particularly during crises (Blau et al.,

2021). The classification of roles as mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented provides a more stable and consistent framework that can be applied across different sectors and situations, enhancing the adaptability of organisational strategies.

The traditional terms professional and support staff can create misconceptions about the value and importance of different roles (Bossu and Brown, 2019). The term 'professional' often implies a higher status, which can undervalue the contributions of support roles. However, many so-called support roles require professional certifications and specialised skills, making the term support potentially misleading. By using mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented classifications, scholars and organisations can avoid these misconceptions and better recognise the value of all roles as they exist within the wider occupational and sectoral context.

2.7.1 Conceptual Distinctiveness: Calling, Profession, Occupation and Roles

This section clarifies how mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles fit within the broader categories of calling, profession, and occupation, and argues for the distinctiveness of the concept and exploring the underlying assumptions of the concept.

According to Moskos (2010) a calling is justified by institutional values, representing a purpose that transcends individual self-interest in favour of a presumed higher good and it is typically held in high regard by the larger community due to its association with self-sacrifice and complete dedication to one's role. He argues that although a calling does not offer remuneration comparable to what one might earn in the marketplace, this is often offset by various social benefits linked to its institutional nature. Members of a calling usually perceive themselves as distinct from the broader society and are seen as such by others. Similarly, Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) argue that people with callings perceive their work as an integral part of their lives. They are motivated not by financial gain or career advancement but by the personal fulfilment derived from the work itself. Originally, the term "calling" had religious connotations, referring to individuals being "called" by God to engage in morally and socially significant work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Although the contemporary understanding of "calling" have been thought to have lost some of its religious associations work that people feel called to do is typically viewed as socially valuable and an end in itself, encompassing activities that may or may not be inherently pleasurable (Thompson and Christensen, 2018). In any profession, it's possible to find individuals who relate to their work in various ways. While one might anticipate a higher prevalence of Callings in certain fields, such as teaching or Peace Corps service, it's plausible that salespeople, medical technicians, factory workers, and secretaries could also perceive their work as a Calling (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). These individuals might deeply enjoy their work and believe that it contributes positively to the world. Mission-oriented roles are externally defined by organisational mandates and structured to serve a specific public or institutional mission. These roles, common in sectors like public administration, law enforcement, education, and healthcare, are designed to meet societal needs or achieve specific outcomes (Perry and Wise, 1990). The tasks associated with mission-oriented roles are often shaped by institutional policies, government regulations, or broader public objectives.

While individuals in mission-oriented roles may experience intrinsic motivation, particularly in jobs that align with their personal values, the defining feature of these roles is their connection to an external mission. A public-school teacher, for instance, must adhere to curriculum standards and meet performance benchmarks, regardless of whether they view teaching as a personal calling. Similarly, a healthcare worker in a public hospital is driven by institutional objectives such as improving patient outcomes, which may or may not align with their personal sense of purpose.

The concept of calling, in contrast, emphasises a deeply personal focus. It is based on the idea that individuals possess unique talents and predispositions that set them apart from others, who may feel called in different ways (Duffy et al., 2018). As such, a calling is shaped by personal uniqueness rather than a collective or shared value (Thompson and Christensen, 2018). It directs the individual towards tasks or roles they are particularly suited for and inclined to pursue. calling is motivated by a deeply personal need for self-fulfilment and a sense of alignment between one's work and personal identity. The focus of a calling is not just on contributing to a broader societal mission, but on fulfilling an internal sense of

purpose. While both mission-oriented roles and callings can involve serving others, the source of motivation is different: mission-oriented roles are focused on achieving external goals for the benefit of society, while callings are about fulfilling one's internal sense of purpose and identity.

An occupation is a collection of work roles across various organisations that share similar work requirements, such as tasks and responsibilities, methodologies, objectives, or qualifications needed by workers, including knowledge, skills, and abilities (Morgeson et al., 2010). Liebig and Sansonetti (2004) define professional occupations as those that necessitate a specified level of educational attainment and are regulated by a professional body, which mandates recognised qualifications and adherence to specific practices to fulfil responsibilities. Similarly, Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz, and Wiethoff (2010) argue that professional occupations typically have a clear set of required qualifications and competencies for career progression. In the UK, professions are defined as occupations where access or practice is restricted by national law to individuals holding specific qualifications (UK National Contact Point, 2014), such as teaching, accountancy, and nursing.

Conversely, nonprofessional occupations may not specify such requirements, allowing for considerable variation in educational attainment and prior experience across different occupational and organisational contexts, such as administration, manufacturing, and customer service. Miller, Scaggs, and Wells (2006) note that nonprofessional occupations often emphasise on-the-job training and may require little to no formal qualifications. While they are sometimes described as 'support' roles, such labels risk underestimating their organisational significance, particularly in the public sector, where nonprofessional roles are essential to ensuring continuity, compliance, and service infrastructure. However, neither professional nor nonprofessional classifications appears to fully capture the institutional positioning or motivational dynamics of public sector roles. Professional status may imply technical expertise or accountability but says little about whether a role contributes directly to the organisation's public mission, nor how employees derive meaning from it. For instance, both a nurse in a public hospital and a finance officer in the same institution may hold professional designations, yet only the former is typically involved in frontline service delivery aligned with the healthcare mission.

Occupations may help delineate the formal requirements of a job, but they cannot fully explain how a role is experienced, what motivates its performance, or how it contributes to institutional outcomes. Therefore, while occupational and professional categories remain important for mapping workforce structure and capability, they need to be supplemented by classifications such as the mission-oriented vs. non-mission-oriented categories that attend to the functional and symbolic positioning of roles within the public sector context.

2.7.2 Underlying Assumptions

To explore the organisational dynamics of mission and non-mission-oriented roles, it is essential to consider the foundational assumptions that shape how these roles are perceived, valued, and managed within an organisation.

The first assumption is that organisations derive their value primarily from activities that directly support their mission, thus emphasising the importance of mission-oriented roles (Barigozzi and Manna, 2020). This assumption is rooted in the belief that organisational success and legitimacy are closely tied to how well core mission objectives are achieved (Mintzberg, 1989). As a result, roles directly involved in the primary goals whether creating products, delivering services, or advancing social outcomes are often prioritised in terms of recognition, resources, and strategic alignment (Mintzberg, 1989; Innstrand, 2016). This assumption influences role hierarchy and task prioritisation, with mission-oriented roles typically positioned at the forefront of organisational importance (Mintzberg, 1989). For example, a healthcare organisation may prioritise roles related to patient care, such as doctors and nurses, as mission-oriented, considering them fundamental to its purpose of delivering health services.

In contrast, support roles like administration or maintenance, while critical, are viewed as secondary and supportive. This assumption can create a value hierarchy where mission-oriented roles receive higher levels of visibility, which can, in turn, influence the way employees in different roles perceive their contributions (Houston, 2011; Bright, 2011). It also affects compensation and development opportunities, where employees in mission-oriented positions might have access to greater incentives or career progression pathways, based on the perceived centrality of their

work to the organisational mission (Bolman and Deal, 2010). Public sector research show that mission-oriented roles tend to exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation, as employees often enter public service motivated by a desire to contribute to the public good (Borst, 2018; Cooke et al., 2019). This resonates with the assumption that mission-centric contributions are paramount, particularly in roles aligned directly with the public sector's core objectives such as healthcare, education, public safety, and social work. Studies suggest that public sector employees in these roles experience higher engagement because their work is directly tied to societal impact, which fulfils a personal need for purpose and altruism (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018).

A second underlying assumption is that despite the apparent distinction between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, there exists a high degree of task interdependence and symbiosis. Organisations are complex, interdependent systems, and achieving organisational goals often requires collaboration between various roles, regardless of direct mission alignment (Mintzberg, 1989). According to this assumption, mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles are interconnected, with each contributing to the organisation's collective success. This assumption is supported by theories of organisational behaviour that highlight role interdependence, suggesting that even roles not directly tied to the core mission are crucial for organisational stability and continuity (Boleman and Deal, 2010).

The assumption of task interdependence and role symbiosis is especially pertinent to public sector organisations, where mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles must collaborate closely due to the complex and interconnected nature of public service delivery. Public sector work often requires high degrees of coordination and mutual support across departments and roles. For instance, while frontline social workers are typically considered mission-oriented due to their direct interaction with vulnerable populations, their effectiveness is significantly supported by non-mission-oriented staff in roles like budgeting, administration, and IT support. Such interdependence creates a symbiotic relationship where each role type reinforces the other, fostering a balanced system of support and action that enables the organisation to operate cohesively (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Recognising this interdependence highlights the necessity of fostering an organisational culture that

values and respects both mission and non-mission roles, supporting a more inclusive and supportive work environment (Bolman and Deal, 2017).

A third assumption is that employees in mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles are driven by distinct motivational factors, which affects their engagement and job satisfaction. Mission-oriented roles are often assumed to attract individuals motivated by intrinsic factors, such as purpose, meaning, and alignment with organisational values. This assumption is grounded in theories of intrinsic motivation, where employees derive personal fulfilment from contributing to a cause or goal they find personally meaningful (Grant, 2007). For example, educators in an organisation focused on improving literacy rates may be motivated by the opportunity to make a difference in the community, resulting in high levels of engagement. In contrast, employees in non-mission-oriented roles may be more motivated by extrinsic factors, such as job security, compensation, and professional growth (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). This differentiation is particularly relevant in organisations where mission-centric roles receive high visibility and praise, while non-mission-oriented roles are less publicly acknowledged. This difference in motivation influences how organisations design employee incentives. For instance, mission-oriented employees may benefit from purpose-driven rewards, such as opportunities to engage in further social impact projects or participate in mission-aligned initiatives, while non-mission-oriented employees may prefer traditional rewards, including pay increases, benefits, or career development programs (Morgeson et al., 2010).

Understanding these differentiated motivations is essential for implementing effective employee engagement strategies, as a “one-size-fits-all” approach may not be optimal. Addressing the unique motivational needs of both groups can improve engagement, reduce turnover, and enhance job satisfaction, ensuring that both mission and non-mission-oriented roles contribute meaningfully to organisational success (Kahn, 1990).

2.8 The Relationship Between Work Engagement, The Public Sector, and Mission-Oriented and Non-Mission-Oriented Roles

The public sector is characterised by complex bureaucratic organisational structures, frequent change of leaders, political interference, lack of proper funding and budget cuts (Borst et al. 2019; Elliot et al., 2020; Esteve et al., 2017). Lavigna (2015) asserts that public organisations have inherent contextual characteristics that can hinder work engagement. For example, Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) explain how public organisations tend to lack decision-making autonomy, bureaucratic structures, political leadership, and difficulties measuring goals. The need for transparency and accountability means that there must be a recorded history, capturing the steps taken before decisions are reached. Many processes are subject to the oversight of official committees, requiring that they be recorded in writing and filed appropriately. It is unavoidable that political factors, both within and outside the organisation, can have a substantial impact on how public institutions function (Brewster and Cerdin, 2018). These work characteristics may be anticipated to negatively impact engagement, as resources often related to engagement include autonomy, control, feedback, and transparency of work.

Furthermore, public service employees often encounter a context that is commonly criticized for being inefficient. Most public service roles (like teaching, nursing, caring) requires high levels of emotional demands due to frequent and often intense interaction with users, which adds to the demands on employees. This is coupled with the socioeconomic pressure to reduce the costs of public service delivery (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). Although public sector work attributes are usually viewed as inhibiting workers motivation Noesgaard and Hansen (2018) argue that public service workers may be motivated by other factors such as a sense of community service, emphasis on job security and preference for intrinsic reward over extrinsic rewards. This may be because public service employees may be motivated by providing the services they render and the value of the social impact of their services.

According to Fletcher et al., (2020), the term public services encompass diverse organisations operating within the public sector, delivering specialized

services to the public, such as healthcare and education. Bakker (2015, p.723) argue that employees who are attracted to the public services are those who want to make the world a better place. Vandenabeele (2008) in the same vein suggest that those predisposed to public services ideals and values will self-select into public service roles such as education, healthcare and security. However, these services/roles which are commonly attributed to public sector by researchers can also be found in the private sector and nonprofit sectors. The private and nonprofit sectors also provides academic services, medical services, security services, protective and personal care services (Leisink, 2021). Besley (2005) argue that these services are better classified as mission-oriented services given that not all public services are necessarily to serve the public interest. Employees who work in the mission-oriented services are referred to as motivated agents who take on jobs that are goal oriented for the intrinsic reward they offer for instance, doctors to save lives, teachers to impact knowledge, judges to promote justice and soldiers to defend and protect the country (Besley, 2005; Makris, 2009; Borst 2018; Vlassopoulos, 2007; Brewster and Cerdin, 2018). Not all organisations within the public sector are mission oriented, for instance government in some countries own and run car manufacturing plants which is a form of revenue for the government (Besley, 2005).

The public sector mission-oriented services are relevant where social objectives, such as equality or externalities, require public provision of services such as education, health care, prisons, or policing. These roles are often characterised by the level of direct contact with services users and are often at the operating core of the organisation and carry out essential job tasks that emphasises public service to the wider community in contrast to performing technocratic and support roles (Bright, 2011). The behaviour of the service providers, such as teachers, doctors, nurses, prison guards, or police, is often influenced by their professional ethics and organisational commitment (Besley and Ghatak, 2018). In contrast to the argument of Vandenabeele (2008) and Bakker (2015), people who want to make the world a better place and serve other people and society may not necessarily do so through self-selecting into public sector roles, but attach themselves to the aforementioned mission-oriented roles in whichever sector is available. The type of institution and the service provided may be more influential to work engagement than the sector in

which these institutions are situated. Mission oriented roles are classified as high productivity roles which are not restricted by administrative constraint where the focus is to achieve overarching objectives that tackle societal challenges (Makris, 2009).

On the other hand, there are non-mission-oriented roles within the public sector, as not all public sector organisations are working towards a mission (Besley and Ghatak, 2018; Makris, 2009; Vlassopoulos, 2007). Non-mission-oriented public sector roles are not often at the operating core of the organisation or directly related to the achievement of a specific public goal or mission such as improving health, protecting the environment, or impacting knowledge, they may focus on more routine, operational, or profit-driven goals providing indirect support to the basic missions (Mintzberg 1989; Makris, 2009; Besley and Ghatak, 2005). While mission-oriented roles are driven by the desire to achieve specific, often ambitious societal outcomes, non-mission-oriented roles may be driven by individual or organisational goals that are not necessarily linked to broader societal challenges. These roles include accountants, lawyers, clerks, sales managers, administrative officers, procurement officers, amongst others (Mintzberg, 1989; Besley and Ghatak, 2005; Brewster and Cerdin, 2018; Bright, 2011). This distinction in roles within the public sector is not to suggest the importance of certain roles over others or to suggest that non-mission-oriented roles do not contribute to the larger goals of public organisations. To the contrary, all public sector roles contribute to the goal of public organisations however the degree to which they contribute differ. Public sector work engagement literature have often group all these roles labelling them as public sector without distinguishing the difference between both roles.

The same organisational factors may not characterise these non-mission-oriented roles as the mission-oriented roles such as emotionally demanding work environment, work intensity and constant demand for efficacy (Borst et al. 2020; Zahari and Kaliannan, 2023). Furthermore, employees in non-mission-oriented roles may have lower levels of alignment with public service motivation, a distinctive feature of the public sector that may influence the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement. However, not all public sector employees have the same degree of alignment with the public service motivation, depending on

the nature and characteristics of their roles (Borst et al. 2019). Therefore, the job characteristics available to employees in both roles may have significantly differing impact on the work engagement levels of the employees.

The literature on work engagement in does not currently address within sector difference. What is more common in the engagement literature is the comparison between private and public sector work engagement (i.e., Borst et al, 2019; Furnham et al. 2014; Bryson et al., 2017). Overall, these difference suggest that different resources and demands may be perceived differently, and some resources may be more prominent than others in terms of work engagement in both categories.

Current research still seems to assume the homogeneity of the public sector overlooking the potential differences in the motivations, behaviours, and outcomes of employees in different types of roles (i.e., Borst et al., 2020; Brennan et al., 2023). This assumption may limit the applicability and validity of existing theories of work engagement and job characteristics in the public sector context. Therefore, there is a need to explore how the heterogeneity of job roles within the public sector influences the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement.

2.9 Conclusions from the Literature Review

The recent interest by researchers about work engagement and context (Farndale, 2022; Truss et al., 2013; Fletcher et al., 2020; Boccoli and Corso, 2022; Shuck et al., 2021; Borst and Knies, 2023) suggests that context is worth reappraising in examining the engagement experience of workforce members. There remains a need to sufficiently incorporate a contextual perspective in the study of work engagement to understand how characteristics of the macro-level environment and micro-level relationships influence individual motivation at work. Bakker, Albrecht, and Leiter (2011, p.23), in their review of literature, highlight the need for contextual studies on engagement, stating that “we need to pay more attention to the broader contextual factors that impact engagement”. Nine years later, Fletcher et al. (2020) express the same concern, as the growing research has not fully addressed the relationship between contextual factors and work engagement. Wittenberg et al. (2023) further reiterate this concern in their recent systematic review, stating that research on work engagement has taken a neutral stance regarding context, which

in turn creates a limit in our understanding of why employees might engage or disengage at work. It is important to acknowledge that work environments are not uniform and that the experience of engagement is affected by contextual factors surrounding them (Johns, 2018). This literature review aimed to discover the role of context in work engagement.

First, the literature review began by examining the development of the concept of engagement from the seminal work of Kahn (1990) through to the popular conceptualisation as work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The conceptualisation of work engagement has allowed for more focused empirical research and the development of reliable instruments such as the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). These instruments have facilitated quantitative studies, thereby contributing to a clearer picture of the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement. However, while the operationalisation of work engagement through theories such as the JDR has yielded valuable insights into the relationships between job characteristics, work engagement and exhaustion, the prevailing frameworks have some limitations, often assuming that job demands and resources affect all employees in the same way, overlooking how individuals interpret and make sense of their work based on the specific context in which they operate.

The second part of the review explored the role of context in shaping work engagement. It found that different contextual factors, including organisational (Fletcher et al., 2020), cultural (Dillard and Osam, 2021), institutional (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013), and occupational settings (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014), can influence work engagement. Each of these contexts has unique characteristics that can affect employee behaviour, motivation, and ultimately, engagement. The literature review showed that context exists on multiple levels. Johns' (2006) framework aids understanding of context by classifying it into omnibus and discrete categories, which may potentially explain how broader and situational contexts impact engagement.

The public sector offers a compelling context for examination, given its distinctive characteristics (Noesgaard and Hansen 2018; Wittenberg et al., 2023; Fletcher et al.,

2020; Borst 2019). Emerging research highlights the importance of work engagement within the public sector (Fletcher et al., 2020; Borst, 2019), but findings remain inconsistent with previous studies on the antecedents of engagement. For instance, Borst (2018) discovered that autonomy (a common antecedent of engagement) had an insignificant relationship with work engagement among healthcare and education workers. Recent studies also suggest that some job demands, such as work intensity, may enhance work engagement in public service employees (Bauwens et al., 2021). These findings directly challenge dominant assumptions in the engagement literature. The JDR model tends to treat job demands as uniformly detrimental, closely linked to exhaustion.

These contradictory findings might stem from the fact that existing literature on public sector engagement is dominated by research focusing on the general framework of job demands and resources, where individual motivational drives are presumed to be homogeneous and roles categories somewhat overlooked (Borst, 2018; Borst et al., 2019; Ancarani et al., 2021; Bauwens et al., 2021). Scholars have proposed that some demands may be challenging or hindering depending on the context in which they exist (Crawford et al., 2010; Mazzetti et al., 2023).

To address the disparity, the review introduces a role-based distinction between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles. Mission-oriented roles, such as those in education, healthcare, or law enforcement, are structured around achieving a clear public mission and often require alignment with societal values or collective goals. Conversely, non-mission-oriented roles tend to be more operational or administrative; while still essential, they are less frequently framed in terms of public value or social purpose.

This classification may help to explain why the same job characteristic, such as autonomy or work intensity, may have different implications for engagement depending on the role context. For instance, autonomy may be energising for a teacher who identifies with the mission of public education, but less meaningful for an administrative worker whose tasks are more routine. This role-based variation has been largely overlooked in engagement – public sector research, which rarely disaggregates by role type.

Overall, studies have shown that public sector-engagement literature appears to identify mostly mission-oriented roles in their studies, ignoring other roles within the sector. Apart from a few studies (i.e., Borst et al., 2019; Mussagulova, 2020), most public sector-engagement have focused on high visibility, high impact roles such as nursing professionals and teaching professionals thereby creating a gap in our knowledge concerning other roles within the public sector such as administrative or more operational roles and how the job characteristics available to them may affect their work engagement. To further clarify the distinctiveness of mission-oriented roles, the review also examined how they differ from related concepts such as calling, profession, and occupation. While all of these shape work identity and motivation, only mission-oriented roles are defined primarily by their institutional purpose rather than individual orientation (calling), qualification systems (profession), or task-based categorisation (occupation). Recognising this helps to isolate a structural feature of public work that has significant implications for how engagement is experienced and sustained.

The lack of focus on the dynamic interaction between the public sector's omnibus context and the discrete requirements of mission- and non-mission-oriented roles presents a significant gap in our understanding of public sector engagement. This study aims to contribute to the engagement literature by incorporating a contextual perspective, emphasising the heterogeneity of roles within the public sector. Hence, the primary research question guiding this study is:

How does the heterogeneity of job roles within the public sector (mission-oriented vs non-mission-oriented roles) influence the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement and exhaustion?

2.10 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the literature on work engagement, particularly within the public sector context, highlighting the gaps in the literature. Key theoretical approaches to operationalising work engagement have been critically evaluated, and the rationale for conceptualising engagement as work engagement in this study has been explained. The Job Demands-Resources (JDR) has been identified as the most widely utilised framework in the work engagement literature for

explaining how different job characteristics influence engagement outcomes. Johns (2006) contextual framework was also introduced to operationalise context, providing a framework for categorising context into omnibus (public sector) and discrete (roles) contexts. The chapter further emphasises the heterogeneity of roles and makes a case for the categorisation of public sector roles into mission and non-mission-oriented roles following the example of Besley and Ghatak (2005). The chapter ended with the identification of the gaps in the engagement research that the current study intends to address.

The next chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of the theoretical framework that supports this study and outlines the development of specific research hypotheses. It examines the key concepts and theories that inform the study's methodology, explaining the rationale for the proposed hypotheses by drawing on existing literature. By establishing these theoretical underpinnings, the chapter creates a clear connection between the theoretical constructs and the empirical analysis, thereby setting the foundation for the research's overall direction and focus.

3 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

3.1 Introduction

Building on the insights from the literature review, this chapter develops a theoretical explanation of the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement within the public sector, focusing on the distinction between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles (Fletcher et al., 2020; Borst, 2018). While prior research has extensively explored how job characteristics shape work engagement and burnout (Bakker et al., 2014; Russell et al., 2020; Van den Broeck et al., 2017), there is limited empirical investigation into how these relationships differ across various types of roles (Bauwens et al., 2021; Fletcher et al., 2020), particularly in the public sector where mission-driven work is prevalent (Fletcher et al., 2020; Brewster and Cerdin, 2017; Knies and Leisink, 2017). This gap is significant given the unique motivational dynamics that exist in mission-oriented roles, which often emphasise a sense of purpose and public service (Besley and Ghatak, 2005).

Mission-oriented roles are thought to provide greater intrinsic motivation, particularly through job characteristics like task significance and autonomy, which may lead to higher levels of engagement (Innstrand, 2016; Borst, 2018; Cooke et al., 2018). Conversely, non-mission-oriented roles, where the connection to broader societal goals may be less direct, might not generate the same level of engagement, even when similar job characteristics are present (Morgeson et al., 2010; Innstrand, 2016). This distinction can be better understood through Johns' (2006) contextual framework, which underscores the importance of situational and organisational context in shaping workplace behaviour. The differentiation between these types of roles raises important questions: how universal the effects of job characteristics on engagement truly are, and whether they are moderated by the presence or absence of a role's mission-orientation. To address these questions, this chapter first examines the research on the JDR theory and Johns' (2006) contextual framework to establish how contextual factors shape the relationship between job demands, resources, and work engagement. It then formulates a series of hypotheses that connect job demands and resources with work engagement in mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles within the public sector. These hypotheses will test the

different effects of key job demands and resources on work engagement and exhaustion across these role types.

The following sections develop the hypotheses that will guide this empirical investigation, detailing the expected relationships between job characteristics and work engagement in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 Job Demands and Resources Theory

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker et al., 2023; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001) suggests that two categories of job characteristics, namely job demands and job resources, characterise any work context. Job resources refer to those aspects of the job, whether physical, psychological, social, or organisational, that help to achieve work goals, reduce the stress associated with their jobs, and foster personal growth and development (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Job resources include characteristics such as supervisor support, feedback, social support, task significance, autonomy, and learning opportunity (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Job demands refer to “physical, psychological, social or organisational features of a job that requires sustained physical, mental, and/or emotional psychological effort from an employee that can result in physiological and/or psychological costs” (Demerouti et al., 2001), they include control, regulation, work pressure, role overload and emotional demands. The relationship between job demands and work engagement is predicted to be negative; high job demands can affect levels of vigour, absorption, and dedication, leading to a decline in work engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). However, job demands and resources might be associated with both beneficial and detrimental effects (Bakker et al., 2023).

3.2.2 The Dual Processes

A fundamental relationship studied by the JD-R theory is that job demands and resources activate two distinct processes namely the health impairment and motivational processes. In the health impairment process, persistent job demands (i.e. interpersonal conflicts, workload) lead to increased effort, which may consume

the mental, physical and emotional capabilities of employees, potentially resulting in a loss of energy, job strain and exhaustion, which is a fundamental element of burnout (Demerouti et al, 2001). Continuous high-level effort to meet job demands can also exhaust an individual's energy reserves, leading to the emergence of health issues and a decline in performance (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Bakker et al., 2023). In the motivational process, job resources (i.e. social support, feedback, skill variety) satisfy the basic psychological needs and foster work engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). There is considerable evidence for the health impairment and motivational processes of the JD-R theory (meta-analyses Christian et al., 2010; Lesener et al., 2020; Mazzetti et al., 2021). Hence, job resources are considered key drivers of engagement, while job demands are viewed as the primary contributors to burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 2016; Bakker et al., 2014; 2023).

3.2.3 Criticisms and Blind Spots

The JDR theory is widely regarded as the leading framework for studying work engagement due to its applicability across various settings (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011); however, it has received several criticisms.

One key issue is that job demands are not universally detrimental and that the relationship between resources may not be as clear-cut as initially portrayed (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014; Bauwens et al., 2021). Studies show that some job demands may contribute to the motivational process when they are considered stimulating (Crawford et al., 2010; Mazzetti et al., 2023). As such, Van den Broeck et al. (2010) posit that job demands can be experienced as either challenge demands or hindrance demands. Challenge demands refer to those demands, which can be motivating as well as energy depleting, while these demands may be energy consuming; they could potentially provide the opportunity for positive outcomes in terms of the employee's inquisitiveness, skills and diligence that can help to attain work objectives (Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Breevaart and Bakker, 2018; Tadic et al, 2015). Examples of challenge demands include time pressure, cognitive demands and workload, which may stimulate employees to exert more energy at work to promote possible goal attainment.

In contrast, hindrance demands are obstacles which can impair performance and, as such, trigger negative emotions in employees subjected to them (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Christian et al. (2010) confirmed that hindrance demands had a negative association with work engagement while challenge demands were found to have a positive relationship with work engagement. This evidence suggests that not all job demands are inherently negative; their impact depends on how employees perceive them.

The distinction between challenges and hindrances may itself be context-dependent. The idea that some job demands may be considered challenging while others may be considered hindering appears to depend heavily on the context in which they occur. For example, Bakker and Sanz-Vergel (2013) in their study of home health nurses found that workload lowered the engagement levels of the nurses, while emotional demands boosted the feeling of engagement amongst the nurses. Similarly, Noesgaard and Hansen (2018) found no negative association between emotional demands and work engagement among caregivers. On the other hand, Duarte et al. (2020) showed that emotional demands were not positively associated with burnout in their non-client-facing managers in the service sector. These findings suggest that the same demand may function differently across roles and sectors, reinforcing the view that job demands should not be evaluated in isolation from context. Thus, as Bakker and Demerouti (2017) also note, identifying whether a demand is challenging or hindering is most effectively undertaken within specific occupational sectors or professional groups. A more context-sensitive approach is required to make sense of how demands operate in practice.

Schaufeli and Taris (2014) emphasised the need for researchers to examine the distinctions between challenges and hindrances to enhance understanding of this redefinition and identify common patterns. Similarly, Bakker and Demerouti (2017) highlighted the importance of uncovering the conditions under which job demands function as either hindrances or challenges, calling this a critical yet unresolved issue in JDR research. To address this complexity, researchers must consider that individuals may interpret demands differently (Searle and Auton, 2015), that a particular demand might serve as a challenge in one context but as a hindrance in another (Bakker and Sanz-Vergel, 2013), and that a demand can simultaneously

function as both a challenge and a hindrance within the same context (Webster et al., 2011).

In the same vein, researchers are beginning to question the universality of job resources (Van Veldhoven et al, 2020; Borst, 2018). For example, Borst (2018) found that autonomy (a common antecedent of engagement) had an insignificant relationship with work engagement in their sample of healthcare and education workers. While Deelstra et al. (2003) in their study of a sample of 48 administrative workers highlight that social support (another common antecedent of work engagement) can provoke adverse reactions when imposed on an employee who neither desires nor requires it. They conclude that unwanted support may lead to feelings of incompetence and a perceived restriction of one's freedom of choice. This implies that job resources may lose their intended positive effects and could potentially become detrimental in specific contexts (Van Veldhoven et al, 2019).

These criticisms indicate that our current understanding may only partially explain why, when, and for whom job demands and resources operate as expected. It becomes increasingly clear that contextual factors, both at the institutional and role levels are crucial. As noted by Hobfoll et al. (2018), and earlier by Johns (2006; 2017), understanding the significance of job demands and resources requires attention to both omnibus context and discrete context.

3.2.4 The Multiplicative Effect

A central tenet of the JD-R theory is that job demands and resources do not function in isolation but interact to shape outcomes such as work engagement and exhaustion. This interaction unfolds through two key mechanisms: the buffer hypothesis and the boost hypothesis (Bakker et al., 2007; 2023). These mechanisms are important because they shift attention away from the absolute presence of job demands or resources and instead emphasise their relational interplay (Bakker et al., 2005). Accordingly, the theory proposes that the ideal job design sets reasonable demands while providing sufficient resources to help employees manage and benefit from those demands.

The buffer hypothesis suggests that job resources can mitigate or cushion the adverse effects of job demands. For example, when job resources such as performance feedback, skill variety, or opportunities for recovery are available, the negative impacts of emotional demands or heavy workloads on outcomes like burnout and psychological strain are lessened (Bakker et al., 2005; De Jonge and Hout, 2021). In essence, resources reduce the effort required to manage demands and soften their psychological toll.

The boost hypothesis (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Bakker et al., 2010) proposes that job resources are especially effective at fostering motivation when employees face complex work that challenges their abilities. Employees regularly facing challenging job demands (e.g., work complexity, workload) can significantly benefit from training, autonomy, and feedback. Additionally, they can leverage social job resources, such as support from colleagues and intellectual stimulation from their leader, to effectively manage these challenges (Bakker et al., 2007; Breevaart and Bakker, 2018). Supporting this perspective, Tadic et al. (2015) found that daily hindrance job demands, such as bureaucracy, role conflict, and hassles, had a less pronounced negative impact on work engagement on days when employees had access to job resources like social support, coaching, and feedback. This highlights that job resources become particularly critical for mitigating strain and enhancing work engagement when job demands are high.

Although these hypotheses seem intuitively appealing, they raise some important concerns. One key issue is that not all resources interact effectively with all demands. The assumption that resources serve as general buffers or motivators may oversimplify the dynamics in specific work environments (Fletcher et al., 2020; Bailey et al., 2015). Van Veldhoven et al. (2019) observe that job resources do not arbitrarily moderate the effects of all job demands; their effectiveness often depends on how well they align with the type of demand involved. For instance, autonomy may reduce burnout in knowledge-intensive roles; however, it could be irrelevant or even counterproductive in structured or routine jobs, such as those in manufacturing, like assembly line work or retail sales assistants.

Similarly, emotional resources like social support may not hold the same relevance in physically demanding jobs compared to tangible resources like ergonomic equipment (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). This variability suggests that job demands and resources cannot be universally applied without consideration of the specific context (Fletcher et al., 2020).

Additionally, the JD-R theory's focus on linear and uniform relationships between job demands and resources has been criticised for oversimplifying complex workplace dynamics. For example, while job resources like feedback may boost engagement for highly motivated employees, they could feel overwhelming or irrelevant to those with lower intrinsic motivation or in unsupportive team environments (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). The interaction between demands and resources is often non-linear, influenced by factors such as team dynamics, workplace culture, and individual differences, which the hypotheses do not always capture effectively (Bailey et al., 2015). The implication here is that individual differences and relational dynamics are not merely background factors; they actively shape how demands and resources are experienced and responded to.

The criticism of the JDR theory highlights its limitations in accounting for the broader, complex dynamics that shape workplace environments. As Bailey et al. (2015, p 7) aptly summarised, “the JD-R fails to take account of heterogeneous, micro-and macro-level contextual factors, interpersonal interactions and emotional or irrational responses [and] issues of power and politics within the workplace [and] who controls resources and demands”. The theory's assumption that job demands and resources exist independently within the workplace overlooks the overarching determinants that influence their availability and nature. By focusing primarily on the interaction between demands and resources in shaping work engagement and exhaustion, the JD-R theory fails to incorporate the systemic and external factors, such as organisational structures, economic conditions, and policy environments, that critically shape workplace dynamics. Bailey et al (2015) summary highlights the need to examine the various categories of context and how they influence engagement.

These criticisms do not undermine the JD-R theory; instead, they emphasise the need for its continued theoretical refinement. The evidence regarding the buffer and

boost hypotheses indicates that while the mechanisms are conceptually robust, their effectiveness is conditional rather than universal. The variation across occupational roles, job structures, and individual experiences suggests that the JD-R theory should be utilised as a flexible analytical framework, rather than a rigid predictive formula. The strength of the JD-R theory may lie not in its universality but in its capacity for adaptation. The interaction between job demands and resources remains a valuable lens for understanding engagement and exhaustion if contextual factors are made integral to the analysis.

3.3 Johns Categorical Model of Context

The previous discussion highlighted the limitations of the JD-R theory. While it provides functional mechanisms through which engagement and exhaustion occur, it often neglects the contextual conditions that influence how demands and resources operate. The theory's tendency to generalise across occupational settings was shown to obscure important variability in how workers experience and respond to their work environment. This limitation has direct implications for understanding when and why specific job characteristics support or hinder engagement, which is central to this research.

To address these shortcomings, Johns' (2006) framework offers a comprehensive approach to understanding workplace behaviour by highlighting the essential role of context. Johns (2006) maintains that organisational behaviour cannot be fully grasped without considering the contextual factors influencing workplace dynamics. This perspective helps address the JD-R theory's oversimplification of job demands and resources by emphasising the significance of broader, external influences.

3.3.1 Context Conceptualisation

Johns conceptualised context in two ways: the omnibus and the discrete context. The omnibus context refers to broad environmental or structural features such as industry, location, or organisational size. The discrete context focuses on more specific, situational variables such as role task design, social dynamics, and leadership practices that directly shape behaviour or moderate other relationships (Johns, 2006). This distinction helps operationalise context at multiple levels of

analysis, which is crucial for understanding how job demands and resources are perceived across roles within a broader institutional context.

3.3.2 Context Effects

Johns further proposes that context has six effects on organisational behaviour. These effects are not independent; the restriction of range (which is the first effect occurring at the omnibus level) often sets the stage for the other effects (Johns, 2006).

3.3.2.1 Context Restricts Range

This restriction occurs when the variability of behaviours or attitudes is limited within a specific context, either by the organisation's nature or by the study's design. These constraints can either highlight or obscure relationships between variables, thus influencing findings and revealing context-specific insights. (Johns, 1991, 2006). For example, studying innovation in a highly regulated industry, where opportunities for creative problem-solving are naturally restricted, provides a comparison with less regulated industries. These differences serve as an important analytical lens: by isolating and examining behaviour within a confined context, researchers can generate insights specific to that setting. When contrasted with findings from other contexts, these insights indicate the extent to which organisational behaviour depends on context (Johns, 2006). In public sector work engagement literature, the restriction of range is reflected in treating the public sector as a homogeneous entity, which masks the relationships between job characteristics. By recognising the heterogeneity of roles within the public sector, insights can be gained about the effects of job demands and resources in each category.

3.3.2.2 Context Affects Base Rate

Range restriction in a given context can significantly influence the prevalence (or base rates) of important organisational behaviours, whether across occupations, locations, or over time. These changes in base rates affect how the behaviours are perceived, their importance to individuals and observers, and the meaning and significance of their associated factors. For example, the same behaviour may carry different implications depending on whether it occurs frequently or rarely, as

suggested by concepts like "frog pond dynamics" (where behaviour is judged relative to its surroundings). Additionally, when behaviours deviate significantly from a balanced 50-50 occurrence rate (becoming either very common or very rare), their predictability decreases, making it harder to understand or forecast their patterns. Another example shown by Johns (2006) is presenteeism, when people go to work even when they are sick. In a study of Swedish employees, researchers found that presenteeism was reported by 21% of civil engineers but by 65% of nursing home aides. The high prevalence of presenteeism among caregiving roles reflects the influence of context-specific expectations, such as moral responsibility, relational accountability, and the emotional salience of the work. These contextual factors increase the base rate of the behaviour and also shape its interpretation. In such roles, presenteeism may be seen as dedication and commitment, while in other settings, it could be perceived as inefficiency or risk. This highlights how contextual factors such as role type and external pressures influence both the frequency of a behaviour and the way it is interpreted. As a result, this can shape how job characteristics are perceived and understood within that setting.

3.3.2.3 Context Changes Causal Direction

Context can reverse the typical cause-and-effect relationship between variables, deviating from the patterns commonly established in research. Research generally supports the idea that positive employee attitudes improve customer satisfaction and organisational performance, such as profits (Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes, 2002). However, Ryan, Schmidt, and Johnson (1996) found the reverse in automotive credit offices: customer satisfaction and loan delinquency rates impacted employee morale. The context explains this shift happy customers with paid loans make the job easier for service representatives, while problematic customers create more "service" work, influencing morale. When left unrecognised, such reversals can be highly problematic as they create theoretical confusion. Context can alter the usual direction of causality, underscoring its power to shape behaviours and relationships in ways that deviate from conventional expectations.

3.3.2.4 Context Reverses Sign

Context can not only reverse the cause-and-effect relationships between factors but also change whether their connection is positive or negative. This phenomenon, where relationships between key variables take on opposite signs, depends heavily on the context in which they are observed. For example, Tett et al. (1999) cited in Johns (2006) examined evidence showing that the relationship between personality traits and job performance can go in either direction, depending on the context. They found that such reversals are relatively common and often influenced by occupational factors. For example, while extraverts and individuals high in conscientiousness generally perform better, this trend can reverse in specific roles. Extraversion, for instance, may not be ideal for accountants, where the job demands strict accountability and limited flexibility. The authors caution that failing to consider these contextual influences can obscure the true connections between personality and performance. They argue that the varying definitions of "good performance" across occupations play a key role in these reversals, as what is valued in one role may differ in another.

3.3.2.5 Context Prompts Curvilinear Effects

Curvilinear relationships often indicate the influence of context, as they show both positive and negative connections between variables within the same dataset. A quadratic curve can represent these changes, depending on the range of the variable being studied. When different levels of a variable align with distinct work contexts, restricting the range can lead to different and sometimes contradictory research findings. For example, Xie and Johns (1995) analysed 143 jobs across various occupational categories, revealing U-shaped relationships between emotional exhaustion (chronic stress) and certain job characteristics. Job complexity and occupational prestige also displayed similar curvilinear patterns. The findings showed that stress stems from different sources depending on the context. In blue-collar and clerical roles, stress was linked to boredom and understimulation, while in professional and managerial roles, it was tied to overstimulation and high responsibility. These differences highlight how stress manifests through contrasting processes, boredom in simpler roles versus pressure in complex ones, depending on the job context.

3.3.2.6 Context Tips Precarious Relationships

The idea of context tipping precarious relationships emphasises how small changes in a situation can cause significant shifts in outcomes. These shifts often occur suddenly and may go unnoticed if researchers do not account for subtle contextual factors, such as the range of a variable or its base rate. Such moments of dramatic change is known as "tipping points," highlighting how sensitive we are to even minor changes in context.

3.4 Theorising about the Heterogeneity of Roles in The Public Sector

The public sector as the omnibus context here provides overarching characteristics that shape the nature of work, such as bureaucratic structures, public accountability, and budget constraints, type of public service, commitment to public interest; the public sector context comprises of these defining elements which influence the engagement levels of its employees (Borst, 2018; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Borst et al., 2019). The sector constitutes a force field or a tension system, whose net effect shapes organisational behaviour (Johns, 2006). These factors influence the availability, allocation, and effectiveness of job demands and resources within the sector (Halinski and Harrison, 2021). Scholars argue that taking these specific defining elements into account when applying the JDR theory to the sector, the outcomes may differ based on the diversity which exists within the sector (Borst, 2018; Akingbola and Van den Berg, 2016).

Authors have argued that employees in various job roles may experience engagement differently depending on the available resources and inherent demands of the work roles without taking contextual variables into account, it may be implied that employees respond linearly and rationally to job demands and resources (Borst, 2018; Bakker et al., 2023). Within this omnibus context, discrete contexts refer to the diverse roles in the public sector. As expressed by Johns (2018, p.34), adopting "a contextual lens can facilitate generalisation as well as particularism". Fletcher et al. (2020), in their comprehensive review of public sector work engagement literature, highlighted that much of the existing research has been disproportionately focused on specific professions such as healthcare and teaching. This narrow focus

underscores the need for a broader understanding of the varied experiences of employees in various roles across the public sector.

According to Johns (2006), context plays a significant role in determining the observed range of organisational variables, directly influencing the outcomes of research studies. When the variability of these variables is constrained, whether due to methodological choices, such as sampling strategies, or substantive factors, such as occupational or technological constraints, research findings may be skewed or incomplete (Johns, 2006). This phenomenon, known as restriction of range, limits the ability to detect authentic relationships between variables, leading to null findings or inconsistencies across studies (Johns, 2006). Johns highlights that this restriction often results from the interplay of methodology and the contextual realities inherent to the phenomenon under investigation. For example, roles themselves impose structural constraints on individuals, shaping their motivational priorities and thereby restricting the observed diversity in needs or responses (Dierdorff et al., 2009).

Research has frequently treated the public sector as a homogeneous entity, often suggesting that all work roles within it share similar demands and resources (Borst, 2018; Fletcher et al., 2020). However, this assumption overlooks the diversity of roles within the public sector, each of which may present unique challenges and opportunities (Besley and Ghatak, 2005; Bossu et al., 2019). By knowing an individual's role, one can infer important characteristics of their task, social, and physical contexts, which collectively shape their behaviour and attitudes at work (Johns, 2006). The demands placed on employees and the resources available to them can vary significantly depending on how closely their roles align with the organisation's core mission (Besley and Ghatak, 2005). For instance, roles that are central to an organisation's mission, such as healthcare professionals in a public hospital or teachers in a public school, are often characterised by high levels of emotional and interpersonal demands (Borst, 2018). These employees are mostly in direct contact with service users, directly impacting the lives of individuals and communities, which can be both deeply rewarding and highly taxing (Borst, 2018). On the other hand, employees in non-mission-oriented roles, often fulfilling administrative or operational functions, may face a different type demands (Makris, 2009; Besley and Ghatak, 2005). While these roles are vital to the overall functioning

of the organisation, they do not directly influence its core mission. As a result, the demands placed on these employees may be distinct from those faced by their mission-oriented counterparts. Similarly, the resources needed to excel in these roles may differ significantly from those in mission-critical positions (Bakker et al., 2023).

Johns (2006) contextual framework provides a valuable framework for addressing the complexity and diversity of roles within the public sector. By incorporating both omnibus and discrete contexts, it captures the broader structural characteristics as well as the specific variables that influence employee demands and resources. This perspective challenges assumptions of uniformity within the public sector, offering a basis for a more refined understanding of how context shapes work engagement and role-specific experiences. Building on this contextual foundation, it is also essential to examine how the concept of exhaustion, a central component of the JD-R theory, interacts with the demands and resources shaped by the unique characteristics of the public sector.

3.5 Hypotheses Development

This section presents the development of the study's hypotheses, grounded in the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier. Drawing on the JD-R theory and Johns' contextual framework, the hypotheses seek to address the limitations of existing models by incorporating contextual influences that shape work engagement in public sector roles. The section systematically outlines the hypothesised relationships between key variables, considering the unique dynamics of mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles. Each hypothesis is developed based on existing literature, empirical findings, and theoretical reasoning, ensuring a strong conceptual foundation for subsequent analysis. Through this approach, the section establishes a clear framework for testing the proposed relationships, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of work engagement in the public sector.

3.6 Main Effect: Roles, Work Engagement and Exhaustion

Empirical research has reported mixed findings in the levels of work engagement of public sector employees in comparison with other sectors, some

studies found that public sector employees were more engaged than employees in the private sector (i.e. Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2013; Borst et al., 2019) which they justify by suggesting that the satisfaction derived from serving society can be a particularly powerful source of motivation. In contrast others have reported lower levels of work engagement and higher levels of burnout in comparison with other sectors (Van den Broeck et al., 2017; Brunetto et al., 2016). However, these findings often emerge from samples that either combine different public sector occupations or compare one occupational group across sectors (e.g. nursing), neglecting the internal diversity of the public sector. The public sector operates within a broad context shaped by structural and institutional characteristics, including political oversight, accountability to multiple stakeholders, limited reliance on market incentives, and a focus on serving the public rather than generating profit. These features create a general environment that distinguishes the public sector from the private sector and influences behaviour in consistent ways. However, within this shared environment, specific aspects such as job roles, emotional demands, task complexity, and the moral importance of outcomes lead to differences across positions. A key distinction lies between mission-oriented roles (such as emergency responders and healthcare professionals) and non-mission-oriented roles (such as administrative or regulatory staff), as these groups vary in terms of the strength of situational demands, emotional involvement, and perceived impact of their work.

Not all public sector roles are directly involved in serving society in a way that makes the mission salient to the employee. Houston (2007) suggests that these differences are better explained by the different categorisations of roles within the sector rather than the sector itself. Research indicates that not all public sector workers experience the same levels of engagement, with the specific roles employees occupy significantly influencing their work engagement or exhaustion (Fletcher et al., 2020; Borst, 2018). This aligns with Johns' (2006, 2017) argument that context restricts range and affects base rates.

For instance, Innstrand (2016) conducted a longitudinal study examining work engagement across eight occupational groups in Norway, revealing significant differences in engagement levels among professions such as lawyers, physicians, nurses, teachers, church ministers, advertising professionals, and IT professionals.

Findings showed that lawyers, physicians, nurses, teachers, church ministers showed higher levels of work engagement than advertising and IT professionals. Similarly, Schaufeli et al., (2006) reported that educators and police officers in their sample had higher levels of engagement than workers in blue collar jobs. Although not all of these studies were framed within a public sector context, the occupational patterns they reveal suggest that engagement levels correlate with the perceived significance or mission alignment of the role. According to Johns (2006) proposal of context restriction of range and its effect on base rate, it can be suggested that the mission which these roles are tied to serves as a contextual boundary that influences variability in work engagement. For example, as noted in Johns' research, presenteeism is notably more common in caregiving and educational professions than in technical or administrative roles. This difference is not just about how often it occurs but also about the underlying context. Occupations with a mission-driven focus typically involve strong relational obligations, a sense of moral duty, and close interaction with vulnerable population. These factors increase both the external expectations and the internal drive to be present at work, even when conditions are not ideal.

Building on this perspective, it can be suggested that the nature of mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles directly affects work engagement and exhaustion. Mission-oriented roles, which often involve direct interaction with service users, may foster engagement due to the awareness of the positive impact of their work for instance doctors whose patient got well, teachers whose students passed exams, police bringing criminals to justice etc thereby impacting their levels of vigour, absorption and dedication, the mission in itself can be a form of incentive for motivation (Borst, 2018; Grant et al., 2007; Robertson et al., 2020; Lysova et al., 2023; Beer et al., 2022). When individuals engage in significant, high-impact tasks, they are acutely aware that their efforts can either benefit or harm others (Grant et al., 2007). This awareness often drives them to invest additional time and energy into their work to ensure positive outcomes for those affected (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Grant et al., 2007).

Conversely, in the case of non-mission-oriented roles, employees in these roles may have limited direct impact on service, such interactions are less likely to provide

employees with a sense of their work's value, importance, or necessity (Grant et al., 2007; Grant, 2008). Employees in non-mission-oriented roles have little or no contact with service users may find their tasks less significant and therefore may experience lower levels of work engagement in comparison to employees whose roles are directly linked to the mission of the organisation (Bailey et al., 2024).

The public sector operates under a unique set of pressures that significantly shape the nature of employees' roles (Fletcher et al., 2020). While all public sector employees are subject to the overarching pressures of cost-saving measures, public scrutiny, and increasing accountability demands, the nature of their specific roles can significantly influence the level of strain they experience (Borst et al. 2020; Zahari and Kaliannan, 2023). Given the pressures of the public sector demands and the inherent demands in mission-oriented roles, employees in these roles may face high levels of exhaustion even though they are engaged at work (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). Mission-oriented roles, which often involve direct engagement with vulnerable populations, complex decision-making and emotionally charged service delivery, tend to be inherently more taxing, the tasking nature of this roles can put a strain on employees within these roles thereby leading to exhaustion. Researchers have found that it is possible for aspects of work engagement in particular dedication and absorption to co-exist with exhaustion (Sonnentag, 2005; Timms et al., 2012) especially with employees in high intensity jobs who may not afford time for psychological detachment inevitably leading to exhaustion in spite of employees feeling dedicated to their work (Timms et al., 2012). Although the mission orientation and intrinsic motivation may cushion the effect of the inherent demands associated with the roles, it can be argued that employees in these roles may face higher levels of exhaustion in comparison to their counterparts in non-mission-oriented roles.

On the other hand, non-mission-oriented roles often more administrative, process-driven, or compliance-focused tend to operate within more stable, predictable frameworks (Brewster and Cerdin, 2018; Bright, 2011). These positions typically involve routine tasks that are less likely to demand the same emotional resilience or high intensity as mission-oriented roles (Bright, 2011). While still impacted by broader pressures of accountability and cost saving measures, the steadiness of their work environment means employees in these positions are generally less

exposed to the heightened stressors experienced by those in mission-oriented role. As a result, employees in non-mission-oriented roles are predicted to experience lower levels of exhaustion.

H1a: Employees in mission-oriented roles will show higher levels of work engagement than employees in non-mission-oriented roles.

H1b: Employees in mission-oriented roles will show higher levels of exhaustion than employees in non-mission-oriented roles.

3.7 Job Demands, Work Engagement, Exhaustion and Roles

The JD-R theory suggests that while each organisation possesses its own distinct characteristics, work settings can be classified based on their job demands and resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2023). Job demands are the aspects of the job that require sustained physical, cognitive, and/or emotional effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs (Demerouti et al. 2001). The JD-R theory proposes that job demands and resources instigate two different processes (Demerouti et al., 2001). On the one hand, the severity of job demands instigates a health impairment process by leading to increased effort. This heightened effort drains employees' physical, emotional, and cognitive resources, potentially resulting in job strain, exhaustion, and health issues (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al 2023). Crawford et al (2010) argues that not all demands are inherently negative, and they categorize demands into two types: hindrance demands and challenge demands. Challenge demands, such as increased work intensity or complex tasks, may have motivational effects by promoting engagement. In contrast, hindrance demands, such as role ambiguity or excessive bureaucracy, tend to impede progress and are more likely to result in stress and negative outcomes like frustration and burnout. Therefore, while challenge demands can foster engagement, hindrance demands typically diminish motivation and well-being.

While certain job demands (such as workload) are common across most occupational groups, others are more specific to particular professions (Bakker et al. 2023). Researchers have argued that hindrance demands are likely to be more salient in the public sector given the austerity in the sector (Esteve et al., 2017; Kiefer, 2015). Researchers have called for studies to examine the conditions under

which job demands may be challenging or hindering, given that employees may perceive demands differently that is a particular demand may be hindering in one setting and challenging in another (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Bakker and Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2020).

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, employees in the public sector are required to do more with less resources which may result in the prevalence of certain job demands within the public sector (Borst et al. 2020; Zahari and Kaliannan, 2023; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). For the purpose of this study, it is essential to explore the various job demands that affect work engagement and exhaustion among public sector employees, particularly in mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles. Emotional demands, work intensity and work-life interference are among the job characteristics that require more energy from public sector employees (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Borst and Knies, 2023; Zahari and Kaliannan, 2023; Burke et al., 2010). Thus, by specifically focusing on these challenge demands, this research aims to uncover how they influence public sector employees' engagement and exhaustion levels.

Johns (2006, 2017) emphasises that behaviour in organisational settings cannot be meaningfully understood outside of the contexts in which it is situated. The differentiation between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles serves as a crucial contextual boundary. This classification restricts the range of variability within each role category, thereby improving the precision with which relationships between job demands, work engagement, and exhaustion can be observed.

The examination of emotional demands, work intensity, and work-life interference in relation to work engagement and exhaustion is particularly relevant in the public sector literature due to the unique challenges faced by employees in this field (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018, Burke et al., 2010). Emotional demands, often heightened in public sector roles that involve direct interactions with the community, can lead to burnout and reduced engagement if not managed effectively (Borst and Knies, 2023). Work intensity is crucial to consider, as public sector employees frequently operate under high-pressure conditions, which can deplete their physical and mental resources, exacerbating feelings of exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Additionally, work-life interference is especially pertinent, given the intrinsic motivation associated with mission-oriented roles that can lead employees to prioritise work over personal life, ultimately impacting their overall well-being (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). Understanding these job demands is essential for developing strategies to enhance employee engagement and reduce burnout, thereby improving organisational effectiveness in the public sector context.

3.7.1 Emotional Demands

Emotional demands are the aspects of work that require workers to manage their emotions and cope with the emotions of others, such as colleagues, clients, or customers. Emotional demands have been found to lead to emotional exhaustion, burnout, compassion fatigue, psychological distress, anxiety, depression, reduced productivity and performance, and increased absenteeism and turnover (Xanthopoulou et al., 2013). According to the JD-R theory, some job resources and demands can be found in all occupational settings, however, some job resources and demands are more prevalent in certain occupational sectors and certain types of professions (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). For example, physical and emotional demands are more prevalent in occupations such as nursing, teaching, and policing while cognitive demands may be more prevalent for occupations such as scientists and software developers (Bakker et al., 2023). However, following Johns' (2006, 2017) framework, the effects of emotional demands cannot be meaningfully interpreted outside the specific organisational and occupational contexts in which they are embedded. Context, as Johns argues, not only determines the salience of particular demands but can also reverse the direction of psychological relationships what may be motivating in one setting may become exhausting in another.

Mission oriented roles are roles which are considered emotionally demanding and require emotional capital given that employees in these roles may often have personal interactions with service users (Akingbola et al., 2023; Borst, 2018). Simultaneously, the desire to address and manage emotional needs is frequently a fundamental reason individuals are drawn to mission oriented professions (for instance, to effect change or fulfil a "calling"). Consequently, emotional demands may not necessarily negatively impact work engagement. Contrary to the JD-R

theory, researchers have found emotional demands to be positively related to work engagement in some occupations (see Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Jiang et al., 2020). Researchers argue that the feeling of helping people and contributing to societal good reduced the detrimental effect of emotional demands, thereby making emotional demand a challenge demand (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Borst and Knies, 2023). Given that emotional demands are a part of mission-oriented roles, employees frequently need to regulate their emotions, ensuring they effectively handle and express them however, when emotional demands are always high, this could lead to an adverse effect such as increased stress level or burnout. Dealing with service users demands, and addressing sensitive issues could also contribute to emotional demands. On the other hand, employees in non-mission-oriented roles may face less emotional demands because they often do not directly deal with the public service users and their roles are not directly related to mission fulfilment and may require little or no emotional investments (Dudau and Brunetto, 2023). Although emotional demands in non-mission-oriented roles might come from managing bureaucratic or internal interactions, which can also be draining.

Emotional demands are inherent in many public sector roles, especially those that involve direct interactions with clients, patients, or the public (Dudau and Brunetto, 2020). In mission-oriented roles, such as nursing, teaching, or social work, employees are often trained and socialised to manage emotional labour as part of their professional responsibilities (Dudau and Brunetto, 2023). They may even find these emotional demands rewarding, as their role requires them to show empathy, care, and support to others, which can strengthen their commitment to their work (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). These employees may perceive emotional demands as part of the meaningful interactions they have with their clients, which can enhance their engagement despite the potential for exhaustion (Noesgaard and Hasen, 2018). However, the continuous emotional toll can eventually erode their engagement, especially if the emotional demands exceed their coping mechanisms and, over time, mission-driven employees may feel drained, and their engagement may decline due to the ongoing pressure of managing emotions (Noesgaard and Hasen, 2018; Dudau and Brunetto, 2020).

On the other hand, public servants in non-mission-oriented roles, such as administrative or regulatory positions, are less likely to be trained in managing emotional labour and may perceive emotional demands as an unnecessary burden. For these employees, the need to regulate their emotions without the emotional rewards of helping others may increase exhaustion. This aligns with Johns (2006), who emphasises the importance of context in reversing the signs of relationships. Johns highlights that context can fundamentally alter the interpretation and impact of workplace demands, supporting the notion that the direction of relationships, such as emotional demands and work engagement, is contingent on situational factors. Thus, while emotional demands may enhance work engagement in mission-oriented roles, they may diminish engagement in non-mission-oriented roles, indicating a positive relationship in one context and a negative relationship in the other.

H2a: Emotional demands will be positively related to work engagement for employees in mission-oriented roles but negatively related to work engagement for employees in non-mission-oriented roles.

H2b: Emotional demands will be positively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be weaker for employees in mission-oriented roles

3.7.2 Work Intensity

Work intensity is the degree of effort, whether physical or mental, that workers put into their jobs in a given time period. It also involves the speed of work, the deadline pressure, and the time and effort needed to complete work tasks (De Bustillo et al., 2011). The JDR theory classifies work intensity as a job demand which can deplete employees' physical and psychological resources, leading to strain (Demerouti et al., 2001). Studies have shown that components work intensity such as working under intensified pace and at very high speed are linked to anxiety, fatigue, and work-related stress (Boxall and Macky, 2014; Bryson and White, 2021).

Work intensity can have both positive and negative consequences for workers and organisations, depending on the level, source, and context of intensity (Crawford et al., 2010). High work intensity can be rewarding and motivating for workers who enjoy their work and have a sense of control and autonomy over it (Boxall and Macky, 2014). However, prolonged exposure to high work intensity can also be

stressful and harmful for workers who face excessive workload, tight deadlines, and low discretion and support (Boxall and Huo, 2022). High work intensity jobs have a large workload as a feature, which can potentially result in more stress or decline in work engagement for employees (Burke et al, 2010). Employees may find it hard to perform their tasks without harming their health when they work at very high speeds or to very tight deadlines (Boxall and Macky, 2014). High work intensity can result in work accidents (some fatal), absenteeism and sickness leave, and family troubles (Boxall and Macky, 2014). These costs are more severe in places where health and safety are not well taken care of (Boxall and Macky, 2014). Work intensity also creates work-related anxiety, especially when workers have little say over their work (Boxall and Macky, 2014; Boxall and Huo, 2022). This indicates that work intensity can hurt both the physical and mental well-being of workers and imply a poor work environment. Researcher suggests that work intensity may act as both hindrance or challenge demand depending on context

The nature of the public sector profoundly influences work intensity through a combination of structural and operational factors that shape employee roles and responsibilities (Bryson and White, 2021). Public sector organisations are inherently driven by a commitment to serve diverse societal needs, often under significant resource constraints and heightened scrutiny (Borst et al. 2020; Zahari and Kaliannan, 2023). In line with Johns' (2006, 2017) view that psychological phenomena must be understood within their situational context, the experience and effects of work intensity are shaped not only by the demands of the task itself but also by the wider organisational and normative environment in which the task takes place. This unique context creates an environment where work intensity is amplified, particularly in mission-oriented roles, due to the expectation of high performance amidst challenging conditions, managing high workloads, navigating emotionally charged situations, and making critical decisions within short time frames (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). These demands contribute to the health impairment process, as employees expend substantial effort to meet expectations, leading to exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al 2023).

Although work intensity is a demand present across all jobs, it is likely to have a less detrimental effect on the work engagement of employees in non-mission-oriented

roles (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2023). This is because their responsibilities are typically not directly tied to the core mission of the organisation and often involve limited interaction with public service users (Borst, 2018). While employees in non-mission-oriented roles, such as human resource administrators or tax administrators, may experience periods of high work intensity such as during the end of the month or financial year when payroll and tax compilations are due, the frequency and nature of these demands are not as constant or emotionally taxing as those faced by employees in mission-oriented roles (Besley and Ghatak, 2005; Brewster and Cerdin, 2018). For example, nurses, teachers, or social service workers engage daily with service users, often under emotionally charged and high-pressure circumstances, which can lead to strain.

Furthermore, the public sector's heightened accountability to political stakeholders and the general public intensifies workplace pressures (Bryson and White, 2021). Employees often face the dual burden of meeting internal performance standards while managing public expectations (Bryson and White, 2021; Fletcher et al., 2020; Zahari and Kaliannan, 2023). This external scrutiny can create a sense of urgency and increase the stakes of task completion, especially in high-visibility roles (Borst, 2018). Consequently, the combination of external accountability and internal operational demands fosters a work environment where intensity is both a functional requirement and an implicit expectation. Mission oriented roles (doctors, nurses, armed forces) are often classified as roles involving high work intensity (Borst, 2018), for instance, doctors and nurses may have to deal with large numbers of patients at the same time and have to respond quickly to life threatening situations which increases their workload and time pressure and the reaction of patients to long waiting times. Prolonged exposure to elevated work intensity initiates a health impairment process, resulting in employee exhaustion and potentially diminishing engagement levels (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al 2023).

H3a: Work intensity will be positively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.

H3b: Work intensity will be negatively related to work engagement for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.

3.7.3 Work Life Interference

Parasuraman and Greenhaus (2002) describe work-life interference as a type of inter-role conflict where the demands of work and personal life clash, making it difficult to fulfil responsibilities in one area (home) when the other (work) is prioritised. The conflicting expectations between these two domains create tension, as balancing obligations in both spheres becomes increasingly challenging (McCrea et al., 2011). Edwards and Rothbard (2000) propose four mechanisms that connect work and other life domains: spillover, compensation, segmentation, and resource drain. Spillover occurs when moods, values, and behaviours from work transfer into non-work life. Compensation involves addressing dissatisfaction in one life domain by increasing engagement in another, more fulfilling domain. Segmentation refers to the strategy of keeping work and personal life separate to minimise the impact of work on other areas. Resource drain occurs when resources such as time, energy, and attention used at work are unavailable for other life domains. Among these, spillover and resource drain are particularly relevant in understanding work-life interference in the public sector (Fletcher et al., 2020).

Spillover, wherein moods, behaviours, and values from work transfer into personal life, and resource drain, where energy, time, and attention are depleted at work and unavailable for personal life, are key pathways through which public sector roles contribute to work-life interference (Boamah et al., 2022). The spillover of work demands into personal time is a notable concern in the public sector, given the nature of its high job demands and limited resources (Boamah et al., 2022; Fletcher et al., 2020). Employees in mission-oriented roles, such as healthcare professionals, social workers, and emergency responders, may experience this work life interference more acutely due to the emotional and personal investment their roles require (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Innstrand, 2016). These employees frequently carry the mental and emotional burdens of their work into their personal lives, blurring the lines between professional and personal life (Fletcher et al., 2020). For instance, Noesgaard and Hansen (2018) found in their sample of caregivers that these caregivers found it difficult to “switch off” after work, with some respondents

continuously thinking about work and the welfare of their patients even during personal time. Psychological detachment – not thinking about work during nonwork time and relaxation – having a low activation level are required for employees to recover from work related effort (Bakker and de Vries, 2021). Recovery is the process of replenishing the cognitive and energetic resources depleted during work (Sonnentag, 2003). This recovery process reduces the feeling of exhaustion and increases the feeling of energy, when the recovery process is neglected then exhaustion is inevitable (Bakker and de Vries, 2021).

The JDR theory explains this dynamics suggesting that work-life interference itself can act as a job demand (Timms et al., 2015; Bakker et al., 2023; Boamah et al., 2022). High job demands, such as work overload, emotional labour, and time pressure, deplete employees' resources, leading to exhaustion and disengagement (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). In public sector mission-oriented roles, the emotional intensity and urgency of responsibilities, combined with limited opportunities to recover, resulting in work-life interference as both an outcome of excessive demands and a demand in itself (Timms et al., 2015). Employees who identify strongly with their work roles, as noted by Adams et al. (1996), are particularly susceptible to this form of interference, as their deep engagement with their work can inhibit their ability to mentally disengage, increasing exhaustion over time.

Employees in non-mission-oriented roles may experience less work-life interference compared to their counterparts in mission-oriented roles due to the nature of their work. These roles, often characterised by more routine, procedural tasks and less emotional or direct client interaction (Bright, 2011), may allow for establishment of clearer boundaries between work and personal life. Since non-mission-oriented jobs may not require as much emotional investment, employees in these roles may find it easier to mentally disengage or "switch off" after work hours and are less likely to experience the same level of spillover their mission-oriented counterparts may face. Mission-oriented employees, who are deeply invested in the societal impact of their work, are more likely to experience sustained work life interference, leading to higher levels of emotional exhaustion and reduced engagement. In contrast, non-mission-oriented employees, with more defined boundaries and less emotional labour, may experience intermittent or less pronounced work-life interference. Thus, I posit that:

H4a: Work-life interference will be negatively related to work engagement for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles

H4b: Work-life interference will be positively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles

3.7.4 Job Resources, Work Engagement/Exhaustion and Roles

Job resources are the aspects of the job that facilitate coping with these demands and include social- and supervisor support, developmental opportunities, and autonomy (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). In the second process, known as the motivational process, job resources such as skill variety, social support, and feedback fulfil basic psychological needs and enhance employee work engagement. As a result, experiencing work engagement promotes creativity and boosts performance (Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2013). In the motivational process, job resources possess the potential to enhance motivation (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2023). Conversely, a lack of job resources can negatively impact workers' motivation and performance, as it hinders goal achievement, leading to feelings of failure, frustration, and ultimately withdrawal behaviours. In roles with high job demands and limited resources, employees are likely to experience exhaustion, cynicism, and diminished professional efficacy (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2023).

This research will examine the role of key job resources autonomy, voice, and social support. In the public sector, examining job resources such as autonomy, voice, and social support is crucial for understanding employee work engagement and exhaustion, particularly when comparing mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles (Innstrand, 2016; Cooke et al 2019). According to the JD-R theory these resources help buffer the negative effects of job demands, enhancing engagement and reducing exhaustion (Bakker et al., 2023). Autonomy has been shown to fulfil key psychological needs, while voice and social support foster a sense of value and connectedness, mitigating burnout (Farndale et al., 2011; Borst, 2018). Public sector employees often face unique stressors, such as bureaucratic constraints and lower financial rewards, making these resources essential for sustaining motivation,

especially in roles driven by a strong sense of mission, where emotional demands are typically higher (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018).

3.7.5 Autonomy

Autonomy refers to the extent to which the job grants considerable liberty, self-reliance, and choice to the individual in planning the work and in selecting the methods to be applied in executing it (Crawford et al., 2015; Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Within the framework of the JDR theory, autonomy serves as a critical resource that can mitigate job demands, reduce exhaustion, and enhance work engagement by fostering motivation (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2023). When employees perceive that they have autonomy over their work, they are more likely to be in control of their work, engage more with their work, and be more enthusiastic about their work (Borst, 2018; Mussagulova, 2020). Autonomy is particularly meaningful in the context of public sector work, particularly in mission-driven roles (Borst, 2018). In these roles, autonomy enables employees to act upon their sense of calling and contribute discretionary efforts toward a cause, unencumbered by excessive bureaucratic constraints. Tummers et al. (2016) in their study of vitality (similar to the vigour dimension of engagement) found that autonomy may have a positive relationship with engagement of public servants because they can act on based on their interests, values, and goals.

Employees in mission-oriented roles often have nonroutine jobs characterised by enduring and intense contact with service users which requires prioritising user responsiveness, which in turn demands extra discretionary capacity in comparison with employees in non-mission-oriented roles who have a more structured and routine job where they apply a structured framework and have little or no contact with service users (Borst, 2018; Dudau and Brunetto, 2023). The relationship between autonomy and work engagement is proposed to be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles given that their roles and tasks are directly linked to the mission of the organisation, a higher level of autonomy will enable them to feel more empowered allowing them to go above and beyond in serving the users of the services they provide thereby leading to higher levels of engagement. When employees are given autonomy, they have the discretion to independently determine

their response to task difficulties (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Employees in mission-oriented roles are often highly skilled professionals who may value the power to make professional decisions based on their qualifications and training (Borst et al., 2019; Dudau and Brunetto, 2023). Given that public sector is generally characterised by low autonomy, slow decision-making processes, red tape, and bureaucratic system (Fletcher et al., 2020), I argue that employees in mission-oriented roles are likely to experience a higher level of engagement when they are given autonomy so they may go above and beyond to carry out their duties as they see fit. When employees in mission-oriented roles lack sufficient autonomy, they may experience lower work engagement and higher exhaustion, as autonomy is crucial for aligning their tasks with the intrinsic motivation tied to the mission (Borst et al., 2019). Conversely, an increase in autonomy in these roles could lead to a more significant boost in engagement compared to non-mission-oriented roles, since mission-driven employees are more responsive to having greater control over their work.

The relationship between autonomy and work engagement may be weaker or less impactful for employees in non-mission-oriented roles, where their tasks are not directly tied to the organisation's mission or broader societal goals (Bright, 2011). In these roles, which often involve structured and routine tasks, autonomy may still offer some benefits, such as providing a degree of control over work processes or time. However, it is unlikely to elicit the same significant motivational boost observed in mission-oriented roles (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Borst, 2018). For example, an administrative assistant who gains discretion over scheduling meetings or organising files may appreciate the added flexibility, but this autonomy does not necessarily enhance their engagement to the same extent as a healthcare professional tailoring treatment plans for patients.

For employees in non-mission-oriented roles, the absence or presence of autonomy may have a less significant effect on their engagement or exhaustion because their work does not evoke the intrinsic motivation tied to a greater purpose (Grant, 2007). Moreover, due to the repetitive and structured nature of their responsibilities, excessive autonomy could lead to ambiguity or inefficiency, as employees might lack the context or need to exercise discretionary judgment. For instance, in data entry

roles, where adherence to predefined standards and efficiency is paramount, too much autonomy in choosing how to perform tasks could disrupt workflows and lead to inconsistencies.

Thus, while autonomy can serve as a practical resource in non-mission-oriented roles, offering opportunities for minor improvements, it may not serve as a significant driver of engagement. In some cases, granting excessive autonomy could even become counterproductive by creating unnecessary complexity or eroding the predictability and clarity that are essential to these non-mission oriented roles . A notable divergence in the relationship between autonomy and exhaustion underscores the importance of context in shaping outcomes. For employees in mission-oriented roles, autonomy aligns closely with their intrinsic motivations and professional goals. This alignment transforms autonomy into a robust driver of engagement and a buffer against exhaustion. Conversely, for employees in non-mission-oriented roles, autonomy may have a less pronounced or even contradictory effect. While it offers some benefits, excessive autonomy in structured roles may introduce inefficiency and ambiguity, inadvertently increasing exhaustion. This supports the notion, as highlighted by Johns (2006), that context can fundamentally alter the interpretation and impact of workplace resources. For example, in mission-oriented roles, autonomy is likely to reduce exhaustion, as it empowers employees and aligns with their intrinsic motivations. However, in non-mission-oriented roles, autonomy might inadvertently increase exhaustion due to inefficiency or ambiguity caused by excessive discretion.

Similarly, in mission-oriented roles, autonomy is proposed to strongly enhance engagement by fostering empowerment and alignment with meaningful work. In non-mission-oriented roles, however, autonomy could have a limited impact or, in some cases, even slightly negative effects on engagement due to a mismatch with the structured nature of these roles.

H5a: Autonomy is positively related to work engagement for employees mission oriented roles, but have a neutral or negative relationship in non-mission-oriented roles.

H5b: Autonomy is negatively related to exhaustion for employees in mission and non-mission-oriented roles but have a neutral or positive relationship with exhaustion for employees in non-mission-oriented roles.

3.7.6 Social Support

Social support is considered as relational resources, social support focuses on interpersonal relationships and interactions at work taking place between coworkers, managers, and clients (Fletcher, 2017). Social support plays a key role in enabling individuals to manage their work demands, thereby averting stress from workload and burnout (Halbesleben, 2006). Additionally, the significance of social resources has been explored through the developing relational viewpoints on job design, which contend that social support is essential for motivation. Perceptions of support enhances safety by affording employees the freedom to take risks and potentially experience failure without the apprehension of facing adverse repercussions (Kahn, 1990). In numerous studies, there has been a positive correlation established between social support from supervisors and coworkers and engagement levels (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). According to Freeney and Tiernan (2009) suggest that in the context of nursing, the feeling of connectedness can foster engagement. supervisor support plays a crucial role in work engagement and was especially important for teachers coping with demanding interactions with students (Bakker et al., 2007).

Freeny and Fellenz (2013) in their study of two maternity hospitals found that a mix of social support from colleagues, autonomy perceived supervisor support and prosocial impact had a significant impact on work engagement. They emphasize that autonomy was a predictor of work engagement in this situation, but it only gained significance because of the connection between supervisor support and prosocial impact. However, support from colleagues did not show any significant impact on engagement in their sample. Bakker et al. (2007) in their study of Finnish teachers found that appreciation and supervisor support were strongly associated with work engagement, especially when teachers faced high emotionally demanding situations, such as dealing with student misbehaviour. In these cases, supervisor support acted as a buffer, reducing the negative impact of such demands and helping maintain engagement.

Drawing from this, I argue that in the context of highly demanding mission-oriented roles in the public sector, where emotional demands are often significant, supportive and collaborative relationships with colleagues and managers can play a critical role in sustaining work engagement. Employees who share a common mission may find additional motivation and resilience from these relationships, as the alignment of values and purpose enhances their sense of commitment and engagement (Noesgaard et al., 2018). This shared mission amplifies the positive impact of social support because it reinforces employees' intrinsic connection to their work. In contrast, employees in non-mission-oriented roles may still benefit from social support, but since their roles may not evoke the same deep emotional or value-driven connection to their work, the impact of such support on engagement may be less pronounced. For them, social support likely serves more as a practical resource to manage job demands, rather than a source of inspiration tied to the organisational mission. In the absence of support, employees, particularly those in mission-oriented roles, are likely to experience heightened exhaustion and diminished work engagement.

Mission-oriented roles often come with high emotional demands, as employees are deeply invested in the purpose and goals of the organisation (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). Without adequate social support from supervisors and colleagues, these employees may struggle to cope with the pressures and emotional strain that accompany their work thereby leading to exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). The lack of supportive relationships can exacerbate feelings of isolation, reduce morale, and hinder their ability to manage job demands effectively, leading to burnout and disengagement (Nguyen et al., 2019). Without a strong network of support, the intrinsic motivation derived from the mission may not be sufficient to sustain engagement over time (Brunnetto et al., 2017). For employees in non-mission-oriented roles, the absence of support may also reduce engagement, though the impact may be less severe. In such roles, where emotional demands are typically lower and intrinsic motivation tied to a higher organisational purpose is weaker, social support often serves as a practical tool to navigate job demands. When this support is absent, employees may still experience disengagement or frustration due to increased workloads or lack of guidance, but the

emotional toll may not be as significant as in mission-oriented roles. Therefore, while both groups suffer from the absence of support, the negative effects are likely to be more profound and far-reaching for those in mission-driven positions, where the emotional and value-based nature of their work makes social support a critical resource for maintaining engagement and well-being.

H6a: Social support is positively related to work engagement for employees in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles, but this relationship is stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.

H6b: Social support is negatively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles, but this relationship is stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.

3.7.7 Voice

Voice refers to employees' capacity to impact organisational decisions by having the opportunity to promote their ideas and ensure they are taken into consideration (Farndale et al., 2011). The concept of employee voice within an organisation viewed through various lenses, first, the presence of systems that support employee voice, second an environment that promotes the sharing of employee ideas and viewpoints, third, the degree of impact these contributions have, namely, the actual effect employee input has on decision-making outcomes (Farndale et al., 2011). Previous studies have highlighted the importance of employee voice for work teams, departments, organisations, and individual employees (Tsameti et al., 2023; Farndale et al., 2011; Kwon et al., 2016). On an individual level, expressing one's voice at work is likely to enhance work engagement (Rees et al., 2013).

There is limited research on the concept of employee voice in the public sector, especially in relation to work engagement, despite its potential significance in demanding environments. Employee voice, or the opportunity for employees to express their opinions and concerns, has been shown to mitigate the adverse effects of high job demands, as evidenced by studies within the JD-R theory (Bakker et al., 2005; Bakker et al., 2014). When employees have a platform to voice their perspectives, it can reduce stress and exhaustion by fostering a sense of control and participation in decision-making, thereby enhancing their engagement. Rees et al. (2013) found that communication practices that promote understanding, and

inclusion are particularly crucial in shaping positive work experiences, as seen in the case of nurses who benefit from environments where their input is valued and considered.

In mission-oriented roles, providing employees with opportunities for direct expression can significantly boost their work engagement. Such employees are often deeply committed to the organisation's mission. Being able to voice their ideas and concerns not only gives them a sense of recognition and esteem but also reinforces their professional identity as competent and valued contributors (Holland et al., 2016). This sense of empowerment can be especially important in high-demand environments, like healthcare, where effective communication among healthcare providers is essential for ensuring patient safety and care quality. In these settings, where the stakes are high, employee voice can help alleviate the pressures of demanding work by creating a collaborative, inclusive atmosphere, allowing mission-driven employees to feel more engaged, motivated, and resilient despite challenging conditions (Holland et al., 2016).

For employees in non-mission-oriented roles, the concept of voice having the opportunity to express opinions or participate in decision-making may not be as critical in fostering work engagement. These roles are typically more transactional and routine, with employees less likely to derive deep intrinsic satisfaction from aligning their work with a larger mission. As a result, the opportunity to voice concerns or influence organisational decisions might not carry the same motivational weight as it does for those in mission-oriented roles. While having a voice can still contribute to a sense of fairness and inclusion, its absence may not significantly impact their engagement or well-being to the same extent. Employees in non-mission-oriented roles may instead prioritise other resources over voice.

H7a: Voice is positively related to work engagement for employees in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles, but this relationship is stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.

H7b: Voice is negatively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles, but this relationship is stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.

3.7.8 The Buffer Effect

The JDR theory proposes that the two categories of working conditions initiates two processes. The job demands which leads to health impairment/strain while job resources leads to a motivational process.

The buffer effect of the JDR theory states that job resources can buffer the undesirable, negative impact of job demands on strain. Job resources such as autonomy, social support and performance feedback have been found to help employees cope with high job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2005; Bakker, 2015; Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti and Bakker, 2023). Several job resources can play the role of buffer for several different job demands (Bakker et al., 2023). according to this hypothesis the job demands and resources that influence an organisation are determined by the specific characteristics inherent to the roles within it (Bakker et al., 2005; Demerouti and Bakker, 2023). Employees in different job settings may find different resources more useful depending on their aspirations and goals. Diener and Fujita (1995) argue that because people strive for different outcomes, the resources that are most beneficial for their well-being are those that align closely with their specific goals. While some resources are highly individual and depend on a person's unique goals (ideographic approach), there are also certain resources that are universally important for most people, regardless of individual differences (Bakker et al, 2005). These universally relevant resources can be studied using a nomothetic approach, which focuses on general patterns and averages across a group or population (Bakker et al., 2005) for example mission and non-mission-oriented roles. For employees in mission-oriented roles whose goals are to achieve public good, the type of resources which will buffer the effect on strain may differ from the type needed for employees in non-mission-oriented roles. The public sector is often characterised by higher job demands than resources (Borst et al., 2017; Esteve et al., 2017; Fletcher et al., 2020) This imbalance can result in increased exhaustion and reduced engagement unless adequate resources are available. It is however important to note that not all possible combinations of job demands and resources have significant interactions (Tadic et al, 2015). According to Bakker et al. (2014), burnout occurs when job demands consistently exceed available resources, leading to a loss of interest in making positive contributions.

Thus, the relationship between job demands and exhaustion will be moderated by the presence of job resources, such that higher job resources will reduce the impact of job demands on exhaustion (Demerouti and Bakker, 2023).

Social support is arguably the most widely recognised situational factor suggested as a potential buffer against job strain (Bakker et al., 2005; Demerouti and Bakker, 2023). Instrumental support from colleagues can assist in completing tasks on time, potentially reducing the effects of work intensity on strain (Bakker et al., 2005; Breevaart et al., 2014). Support from leaders and managers may alleviate the impact of job demands such as emotional demands, and work intensity on exhaustion, support from colleagues and managers may aid employees in coping with job demands such as emotional demands and work intensity (Demerouti and Bakker, 2023). In a time-lagged study of Israeli frontline civil servants, Eldor (2018) noted compassion from supervisors was beneficial for engagement when public demand was high. For employees in mission-oriented roles, such as healthcare workers, educators, and social workers, the nature of their work often involves navigating emotional demands and enduring high work intensity. These demands, inherent in their roles, can lead to significant exhaustion if not managed effectively (Burke et al., 2010; Borst and Knies, 2017). In such contexts, social support from colleagues and managers becomes a critical resource (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007; Bakker, 2005; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). Social support from colleagues fosters a shared understanding of the emotional complexities inherent in such roles, enabling employees to process their experiences collaboratively and develop strategies for coping (Demerouti et al., 2001). Moreover, support from managers who demonstrate empathy and provide practical resources creates an environment of psychological safety, where employees feel valued and understood (Tadic et al., 2015). The opportunity to seek for help from colleagues and managers when faced with high workload and tight deadlines can mitigate the impact on exhaustion. This sense of acknowledgment and shared responsibility can mitigate the adverse effects of emotional demands and work intensity. In mission-oriented roles, where the focus is often on serving others, such support ensures that employees themselves are not overlooked, enabling them to sustain their work engagement levels and reducing exhaustion (Nguyen et al., 2019).

In contrast, non-mission-oriented roles, which often prioritise efficiency, routine, and operational outputs, present a different dynamic. While the emotional demands in these roles are generally lower, work intensity manifests through time pressures, repetitive tasks, and performance metrics (Bright, 2011; Borst, 2018). Here, social support primarily addresses the practical aspects of work intensity, such as task allocation, workflow management, and troubleshooting. The impact of social support in these contexts is more transactional, focusing on reducing operational bottlenecks and enhancing task efficiency (Borst, 2018). Although emotional buffering may be less critical in non-mission-oriented roles, the presence of supportive relationships still fosters engagement and mitigate exhaustion caused by routine or occasional high work intensity demands. However, the absence of a shared mission may limit the depth of relational support, making its effects less pronounced compared to mission-oriented roles.

H8a: The buffer effect of social support on the relationship between work intensity and exhaustion will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles compared to those in non-mission-oriented roles.

H8b: Social support will moderate the relationship between emotional demands and exhaustion, such that it will significantly buffer this relationship for employees in mission-oriented roles, but not for those in non-mission-oriented roles.

Autonomy is a critical job resource often associated with reducing the negative impact of high job demands by allowing employees to have control over how, when, and where they perform their tasks (Demerouti et al., 2007; Bakker et al., 2023). Autonomy may play a far more critical role in mission-oriented roles, where employees are often required to make decisions on the spot to address complex, dynamic, and emotionally demanding situations (Borst, 2018). For example, healthcare workers, social workers, or emergency responders frequently encounter unpredictable challenges that necessitate immediate, independent decision-making (Borst et al., 2019; Dudau and Brunetto, 2023). In such contexts, autonomy enables employees to respond effectively to situational demands, fostering a sense of empowerment and competence. This enhances their capacity to manage work intensity and buffers against exhaustion (Bakker, 2005). The flexibility and decision-making authority allowed by autonomy empower mission-oriented employees to navigate high-pressure situations with greater confidence and adaptability, thereby

reducing the likelihood of burnout (Dudau and Brunetto, 2023 van de Ven et al, 2022; Apostel et al, 2023).

In non-mission-oriented roles, which are often characterised by routine, repetitive tasks or strictly regulated workflows, the scope for meaningful autonomy is restricted (Grant, 2007). Employees in these roles may have fewer opportunities to make impactful decisions or alter their tasks in ways that would alleviate work intensity. For instance, in roles such as data entry or manufacturing, even when employees have some control over the pace or sequence of tasks, the inherent monotony or external pressures for efficiency remain largely unaffected, limiting autonomy's effectiveness in reducing exhaustion (Grant, 2007).

H8c: Autonomy will buffer the relationship between work intensity and exhaustion in mission-oriented roles but not in non-mission-oriented roles.

3.7.9 Voice and Work Life Interference

Work life interference, a form of strain caused by the spillover of work demands into personal life, can be mitigated when employees are provided with adequate resources (Bakker et al., 2014). Employee voice, or the ability to express concerns, needs, and suggestions, functions as a critical job resource by addressing the imbalance between demands and resources that contributes to work-life interference (Holland et al., 2016). Employee voice serves as a crucial job resource by enabling individuals to address and influence the demands that contribute to work life interference (Lee, 2023). When employees feel safe to share their concerns without fear of judgment or retaliation, they experience a sense of control and support, which buffers the stress associated with work-life interference (Sherf et al., 2021).

Additionally, voice facilitates the identification and resolution of systemic issues which can potentially allow for assistance programs or interventions creating a buffer effect against strain.

Mission oriented roles often involve unpredictable schedules, extended hours, and emotionally taxing situations that exacerbate work-life interference (Dudau and Brunetto, 2022). In these contexts, employee voice is particularly vital, as it enables workers to communicate the unique challenges they face and advocate for solutions tailored to their specific needs (Holland et al., 2016). For instance, healthcare

workers may use their voice to request more flexible schedules or access to counselling services, which directly address the emotional and temporal strain associated with their roles (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). Furthermore, the ability to voice concerns creates a sense of acknowledgment and validation, fostering resilience and reducing the psychological burden of balancing high demands with personal responsibilities.

In contrast, non-mission-oriented roles, typically involve more structured schedules and repetitive tasks with less emotional intensity (Houston, 2011; Bright, 2011). While these roles may have fewer unpredictable demands, work-life interference can still arise from factors such as rigid deadlines, high work intensity, or limited autonomy. Employee voice in these roles may focus on operational concerns, such as workload distribution, task prioritisation, or the need for additional resources. By addressing these systemic issues, voice mechanisms can lead to practical interventions, such as improved workflow efficiency or adjustments in workload, which alleviate strain. However, the emotional and relational dimensions of voice may play a less pronounced role in non-mission-oriented contexts, as the demands do not typically involve the same level of emotional labour or personal sacrifice.

H8d: voice has a stronger buffering effect on work-life interference in mission-oriented roles than in non-mission-oriented roles.

Figure 3-1 Theoretical Framework

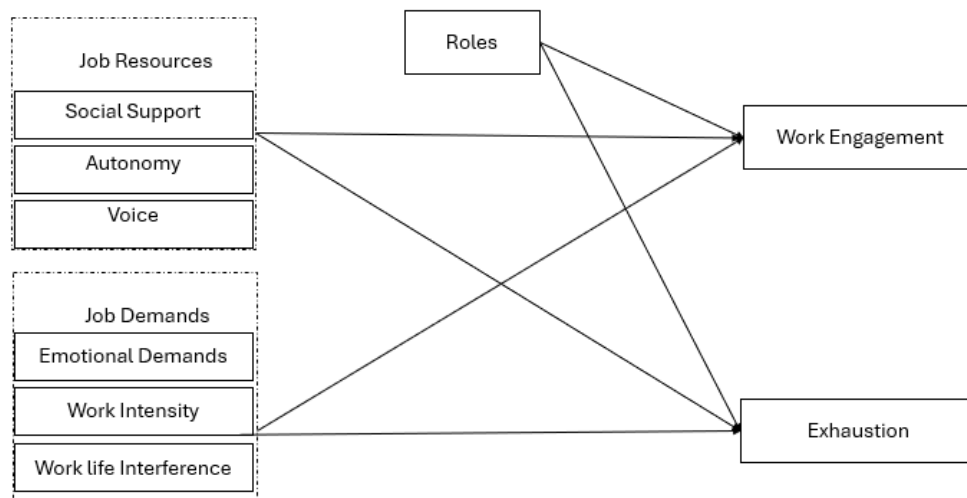


Figure 3-1 illustrates the theoretical framework developed here graphically.

3.8 Chapter Summary

Despite the widespread application of the JDR theory to the study of work engagement, much of the existing literature assumes a level of uniformity in how job demands and resources operate across different sectors. This assumption becomes particularly limiting in the context of public sector research, where job roles are often treated as homogeneous units. As the literature suggests, the public sector is characterised by distinctive omnibus contextual features, such as bureaucratic procedures, resource constraints, and an overarching normative orientation toward public service delivery (Borst, 2018; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). These sector-level features influence the distribution of demands and resources and how employees interpret and respond to them (Halinski and Harrison, 2021). However, such a generalised lens can obscure the more granular, role-specific (discrete contextual) differences that significantly shape employees' work experiences.

A considerable portion of empirical research on public sector engagement tends to focus on mission-oriented roles such as those in education, healthcare, or emergency services while paying limited attention to the diversity of demands and

resources experienced by employees in non-mission or support functions (Fletcher et al., 2020). This pattern introduces a methodological concern identified by Johns (2006) as restriction of range, where limited sampling and unexamined contextual variation constrain the visibility of relationships between key theoretical constructs. For instance, failing to differentiate between roles characterised by high emotional labour and those defined by operational or administrative constraints can mask important distinctions in how employees perceive and respond to job characteristics. Such omissions risk producing partial or potentially misleading conclusions, thereby weakening both the external validity and theoretical precision of JDR applications in the public sector.

Additionally, treating the public sector as a single, undifferentiated occupational environment neglects the extent to which base rates of work-related behaviours such as engagement or burnout vary across distinct role types. As Johns (2006) points out, the meaning and impact of behaviours are not context-free but depend on their frequency and significance within specific settings. For example, emotional demands in caregiving roles may have different implications in terms of intensity and psychological toll compared to those in back-office administrative functions. This variation is crucial for understanding how job characteristics are perceived and how effectively models like the JD-R theory can account for differential experiences of work engagement and strain.

To address these gaps, this study draws on Johns' (2006) contextual framework, which differentiates between omnibus and discrete contextual dimensions. This framework allows for a more refined analytical perspective capable of uncovering how role-specific factors moderate the relationship between demands, resources, and psychological outcomes. In doing so, the research seeks to advance both JDR theory and the public sector engagement literature by highlighting the heterogeneity of roles and their dynamic interaction with contextual forces. Specifically, it investigates how role diversity within the public sector shapes the perception and effects of job demands and resources on work engagement and exhaustion.

4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the philosophical and methodological foundations of the study. The research is based on a positivist philosophy and follows a deductive approach, allowing hypotheses drawn from established theory to be tested using empirical data. A mono-method quantitative design is employed, using survey data from a secondary dataset within a cross-sectional time frame. This is summarised in table 4-1.

The chapter begins by presenting the philosophical foundations that shaped the study. This is followed by an explanation of the research design, including how the sample was selected and the statistical methods used to analyse the data. The chapter then sets out the rationale for the chosen research approach and concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations relevant to the study.

Table 4-1 Research Approach

Design	Approach
Philosophy	Positivism
Theory development	Deduction
Methodological choice	Mono method quantitative
Strategy	Survey
Time horizon	Cross sectional
Procedures and techniques	Secondary dataset

Coined from Saunders et al. (2023), research onion.

4.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

Research philosophy refers to the underlying beliefs and assumptions that researchers hold about the nature of knowledge and the processes through which it can be acquired (Saunders et al., 2023). These philosophical foundations are crucial because they shape the overall research design, guiding the selection of methods for both data collection and analysis. While research methods are often classified as either qualitative or quantitative, Myers (2009, p. 35) argues that a more meaningful

distinction lies in the philosophical assumptions that underpin these methods. Understanding these assumptions is vital for designing robust management research (Saunders et al., 2023), as they influence the formulation of research questions, the strategies employed to investigate them, and the interpretation of findings (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Furthermore, being aware of the strengths and limitations of various philosophical perspectives enables researchers to choose approaches that are best suited to addressing their specific research questions (Saunders et al., 2023). Key philosophical assumptions typically include ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the nature of knowledge), and axiology (the role of values in research) (Saunders et al., 2023). Saunders et al (2023) emphasise that the selection of the right philosophy should be carefully considered before methodological decisions, as it is essential for producing meaningful contributions to knowledge.

4.2.1 Ontology

According to Saunders et. al. (2023 p. 134) ontology is associated with the ‘nature of reality and the assumptions researchers have about the way the world operates, and the commitment held to a particular view’. Ontological assumption comprises of the ideas concerning the existence of relationships between the world in general, society and people and seeks to answer the question: *what is the nature of reality?* (Creswell, 2014). There are three points of view to ontology, namely objectivist, subjectivist and constructivist. The objectivist view on ontology posits that social reality exists independent of social actors suggesting that a single objective reality is valid for any research phenomenon or situation irrespective of the researcher’s perspective or belief (Saunders et al., 2023). A subjectivist approach views reality as socially constructed, shaped by individuals’ values and interpretations. It emphasises understanding diverse perspectives, recognising that researchers are part of the meaning-making process and cannot separate themselves from their own values (Saunders et al., 2023).

Constructivism holds that objective truth is not discoverable, as reality is shaped through social interactions and subjective interpretation (Saunders et al., 2023). It views social phenomena as evolving constructs inseparable from human actors

(Bryman and Bell, 2007). Researchers interpret meaning based on their own contextual understanding, allowing for multiple perspectives.

Ontologically, this study adopts an objectivist view. This view holds that human beings are influenced by external factors within their environment and that their behaviours, such as engagement and exhaustion, are shaped by these external realities (Mann and MacLeod, 2015). In the context of this research, work-related behaviours such as engagement and exhaustion are viewed as outcomes influenced by observable factors such as role classification, organisational demands, resources and conditions within the public sector context. Adopting an objectivist ontology allows the study to examine these influences systematically, to produce findings that are consistent and generalisable across similar contexts.

4.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology examines the nature and sources of valid knowledge and how it can be acquired (Saunders et al., 2023). It also addresses the criteria and standards for judging what counts as acceptable knowledge in a field of study. Thus, what should be regarded as appropriate knowledge about the social world? A contentious issue is whether the same methods, rules, and values that apply to the natural sciences should also be used to study the social world (Bryman and Bell 2007). A positivist epistemology underlies a natural science perspective, but this epistemological view now extends to other fields besides natural science. Positivism is based on the assumption that reality is objective and is understood through direct observation, independent of social context (Becker et al., 2012). It underpins a deductive approach, where hypotheses derived from existing theory are tested using quantitative methods to produce generalisable conclusions (Crotty, 1998). The positivist epistemology holds that knowledge is valid when it corresponds to observable phenomena, with the researcher acting as a neutral observer unaffected by the subject of study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This philosophy prioritises objectivity, emphasising limited interaction with research subjects (Wilson, 2014), and relies on three core principles: validity, reliability, and generalisability (Golafshani, 2003). Together, these ensure that findings are accurate, consistent, and applicable beyond the study context.

Interpretivism, in contrast to positivism, asserts that social reality is not objective but socially constructed through human interaction and interpretation (Blaikie, 2007). It emphasises the need to understand the subjective meanings individuals assign to their experiences, arguing that statistical patterns alone are insufficient without exploring the social context in which they arise (Myers, 1997). This epistemological stance highlights the fundamental difference between studying people and studying objects in the natural sciences, requiring researchers to engage with the meanings behind social actions (Bryman and Bell, 2007). While interpretivism offers conceptual depth and a nuanced understanding of social phenomena, it is often criticised for limitations in reliability, validity, and generalisability due to its qualitative nature.

Constructivism holds that objective truth does not exist independently of human perception and thus cannot be discovered through detached observation (Saunders et al., 2012). Instead, it assumes that reality is socially constructed, with meaning emerging from the researcher's subjective interpretation of experiences and interactions (Berger and Luckmann, 1991; Crotty, 1998). In contrast to positivism, constructivism values individual perspectives and context, offering in-depth understanding rather than generalisable truths (Kelliher, 2005; Myers, 1997). This approach typically adopts an inductive strategy, exploring participants' experiences to generate rich, qualitative insights. However, it is often critiqued for lacking the objective quality criteria such as validity and reliability associated with positivist research (Eisenhardt, 1989).

A methodology is the way of linking the methods used in the study to the expected results. It is important to know the reasons for choosing a specific type of research to address a research question or a problem. This helps to reach a conclusion that adds value and faces less criticism from the research community. The three main types of research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. These approaches enable researchers to conduct their studies effectively. Quantitative research is associated with natural science (positivist epistemology) and an objectivist perspective of the world. In contrast, qualitative research typically focuses on words rather than numbers in the gathering and examining of data. This approach stresses an inductive method to the connection between theory and research, with the goal of theory creation. Also, an interpretivist way of knowing with constructivism

reality forms the research framework. A mixed-method design integrates both the qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell, 2014). Remenyi et al. (1998) suggests that in research, various prominent factors affect the choice of research approach, these factors include the research question, cost, or budget accessible to the researcher, and the abilities of the researcher.

4.3 The Positivistic Quantitative Research Approach

To address the research questions in this study, a positivist paradigm was adopted to enable a deductive approach in testing the hypothesized relationships between the main study variables. Consequently, a quantitative research strategy was selected to facilitate the empirical linking of theoretical categories or concepts, providing an objective framework for theory testing (Saunders et al., 2023). The findings related to the research questions in this study aimed to reveal the objective reality or patterns within the job characteristics work engagement relationship in the public sector (Saunders et al., 2023). Drawing on the JDR theory, a series of hypotheses have been formulated to be empirically tested. The focus is on collecting measurable data that can be analysed using statistical methods, allowing for the confirmation or rejection of these hypotheses.

Given the theory-testing nature of this research, a deductive approach is considered most appropriate. As Saunders et al. (2023) explain, deductive reasoning involves drawing conclusions that logically follow from a set of theoretical premises, with the validity of those conclusions depending on the accuracy of the underlying assumptions. In contrast, an inductive approach commonly used for theory building relies on the subjective interpretation of data to generate new theoretical insights (Saunders et al., 2023). This makes it less suited to the aims of the current study, which prioritises objectivity and seeks to test existing theoretical propositions rather than develop new ones. Moreover, despite being described as more open-ended, the inductive approach can be less structured and less objective than the deductive method (Saunders et al., 2023).

This research employs the JDR theory to examine whether employees in mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles experience varying levels of work engagement and exhaustion as a result of differing job demands and available

resources. In line with the deductive framework, this study aims to assess these relationships using quantifiable measures. This methodological stance is consistent with previous studies on work engagement, which have frequently adopted a positivist paradigm, emphasising empirical testing and the use of measurable constructs to generate objective, generalisable findings (see Schaufeli et al., 2002; Maslach and Leiter, 2008; Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Sonnentag et al., 2012).

Quantitative research seeks to explain phenomena through the collection and analysis of numerical data, typically using statistical methods. One of its primary strengths lies in its ability to generate reliable and measurable results that can be generalised to larger populations. Moreover, quantitative research is particularly well suited for testing and validating existing theoretical explanations, as it allows for the formulation and empirical evaluation of hypotheses prior to data collection. This approach often employs structured methods of inquiry such as experiments and surveys that rely on predefined instruments to produce quantifiable outcomes (Saunders et al., 2023).

Among these methods, experimental design aims to assess the effect of deliberately modifying an independent variable by comparing outcomes between two groups: a treatment group that is exposed to the intervention and a control group that is not. Measurements of the dependent variable are taken both before and after the intervention, allowing researchers to attribute any observed changes to the manipulation of the independent variable. However, in business and management research, the application of experimental designs is limited due to the difficulty of maintaining control over variables that are often influenced by complex and subjective organisational factors, including employee attitudes and behaviours (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

In the context of this study, an experimental design is particularly unsuitable. The random assignment of participants to treatment and control groups, a key element of experimental research intended to minimise bias is not feasible, as public sector roles (mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented) are typically occupied by individuals whose selection is shaped by distinct skills, motivations, and career paths. Additionally, work engagement is a process that evolves over time, making it

less amenable to the snapshot logic of experimental manipulation. As such, a non-experimental approach specifically, survey-based cross-sectional or longitudinal designs is deemed more appropriate for capturing the naturally occurring relationships between job characteristics, resources, and levels of engagement across different categories of public sector roles.

Survey research is a well-established method in the social sciences, valued for its structured approach to data collection (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Its effectiveness depends largely on the clarity with which researchers identify the types of information required to examine the phenomenon of interest. By employing standardised measurement techniques, survey research enables respondents to provide data that are directly comparable (Fowler, 2009). This standardisation contributes to consistency in reliability and validity, ensuring that the data accurately reflect the concepts being measured and thereby increasing confidence in the results (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Given the focus of this study on examining the relationship between job demands, resources, and levels of work engagement across distinct public sector roles, survey research is particularly well suited. It allows for the collection of data from a broad and diverse sample, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the findings. Moreover, it enables the use of validated scales to capture complex psychological constructs such as engagement and exhaustion, which are central to the theoretical framework. The ability to measure these constructs across a large population at a single point in time makes the survey method the most appropriate choice for addressing the research questions posed in this study.

4.4 Research Design

4.4.1 Data Collection Method

The literature review reveals that a deeper understanding of the influence of contextual factors on employee work engagement remains an important area for future research. Based on arguments and gaps highlighted in the text above, this research seeks to address the research question: “How does the heterogeneity of job roles within the public sector (mission-oriented vs non-mission-oriented roles) influence the relationship between job characteristics and employee work engagement?”

To address this question, employing a research strategy that involves the examination of meticulously chosen secondary data sources, which are representative of both national and international levels, is deemed suitable (Antonius, 2013). Secondary data analysis offers numerous advantages. First, it allows the research to maintain a total objectivist stance, given that the data has been collected by a third party over which the research has no influence. Currently, a vast array of topics and modern issues are being covered by most secondary data sources. This enables researchers to handle and analyse substantial volumes of data within a single study. Consequently, they can address significant questions related to research and policy more rapidly than they could through smaller-scale studies (Magee et al., 2006).

Many secondary data sets are of high quality given that the sampling procedures are rigorous often yielding samples that are as representative as one could reasonably expect (Bryman, 2016). Specifically, the sample sizes are usually substantial, and participants are typically selected randomly from a defined population (using population or address lists), which reduces the likelihood of sample bias. This enhances the generalisability of the findings; the results can be extended to the broader population that the sample represents (De Vaus, 2014).

This study aims to examine the effects of contextual factors, such as the nature of the role, on employee work engagement within the public sector and requires data that represents a wide range of industries, occupations, and includes cross-national data. Consequently, a large, representative sample of the population under study (public sector employees) is necessary, which would not be feasible to obtain through primary data collection alone.

The organisations responsible for carrying out these data collections are often equipped with well established procedures to deal with non-response and keep the issue to a minimum. Samples are often national or international samples and cover a wide variety of regions. The extent of geographic distribution and the magnitude of the sample size in such datasets are typically achieved only in studies that receive significant funding (Bryman, 2016). It is virtually impossible for student projects to approach the breadth of coverage these datasets achieve. These datasets are often

produced by seasoned researchers and are collected by social research institutions that have established frameworks and quality control processes to ensure the integrity of the data collected (MacInnes, 2017). As a result, data collection adheres to high standards, and measurement methods are consistently evaluated and improved by statisticians..

Secondary data facilitates longitudinal studies, allowing researchers to track patterns and relationships over time (Bryman, 2016). This continuity is possible because the same types of data are gathered over extended periods. Often, this involves reusing specific survey questions annually, which helps in recognising trends, such as changes in public opinion or behavioural shifts, as they develop over time.

Secondary data also presents the opportunity for cross-cultural analysis. Cross-cultural research often presents some barriers to researchers. The expenses and logistical complexities of conducting studies abroad are clear obstacles, particularly when significant language and cultural differences exist. One viable approach to undertake cross-cultural research is through the secondary analysis of data from multiple countries (Bryman, 2016).

Various forms of secondary data exist; these include surveys and administrative records frequently gathered by governmental organisations (for instance, data related to health, education, and employment), as well as national censuses (De Vaus, 2014). They predominantly comprise quantitative data, which are data concerning objects, variables and their values which can be expressed numerically (Hox and Boeije, 2005). This thesis will use quantitative secondary data sources. Surveys will be utilised throughout every stage of the secondary data analysis process. Survey research is the process of gathering data on the attitudes, opinions, or behaviours of large populations (MacInnes 2017). The distinctive aspects of surveys lie in the data's format and the objectives of its analysis. This type of research is marked by an organised collection of data, where details regarding various subjects such as individuals, families, or nations are collected and subsequently catalogued into a grid that aligns variables with cases. The primary goals of survey research include outlining the traits of a collection of subjects, investigating potential causes of certain events by contrasting different subjects, and

identifying other attributes that consistently correlate with these events. Therefore, survey research aims to infer causal relationships through an extensive comparison of the diverse characteristics of cases (De Vaus, 2014). Therefore, survey research fits well with the aims of this study, which is to examine the heterogeneity of roles within the public sector and the impact it has on job characteristics and work engagement.

Although secondary data sources offer significant benefits, they are not without their drawbacks. A primary limitation is the lack of control researchers have over the data collection methodology, including the choice of population, sampling techniques, and the metrics applied, as noted by Hair et al. (2015). Specifically, secondary data might not encompass the particular segments of the population that a researcher intends to analyse. Moreover, the initial researchers might not have gathered all the requisite information needed for the researcher's current study (MacInnes, 2017).

Furthermore, the way in which variables are operationalized may not align precisely with the definitions used in the current research (Castle, 2003).

Additionally, a significant limitation of surveys is the issue of non-response. In many Western countries, non-response rates have surged over the past two decades, potentially affecting the sample's representativeness and, as a result, the ability to generalise the research findings (Hox and Boeijs, 2005). Moreover, when conducting survey research, it is crucial for researchers to be cautious of mistakenly attributing causal relationships, as merely showing that two variables are associated does not establish causality (De Vaus, 2014). Finally, some secondary data sources may suffer from low quality (e.g., poor sampling strategies, unreliable measures, data errors, and missing values) or may be outdated (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2014), making the interpretation of these studies very challenging.

Many of these limitations can be addressed by selecting only the highest quality data and ensuring the data source aligns with the research objectives. Previous literature has argued that the key to successfully using secondary data to obtain meaningful results is a strong alignment between the hypotheses and the dataset (MacInnes, 2017). The survey chosen for this thesis is well-suited to the study's research aims

and thematic coverage. The survey employ strict quality control measures, ensuring the data is accurate and of high quality.

4.4.2 Review of Secondary Data Sources.

Before selecting secondary data, a thorough review of existing surveys was conducted. Various criteria were considered when assessing the surveys and their suitability for this study's objectives. These criteria were based on recommendations from different authors on how to collect, evaluate, and analyse secondary data sources (MacInnes, 2017; De Vaus, 2014; Castle, 2003; Hair et al., 2015). The criteria considered for the study include topical coverage, sample size, sample description, the survey objective, methodology employed, the operationalisation of variables, data quality including the sample selection strategy and quality measures, the transparency and comprehensiveness of data documentation and the year in which the data was collected.

4.4.3 Surveys Considered

Several European countries have conducted national surveys that effectively cover work and employment areas. Finland was the first to show interest in measuring job quality issues, launching the Quality of Work Life Survey (QWLS) in 1977 to monitor the working conditions of its population. Despite its small sample size and infrequent administration (only a few surveys have been conducted), the QWLS addresses a broad range of job quality aspects. However, the data is not publicly accessible and must be purchased from Statistics Finland.

Italy has also shown significant interest in job quality research, launching the Quality of Work Life Survey (QWLS) in 2002 to assess the impact of major labour market reforms from 1997. The QWLS has been conducted three times, providing valuable insights into working conditions in Italy, though the reports are the only source of information available in English. Similarly, Denmark's National Research Centre for the Working Environment (NRCWE) conducts the Danish Work Environment Cohort Study (DWECS) every five years. This comprehensive survey, with a large sample size of 8,600-20,000 workers, offers extensive data on work-related issues. However, like the Finnish survey, the DWECS data is not publicly accessible.

Several other European countries have shown interest in studying work and employment issues. However, most national surveys are either not publicly accessible or are only available in the native language of the country where the study was conducted. For example, Germany's BIBB/IAB-Survey evaluates the working conditions of the German population, but it is only available in German.

Most European countries have public research organizations that provide various statistics on work and employment. For example, the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) offers comprehensive thematic coverage and has a website available in both Italian and English. The aim of ISTAT is to offer data on employment and other crucial issues free of charge.

Similarly, Statistics Finland provides useful data for studying work conditions in Finland, although not all of its statistics are publicly accessible. Therefore, the limited public availability of data significantly restricts the usefulness of national-level research. Additionally, while a wide range of employment statistics is available across Europe, many countries do not offer their official statistical websites in English, limiting access for international researchers.

Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) was also considered, although it contains a number of job characteristics and measurement of work engagement, it has a lower sample size and is not being updated on a regular basis (8 years). The European Social Survey (ESS) provide the trend data on how people's attitudes, beliefs and values change over time. The survey covers around 30 European nations however it does not capture work engagement and other job characteristics related to this study.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EUROFOUND) conducts the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) every five years, covering a broad geographical range across Europe (36 countries in the latest 2021 edition). The EWCS provides comprehensive data on job characteristics at the European level, including measures of work engagement and exhaustion. Among the surveys reviewed, the EWCS stands out as the only survey specifically focused on capturing the conditions of work and employment in Europe. The EWCS data offers an extensive level of detail on occupations. The occupations are

classified according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO). The ISCO is a classification system organised hierarchically from the most specific to the broadest categories: unit groups, minor groups, sub-major groups, and major groups. This structure is based on the similarity of jobs in terms of required skill level and skill specialisation, this aligns well with this study's objectives and providing relevant data to address its hypotheses. Methodologically, a key strength of the EWCS is its centralised development and coordination by Eurofound, where a team of experts in work and employment oversees the process. This ensures transparency, consistency, and thorough documentation throughout the research process (De Bustillo et al., 2011).

This research adopts a quantitative approach, using data from the seventh European Working Conditions survey (EWCS) conducted in 2021 by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. The data can be found on <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/surveys/european-working-conditions-surveys/european-working-conditions-telephone-survey-2021>.

The rationale for using this data gathering approach is that the EWCS is considered to be the most important international data source on the quality of the working environment currently available in Europe, as it covers a wide range of issues in the general work context including psychosocial factors, working conditions, work-life balance, work engagement, job resources and job demand, finances, work, and health factors. The dataset covers all the variables which are included in the current research and therefore negates the need for the use of primary data collection. The dataset features a wide range of occupation, sectors, spanning across various countries, ordinarily this range of data cannot easily be captured by a single researcher with limited budget, training, and time. Using the EWC dataset will enable me compare and contrast the effects of job demands and resources on work engagement across different public sector settings, given that a large and diverse sample of mission and non-mission-oriented roles are captured in the dataset across different countries and regions in Europe.

For the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS) 2021– wave 7 a single-stage, un-clustered sampling technique and the Random Digit Dialling design

was employed to identify telephone numbers of potential sample population in 36 countries including all European Union Member States as well as the United Kingdom, Norway, Switzerland, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The survey was carried out from March–November 2021 by telephone survey given that the COVID pandemic interrupted face-to-face interviews. The target population involved all residents of the countries mentioned above aged 16 or older and in employment at the time of the survey. People were in employment if they had a paid job for at least an hour in the week preceding the interview in accordance with ILO regulations. The total number of respondents was 71,758 in all 36 countries. Random probability sampling was used to generate nationally representative samples for each country.

4.4.4 Sample Description

To categorise mission and non-mission-oriented roles, a systematic process was followed to ensure reliability and consistency. First, a review of existing literature on public sector job classifications was conducted to identify common characteristics distinguishing mission-oriented roles, such as roles with a strong public service or societal impact focus, from non-mission-oriented roles, which tend to prioritise administrative or operational support functions. The process of classifying roles into mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented categories was guided by the foundational work of Besley and Ghatak (2005; 2018), who defined mission-oriented roles as that which aligns with the core purpose and values of public service. Their conceptual framework provided the basis for identifying roles that are central to an organisation's public service mission.

This was further informed by Houston's (2011) application of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), which offered a structured approach to classifying public service roles. However, not all roles fit neatly within this framework. Some presented ambiguity, occupying a space that was neither clearly aligned with the organisation's core mission nor entirely removed from it. These grey areas required additional judgement in order to maintain conceptual consistency.

To resolve this, roles were assessed based on how closely their functions aligned with direct service delivery, reflecting Mintzberg's (1989) notion of the "operating

core.” This meant evaluating the substance of what each role contributes to the organisation’s central objectives, rather than relying solely on formal titles or departmental location. The focus was on the extent to which a role was involved in delivering services that represent the organisation’s core mission.

To support this process, a role-function mapping exercise was conducted. ISCO codes were cross-referenced with job descriptions where available, enabling a more accurate alignment with the conceptual definitions of mission and non-mission roles. Where uncertainty remained, a cautious approach was adopted: roles were classified as non-mission oriented unless there was clear evidence to justify their inclusion as mission oriented. This conservative approach helped minimise the risk of overestimating the presence or effect of mission alignment. Where relevant, this classification was triangulated with existing empirical studies and theoretical literature (Brewster and Cerdin, 2018; Makris, 2009; Vlassopoulos, 2007; Bright, 2011; Borst, 2018; Innstrand, 2016). In instances where previous research consistently described a role as supportive rather than core, the classification followed that precedent. This helped ensure that the categorisation remained consistent with established understandings in the literature while remaining analytically robust.

Occupational roles were classified using the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) (ILO, 2012). The 4-digit ISCO classification was selected for its specificity, allowing for detailed categorisation of job roles. This granularity was critical for distinguishing between mission-oriented roles, such as those in healthcare and education, and non-mission-oriented roles, such as administrative positions. Mission-oriented roles were coded as 1 and non-mission-oriented roles as 0. Definitions and tasks provided by the ISCO classification system were cross-referenced to ensure accurate coding. Additionally, to strengthen the classification framework, Professor Timothy Besley, who originally introduced the mission and non-mission-oriented role distinction, was contacted for expert input. His feedback helped confirm that the categorisation aligned with theoretical expectations and practical applications in public sector research.

4.4.5 Data Preparation

The original dataset comprised 71,758 participants. For this study, the sample was restricted to employees working in the public sector. Using SPSS, cases were filtered excluding private sector, nonprofit and self-employed, respondents with more than one job this is because these respondents may also have jobs in other sectors and could have various levels of engagement and exhaustion from each job, and respondents who indicated that they had jobs or businesses but didn't work the weeks prior to the survey resulting in a subset of 15,992 participants. Relevant variables needed for the research were then selected. 8025 samples after excluding respondents who did not answer the engagement and exhaustion questions. Visual inspection was conducted and respondents who responded to engagement and exhaustion questions with don't know, or refusal were excluded also respondents who had high number of missing responses across other variables were excluded resulting into 8022 respondents. All data were assessed for errors, outliers, and missing values using descriptive statistics, following recommendations by MacInness (2017) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2014) for preparing secondary data for analysis. These checks ensured data quality and accuracy prior to further analysis.

4.4.6 Missing Data Analysis

An initial analysis identified that 50% of responses for the primary outcome variables work engagement and exhaustion were missing. The missing data resulted from modular survey adjustments in the 2021 EWCTS, which reduced questionnaire length to accommodate telephone-based data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurofound, 2021). Given that this data was not missing completely at random, it was excluded, reducing the dataset to 9,486 cases.

Responses coded as "777" (not applicable), "888" (don't know), and "999" (refusal) were marked as missing in SPSS. To address the high levels of missing data, Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) estimation was employed to address missing data, as it is widely regarded as a robust method that produces less biased parameter estimates compared to traditional techniques such as listwise or pairwise deletion (Gaskin et al., 2025). The use of FIML is particularly important in preserving

the validity and reliability of the findings by utilising all available information in the dataset without imputing or discarding cases.

This section outlines the measures used in the study, all of which were based on established scales. All items were measured using 5-point Likert-type scales, with five response options, ranging from 1 to 5: Never (1) Rarely (2) Sometimes (3) Often (4) Always (5).

Work engagement

Work engagement was assessed using a shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli et al., 2006). The scale consists of three items measuring vigour, absorption and dedication. While the original UWES includes a more comprehensive set of 17 items, shortened versions of the scale have been validated and are widely used in research to capture essential dimensions of engagement efficiently. Notably, Schaufeli et al. (2019), including the original developer of the UWES, proposed and validated both 9-item and 3-item versions, confirming that they reliably assess the core elements of engagement. Q90A- At my work I feel full of energy; Q90B- I am enthusiastic about my job; Q90C- Time flies when I am working.

Exhaustion

Exhaustion was measured using the sub facet exhaustion of Maslach Burnout Inventory MBI (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). This dimension is widely regarded as the primary component of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). The subscale includes two items, such as Q90D- I feel physically exhausted at the end of the working day; Q90G I feel emotionally drained by my work.

Job role

This measure was ascertained using the question: Q5- What is the title of your job?; Q3- What is the title of your main job? Respondents' occupations are coded in the dataset using the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO -08 four digit) according to their skill level and content of their jobs. Occupations satisfying the foregoing definition of mission-oriented roles were assigned a value of

1 for this variable, and non-mission-oriented roles were assigned a value of 0. Examples of roles classified as mission oriented include social workers, personal care workers, doctors, nurses, teachers, armed forces officers etc, non-mission-oriented roles include accountants, clerks, receptionists, software developers etc.

Work intensity

Work intensity was measured using two items from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) Kristensen et al. (2005). Q49A- Does your job involve; working at very high speed?; Q49B- involve working to tight deadlines? All items were answered using a Likert-type response scale

Social support

Social support was measured using four items indicating support from managers and colleagues from the Karasek and Theorell Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) 1990. The items include Q70E- There is good cooperation between you and your colleagues; Q61A1-Your colleagues help and support you; Q61A2- Your colleagues or peers help and support you; Q61B- Your manager helps and supports you.

Voice

Voice was measured using three items from the scale developed by Van Dyne and LePine (1998) and validated by Rees et al (2013). the items include Q61C- You are consulted before objectives are set for your work; Q61D- You are involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of your department or organisation; Q61N- You can influence decisions that are important for your work.

Work life interference

Work-life interference was measured using the 'Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL) Scale' developed by Fisher-McAuley et al. (2003) and validated by Hayman (2005) Q45A- Kept worrying about work when you were not working Q45B- Felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done

Emotional demands

Emotional demands was measured using two items. These items are part of the Questionnaire on the Experience and Evaluation of Work (van Veldhoven and Broersen, 1999; van Veldhoven and Meijman, 1994). The items include Q30H- Being in situations that are emotionally disturbing for you; Q30F- Dealing directly with people who are not employees at your workplace such as customers, passengers, pupils, patients etc.

Task autonomy

Task autonomy was measured with three items adapted from Hackman and Oldham (1980). The items include Are you able to choose or change Q54A- your order of tasks; Q54B- your methods of work; Q54C- your speed or rate of work.

Control variables.

In addition to the measurement scales, the study controlled for several variables identified in previous research as factors that could influence respondents' answers. These variables included age, which (Rudolph and Baltes, 2017) found to affect work engagement; gender, which Banihani et al. (2013) noted as potentially influencing engagement; and job tenure, which Coetzee and Rothmann (2005) identified as having an impact on engagement; educational qualification (Mazzetti et al., 2023). This study also controlled for country (Hu et al., 2014). The relationships between these control variables and the main variables of interest were not hypothesised in this study but were included to account for their potential confounding effects. By considering these variables, the study aimed to ensure a more accurate analysis of the primary relationships under investigation.

Age was grouped into five brackets, from (1) 16–24 years; (2) 25–34 years; (3) 35–44 years; (4) 45–55 years; (5) 56+ years, *gender* was dichotomised into male (coded as 0) and female (coded as 1). *Job tenure* was categorised into 4 groups based on the duration of employment, reflecting varying levels of workplace experience, from (1) less than 1 year; (2) 1–4 years; (3) 5–9 years; (4) 10 years or more. *Educational qualifications* were grouped into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. The *country* of employment was included as a control variable to account for potential cultural and regional differences. Finally, *firm size* was categorised into 7 groups based on

the number of employees, ranging from small enterprises (1) 1–4 employees; (2) 5–9 employees; (3) 10–49 employees; (4) 50–99 employees; (5) 100–249 employees; (6) 250–499 employees; (7) 500 or more employees to address workplace variations associated with organisational scale.

Table 4-2 Construct table

Constructs	Measures	Sources
Work Engagement	I am enthusiastic about my job. At work I feel full of energy. Time flies when I am working.	Schaufeli and Bakker (2003)
Exhaustion	I feel physically exhausted at the end of the working day. I feel emotionally exhausted by my work.	Maslach and Jackson (1993)
Job Resources		
Voice	You are consulted before objectives are set for your work. You are involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of your department or organisation. You can influence decisions that are important for your work.	Van Dyne and LePine (1998)
Autonomy	Are you able to choose or change - your order of tasks. Are you able to choose or change - your methods of work. Are you able to choose or change - your speed or rate of work.	Hackman and Oldham (1980)
Social Support	Your colleagues help and support you. Your manager helps and supports you.	Karasek and Theorell (1990)
Job demands		
Work intensity	Does your job involve; working at very high speed? Does your job involve: working to tight deadlines?	Kristensen et al. (2005).
Work Life Interference	Kept worrying about work when you were not working. Felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done.	Fisher-McAuley et al. (2003)
Emotional Demands	Being in situations that are emotionally disturbing for you. Dealing directly with people who are not employees at your workplace such as customers, passengers, pupils, patients etc.	Van Veldhoven and Meijman, (1994)

4.5 Data Analysis

This section outlines the data analysis employed in this study to ensure the validity of results and the reliability of conclusions. First, the constructs were evaluated through exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), with the reliability of all scales assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Next, descriptive statistics and correlations were calculated to examine preliminary relationships among the study variables, as informed by the theoretical framework. Finally, the structural relationships were analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM). The justification for selecting SEM as the primary analytical tool is discussed, along with details of the fit statistics used to test the study hypotheses.

Considering the theoretical lens of JDR and the philosophical position for the research, structural equation modelling (SEM) in SPSS AMOS version 29 was selected as the ideal statistical method for testing the proposed research hypotheses. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is recognised as a powerful statistical technique that integrates the analysis of causal processes into a series of structural equations, enabling a clearer conceptualisation of the theory under investigation (Byrne, 2013). Unlike exploratory methods, SEM takes a confirmatory approach to data analysis. Crucially, it accounts for measurement error in both dependent and independent variables when estimating structural relationships between latent constructs an advantage over traditional regression models, which are unable to detect or correct for such errors (Byrne, 2013; Geiser, 2012). Furthermore, SEM allows for the estimation of multivariate relationships and the evaluation of indirect effects with confidence intervals. Hence, SEM was considered suitable for analysing the structural models for this research. SEM is typically regarded as a two-step process. The first step involves testing the measurement model, followed by the evaluation of the structural model. The measurement model primarily assesses the relationships between the observed variables and the underlying latent constructs within the study (Kline, 2011).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is a multivariate Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique that is covariance-based and follows a hypothesis-testing approach to assess a structural theory. It is employed to examine the multidimensionality of a theoretical or empirically observed construct, particularly when using large sample sizes (Byrne, 2010). As an advanced statistical method, CFA is used to estimate and validate the relationships between manifest and latent variables, grounded in an established theory or prior empirical findings (Schreiber et al., 2006). This method is most suitable when the researcher possesses prior knowledge of the latent variables included in the model structure (Hair et al., 2011). To test the measurement model, a five-step process is required. The first step involves examining the chi-square statistic (χ^2), a key indicator that measures the difference between the observed and estimated covariance matrices, serving as an absolute fit measure. Ideally, a non-significant χ^2 statistic is desired, indicating a good model fit, typically reflected by a low χ^2 value and a high p-value, which confirms that the model accurately represents the data (Hair et al., 2018).

The second step involves evaluating the covariance and correlation matrices. This is a crucial step in CFA to verify the level of covariance and correlation among the research variables. The sample covariance matrix reveals the variances for each variable and the covariances between them, while the sample correlation matrix presents the standardised covariance values, indicating the correlations between the indicators of latent variables (Hair et al., 2018). The third and most critical aspect of CFA is evaluating the model fit indices. These indices determine whether the measurement model is acceptable and assess how well the data aligns with the proposed model (Kline, 2015). According to Dagnino and Cinici (2015), it is important to report multiple fit indices rather than relying on a single measure, due to factors such as model complexity and sensitivity to sample size. Commonly reported fit indices include the chi-square index, relative chi-square, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) (Kline, 2015; Hair et al., 2018). The chi-square index (CMIN), also known as χ^2 goodness-of-fit (GOF), compares the observed data model to the predicted model, with lower values indicating a better model fit (Hair et al., 2018). The second fit index

is the relative chi-square (CMIN/DF), which accounts for model complexity by adjusting the χ^2 value based on the degrees of freedom.

A good model fit is indicated by values below 2, while values between 2 and 5 suggest an acceptable fit (Kline, 2015). One limitation of the χ^2 goodness-of-fit (GOF) index is its tendency to reject measurement models when tested with large sample sizes. To address this, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is often evaluated to assess how well the model fits the sample (Hair et al., 2018). A key benefit of RMSEA is the ability to construct confidence intervals, reducing the reliance on a strict threshold. However, recommended cut-off values, typically between .05 and .08, should be followed unless otherwise justified. RMSEA is considered a poor measure of fit, where higher values indicate poorer fit, making it an essential model fit index to assess (Hair et al., 2018). Furthermore, the absolute fit indices and incremental fit indices assess model fit by comparing it to a baseline model. The comparative fit index (CFI) is the most commonly used among these because it is insensitive to sample size and the complexity of the model (Hair et al., 2018). The CFI ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating a better fit. Typically, when values fall below .9 they are considered unacceptable, while values closer to 1 reflect a good fit (Kline, 2015). Another key incremental index Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). The TLI compares the chi-square values of the null and specified models and accounts, to some extent, for model complexity. It is a non-normed index, meaning its values can fall below 0 or exceed 1; however, values above 0.9 are considered indicative of good fit (Hair et al., 2018).

4.5.1 Common-method bias

According to Podsakoff et al. (2003), common-method bias arises when both dependent and independent variables are measured using the same questionnaire within the same timeframe. The potential presence of bias was statistically assessed using Harman's single-factor test (Harman, 1967). The test was conducted by performing an exploratory factor analysis with unrotated principal component analysis, restricting the extraction to a single factor. Podsakoff et al. (2003) suggest that common-method variance bias is indicated when this single factor accounts for most of the covariance between the dependent and independent variables. Simply

put, if the single factor explains more than 50% of the total variance, then bias is present. Results from this analysis are presented in Appendix E and suggest that there is no bias since the variance extracted was 20.78% for the dataset.

4.5.2 Outlier Analysis

Outlier analysis was performed to identify any variables with scores that significantly deviate from the overall pattern of the dataset (Hair et al., 2018; Field, 2009). To identify potential outliers, box and whisker plots were examined for each item. The results indicated that while most items were free of outliers, a few exhibited noticeable ones, particularly within the social support variables. For items that contained outliers, no more than fifteen cases were observed. In general, outliers are often excluded from empirical analysis as they may not be representative of the population (Hair et al., 2018). However, in this study, outliers were retained due to the lack of clear evidence suggesting they were truly anomalous or unrepresentative of the broader dataset (Hair et al., 2018). Given the diverse occupational backgrounds of the sample, it is reasonable to expect variations in how individuals experience these variables. Differences in job roles, industries, and work environments may contribute to distinct perspectives, leading some respondents to report experiences that deviate from the general pattern.

4.5.3 Reliability and Validity

Evaluating the reliability and validity of the measurement model is a crucial step to assess the accuracy and consistency of the measurement scales.

The reliability of a scale refers to the extent to which the variance in observed scores can be attributed to the true score of latent variables (Kline, 2015). The reliability of a scale refers to its stability over time (e.g., in repeated measures) and its internal consistency, reflecting the dimensionality of the scale (Kline, 2015). It assesses whether the proposed items accurately measure the intended underlying concepts. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient, composite reliability (CR), inter-item correlations, and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to assess internal consistency. While acceptable reliability indicates consistency, it does not necessarily confirm validity. As Hair et al. (2018, p. 124) explain, validity refers to "the extent to which a

single variable or set of variables (construct validity) correctly represents the concept of study free from any systematic or non-random error." Consequently, further analysis was required to verify the validity of the model. Two key aspects of construct validity examined in this study were convergent and discriminant validity. This step was essential to establish construct validity beyond the evaluation of model fit and factor loadings (Hair et al., 2018).

Convergent validity is demonstrated when the indicators of a construct share a high proportion of common variance (Hair et al., 2018, p. 675). In other words, it reflects the similarity between different measures designed to assess the same theoretical concept (Haist, 2021). Convergent validity is assessed by examining the factor loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE).

The coefficient alpha reflects the level of interrelatedness among a set of items designed to measure a single construct (Netemeyer et al., 2003). Cronbach's alpha values above 0.8 are considered excellent, while values between 0.7 and 0.8 are acceptable (Hair et al., 2018; Kline, 2015). However, for scales with fewer than 10 items, achieving a high Cronbach's alpha can be difficult, as shorter scales tend to underestimate reliability (Pallant, 2020). In such cases, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.5 or higher may be considered acceptable, especially when supported by additional validation techniques (Taber, 2018; Pallant, 2020).

Table 4-3 Coefficients Assessing Reliability and Validity

Type	Coefficient	Suggested Values
Reliability	Cronbach's alpha (α)	≥ 0.70

Type	Coefficient	Suggested Values
	Inter-item correlations	0.30 - 0.70
	Composite reliability / Construct reliability (CR)	≥ 0.70
	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	≥ 0.50
Validity	Convergent Validity - Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	≥ 0.50
	Convergent Validity - Composite reliability (CR)	≥ 0.70
	Discriminant Validity - Comparison of AVE and squared correlations (SIC)	AVE > SIC

4.5.4 Linear Regression, Multigroup-Group Analysis And Moderation Testing

To test which group showed higher levels of engagement and exhaustion, linear regression was employed. Linear regression is an established method for examining the relationship between a categorical independent variable and a continuous outcome variable (Field, 2013). Linear regression provided a straightforward method for estimating the direct effect of mission orientation on work engagement and exhaustion without the need for complex model structures, given the binary nature of the independent variable (Cohen et al., 2003). It also enabled the quantification of the direction and magnitude of the relationship, offering interpretable coefficients that indicate whether mission-oriented employees exhibit significantly higher levels of engagement and exhaustion compared to their non-mission-oriented counterparts.

The impact of roles on the relationship between job demands, job resources, engagement and exhaustion was tested using multigroup-group analysis. Prominent researchers have employed the multigroup method of analysis in the field of work engagement, including Van den Broeck et al (2018), who utilised it to examine measurement invariance across different sectors. Borst (2018) employed this method to test the difference between occupational groups within the public sector.

The effect of moderators on the relationships between variables in the theoretical model is examined using measurement invariance and multiple-group analysis. Measurement invariance refers to the extent to which items or subscales carry the same meaning across different groups (Hair et al., 2018). This is assessed

by examining the equivalence of the instrument's psychometric properties through a series of steps: configural invariance, metric invariance, factor covariance invariance, and measurement error invariance. Configural invariance tests whether the same items are associated with the same underlying latent constructs across groups, while allowing factor loadings to vary between them (Hair et al., 2018). Multiple-group analysis is a widely used method for assessing various levels of measurement invariance across groups. It involves collecting separate samples for each group and conducting comparisons to determine the degree of equivalence between them. The procedure is based on a sequence of empirical comparisons among models that impose progressively restrictive constraints (Hair et al., 2018). The primary metric used to assess differences between models is the change in chi-square values, denoted as $\Delta\chi^2$. This allows for a direct comparison between an unconstrained model and a more restricted one. The underlying principle is that if the chi-square value of the constrained model is not significantly higher than that of the less constrained model or if the $\Delta\chi^2$ between the two models is statistically non-significant then the added constraints are considered acceptable. The testing procedure begins with estimating unconstrained models separate and distinct models for each subgroup. These initial models must demonstrate good model fit, typically indicated by acceptable values for χ^2/df , CFI, and RMSEA, to justify proceeding with further analysis. The next step involves testing for configural invariance by estimating a common model across both groups without imposing any constraints. This model should also exhibit adequate model fit, comparable to the separate group models. This stage confirms that the constructs are congeneric across groups (Hair et al., 2018). This model is often referred to as the totally free (TF) model, as all parameters are freely estimated without constraints. In the next steps, constraints are added to the baseline model, and changes in chi-square ($\Delta\chi^2$) are tested for significance. The first step, metric invariance, constrains factor loadings to be equal across groups. If supported, full metric invariance is confirmed; if not, partial invariance is sought by freeing the minimum necessary loadings.

Next, factor covariance invariance tests whether covariances between constructs are equal, followed by error variance invariance, where error variances are constrained across groups. At each stage, non-significant $\Delta\chi^2$ indicates the invariance hypothesis

is supported. Finally, moderation is tested by comparing a constrained model (equal paths across groups) to the metric-invariant model. A significant $\Delta\chi^2$ indicates the path differs between groups, confirming a moderating effect of group context. If not, no moderation is supported.

Moderated Structural Equation Modelling (MSEM) was employed as an appropriate analytical approach for testing interaction effects between job demands and job resources in predicting work engagement within the public sector. This method enables a robust examination of latent constructs and their interrelationships (Collier, 2020; Hair et al., 2018). In this approach, indicators of the moderator are aggregated (e.g., through averaging or summing), and the resulting composite score is then mean-centred. The interaction term is created by multiplying the mean-centred moderator composite with a similarly mean-centred composite of the independent variable. This product term is then entered into the structural model as an observed variable predicting the latent dependent construct.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted following the ethical approval from Cranfield University Ethics department. The data used for this research were obtained from the 2021 European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS), which is publicly available through the UK Data Service. Access to the dataset is free of charge but requires registration with the UK Data Service. Following registration, researchers are required to complete a brief online form outlining the title and general aims of their project. Access is granted immediately to students and academic researchers conducting work for non-commercial, research-related purposes. For the present study, the 2021 EWCTS dataset in SPSS format, along with the accompanying technical documentation and survey materials, was downloaded from the UK Data Service and utilised for the empirical analyses. The dataset used for the analysis was fully anonymised, ensuring that no personal identifiers, such as respondents' names, were accessible or disclosed at any stage of the research process. The publicly available dataset initially accessed for this study included only the ISCO two-digit occupational codes, which represent aggregated occupational categories. However, to accurately classify roles as mission-oriented or non-mission-oriented

within the public sector, more detailed occupational data were required. Specifically, the ISCO four-digit codes were necessary, as they provide disaggregated classifications of individual occupations. A formal request for access to these data was submitted via email to the EUROFOUND data manager. In response, the data manager required the completion of an ethics and confidentiality agreement. Upon review and signing of the agreement, the additional dataset containing the ISCO four-digit occupational codes was released to the researcher. All procedures adhered strictly to ethical standards concerning data confidentiality and responsible data use.

4.7 Summary

This chapter discussed the research methodology, providing the rationale for the chosen approach. The study adopts a positivistic perspective, which seeks to uncover the truth of a phenomenon through objective measurement. This aligns with the use of quantifiable data, making a quantitative research design the most suitable choice for the study. Within this framework, the study aimed to test several key hypotheses rather than conduct an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon. The methodological approach employs a secondary research design using the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS, 2021). The chapter explained the rationale for using secondary data analysis, emphasising its strengths and addressing potential limitations. The process of secondary data analysis was systematically developed, drawing on established recommendations for selecting, evaluating, and analysing secondary data. This included reviewing data sources, selecting and evaluating the survey, and providing a detailed account of sample characteristics and survey measures aligned with the study's conceptual framework. The chapter further detailed the analytical strategy and explained the steps taken to prepare the data for analysis.

By following this structured approach, the study ensured that quality standards were upheld throughout each stage of data collection, evaluation, and analysis. The findings, representing the final stage and outcome of this process, are presented in the next chapter.

5 Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analyses of this thesis and is divided into three sections. The first section presents the descriptive statistics for all variables used in this thesis and describes the research samples' demographic variables in detail. Next, it provides an overview of the observed basic correlations between the research variables. The second section reports the statistical results that were obtained from the CFA, multigroup and the path analysis. In the last section the results of the hypothesis testing using linear regression and Multigroup analyses are presented.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

This section presents an overview and detailed description of the demographic variables essential for assessing the representativeness of the sample. It further examines the distribution of these variables across mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, thereby informing the generalisability of the study's findings. The final dataset consisted of 8022 participants spanning 377 distinct roles. The sample consisted of 4036 participants classified as mission-oriented and 3986 classified as non-mission-oriented employees. Descriptive statistics in Table 6-1 shows the distribution of the study sample.

The gender distribution indicated that a higher proportion of women were in mission-oriented roles (69.2%) compared to non-mission-oriented roles (52.8%). In contrast, a larger percentage of men occupied non-mission-oriented roles (47.2%) compared to mission-oriented roles (30.8%).

In terms of age, the largest age group for both mission- and non-mission-oriented employees was in the 45–55 range, representing 32% of non-mission and 30% of mission-oriented workers. The second largest age group was between 35 and 44 years, comprising 24% non-mission workers and 27.1% mission-oriented workers, respectively. The smallest age group was the 16–24 category, making up only 6.4% of non-mission and 4.9% of mission-oriented employees suggesting a relatively mature workforce across the public sector.

Regarding education, most mission-oriented employees held tertiary degrees (77%), a substantially higher percentage compared to their non-mission-oriented counterparts (57%). Conversely, secondary education was more common among non-mission-oriented workers (42%) than mission-oriented employees (22.7%). Primary education is minimally represented in both groups. This suggests a higher educational threshold for mission-oriented roles

Job tenure is similarly distributed across both groups, with about half of the respondents (49.2% non-mission; 50% mission) having ten years or more of service. Early tenure employees (less than one year) are a minority in both categories, accounting for 9.7% in non-mission and 8.4% in mission-oriented roles. This stability in tenure highlights the relatively long-term nature of public sector employment.

The distribution of respondents across different organisational sizes shows clear patterns between mission and non-mission-oriented roles. Among non-mission-oriented employees, 17.9% work in organisations with 1–9 employees, 30.3% in organisations with 10–49 employees, 27.5% in organisations with 50–249 employees, and 24.3% in organisations with 250 or more employees. In contrast, mission-oriented employees are distributed as follows: 12.8% in organisations with 1–9 employees, 35.6% in those with 10–49 employees, 35.5% in organisations with 50–249 employees, and 16.1% in organisations with 250 and over. Across both groups, most respondents are found in organisations with 10 to 249 employees. Overall, the descriptive statistics offer a clear overview of the sample, highlighting distinct demographic and organisational differences between employees in mission-oriented roles and non-mission-oriented roles.

Table 5-1 Descriptive Statistics

Sample characteristics	Non-Mission (N = 3986)	Mission (N = 4036)
	%	
Gender		
Male	47.2%	30.8%
Female	52.8%	69.2%
Age		
16-24	6.4%	4.9%
25-34	17.3%	19.3%
35 - 44	24.0%	27.1%
45-55	32.0%	30.0%
56+	20.3%	18.7%
Level of Education		
Primary	1.0%	0.1%
Secondary	42.0%	22.7%
Tertiary	57.0%	77.2%
Job tenure		
Less than a year	9.7%	8.4%
1 to 4 years	25.1%	25.7%
5 to 9 years	15.9%	15.9%
10 years or more	49.2%	50.0%
Firm size		
1 - 9	17.9%	12.8%
10 - 49	30.3%	35.6%
50 - 249	27.5%	35.5%
250 and over	24.3%	16.1%

The descriptive statistics and intercorrelation of all research variables are presented in Table 6-2 for the general public sector sample. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Findings show that emotional demands had a mean of 3.12 (SD = 1.09). Work-life interference had a slightly lower mean of 2.73 (SD = 0.93), while work intensity was rated moderately high with a mean of 3.32 (SD = 1.01). Autonomy had a mean of 3.31 (SD = 0.96), and social support was rated highest among the job resource variables with a mean of 4.15 (SD = 0.83). Voice was rated at a mean of 3.55 (SD = 0.92), and engagement showed a relatively high average of 3.98 (SD = 0.71). Exhaustion was lower in comparison to other outcome variables, with a mean of 2.78 (SD = 0.96). Firm size, included as a control variable, had a mean of 2.57 (SD = 0.98).

The intercorrelations among the core study variables revealed several statistically significant associations. Emotional demands were positively correlated with work-life interference ($r = .27, p < .01$), work intensity ($r = .20, p < .01$), and exhaustion ($r = .35, p < .01$), and negatively correlated with autonomy ($r = -.03, p < .01$) and social support ($r = -.06, p < .01$). Work-life interference was positively correlated with work intensity ($r = .27, p < .01$) and exhaustion ($r = .52, p < .01$), and negatively correlated with autonomy ($r = -.05, p < .01$), social support ($r = -.15, p < .01$), voice ($r = -.08, p < .01$), and engagement ($r = -.14, p < .01$). Work intensity was positively correlated with exhaustion ($r = .31, p < .01$) and voice ($r = .04, p < .01$), and negatively correlated with autonomy ($r = -.03, p < .01$) and social support ($r = -.06, p < .01$).

Autonomy was positively correlated with social support ($r = .13, p < .01$), voice ($r = .35, p < .01$), and engagement ($r = .18, p < .01$), and negatively correlated with exhaustion ($r = -.12, p < .01$). Social support showed significant positive correlations with voice ($r = .43, p < .01$) and engagement ($r = .29, p < .01$), and a negative correlation with exhaustion ($r = -.21, p < .01$). Voice was positively correlated with engagement ($r = .33, p < .01$) and negatively correlated with exhaustion ($r = -.16, p < .01$). Engagement was negatively correlated with exhaustion ($r = -.18, p < .01$). Firm size showed relatively low correlations with the primary variables, with a small positive association with work intensity ($r = .12, p < .01$) and a negative correlation with engagement ($r = -.04, p < .01$).

Several statistical patterns are noteworthy in the data. The strongest observed correlation was between work-life interference and exhaustion ($r = .52, p < .01$), indicating a high degree of co-variation between perceived interference from work into personal life and feelings of exhaustion. Voice and social support were also strongly correlated ($r = .43, p < .01$), voice further showed moderate positive correlations with both autonomy ($r = .35, p < .01$) and engagement ($r = .33, p < .01$), indicating consistent statistical associations across these variables. Engagement displayed significant positive associations with multiple job resources, including autonomy ($r = .18, p < .01$), social support ($r = .29, p < .01$), and voice ($r = .33, p < .01$), while simultaneously correlating negatively with exhaustion ($r = -.18, p < .01$). Additionally, each of the three job resources autonomy, social support, and voice was negatively correlated with exhaustion ($r = -.12, -.21$, and $-.16$ respectively; all $p < .01$), showing a consistent inverse statistical relationship between job resources and strain.

Table 5-2 Variable Means, Standard Deviation and Bivariate Inter-Correlations of all Research Variables

		M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Emotional Demands	3.12	1.09								
2	Work-life Interference	2.73	0.93	.27**							
3	Work Intensity	3.32	1.01	.20**	.27**						
4	Autonomy	3.31	0.96	-.03**	-.05**	-.03**					
5	Social Support	4.15	0.83	-.06**	-.15**	-.06**	.13**				
6	Voice	3.55	0.92	-.02	-.08**	.04**	.35**	.43**			
7	Engagement	3.98	0.71	.02	-.14**	-.01	.18**	.29**	.33**		
8	Exhaustion	2.78	0.96	.35**	.52**	.31**	-.12**	-.21**	-.16**	-.18**	

N = 8022 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 5-3 Summary of t-test Analysis

	Work engagement		Exhaustion		Social support		Voice		Autonomy		Emotional demands		Work-life interference		Work intensity	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Mission-oriented roles	4.05	.67	2.93	.95	4.18	.80	3.58	.89	3.32	.92	3.56	.96	2.86	.92	3.35	1.02
Non mission-oriented roles	3.90	.74	2.62	.95	4.12	.87	3.53	.96	3.30	.99	2.68	1.04	2.60	.92	3.29	1.00
Independent sample t-test	9.343***		14.906***		3.191**		2.253*		1.010 ns		39.163***		12.509***		2.756***	

*** $p \leq .001$ M is mean; SD is standard deviation.

5.2.1 Descriptive Statistics: T-test analysis

An independent samples t-test was performed to compare scores on work engagement, exhaustion, social support, voice, autonomy, emotional demands, work-life interference, and work intensity between participants in mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles. The results revealed several statistically significant differences between the two groups. Table 6-3 displays the results of the t-test and provides statistical evidence of the differences between the groups.

Participants in mission-oriented roles reported significantly higher levels of work engagement ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.67$) compared to those in non-mission-oriented roles ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.74$), $t(9.343)$, $p < .001$. Similarly, the level of exhaustion was significantly greater among mission-oriented participants ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.95$) than among their non-mission counterparts ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 0.95$), $t(14.906)$, $p < .001$. A significant difference was also observed in perceived social support, with the mission group reporting higher support ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.80$) than the non-mission group ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.87$), $t(3.191)$, $p = .001$.

In terms of perceived voice within the organization, participants in mission-oriented roles reported slightly higher levels ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.89$) than those in non-mission roles ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.96$), and this difference was statistically significant, $t(2.253)$, $p = .024$. However, no significant difference was found in perceived autonomy between the two groups, with mission-oriented participants scoring $M = 3.32$ ($SD = 0.92$) and non-mission participants scoring $M = 3.30$ ($SD = 0.99$), $t(1.010)$, $p = .312$. Notably, emotional demands were significantly higher in the mission-oriented group ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.96$) compared to the non-mission group ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.04$), with a highly significant result, $t(39.163)$, $p < .001$. Work-life interference was also significantly greater among mission participants ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.92$) relative to non-mission participants ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.92$), $t(12.509)$, $p < .001$. Finally, a small but statistically significant difference was observed in work intensity, with mission-oriented

participants reporting slightly higher scores ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.02$) than their non-mission counterparts ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.00$), 2.756 , $p = .006$.

These results show that employees in mission-oriented roles tend to experience both greater engagement and higher job demands when compared to those in non-mission roles. The lack of difference in perceived autonomy indicates that both groups may share similar levels of control or independence in their roles, despite other disparities in their workplace experiences.

5.3 Measurement Model Assessment

The validity of the construct was assessed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The measurement model employed in this study comprised eight latent variables, each associated with a set of manifest indicators. These latent variables represent theoretical constructs that are not directly observable but are inferred through measurable indicators (Tabachnick et al., 2019). The indicators, which are individual items completed by participants, constitute the directly observed variables. Moreover, error terms (e) are incorporated into each indicator to account for measurement inaccuracies and the possibility that factors other than the latent constructs may influence the observed responses (Blunch, 2013, p. 5). The results of the CFA for each group are analytically presented in the next section.

5.3.1 Overall Model Assessment

To confirm the current model, a non-significant χ^2 fit statistic is expected and desired. This would be represented by a low χ^2 value and a large p -value (Hair et al., 2018). The present model showed an undesirable statistically significant difference, suggesting a poor model fit. However, Hair et al. (2010, p. 661) argued that caution needs to be taken when interpreting chi-square results from model testing that applied large sample sizes ($n > 400$). The authors demonstrated that the method becomes highly sensitive and detects almost any difference, and therefore suggests a poor fit for common goodness-of-fit

measures. Hair et al. (2010, pp. 665-6) pointed out that “even if the differences in the covariance matrices (i.e., residuals) remained constant, the χ^2 value is reported to inflate with increasing n .” Therefore, the χ^2 results should not be used as the only indicator of model fit when running SEM with larger sample sizes. The comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis’s index (TLI), and root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) are used to assess whether the model fits the data.

The CFA results for the mission-oriented group indicated an acceptable to excellent fit. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was 0.968, and the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) was 0.952. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.939, and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.919. Each of these indices exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of 0.90, supporting the adequacy of the model. Additionally, the RMSEA value was 0.046, with a 90% confidence interval ranging from 0.044 to 0.049, which falls within the excellent range for model fit. These findings suggest that the hypothesized measurement model fits the mission-oriented group data well.

Similarly, the measurement model demonstrated a strong fit in the non-mission-oriented group. The GFI was 0.971, and the AGFI was 0.956. The CFI reached 0.946, and the TLI was 0.928, all of which exceed the .90 threshold. The RMSEA was 0.044, with a 90% confidence interval from 0.042 to 0.047, further indicating excellent fit. These results provide evidence that the measurement model is also appropriate for the non-mission-oriented group. In summary, both group-specific models demonstrated acceptable to excellent fit.

Table 5-4 Goodness of Fit Indices

Fit Index	Mission-Oriented	Non-Mission-Oriented	Recommended Threshold
Chi-Square (CMIN)	1242.950	1136.505	
Degrees of Freedom (DF)	128	128	
Chi-Square/df (CMIN/DF)	9.71	8.88	≤ 3.00 - ≤5.00)
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.968	0.971	≥ 0.90
Adjusted GFI (AGFI)	0.952	0.956	≥ 0.90
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.939	0.946	≥ 0.90
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.919	0.928	≥ 0.90
RMSEA	0.046	0.044	≤ 0.06
RMSEA 90% CI	[.044, .049]	[.042, .047]	

To assess the unidimensionality of the constructs, the standardized regression weights (factor loadings) were examined. According to Hair et al. (2018), factor loadings should exceed 0.50 to be considered acceptable indicators of a single underlying construct. Loadings closer to 1.00 suggest a strong relationship between the observed indicator and its corresponding latent factor, whereas values below 0.50 may indicate weak association or the need for item revision or exclusion. As shown in Table 6-5, most of the factor loadings exceeded the 0.50 threshold in both groups, demonstrating acceptable levels of item reliability across the constructs with the exception of a few items noted below.

For autonomy, factor loadings were consistently strong across both groups, ranging from .678 to .746 for mission and .705 to .799 for non-mission, indicating stable item performance. Voice items demonstrated similar consistency, with loadings between .666 and .698 in the mission role and .696 to .712 in the non-mission role. Support was measured with two items. SOC2 exhibited exceptionally high loadings (.992 for mission, .987 for non-mission), suggesting a strong representation of the construct. SOC1 showed moderate loadings (.618 and .633), which remain acceptable. Engagement showed

acceptable loadings for ENG1 and ENG2 ($\geq .687$ across both roles). However, ENG3 demonstrated weaker loadings (.492 for mission, .471 for non-mission), suggesting reduced item reliability for this indicator. This item is excluded from further analysis..

Emotional demand was adequately measured by both EMO1 and EMO2. EMO2 showed higher loadings (.744 and .763), while EMO1 remained within acceptable limits (.657 and .598). Work-life interference included one strong item (WL2: .754 for mission, .681 for non-mission) and one weaker item (WLI1: .483 and .506). These results suggest a need for refinement of the WLI1 indicator. Intensity and exhaustion constructs demonstrated consistent loadings across roles. Intensity indicators ranged from .676 to .754, and exhaustion indicators from .617 to .720, indicating stable measurement properties.

Overall, the measurement model showed acceptable reliability across both role conditions, with the majority of items loading at or above standard thresholds. Table 5-5 summarises the final factor loadings, scale reliability and convergent validity for all items used within the model.

Table 5-5 Measure Validity and Reliability

	FL		CR		AVE	
	MR	NMR	MR	NMR	MR	NMR
Work engagement			0.681	0.675	0.516	0.510
I am enthusiastic about my job.	.724	.740				
At work, I feel full of energy.	.713	.687				
Time flies when I am working.	.492	.471				
Exhaustion			0.660	0.595	0.493	0.424
I feel physically exhausted at the end of the working day.	.684	.617				
I feel emotionally exhausted by my work.	.720	.684				
Voice			0.726	0.747	0.469	0.496
You are consulted before objectives are set for your work.	.698	.696				
You are involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of your department or organisation.	.666	.705				
You can influence decisions that are important for your work.	.691	.712				
Autonomy			0.749	0.794	0.499	0.563
Are you able to choose or change your order of tasks?	.694	.745				
Are you able to choose or change your methods of work?	.746	.799				
Are you able to choose or change your speed or rate of work?	.678	.705				
Social Support			0.803	0.808	0.683	0.687
Your colleagues help and support you.	.618	.633				
Your manager helps and supports you.	.992	.987				
Work Intensity			0.684	0.524	0.520	0.486
Does your job involve; working at very high speed?	.754	.717				
Does your job involve: working to tight deadlines?	.687	.676				
Work Life Interference			0.561	0.524	0.401	0.360
Kept worrying about work when you were not working.	.483	.506				
Felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done.	.754	.681				
Emotional Demands			0.659	0.636	0.493	0.470
Being in situations that are emotionally disturbing for you.	.657	.598				
Dealing directly with people who are not employees at your workplace such as customers, passengers, pupils, patients etc.	.744	.763				

Note: N=8022; FL is factor loading for each item; CR is the composite reliability; AVE is the average variance extracted; MR is **mission-oriented** roles; NMR is **non-mission-oriented** roles

5.3.2 Validity and Reliability

Following the evaluation of overall model fit, a more detailed assessment of the measurement model's quality was conducted. Specifically, the model's content validity was examined through tests of convergent and discriminant validity.

Convergent validity was assessed by analysing factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and the average variance extracted (AVE).

The measurement model was assessed through Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for both mission and non-mission groups to establish the reliability and convergent validity of the constructs. CR values above 0.70 are generally considered acceptable, indicating internal consistency of the construct indicators. In this analysis, most constructs met or exceeded this threshold, with some marginal cases warranting further consideration.

For the mission group, autonomy (CR = 0.749), voice (CR = 0.726), support (CR = 0.803), and intensity (CR = 0.684) demonstrated good internal consistency, reinforcing the robustness of their measurement. Engagement and emotional demands had slightly lower CR values at 0.681 and 0.659, respectively. While these are slightly below the 0.70 benchmark, they remain within an acceptable range in exploratory research or complex organizational settings, where perfect reliability is seldom observed. Interference and exhaustion, with CR values of 0.561 and 0.660 respectively, suggest weaker internal consistency, particularly for interference, which may require a closer examination of item content or dimensionality. Nevertheless, these values still contribute useful insight when interpreted within the broader structural model.

In the non-mission group, autonomy (CR = 0.794), voice (CR = 0.747), and support (CR = 0.808) again displayed strong reliability. Engagement (CR = 0.675), emotional demands (CR = 0.636), and intensity (CR = 0.653) reflected acceptable levels of consistency, although slightly under the ideal threshold. Interference (CR = 0.524) and exhaustion (CR = 0.595) presented with lower reliability, reinforcing concerns raised in the mission group context and potentially indicating that these constructs may be more context-dependent or that the corresponding items were not as cohesive in non-mission settings.

The AVE values further support the evaluation of convergent validity, where values above 0.50 indicate that a construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators.

In the mission group, support (AVE = 0.683), intensity (AVE = 0.520), and engagement (AVE = 0.516) met this criterion, affirming their construct validity. Autonomy and exhaustion were just below the threshold at 0.499 and 0.493, respectively, and although marginally deficient, they still provide a reasonable level of convergent validity in applied settings. Voice and emotional demands had AVE values of 0.469 and 0.493, which, while slightly low, may still be tolerable, particularly in multifaceted organizational constructs where high item intercorrelations are difficult to achieve. Interference (AVE = 0.401) emerged as the weakest in terms of convergent validity, aligning with its low CR and suggesting that this construct may be either multidimensional or poorly specified.

Similar patterns emerged in the non-mission group. Support (AVE = 0.687), autonomy (AVE = 0.563), and engagement (AVE = 0.510) satisfied the AVE criterion, confirming good convergent validity. Emotional demands and intensity approached the threshold, with AVE values of 0.470 and 0.486, respectively, reflecting acceptable but not optimal levels of explained variance. Voice again narrowly missed the criterion at 0.496, and both exhaustion and interference fell further behind, with AVE values of 0.424 and 0.360, respectively. These lower values highlight potential concerns in the measurement model for these constructs in the non-mission context and point to the necessity of reviewing item quality or considering alternative modelling strategies.

Overall, the reliability and validity indices suggest that the measurement model is largely adequate, especially for constructs like autonomy, voice, support, and engagement. Constructs such as interference and exhaustion reveal measurement weaknesses that should be acknowledged when interpreting the structural relationships. Importantly, the consistency of measurement across mission and non-mission groups provides encouraging evidence for the stability of the constructs. For reasons of complementarity, no modifications were introduced at this stage to preserve the structural alignment across the two groups. This decision ensured that all models remained theoretically comparable, maintaining consistency in the conceptual framing across groups.

Consequently, despite some constructs showing marginal deficiencies in their reliability and convergent validity indicators, the overall reliability test was considered satisfied for the vast majority of the cases examined. This approach allowed for a more coherent cross-contextual interpretation while accepting minor measurement trade-offs in favour of theoretical consistency and comparative validity.

5.3.2.1 Cronbach's Alpha

Although some constructs in this study (e.g., Work-Life Interference, $\alpha = .518$; Emotional Demands, $\alpha = .512$) demonstrated Cronbach's alpha values below the commonly accepted threshold of .70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), these items were retained due to both theoretical and practical considerations. First, Cronbach's alpha is influenced by the number of items in a scale; shorter scales (e.g., 2-item measures) often yield lower alpha values despite meaningful inter-item correlations (Cortina, 1993). The items in question were carefully developed based on prior validated instruments and are essential for preserving the theoretical integrity of the constructs being measured (DeVellis, 2017; EUROFOUND, 2021).

To further assess the internal consistency of the scales used in this study, an inter-item correlation analysis was conducted. While Cronbach's alpha provides an overall estimate of reliability, it is influenced by the number of items in a scale and assumes tau-equivalence (Dunn, Baguley, and Brunsden, 2014). Therefore, examining the average inter-item correlation offers a more nuanced understanding of how well items relate to one another within each construct. Table 6-7 shows that all items exhibit correlations exceeds the recommended threshold of < 0.3 , suggesting that the indicators collectively measure a common underlying construct (Hair et al., 2018). All inter item correlations were on acceptable levels.

Table 5-6 Cronbach's Alpha

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Interitem Correlation
Engagement	.673	.406
Exhaustion	.619	.448
Voice	.736	.483
Social Support	.761	.617
Autonomy	.770	.528
Work Intensity	.661	.494
Work-Life Interference	.518	.352
Emotional Demands	.512	.352

5.3.3 Discriminant Validity

The assessment of discriminant validity was conducted using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, a widely recognised standard in structural equation modelling. According to this criterion, a construct demonstrates adequate discriminant validity if the square root of its Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeds the highest correlation it shares with any other construct. This ensures that each construct is empirically distinct and captures a unique aspect of the theoretical model.

In both the mission and non-mission groups, all constructs satisfied the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Specifically, the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than any of its inter-construct correlations. For instance, in the mission group, the square root of AVE for support was 0.829, which exceeded its highest observed correlation of 0.539 with voice. Similarly, autonomy, voice, engagement, emotional demands, intensity, and exhaustion all displayed square roots of AVE higher than their respective maximum correlations with other constructs. This pattern was consistently observed in the non-mission group as well, where each construct maintained a distinct identity in relation to the others.

These results confirm that the constructs used in the model exhibit strong discriminant validity across both contexts. This is a critical finding, as it

reinforces the conceptual clarity and empirical robustness of the measurement framework, ensuring that the constructs not only measure what they are intended to measure but also do so without significant overlap.

5.4 Hypothesis Testing

5.4.1 Linear Regression

To test whether mission-oriented roles are associated with distinct work outcomes, two simple linear regression analyses were conducted examining the influence of role orientation on engagement and exhaustion. Role orientation was coded as a binary predictor (1 = mission-oriented, 0 = non-mission-oriented), allowing direct comparison of work experiences across these occupational contexts.

Hypothesis 1a posited that employees in mission-oriented roles would report higher levels of work engagement than their counterparts in non-mission-oriented roles. The results revealed a statistically significant positive effect of mission-oriented role status on engagement ($B = 0.148$, $SE = 0.016$, $\beta = 0.104$, $t = 9.35$, $p < .001$). This finding supports H1a and indicates that mission-oriented employees tend to experience higher engagement in their work.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b) proposed that employees in mission-oriented roles would also exhibit higher levels of exhaustion than those in non-mission-oriented roles. The results showed a significant positive relationship between mission role orientation and exhaustion ($B = 0.316$, $SE = 0.021$, $\beta = 0.164$, $t = 14.91$, $p < .001$) supporting the hypothesis that employees in mission-oriented roles will show more exhaustion than non-mission roles.

Table 5-7 Linear Regression Table

Dependent Variable	Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	p-value
Engagement	Mission oriented	0.148	0.016	0.104	< .001
Exhaustion	Mission oriented	0.316	0.021	0.164	< .001

5.4.2 SEM Result for Each Roles

To examine the hypothesised relationships and enable a comparison between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented groups, it is essential to establish measurement invariance. Using AMOS, the full measurement model was tested, and comparisons were made across the three levels of invariance. Configural invariance assesses whether the constructs exhibit the same underlying factor structure across the two organisational types; in this model, all loadings and variances are allowed to vary (Hair et al., 2018). Metric invariance involves constraining the factor loadings to be equal across groups, while scalar invariance further constrains both the factor loadings and intercepts to equality. Measurement invariance is typically assessed by comparing the configural model with the metric model, and the scalar model with the metric model, using changes in chi-square values and fit indices such as RMSEA, TLI, and CFI. However, the chi-square difference test is highly sensitive to sample size and often leads to the rejection of measurement invariance, particularly in large samples (Chen, 2007). As a result, greater emphasis is placed on evaluating changes in fit indices. A change of $\geq -.010$ in CFI, alongside a change of $\geq .015$ in RMSEA between the less and more constrained models, is considered evidence of non-invariance (Chen, 2007).

The model fit summary provides a comprehensive assessment of invariance testing across increasingly constrained models in AMOS, comparing mission and non-mission-oriented organisations. The evaluation focuses on the extent to which constraints on structural paths, covariances, and residuals influence overall model fit. Given the sensitivity of chi-square statistics to sample size in this case 78.066 (df = 2), greater emphasis is placed on fit indices such as RMSEA, CFI, and TLI. Table 6-7 presents the result of the multigroup model fit analysis. The configural model (unconstrained) demonstrates a strong baseline fit across groups, with RMSEA = .069, CFI = .992, and TLI = .766. When equality constraints are imposed on factor loadings in the metric model, model fit remains robust (RMSEA = .029, CFI = .990, TLI = .958), supporting metric invariance. The scalar model, which constrains both factor loadings and

intercepts, also shows good fit (RMSEA = .031, CFI = .970, TLI = .952), with changes in fit indices within recommended thresholds ($\Delta\text{CFI} \leq .01$; $\Delta\text{RMSEA} \leq .015$), indicating scalar invariance. The strict model, which further constrains residual variances, continues to exhibit acceptable fit (RMSEA = .033, CFI = .965, TLI = .947), suggesting that strict invariance is present across the two groups.

Table 5-8 Measurement Invariance Fit Indices

Model	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	PCLOSE
Configural (Unconstrained)	78.066	2	39.033	0.069	0.992	0.766	0.007
Metric (Structural Weights)	109.101	14	7.793	0.029	0.99	0.958	1.0
Scalar (Structural Covariances)	308.75	35	8.821	0.031	0.97	0.952	1.0
Strict (Structural Residuals)	353.556	37	9.556	0.033	0.965	0.947	1.0

*** $p \leq .001$. CMIN = chi-square statistic; DF = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; PCLOSE = probability of close fit. All models are significant at $p \leq .001$.

Next, all structural path coefficients were constrained to be equal across both groups. This fully constrained model resulted in a chi-square value of 109.101 (df = 14), with RMSEA improving to .029 and CFI remaining high at .990.

However, the chi-square difference test relative to the unconstrained model yielded $\Delta\chi^2 = 31.035$ with $\Delta\text{df} = 12$, $p = .002$, indicating a significant deterioration in model fit and suggesting that not all path coefficients could be assumed equal across groups.

To pinpoint the source of this non-invariance, each structural path was tested individually for equality using nested model comparisons. These tests revealed that the majority of paths did not produce significant changes in model fit when constrained implying invariance across role types. The only exceptions were the paths from social support to engagement ($\chi^2 = 4.161$, df = 1, $p = .041$) and from

emotional demands to exhaustion ($\chi^2 = 14.925$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), both of which exhibited statistically significant chi-square differences, suggesting non-invariance.

Based on these findings, a partial invariance model was specified in which the non-invariant paths (social support to engagement and emotional demands to exhaustion) were freely estimated across groups, while all other paths were constrained to be equal. Table 6-8 shows that the model demonstrated improved overall fit with a chi-square of 78.938 ($df = 3$), RMSEA of .056, CFI of .992, TLI of .844, PCLOSE of .157, and a reduced AIC of 216.938. The improvement in model fit, alongside the non-significant chi-square difference from the unconstrained model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 0.872$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p > .05$), confirmed that this partial invariance model provided a statistically robust and parsimonious representation of the data. By allowing the two identified paths to vary across groups, the model adequately accounted for cross-role differences without imposing unnecessary constraints on invariant relationships.

Table 5-9 Path-Specific Invariance Test Results Compared to Unconstrained Model

Constraint/Path	Constrained Model χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	P-value	Invariance
aut2eng (Autonomy → Engagement)	78.074	3	0.008	1	.929	Yes
voc2eng (Voice → Engagement)	78.938	3	0.871	1	.351	Yes
wli2exh (Work-life interference → Exhaustion)	78.251	3	0.185	1	.667	Yes
int2exh (Work Intensity → Exhaustion)	78.235	3	0.169	1	.681	Yes
aut2exh (Autonomy → Exhaustion)	79.554	3	1.488	1	.223	Yes
voc2exh (Voice → Exhaustion)	78.751	3	0.685	1	.408	Yes
soc2exh (Social support → Exhaustion)	78.460	3	0.394	1	.530	Yes
wli2eng (Work-life interference → Engagement)	78.626	3	0.559	1	.454	Yes

int2eng (Work intensity → Engagement)	78.706	3	0.639	1	.424	Yes
emo2eng (Emotional demands → Engagement)	81.232	3	3.166	1	.075	Yes
soc2eng (Social support → Engagement)	82.228	3	4.161	1	.041	No
emo2exh (Emotional demands → Exhaustion)	92.991	3	14.925	1	.000	No

Note. $\Delta\chi^2$ and Δdf represent the change in chi-square and degrees of freedom between the unconstrained and constrained models for each path. A p-value $\leq .05$ indicates a statistically significant difference in path estimates between groups, suggesting non-invariance (i.e., the relationship differs across groups). "Yes" under Invariance indicates that constraining the path did not significantly worsen model fit (i.e., the path is invariant across groups); "No" indicates significant group differences in that structural path.

Table 5-10 Job Characteristics, Work Engagement, Exhaustion Across Roles

Direct effect	β Mission-oriented roles	β Non-mission-oriented roles	Z^{diff}
Engagement			
Autonomy → Engagement	.069***	.071***	0.09
Voice → Engagement	.210***	.233***	0.93
Support → Engagement	.188***	.141***	2.08
Work-life interference → Engagement	-.107***	-.123***	0.73
Work intensity → Engagement	.020	.003	0.80
Emotional demands → Engagement	.043	.001	1.80
Exhaustion			
Autonomy → Exhaustion	-.042	-.065***	1.25
Voice → Exhaustion	-.068***	-.086***	0.85
Support → Exhaustion	-.078***	-.091***	0.63
Work-life interference → Exhaustion	.403***	.395***	0.42
Work intensity → Exhaustion	.162***	.154***	0.42
Emotional demands → Exhaustion	.237***	.159***	3.80
R^2 Engagement	.16	.11	
R^2 Exhaustion	.37	.33	
TLI	.954	.951	
CFI	.968	.965	
RMSEA	.036	.036	

Note. Z^{diff} is calculated with the formula: $Z = (b_1 - b_2) / \sqrt{(SE_1^2 + SE_2^2)}$. If Z^{diff} is equal to or higher than 1.96, the difference is significant. TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error approximation * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

Hypothesis 2a proposes that emotional demands will be positively related to work engagement for employees in mission-oriented roles but negatively related to work engagement for employees in non-mission-oriented roles. Emotional demands were positively but non-significantly related to engagement in mission-oriented roles ($\beta = .043$), and essentially unrelated in non-mission roles ($\beta = .001$). The between-group difference approached marginal significance ($Z^{diff} 1.80, p < .10$). While the positive association for mission-oriented roles aligns with the hypothesis, the lack of statistical significance in either path limits confirmatory strength. Therefore, the hypothesis is partially supported.

Hypothesis 2b predicted a positive relationship between emotional demands and exhaustion in both groups but a weaker effect in mission-oriented roles. Emotional demands was significantly positively related to exhaustion in both groups (mission: $\beta = .237, p < .001$; non-mission: $\beta = .159, p < .001$). However, the relationship was significantly stronger in mission-oriented roles ($Z^{diff} 3.80, p < .001$), indicating that the strain associated with emotional demands is more pronounced among mission-oriented employees.

Hypotheses 3a posits that work intensity will be positively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles. Consistent with expectations, work intensity was significantly and positively related to exhaustion in both groups (mission: $\beta = .162, p < .001$; non-mission: $\beta = .154, p < .001$); however, the difference was not statistically significant ($Z^{diff} 0.42$), offering partial support for the hypothesis. Hypothesis 3b predicted a negative relationship between work intensity and engagement, stronger for mission-oriented employees. This hypothesis was also not supported: the relationships were non-significant in both groups (mission: $\beta = .020, p > .05$; non-mission: $\beta = .003, p > .05$), with no significant difference between them ($Z^{diff} 0.80$).

Hypotheses 4a highlights that work-life interference will be negatively related to work engagement for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles. There was a significant negative relationship between work-life

interference and engagement in both groups (mission: $\beta = -.107$, $p < .001$; non-mission: $\beta = -.123$, $p < .001$), but the group difference was not significant ($Z^{\text{diff}} = 0.73$). Hypothesis 4b posits that work-life interference will be positively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles. Work-life interference was a strong and significant predictor of exhaustion across both groups (mission: $\beta = .403$, $p < .001$; non-mission: $\beta = .395$, $p < .001$), but the difference was not statistically significant. Thus, while work-life interference contributes to exhaustion, it does so equally across both roles.

In terms of job resources, Hypothesis 5a proposes that autonomy is positively related to work engagement for employees in mission-oriented roles but has a neutral or negative relationship in non-mission-oriented roles. This was partially supported, as autonomy was significantly and positively related to engagement in both groups (mission: $\beta = .069$, $p < .001$; non-mission: $\beta = .071$, $p < .001$), with no difference between groups. Hypothesis 5b predicted that autonomy would be negatively related to exhaustion in both groups, but a neutral or positive relationship with exhaustion for employees in non-mission-oriented roles. In mission-oriented roles, the relationship was not statistically significant ($\beta = -.042$, $p > .05$), while in non-mission-oriented roles, autonomy was significantly negatively associated with exhaustion ($\beta = -.065$, $p < .001$); however, the difference between both groups was not statistically significant. Hypothesis 5b was therefore partially supported.

Hypothesis 6a suggests that social support is positively related to work engagement for employees in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles, but this relationship is stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles. Social support exhibited the hypothesized positive association with engagement across both groups, and the effect was significantly stronger for mission-oriented employees (mission: $\beta = .188$, $p < .001$; non-mission: $\beta = .141$, $p < .001$; $Z^{\text{diff}} = 2.08$, $p < .05$). However, Hypothesis H6b, which posited a stronger negative association between support and exhaustion in mission-oriented roles, was not supported. Although support was significantly negatively associated

with exhaustion in both groups (mission: $\beta = -.078$, $p < .001$; non-mission: $\beta = -.091$, $p < .001$), the difference was not statistically meaningful ($Z^{\text{diff}} = 0.63$).

Hypothesis 7a predicts that voice is positively related to work engagement for employees in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles, but this relationship is stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles. Voice was significantly and positively associated with engagement for both groups (mission: $\beta = .210$, $p < .001$; non-mission: $\beta = .233$, $p < .001$), but no significant difference was observed ($Z^{\text{diff}} = 0.93$) This indicates that perceived voice enhances engagement across all employees, regardless of mission orientation.

Hypothesis 7b suggests that voice is negatively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles. However, this relationship is stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles. Voice was significantly negatively related to exhaustion in both groups (mission: $\beta = -.068$, $p < .001$; non-mission: $\beta = -.086$, $p < .001$), with a non-significant difference between them ($Z^{\text{diff}} = 0.85$).

5.4.3 Interactions Between Job Demands and Job Resources

To test the interactions between job demands and job resources a moderated structural equation modelling (MSEM) analysis was performed. Table 6-10 presents the results of the relationship between the interactions of job demands and resources on exhaustion in mission-oriented roles and non-mission-oriented roles.

Table 5-11 Interaction Effect Of Resources and Demands

Interaction Effect	β Mission-oriented roles	β Non-mission-oriented roles	Zdiff
Exhaustion			
Support $\times$ Intensity	-.012	-.026*	0.79
Voice $\times$ Interference	-.014	.003	1
Autonomy $\times$ Intensity	-.034**	.011	2.89
Support $\times$ Emotional Demands	-.004	-.018	0.73

Note. Zdiff is calculated with the formula: $Z = (b_1 - b_2) / \sqrt{(SE_1^2 + SE_2^2)}$. If Zdiff is equal to or higher than 1.96, the difference is significant.

Hypothesis 8a proposed that the buffering effect of social support on the relationship between work intensity and exhaustion would be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles. Contrary to this expectation, the interaction effect was slightly more pronounced in non-mission-oriented roles ($\beta = -.026, p < .05$) than in mission-oriented roles ($\beta = -.012$), and the difference between these effects was not statistically significant ($Z^{\text{diff}} = 0.79$). These findings suggest that the moderating role of social support in alleviating the effects of work intensity on exhaustion does not differ meaningfully between the two role types. Thus, it was not supported.

Hypothesis 8b posited that social support would buffer the relationship between emotional demands and exhaustion more effectively in mission-oriented roles. The interaction between support and emotional demands was minimal and non-significant in both mission-oriented ($\beta = -.004$) and non-mission-oriented roles ($\beta = -.018$), and the Z-difference between the effects was negligible ($Z^{\text{diff}} = 0.73$). These results do not provide empirical support for the hypothesis. The anticipated moderating influence of social support under conditions of emotional strain appears limited across both role types. Hypothesis 8b was therefore not supported.

The data supported hypothesis 8c. This hypothesis stated that autonomy would buffer the relationship between work intensity and exhaustion in mission-oriented roles but not in non-mission-oriented roles. A significant negative interaction was observed for mission-oriented roles ($\beta = -.034, p < .01$), indicating that autonomy served as a protective factor that attenuated the exhaustion effects of work intensity. For non-mission-oriented roles, the interaction was positive but non-significant ($\beta = .011$), and the difference between groups was statistically significant ($Z^{\text{diff}} = 2.89$). These findings underscore the context-specific value of autonomy in roles that are more complex, value-driven, and mission-focused, supporting this hypothesis.

Finally, Hypothesis H8d predicted that voice would have a stronger buffering effect on the relationship between work-life interference and exhaustion in

mission-oriented roles. the interaction effects were in the expected direction (mission-oriented: $\beta = -.014$; non-mission-oriented: $\beta = .003$) but not statistically significant, and the Z^{diff} (1.00) did not reach conventional thresholds.

5.4.4 Control Variables

The inclusion of control variables in the structural models for both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles yielded several statistically significant effects on engagement and emotional exhaustion. In the mission-oriented model, age group was positively associated with engagement ($\beta = 0.085$, $p < .001$) and was not significantly related to exhaustion. Tenure showed a negative relationship with engagement ($\beta = -0.035$, $p = .021$) and a positive relationship with exhaustion ($\beta = 0.034$, $p = .015$). Gender was positively associated with engagement ($\beta = 0.170$, $p < .001$) and showed no significant relationship with exhaustion. Country had a small but significant negative association with exhaustion ($\beta = -0.004$, $p < .001$) and no association with engagement. Education was not significantly related to engagement ($\beta = -0.032$, $p = .326$).

In the non-mission-oriented model, age group was positively associated with engagement ($\beta = 0.106$, $p < .001$) and not significantly related to exhaustion. Tenure was negatively related to engagement ($\beta = -0.033$, $p = .047$) and positively related to exhaustion ($\beta = 0.035$, $p = .014$). Education showed a negative association with engagement ($\beta = -0.131$, $p < .001$) and was not significantly related to exhaustion. Gender was positively associated with engagement ($\beta = 0.063$, $p = .040$), with no significant effect on exhaustion. Country was not significantly related to engagement ($\beta = -0.001$, $p = .434$) or exhaustion ($\beta = 0.001$, $p = .304$).

Table 5-12 Summary of Hypotheses and Results

	Hypotheses	Result
H1a	Employees in mission-oriented roles will show higher levels of work engagement than employees in non-mission-oriented roles.	Supported
H1b	Employees in mission-oriented roles will show higher levels of exhaustion than employees in non-mission-oriented roles.	Supported
H2a	Emotional demands will be positively related to work engagement for employees in mission-oriented roles but negatively related to work engagement for employees in non-mission-oriented roles.	Partially Supported
H2b:	Emotional demands will be positively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be weaker for employees in mission-oriented roles	Not Supported
H3a	Work intensity will be positively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.	Partially Supported
H3b	Work intensity will be negatively related to work engagement for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.	Not Supported
H4a	Work-life interference will be negatively related to work engagement for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles	Partially Supported
H4b	Work-life interference will be positively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, but the relationship will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles	Partially Supported
H5a	Autonomy is positively related to work engagement for employees in mission-oriented roles but has a neutral or negative relationship in non-mission-oriented roles.	Partially Supported
H5b	Autonomy is negatively related to exhaustion for employees in mission and non-mission-oriented roles but has a neutral or positive relationship with exhaustion for employees in mission-oriented roles.	Partially
H6a	Social support is positively related to work engagement for employees in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles, but this relationship is stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.	Supported
H6b	Social support is negatively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles, but this relationship is stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.	Not Supported
H7a	Voice is positively related to work engagement for employees in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles, but this relationship is stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.	Not Supported
H7b	Voice is negatively related to exhaustion for employees in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles, but this relationship is stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles.	Not Supported
H8a	The buffer effect of social support on the relationship between work intensity and exhaustion will be stronger for employees in mission-oriented roles compared to those in non-mission-oriented roles.	Not Supported
H8b	Social support will moderate the relationship between emotional demands and exhaustion, such that it will significantly buffer this relationship for employees in mission-oriented roles, but not for those in non-mission-oriented roles.	Not Supported
H8c	Autonomy will buffer the relationship between work intensity and exhaustion in mission-oriented roles but not in non-mission-oriented roles.	Supported
H8d	Voice has a stronger buffering effect on work-life interference in mission-oriented roles than in non-mission-oriented roles.	Not Supported

5.5 Summary

This chapter presents the results of the statistical testing of the research hypotheses. The findings indicate that, in this context, both mission- and non-mission-oriented roles within the public sector can interact with job characteristics to influence work engagement and exhaustion. The results obtained from the statistical tests, which are presented in this chapter, will be evaluated in the next chapter in light of previous literature and theory.

6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results from the empirical findings and their theoretical and practical implications. The overall aim of the current study was to examine how the context of heterogeneity of roles (mission-oriented roles and non-mission-oriented roles) within the public sector influences the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement of employees within these roles. Grounded in the JDR theory and contextualised through Johns' (2006) contextual framework, the findings are explored to highlight how job demands and resources operate differently across both roles. The analysis revealed both expected and unexpected patterns, offering new insights into the dynamic interplay between context, role orientation, job characteristics, motivational outcomes and strain. The chapter integrates the findings into a conceptual narrative drawing on the data to explore how contextual differences manifest in patterns of engagement and exhaustion, how specific demands and resources function within distinct role orientations, and how their combinations shape employee experiences within the public sector.

The chapter begins by analysing the differences in work engagement and exhaustion between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles. It then examines how specific job demands emotional demands, work intensity, and work-life interference relate to these outcomes. Next, the role of key job resources, including autonomy, social support, and employee voice, in shaping employee experiences is explained. The final section explains how these resources may moderate the effects of job demands on exhaustion. Each part of the discussion draws on relevant theoretical perspectives and empirical studies and concludes with reflections on the broader implications for theory and organisational practice.

6.2 Contextual Differences in Work Engagement and Exhaustion

This study adopts a contextual approach to understanding the mechanisms underlying work engagement within the public sector, building on longstanding critiques of context-free theorising in engagement research (Fletcher et al, 2020; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Borst et al., 2019; Wittenberg et al., 2023). As outlined in the literature review, the public sector is far from homogeneous (Fletcher et al., 2020; Borst, 2018). Instead, it is composed of multiple occupational subdomains with distinct demands, resources, and normative structures (Borst, 2018; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). This heterogeneity introduces considerable variance in how job characteristics are experienced and in how they influence psychological outcomes at work. The current study addresses this complexity by employing Johns' (2006) framework, which distinguishes between omnibus context (broad sector-wide conditions) and discrete context (role-specific situational features), to conceptualise and measure how different public sector roles affect work engagement and exhaustion.

Consistent with Johns' (2006) proposition about the effect of context on base rates, the findings show that employees in mission-oriented roles reported significantly higher work engagement and higher exhaustion than employees in non-mission-oriented roles. This pattern supports the argument that context, particularly the salience of a role's mission, exerts a powerful influence on employees' psychological experiences (Grant et al., 2007; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018).

Drawing on Johns' (2006, 2017) framework of context, it becomes clear that job roles act as situational boundaries which structure both behavioural expectations and psychological outcomes. In particular, the distinction between mission- and non-mission-oriented roles illustrates how variability in mission orientation and perceived significance of work influences both motivation and strain. Employees in mission-oriented roles such as nurses, teachers, or emergency service personnel are embedded in contexts that place them in direct contact with service

users and often require emotionally charged decision-making (Borst, 2018; Dudau and Brunetto, 2023). The data suggests that these features, which heighten the perceived impact and moral value of their work, also contribute to elevated work engagement. This is consistent with findings from Grant et al. (2007), who demonstrate that task significance and the awareness of one's positive social impact are key drivers of work engagement. In such roles, the work itself becomes a source of intrinsic motivation, providing psychological rewards through the visibility of meaningful outcomes (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Besley and Ghatak, 2005). Engagement in this sense embodies a moral investment in the role (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018). However, the same characteristics that facilitate engagement may simultaneously increase susceptibility to exhaustion (Timms et al, 2012). High-stakes decision-making, intense emotional demands, and the weight of moral responsibility create working conditions that are inherently demanding (Borst, 2020). Employees often encounter competing pressures: the desire to perform at high levels due to the social importance of their role, and the structural limitations imposed by under-resourcing, time constraints, or bureaucratic burden. As previous studies have shown (e.g., Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Bakker et al., 2023), this dynamic can result in a strain-engagement duality wherein employees remain highly dedicated yet simultaneously experience emotional depletion. Notably, the positive association between engagement and exhaustion supports prior arguments by Sonnentag (2005) and Timms et al. (2012), who observed that dedication and fatigue are not mutually exclusive. Employees in mission-oriented roles may continue to invest energy and commitment even when they are no longer able to recover adequately, particularly when the social value of their work is emphasised. This suggests that the psychological mechanisms behind engagement in such roles may involve internalised expectations of self-sacrifice, amplified by professional norms and public scrutiny. The findings also echo earlier research indicating that presenteeism is more common in caring professions due to relational obligations and the difficulty of detaching from the needs of service users (Johns, 2010).

Conversely, employees in non-mission-oriented roles, often in administrative, regulatory, or back-office positions, operate in contexts with different psychological and structural demands (Grant et al., 2007; Grant, 2008). As discussed in the literature, these roles tend to involve more procedural tasks, fewer emotionally intense interactions, and less immediate visibility of one's social contribution (Bright, 2011). While these roles still operate under the broader pressures of the public sector, including budget constraints, performance monitoring, and political accountability, they may offer more psychological distance from the emotional consequences of service delivery (Brewster and Cerdin, 2018). This may explain the lower levels of both engagement and exhaustion observed among these employees. Their work may lack the affective intensity associated with direct service provision, resulting in less intrinsic motivation, but also affording greater opportunities for psychological detachment and recovery (Bakker and de Vries, 2021), hence the lower levels of exhaustion reported in the data.

6.3 Context as a Moderator of Job Characteristics and Work Engagement

Grounded in the JDR theory and guided by Johns' (2006, 2017) emphasis on situational context, the results reveal both expected and unexpected patterns. The JDR theory distinguishes between two main psychological processes: the health impairment pathway, where demands lead to strain, and the motivational pathway, where resources foster engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2023). It also assumes that these processes are relatively stable across occupational contexts. However, the current data shows that this is not the case; the present findings show that these processes are not uniform but instead partially shaped by mission orientation.

Emotional demands were more strongly linked to exhaustion in mission-oriented roles, while their connection to engagement was positive but not statistically significant. Consistent with recent studies, which showed a positive relationship between emotional demands and engagement (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018;

Jiang et al., 2020; Borst and Knies, 2023), the findings suggest that while emotional demands may be perceived as challenge demands in mission roles due to their alignment with the organisation's mission, their role as hindrance demands outweighs their function as challenge demands. Indeed, authors have suggested that some demands may be challenging or hindering depending on the occupational roles they are associated with (Crawford et al., 2010). However, in the current data, it appears they can have both effects. This aligns with previous research indicating demands can be both challenging and hindering simultaneously (Searle and Auton, 2015; Webster et al., 2011). In line with Johns (2006), the context of a situation influences the prominence of specific demands and can potentially reverse the direction of psychological relationships. Although emotional demands are regarded as an inherent feature of mission-oriented work, the ongoing emotional toll may eventually diminish engagement, especially if these demands exceed coping mechanisms. Over time, mission-driven employees might feel drained, leading to exhaustion (Dudau and Brunetto, 2020).

On the other hand, an unexpected result was the consistent pattern of work intensity across role types. Work intensity was associated with greater exhaustion regardless of mission orientation, and no significant moderation effect was observed. This suggests that work intensity exerts a broadly similar strain across public sector roles, cutting across role categories (Bryson and White, 2021). While some literature assumes that mission-driven roles involve distinctive time-based pressures (Brewster and Cerdin, 2018; Borst, 2018), the present data indicate that such pressures are now widespread. One possible explanation is the normalisation of intensive work across the public sector, driven by performance targets, austerity measures, and growing accountability demands (Borst et al. 2020; Zahari and Kaliannan, 2023). In this context, work intensity appears less as a differentiating factor and more as a structural condition of omnibus public sector context. In Johns' (2006) terms, these findings highlight strong contextual constraints that standardise employee experiences, limiting the scope of role-based variation.

A similar levelling pattern emerged for work-life interference. Although previous work argued that emotionally invested mission-oriented practitioners experience stronger work-life spillover due to blurred boundaries (Innstrand, 2016; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018), the findings indicate practically identical effects on engagement and exhaustion across role types. However, the comparable strength of effects across both role types indicates that this form of strain is no longer limited to roles with high personal commitment. Instead, it may now reflect broader systemic changes in the public sector overall. One reason for this could be the broader structural and cultural shifts that have transformed public sector work over the past decade (Shan et al., 2022). The digitisation of services, increased performance monitoring, and extensive managerial reforms have fostered a growing expectation that employees remain constantly reachable. These changes have often been framed as modernisation or efficiency improvements, but they have also introduced new pressures that extend beyond the physical workplace (Shan et al., 2022). For many public sector workers, responding to emails after hours, managing online systems from home, or being available for virtual meetings has become part of routine work (EUROFOUND, 2021). This makes it harder to keep clear boundaries between work and personal life, even for those in roles not typically linked with high mission engagement.

This trend has been further intensified by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many public organisations adopted remote or hybrid working arrangements at scale for the first time (Kniffin et al 2021). According to Johns (2006), Temporal aspects also matter: whether the data is gathered during periods of stability or crisis, early or late in an organisational change process, or at a particular historical juncture, all influence the meaning and consequences of action.

While these changes offered flexibility, they also contributed to the erosion of temporal and spatial boundaries around work. For many employees, the shift to working from home meant that the workplace became embedded in the home environment, blurring distinctions between professional responsibilities and private time (Delanoeije et al., 2019). Given that the data for this study was

collected during the pandemic period (EUROFOUND, 2021), these conditions likely shaped the way respondents experienced work-life interference. What might have previously been a more role-specific experience may now have become a shared reality across much of the public sector. Moreover, these findings point to a more profound shift in the culture of public service. The ideal of the “always available” employee, shaped by both digital connectivity and increasing organisational demands, may be replacing earlier norms that respected more precise work-life boundaries (Kniffin et al, 2021). In this sense, work-life interference may be less about individual role orientation and more about the broader institutional climate in which public sector employees now operate. The pressures of delivering more with fewer resources, responding to rising citizen expectations, and complying with accountability measures all contribute to a working environment where time is stretched, and boundaries are porous.

This suggests that the emotional and logistical challenges associated with work-life interference are no longer limited to those who see their work as mission driven. They are increasingly part of the everyday experience of public sector employment. The lack of significant differences across role types in this study may thus reflect a levelling effect, where broader structural factors have made work-life interference a common feature of the sector as a whole. These findings underscore the importance of examining not just the demands specific to individual roles, but also the wider organisational and societal conditions that shape how work is organised and experienced.

In terms of the moderating role of context in the relationship between resources and engagement, the multigroup analysis showed that although the path from social support to engagement was significant for employees in non-mission-oriented roles, it was much more significant for employees in mission-oriented roles. This is consistent with previous studies that highlight the critical role of relational resources in sustaining motivation and well-being in mission-oriented roles (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2018; Bakker et al., 2007). The shared mission among these employees appears to amplify the benefits of supportive

relationships with colleagues and supervisors, enhancing resilience and commitment to the work. Johns' (2006) contextual framework complements this view by positing that the meaning and effects of job characteristics are contingent upon the broader context in which work occurs. In mission-oriented roles, the context is infused with collective purpose, often linked to societal contribution, which can intensify the significance of relational resources. In such settings, social support is not merely instrumental it becomes emotionally and symbolically potent, reinforcing shared goals, values, and resilience in the face of pressure. In line with Bakker et al., (2007) who found that engagement in their sample of teachers increased when they received support particular when facing difficult situations. This interpretation is particularly salient in the public sector, where mission-oriented roles are frequently tied to service delivery, care, and governance. Here, emotional labour and value congruence are embedded in the role design, making interpersonal relationships a central conduit for sustaining engagement.

In contrast, employees in non-mission-oriented roles still benefit from social support, but the meaning of that support may be more transactional. Rather than fuelling intrinsic motivation or affirming identity, it likely assists in managing workload or navigating procedural demands. This more instrumental usage of support is less tightly bound to a shared sense of mission and therefore less influential in energising engagement. This contextual distinction speaks to the public sector's diverse occupational landscape, where the variability in mission salience influences how resources are experienced. Conversely the negative relationship between social support and exhaustion was significantly negative aligning with the JDR theory's preposition (Bakker and Demerouti, 2023). The lack of a significant difference in this path suggests that the protective function of support against burnout is relatively stable across occupational contexts, regardless of mission centrality.

Autonomy was significantly and positively associated with work engagement across both mission and non-mission roles, with no significant difference between the groups. This suggests that autonomy acts as a valuable resource for public

employees broadly, regardless of the degree to which their roles are directly linked to organisational mission or societal purpose. While the literature emphasises the particular importance of autonomy for mission-driven employees who seek to exercise discretion aligned with intrinsic motivation (Borst, 2018; Tummers et al., 2016), these findings indicate that even employees in more routine or structured roles benefit meaningfully from having control over their work processes. This may reflect a growing trend in public sector work towards valuing employee agency and flexibility, possibly amplified by the recent shift to hybrid and remote working arrangements that require individuals to manage their own schedules and methods more independently. With greater responsibility for structuring their own work, even those in traditionally low-autonomy roles may now find that control over pace, timing, and methods of execution has become more integral to their engagement. In the JDR theory autonomy functions as a key job resource that promotes work engagement by supporting psychological needs for competence and self-determination (Bakker and Demerouti, 2023). Its impact appears consistent across contexts, implying that control over one's work is universally empowering even when the content or perceived significance of the work varies. The motivational function of autonomy, therefore, may be less contingent on the mission orientation and more rooted in its ability to enhance employees' sense of ownership, efficacy, and agency. This resonates with the findings of Tummers et al., (2016) which showed that autonomy had a positive relationship with engagement of public servants because they were at liberty to act based on their interests and goals

According to Johns' (2006) contextual framework, the meaning and impact of work characteristics depend on the situational and organisational setting. That autonomy retains its positive association with engagement across differing role types suggests that the public sector context itself may play a shaping role. Bureaucratic environments are often characterised by rigid hierarchies and standardised procedures; in such settings, even modest degrees of autonomy might represent a significant departure from normatively constrained work patterns, thereby exerting a disproportionately positive influence on motivation

and satisfaction (Zahari and Kaliannan, 2023). Rather than being a context-specific resource, autonomy in the public sector may thus represent a form of functional empowerment a shift in work design that resonates across role boundaries due to historically limited discretion.

On the other hand, autonomy also showed a significant negative relationship with exhaustion, though the effect was more pronounced for non-mission-oriented roles. This suggests that in addition to its motivational function, autonomy may serve as a protective factor against strain, particularly for those whose roles are less infused with intrinsic meaning. For these employees, discretion over how tasks are carried out may help mitigate the fatigue that arises from repetitive, bureaucratic, or externally imposed demands. When autonomy is lacking in such contexts, employees may feel trapped in mechanistic routines, increasing their vulnerability to emotional depletion. In contrast, for mission-oriented employees who may already find personal meaning and energy in their work, the role of autonomy in alleviating exhaustion may be less pronounced (Borst, 2018). Their motivation is likely maintained by a strong alignment with mission values, rather than a need for control over how tasks are executed. While autonomy still contributes to their engagement, it may not be the primary factor in reducing strain. This divergence in function between motivating and buffering highlights the importance of context in understanding how job resources operate. Within the varied and evolving landscape of the public sector, autonomy appears to influence employees differently, depending on the inherent purpose, structure, and demands of their roles.

In terms of voice the findings demonstrate that having the opportunity to express ideas and influence organisational decisions positively relates to engagement in both mission and non-mission-oriented roles with no significant difference between groups. This challenges the expectation that voice would be more strongly linked to engagement for mission-oriented employees (Rees et al., 2013; Holland et al., 2016). The data suggest that feeling heard and valued is a universally important motivator in the public sector, regardless of the role's mission orientation. Instead, the results indicate that voice functions as a broadly

salient resource within the public sector irrespective of an employee's proximity to the organisational mission. This may reflect a more general desire among public servants to feel respected and involved in shaping the workplace, which is consistent with findings from self-determination theory that emphasise the universal psychological need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2000). The consistent positive association between voice and engagement across both groups also reinforces core propositions within the JDR theory, which posits that access to key resources enhances motivation and work-related well-being (Bakker and Demerouti, 2023). Voice, by enabling participation, recognition, and a sense of influence appears to meet these resource-based conditions in both types of roles. This is particularly relevant in the public sector, where bureaucratic constraints and hierarchical decision-making structures can otherwise leave employees feeling disconnected from organisational direction (Kampen, Van de Walle, and Bouckaert, 2006).

Similarly, voice was negatively related to exhaustion in both groups again without significant group differences. This indicates that the opportunity to participate and influence may help employees manage stress and prevent exhaustion across different job types, reinforcing voice as a critical resource in diverse public sector environments.

Taken together, these findings underline the importance of context in understanding the effects of job characteristics. While some patterns reflect broader structural changes affecting all public workers, others remain sensitive to whether employees see their roles as part of a larger mission. This suggests that efforts to support engagement and well-being in the public sector should not only focus on individual job design but also on the wider organisational and cultural environment in which employees operate.

6.4 The Role of Job Resources in Buffering Strain

The buffering hypothesis of the JDR theory posits that job resources can mitigate the adverse effects of job demands on employee strain and exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). This proposition assumes

that the presence of adequate job resources such as social support, autonomy, and employee voice can interrupt the health impairment process triggered by high job demands. The current study tested this assumption across mission- and non-mission-oriented roles within the public sector, examining whether the strength of these buffering effects is context-dependent. As Johns (2006) argues, context both situational and institutional exerts a significant influence on behaviour, shaping how individuals experience and respond to work-related stressors. In public sector settings, where structural rigidity, resource constraints, and political oversight are prevalent (Esteve et al., 2017; Borst et al., 2019), the effectiveness of resources as buffers may vary considerably depending on the nature of the role and its alignment with intrinsic goals, public service motivation, or bureaucratic imperatives.

Surprisingly, the findings revealed that social support did not significantly buffer the relationship between emotional demands and exhaustion across either mission- or non-mission-oriented roles, nor did it moderate the impact of work intensity in the expected direction. While previous research has positioned social support particularly from supervisors and colleagues as one of the most robust job resources for alleviating strain (Bakker et al., 2005; Demerouti and Bakker, 2023), its limited effect in this context raises important questions. One explanation is that the inherently emotional and value-laden nature of mission-oriented roles (e.g., healthcare, social work) introduces complexities that interpersonal support alone cannot resolve. In such roles, employees may experience deep emotional labour, moral stress, and persistent role conflict, which require more systemic or structural interventions beyond relational support (Borst and Knies, 2017; Eldor, 2018). In contrast, in non-mission-oriented roles typically more routinised and task-driven the same support may be more effective in relieving operational bottlenecks or assisting with workload management, thus producing a modest buffering effect.

Autonomy, in contrast, showed a significant buffering effect on the relationship between work intensity and exhaustion in mission-oriented roles. This supports the theoretical proposition that autonomy enables self-regulation and decision-

making flexibility, critical in environments marked by unpredictability and emotionally demanding interactions (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). In public sector contexts, especially in mission-oriented roles, employees often navigate conflicting expectations and intense demands under conditions of resource scarcity (Fletcher et al., 2020). Autonomy offers a psychological and functional means to reframe or reprioritise work tasks, contributing to a sense of control and competence (Demerouti et al., 2007; Dudau and Brunetto, 2023). This finding supports Johns' (2006) assertion that the meaning and utility of job resources are contextually situated; autonomy in mission-oriented roles is not merely a preference but a necessity for task execution and emotional resilience. Conversely, in non-mission-oriented roles, which are more tightly constrained by procedural standardisation and bureaucratic oversight, autonomy tends to be symbolic or limited in scope, reducing its practical buffering potential (Grant, 2007; Borst, 2018). The presence of job autonomy in such roles may not translate into genuine discretion or impact, thus limiting its effectiveness in mitigating exhaustion.

Employee voice did not significantly moderate the relationship between work-life interference and exhaustion. In mission-oriented roles, employee voice may be more meaningful due to the high personal and emotional investment employees make in their work. The ability to express concerns, suggest improvements, and seek accommodations may function as a vital mechanism for managing role overload and psychological strain (Sherf et al., 2021; Lee, 2023). However, in the public sector, formal voice mechanisms may be constrained by hierarchical structures, risk-averse cultures, or limited responsiveness to employee feedback (Holland et al., 2016; Dudau and Brunetto, 2022). The absence of a significant interaction effect could reflect these contextual limitations, where structural barriers inhibit the translation of voice into tangible change, thereby reducing its buffering capacity. In non-mission-oriented roles, where emotional labour and schedule unpredictability are less salient, voice may be perceived more as a procedural formality than an empowering resource, further explaining its limited statistical impact.

6.5 Contributions

This thesis advances understanding of how contextual factors shape the relationship between job characteristics and key work outcomes, specifically, work engagement and exhaustion, by integrating Johns' (2006) contextual framework with the JDR theory. While research on work engagement has expanded significantly over the past two decades, the influence of context particularly within varied job roles in public sector remains underexplored (Fletcher et al., 2020; Borst, 2018). This study addresses this gap by empirically demonstrating that the effect of job demands and resources are not experienced uniformly across occupational roles. Instead, these relationships are dependent on the contextual features of those roles, including their orientation toward the organisation's mission.

By doing so, this research contributes to the growing body of literature examining work engagement in context, particularly within public sector settings (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2020; Borst, 2018; Bauwens et al., 2021; Farndale et al., 2022). It provides empirical support for the argument that the JDR theory, while widely applied, may oversimplify the nature of job demands and resources by assuming uniform effects across different work environments. This thesis demonstrates that such assumptions overlook the critical role of occupational context, as engagement and exhaustion are moderated by how demands and resources are perceived and enacted within specific role settings.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the advancement of the JDR theory by showing that its two central mechanisms the motivational and health-impairment processes are moderated by role orientation. Drawing on Johns' (2006, 2017) work, the thesis identifies role orientation as a key contextual moderator that influences how employees interpret and respond to job characteristics. The findings reveal that emotional demands can act both as challenge and hindrance demands within mission-oriented roles, depending on context, thereby supporting arguments to reconceptualise demands as context-dependent rather than inherently positive or negative (Crawford et al., 2010;

Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). Likewise, the function and salience of job resources such as social support vary meaningfully across different role types, reinforcing the idea that resource effects are not universally applicable but contingent upon contextual factors such as mission alignment and task characteristics.

Next this study portrays roles as an important contextual factor in relation to work engagement. For example, demarcating role orientations, specifically differentiating between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented, revealed systematic differences that have largely gone unnoticed within the public sector work engagement literature. These differences, which might have remained obscured in more aggregated analyses, highlight how role-based distinctions structure the psychological meaning of work, influencing not only engagement levels but also the pathways through which engagement is fostered or undermined. This aligns with Johns' (2006) proposition that context, when systematically incorporated, enhances both theoretical precision and empirical clarity.

Methodologically, the study offers a significant contribution by employing a multigroup analysis to explore variations across distinct public sector roles. Rather than treating the public workforce as a homogenous population, it adopts a theoretically informed role classification distinguishing mission-oriented from non-mission-oriented roles which allows for more refined insights into how job characteristics operate across contexts. This approach serves as a model for future research seeking to embed contextual sensitivity into quantitative investigations of work engagement, strain, and well-being.

Empirically, the study provides insights into how specific job demands (e.g., emotional demands, work intensity, work–life interference) and resources (e.g., social support, autonomy, employee voice) influence work engagement and exhaustion across the public sector. For example, emotional demands were found to be particularly draining in mission-oriented roles, while social support proved to be an especially salient resource in fostering engagement in mission-oriented roles. Interestingly, some job demands, such as work intensity and

work–life interference and resources, such as autonomy and voice, exerted similar effects across both role types, suggesting that certain structural pressures may transcend role distinctions and reflect broader systemic challenges and structure within the public sector. A key contribution of this thesis to the public sector work engagement research is the investigation of voice as a resource in the public sector. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first empirical study to explicitly examine the relationship between employee voice and work engagement across distinct role orientations within the public sector. While previous research has addressed the importance of voice as a resource, its relevance has been underrepresented within the public sector context. The results demonstrate that the opportunity to express opinions, influence organisational decisions, and feel heard is equally important across both mission- and non-mission-oriented roles. This suggests that employee voice functions as a universally valued job resource, transcending occupational purpose or proximity to public service mission. In doing so, the study advances theoretical understanding of voice as a key motivator in the JDR theory (Bakker and Demerouti, 2023).

Together, these findings offer a more contextually grounded account of how job demands and resources shape employee outcomes. They demonstrate that public sector employees do not respond to workplace conditions in isolation but interpret them through the lens of their role’s purpose, expectations, and constraints. As such, this thesis not only refines theoretical models but also informs more targeted and effective organisational practices aimed at supporting engagement and well-being in diverse public sector environments.

6.6 Implication for Practice

This research holds several implications for practice within the public sector. It provides strong evidence that roles are not neutral vessels but act as powerful contextual filters that shape how employees experience job demands and resources. As such, engagement interventions should not be uniformly applied across all roles. Public sector organisations should differentiate between

mission-oriented (e.g., teachers, healthcare workers, social workers) and non-mission-oriented roles (e.g., administrative staff, IT personnel, finance officers) when designing well-being strategies. For example, mission-oriented roles may benefit more from practices that affirm intrinsic motivation and emotional support, while non-mission roles may respond better to increased autonomy and streamlined procedures.

This implies the need for role-differentiated HR policies, job design, and leadership development practices. Managers must be trained to recognise the different emotional, cognitive, and motivational profiles associated with each role and adapt their leadership and resource allocation accordingly.

The study reveals that demands such as emotional labour are not universally detrimental, especially in mission-driven roles where emotional connection to the work may simultaneously energise and exhaust. This challenges traditional approaches that seek to eliminate or minimise all job demands. Instead, public sector organisations should focus on managing rather than eliminating emotional demands, providing emotional support resources (e.g., supervision, counselling, reflective practice spaces) that allow employees to process and integrate these experiences without burnout.

HR practitioners and line managers must be trained to recognise the challenge–hindrance duality of demands and be equipped to support employees in navigating them, particularly in emotionally intense professions.

One of the most significant practical implications of this study is the universal importance of employee voice in driving engagement across both mission- and non-mission-oriented roles. Regardless of occupational identity or proximity to the organisational mission, employees are more engaged when they feel heard, respected, and involved in decision-making processes.

Given the bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of many public sector organisations, this finding should prompt a re-examination of communication structures and participatory mechanisms. Managers should be encouraged and

incentivised to create inclusive forums where employees can express their ideas and concerns, contribute to problem-solving, and influence policy or operational decisions. Doing so not only boosts engagement but also strengthens organisational trust and psychological safety. Incorporating voice mechanisms such as staff councils, feedback loops, anonymous suggestion systems, and participatory planning into routine operations can serve as a low-cost, high-impact strategy to enhance engagement and morale across the workforce.

Using role orientation as a contextual differentiator demonstrates the value of including theoretically grounded context markers into organisational operations. Rather than relying solely on generic engagement surveys, public sector employers should incorporate role-specific analysis into their workforce planning, stress audits, and engagement metrics. This may include segmented reporting (e.g., comparing engagement by role type), tailoring interventions based on role profiles, and developing dashboards that can flag risk patterns (e.g., emotional exhaustion in mission-critical roles). Doing so will enable public sector organisations to move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches and instead adopt data-driven, context-aware strategies that align more closely with the lived realities of their diverse workforce.

6.7 Limitations and Areas for Further Research

While this study offers important insights into how role orientation and job characteristics shape work engagement and exhaustion in the public sector, several limitations should be acknowledged, which point to valuable directions for future research.

One of the main limitations is the cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inference. Although the study's hypotheses are based on solid theoretical frameworks, such as the JDR theory, the data offer only a snapshot in time. For example, more engaged employees may perceive greater access to resources like voice, rather than the other way around. Additionally, some effects, especially those related to long-term demands like emotional demands, may

develop over time and are therefore likely underestimated in a single-time-point study (O'Driscoll and Brough, 2010). Longitudinal research is necessary to understand better how demands, resources, and engagement outcomes interact and change over time.

A second limitation relates to the reliance on secondary, self-report data. While large-scale survey data enabled analysis across a broad and diverse sample, the measurement of some key constructs (e.g., engagement and exhaustion) was restricted to two and three-item indicators. Although these are common in organisational studies and have demonstrated acceptable validity (De Cuyper et al., 2010), they may not fully capture the complexity of these constructs. Future studies could employ validated multi-item scales, such as the complete Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) or the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), to capture greater conceptual depth. In addition, integrating qualitative methods or longitudinal designs would provide richer insights into how engagement and exhaustion unfold over time and how contextual and role-specific factors shape them.

The study also simplifies the complexity of occupational roles by grouping them into binary categories of mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented. While this was analytically useful for testing theoretical distinctions, it does not fully reflect the nuance and diversity of public sector work. Roles can vary widely in terms of emotional intensity, discretion, and public contact, even within a single category. Future research should adopt finer-grained role classifications based on task characteristics, seniority, or contract type. Additionally, exploring role temporality, such as short-term vs. permanent appointments, may offer insight into how stability and career trajectory influence work engagement and well-being.

Another important limitation concerns the generalisability of findings beyond the European public sector context. While the study draws from a large and diverse sample across European countries, its findings may not be directly applicable to low- and middle-income countries, where public sector institutions often operate

under different cultural, political, and resource constraints. The institutional context, including the level of bureaucratic autonomy, funding, and political interference, may significantly shape how job demands and resources function. Moreover, the use of a pan-European dataset may obscure important national-level variation in public administration systems, labour relations, and organisational cultures. Although multigroup analyses reveal some variation by occupational category, the study is limited in its ability to capture institutional or national differences, as the primary unit of analysis is occupational rather than organisational or macro-level.

Additionally, public sector–specific demands, such as red tape, procedural rigidity, and bureaucratic overload, were not directly assessed in this study. These factors, long recognised as distinctive stressors within public organisations (Borst, 2018), may interact with or even counteract the motivational potential of job resources like autonomy and voice. Future research should explicitly examine how such administrative constraints influence engagement and whether they differentially affect mission- vs. non-mission-oriented roles.

Finally, while the use of a large-scale dataset was appropriate for identifying broad trends and relationships, future research would benefit from qualitative, in-depth studies, particularly within single organisations. This would allow exploration of how employees interpret and respond to job characteristics and engagement differently depending on their role proximity to the organisational mission. Now that key associations have been established at a broad level, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches can offer the contextual depth needed to understand the meaning-making processes behind engagement and burnout. Such work would also help to uncover organisation-specific dynamics such as leadership style, internal communication, and participatory structures that may mediate the effects identified here.

While this study provides a strong foundation for understanding engagement in the public sector through a role-based lens, future research should pursue

longitudinal, multi-level, and mixed-method designs that attend to the organisational, national, and cultural contexts in which public servants work.

7 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to answer the research question: *How does the heterogeneity of job roles within the public sector (mission-oriented vs non-mission-oriented roles) influence the relationship between job characteristics and the dual outcomes of work engagement and exhaustion?*

The findings demonstrate that context, specifically the distinction between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles, significantly influences how job characteristics are perceived and how they shape work engagement and exhaustion. Employees in mission-oriented roles reported higher levels of both engagement and exhaustion, reflecting a dual dynamic in which mission-oriented work can be both energising and depleting. This supports the proposition that motivational and strain outcomes coexist depending on the context. In contrast, non-mission-oriented roles are associated with lower levels of both engagement and exhaustion.

The study expands existing applications of the JDR theory by treating contextual heterogeneity as a key analytical variable instead of a control variable. While the JDR theory suggests stable relationships between demands, resources, engagement, and strain, this research found that the strength and direction of these relationships vary according to role type. For example, emotional demands were more strongly associated with exhaustion in mission-oriented roles, despite some links to engagement. In this case, emotional demands served more as a hindrance than a challenge demand.

Resources such as autonomy, social support, and voice were generally associated with higher engagement and lower exhaustion. However, the effectiveness of these resources differed between roles. Autonomy had a stronger buffering effect in mission-oriented roles, likely because it provides greater flexibility in dealing with complex, emotionally demanding situations. Voice and social support were beneficial across both groups. However, they did not significantly reduce the impact of demands on exhaustion, possibly due to organisational constraints that limit the practical use of these resources. A

notable outcome of the study was the lack of significant differences in the experience of work-life interference across role types. While it was expected that mission-oriented employees would report higher interference due to their stronger personal investment in the work, both groups reported similar levels.

In conclusion, the results show that job demands and resources do not have uniform effects across public sector roles. Instead, their impact is shaped by role-specific conditions that influence how employees interpret and respond to their work environment. These findings confirm that the public sector is not motivationally uniform, and that the nature of the role plays a vital part in determining both engagement and strain.

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Appendices

Appendix A : Ethical approval letter



16 March 2024

Dear Miss Ubachukwu ,

Reference: CURES/21425/2024

Project ID: 24642

Title: Examining the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement in mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles within the public sector

Thank you for your application to the Cranfield University Research Ethics System (CURES).

We are pleased to inform you your CURES application, reference CURES/21425/2024 has been reviewed. You may now proceed with the research activities you have sought approval for.

If you have any queries, please contact CURES Support.

We wish you every success with your project.

Regards,

CURES Team

Appendix B Appendix EUROFOUND Confidentiality Agreement



Confidentiality Agreement

Dataset: European Working Conditions Survey
Project No: 210701
Contract no: n/a
Name and address: Udochukwu Ubachukwu
Cranfield University School of Management
Represented by: Udochukwu Ubachukwu

Introduction

Eurofound's approach to the principles, concepts and procedures that keep data confidential while still permitting their use for statistical purposes are based on that taken by Eurostat¹. When carrying out its surveys, respondents are assured that their answers remain anonymous. and when processing the data, measures are taken to minimise the risk of identification. To this end, Eurofound makes available its datasets at a highly aggregated level to the general public.

In the interest of scientific progress in Europe, in exceptional cases, subject to the signature of a confidentiality agreement and compliance with certain conditions, Eurofound may allow access to survey data which is more disaggregated than that available to the public. When preparing these requests, Eurofound tries to ensure that the risk of identification of respondents is minimal.

This confidentiality agreement concerns access to a disaggregated version of the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS) 2021 dataset.

Purpose of this request

The data will be used strictly for Examining the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement in mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles within the public sector carried out by Udochukwu Ubachukwu u.g.ubachukwu@cranfield.ac.uk of Cranfield University, Bedfordshire, United Kingdom.

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/research-methodology/statistical-confidentiality>



Signed:

Udochukwu Ubachukwu
PhD student
Cranfield University School of Management
u.g.ubachukwu@cranfield.ac.uk
07547538527

Date: 18/06/2024

Appendix C Correspondence with Professor Besley

RE: Seeking Your Expertise on Mission and Non-Mission Roles in Public Sector Work



Besley, T <T.Besley@lse.ac.uk>

To ○ Udochukwu Ubachukwu



Reply

Reply All

Forward



Tue 13/08/2024 19:15

You forwarded this message on 27/08/2024 15:40.

Dear Udo,

This sounds very interesting and I am broadly in agreement with how you are making the distinction in roles.

Good luck with the work and please keep me informed.

Best regards,

Tim Besley

Tim Besley
Professor of Economics and Political Science &
W. Arthur Lewis Professor of Development Economics
LSE
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE
Tel: (44) 20 7955 6702
<https://www.lse.ac.uk/economics/people/faculty/tim-besley>

Appendix D Classification Procedure for Mission and Non-Mission-Oriented Roles

To distinguish between mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented roles in the public sector, a structured process was followed. The aim was to apply a clear and consistent method grounded in theory, supported by data, and reviewed by peers to ensure reliability.

Step 1: Defining Mission Orientation

The starting point for classification was the theoretical work of Besley and Ghatak (2005, 2018), who describe mission-oriented work as that which directly contributes to the core goals and values of public service. This includes roles that involve delivering services with a strong social impact such as teaching, healthcare, or emergency response.

Additional guidance came from Mintzberg's (1989) concept of the "operating core", roles that carry out the main work of the organisation as well as research by Houston (2011), who applied the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) to public service jobs.

Based on these sources, four criteria were developed to determine whether a role could be considered mission-oriented:

1. Direct service delivery to the public.
2. Alignment with the organisation's main goals.
3. Tasks that require public service motivation.
4. A consistent description as mission-related in previous research.

Step 2: Role Identification and ISCO Coding

An initial list of public sector job roles and corresponding task descriptions was obtained from the International Labour Organization (ILO) website, using the official International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) dataset. The dataset, available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org>, includes four-digit ISCO codes and descriptions of the tasks typically associated with each occupation. Job descriptions, were also reviewed to understand the core functions of each role. This helped ensure the classification was based on actual tasks rather than just job titles.

Step 3: Assessment of Roles

Each role was assessed against the four criteria. If a role clearly met at least three of the four criteria, it was marked as mission-oriented. If not, it was marked as non-mission-oriented. This approach allowed for flexibility while still applying a consistent standard.

Special care was taken with roles that were not clearly one or the other for example, policy advisors or compliance officers where the link to the organisation's core mission was indirect. In such cases, classification depended on the specific tasks described in role documentation.

Step 4: Peer Review

To test the consistency of the classifications, three researchers with background in human resources reviewed a sample of the role assessments. They were given the

criteria and a selection of job descriptions and asked whether they agreed with the classifications. Their feedback led to adjustments in a few cases, particularly where roles had been classified too narrowly based on formal titles rather than job content. This review helped ensure the process was not based solely on individual judgement and that the reasoning behind classifications was sound.

Additionally, Professor Timothy Besley, whose work was central to the theoretical framework, was consulted. He confirmed that the approach aligned with the way the mission concept is used in research on public organisations.

Step 5: Final Coding

To reduce the risk of overestimating the number of mission-oriented roles, a cautious approach was taken in the final stage. Roles were only coded as mission-oriented (1) when there was clear evidence based on both the criteria and supporting documents. If there was any remaining uncertainty, the role was coded as non-mission-oriented (0). This classification was finally applied to the EWCTS SPSS data for analysis.

Appendix E Common Method Bias

Total Variance Explained						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.910	20.579	20.579	3.910	20.579	20.579
2	2.616	13.768	34.346			
3	1.745	9.187	43.533			
4	1.338	7.044	50.577			
5	1.179	6.206	56.782			
6	0.991	5.214	61.996			
7	0.941	4.953	66.949			
8	0.753	3.963	70.912			
9	0.651	3.425	74.337			
10	0.610	3.212	77.549			
11	0.533	2.806	80.356			
12	0.525	2.763	83.118			
13	0.516	2.718	85.836			
14	0.498	2.620	88.456			
15	0.491	2.585	91.041			
16	0.473	2.488	93.529			
17	0.462	2.431	95.960			
18	0.423	2.227	98.187			
19	0.344	1.813	100.000			
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.						