The People Matter Survey Theoretical Framework

A report on the underpinning theory and research

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Preamble

In December 2017, Dr Simon Albrecht, from the School of Psychology at Deakin University, was invited to contribute academic expertise into the Victorian Public Sector Commission’s (VPSC) People Matter Survey Reform Project (PMSRP).

After an extensive consultation process, the PMSRP proposed a series of recommendations to the Victorian Secretaries’ Board. All recommendations were accepted and an agenda for the roll-out of a revised and reformed PMS was set for 2019.

The recommendations included:

**Recommendation 1:** That the Victorian Public Sector Commission provide direction for the People Matter Survey by:

1. redefining the purpose and goals of the survey;
2. developing a proposed theoretical framework for workplace climate in the Victorian public sector, in collaboration with academic advisors; and
3. testing and validating the proposed theoretical framework by:
4. conducting a survey containing a revised set of questions in 2019; and
5. performing statistical analysis on results from the 2019 survey.

Dr Albrecht was then contracted by VPSC in January 2019 to deliver the following services:

1. Draft survey content
2. Document summarising the theory and literature supportive of model and measures
3. Consultation on platform and reporting format
4. Statistical psychometric/measurement and theory validation

This report addresses Recommendation 1b and Service Deliverable b (as above) and, in broad terms, describes some of the theoretical underpinning for the framework and measures included in the revised PMS.

This report focuses on the theoretical constructs suggested by Dr Albrecht as input into the PMS Reform Project. The report does not include consideration of any constructs included independent of Dr Albrecht’s input.

The report also provides a brief summary of the results of statistically validating the 2019 People Matter Survey results. The full validation report is available in a separate document.

People’s ‘Experience of Work’ Matters

It is widely recognised that people are an organisation’s most important asset and that the ‘employee experience’ of work is both an important predictor and indicator of employee wellbeing and individual, team and organisational performance and effectiveness (Barrick et al., 2015). Meta-analytic research studies (studies that combine the results of multiple independent studies) have consistently shown that employees who are more engaged and motivated at work are more satisfied, perform more productively, and are less likely to leave voluntarily (Christian et al., 2011; Crawford et al, 2010).

Along with most organisations in the contemporary context of work, the Victorian public sector aims to create organisational contexts that enhance employee wellbeing and performance (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). As such, the public sector aspires to create work environments that provide opportunities for employee growth and development, and that support employees feeling they are contributing to meaningful and important work and societal outcomes. It is therefore important for public sector organisations to routinely ‘take the temperature’ of the employee experience in different areas of the sector. Organisations within the sector need data they can have confidence in to identify areas of strength and also to identify areas for improvement and development.

“The most valuable asset of a 21st century institution will be its knowledge workers and their productivity.” (Peter Drucker, 1999)

Given the important outcomes associated with the employee experience of work, it becomes important to identify what the organisational, team, job, and individual psychological drivers are that help shape employee wellbeing, engagement, satisfaction, and performance at work (Schneider et al., 2017).

Employee surveys provide a powerful means by which organisations can monitor or track how employees are experiencing their work environment (Church et al., 2012). The PMS therefore provides an important mechanism by which public sector organisations can assess how employees experience their work and how that experience can potentially be improved.

The People Matter Survey Reform Project

The PMS Reform Project offered the opportunity for the VPSC to take a refreshed approach to measuring the way that Victorian public sector employees experience their work. The remit of the Reform Project is, in part, to ensure that Victorian public sector organisations are provided with relevant and accessible evidence-based survey data that they can use with confidence to inform strategic human resource decisions. Importantly, the reform project also aims to provide a means for public sector organisations to monitor and potentially improve the working lives of their employees.

Although the mandate for the revised PMS aimed to incorporate an evidence-based approach (e.g. underpinning theory, the use of validated measures, etc.), pragmatic and fit-for-purpose considerations (e.g. different stakeholder interests and priorities, number of questions included in the survey) required a balance be struck between academic evidence-based considerations and pragmatic organisational interests.

“The 2019 People Matter Survey is an opportunity for all Victorian public sector employees to have their say about their experiences of working within the sector and within their organisation. The overall aim of the survey is to improve the working lives of employees, so that the Victorian public sector is better equipped to deliver relevant, high quality, timely, and cost-effective services for the Victorian community.”

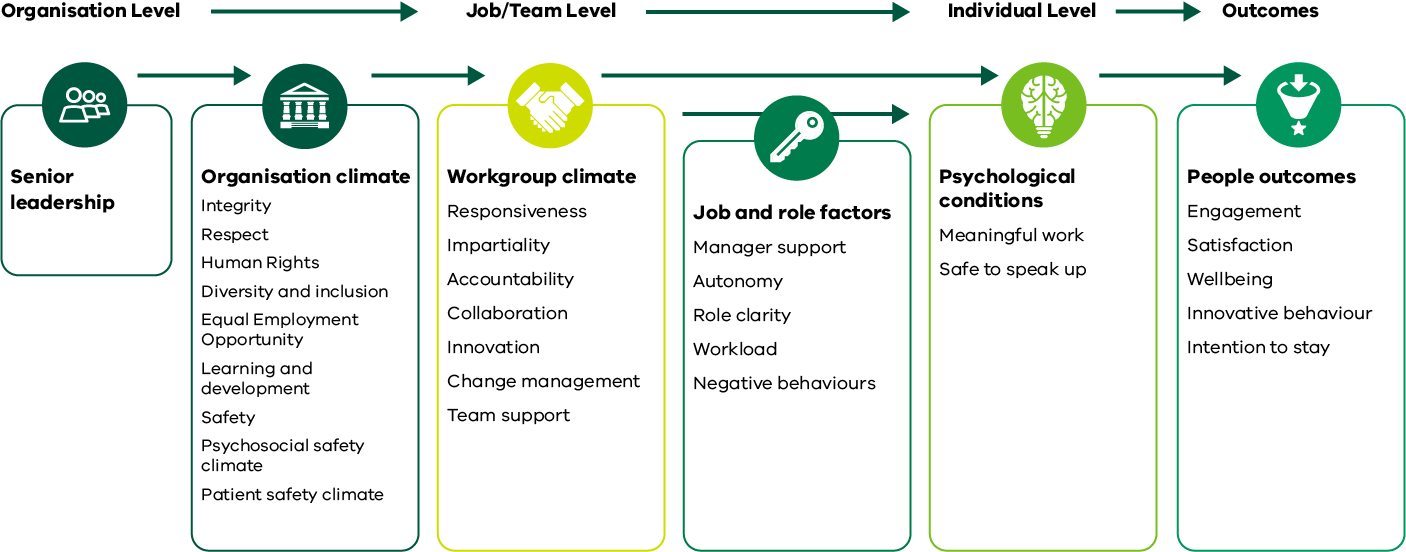
The PMS Theoretical Framework

The Victorian public sector is a complex group of organisations, with many different types of organisations offering many different services. The challenge for the PSMRP was to develop an encompassing framework or ‘model’ that could can help the diversity of users of the PMS understand, explain, and action their PMS survey results. The aim was to develop a framework that would bring together findings and insights from research and from previous PMS experiences to explain the factors that contribute to how Victorian public sector employees experience their work.

A number of draft frameworks were considered by the PMSRP. Some frameworks were more aligned with academic research, while others took more account of VPSC mandated reporting requirements, and stakeholder input and preferences. Therefore, and as previously noted, some of the constructs included in the framework, the way they were measured, and their proposed inter-relationships may not neatly fit into previously validated academic theories and models.

The final PMS framework that to a large extent informed the PMS survey design is shown in Figure 1. The framework is broadly grounded in theory and research, and focuses on core organisational constructs that are common across the different organisations that form the Victorian public sector. The framework shows that organisational level factors (e.g. senior leadership, organisational climate) influence job and team level employee experiences (e.g. workgroup climate, job resources, job demands), that influence individual psychological experiences (e.g. meaningfulness of work, psychological safety), that in turn influence important employee attitudinal and behavioural outcomes such as engagement, job satisfaction, wellbeing, turnover intentions, and innovation.

The following section of the report overviews the theoretical perspectives and the research evidence that underpin the relationships proposed in the framework. The theory and evidence supporting the relationships between the elements of the framework are described. The report focuses only on those aspects of the framework that were academically derived and does not focus on the relationships derived from VPSC stakeholder consultation processes.



**Figure 1.** People Matter Survey theoretical framework

Theoretical Platforms and Research Evidence

Theories Underpinning the PMS Framework

The links between the PMS constructs were developed based on a number of well-established organisational and psychological theories. The theoretical platforms that informed proposed associations between the academically selected constructs include: social exchange theory (Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo & Lynch, 1998; Blau, 1964), Self Determination Theory (Gagne, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000), job characteristics theory (JCM; Hackman & Oldham, 1980), psychological empowerment theory (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995), engagement theory (Kahn, 1990), Job Demands-Control theory (Karasek, 1979), and Job Demands-Resources Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

“There is nothing so practical as a good theory.” (Lewin, 1940)

Job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and psychological empowerment theory (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995), for example, suggest that jobs that provide employees with autonomy and support result in a stronger sense of meaning, which in turn leads to positive outcomes such as employee motivation and job satisfaction. Along similar lines, engagement theory (Kahn, 1990) proposes that meaningfulness, psychological safety, and the availability of resources are preconditions for employees feeling invested and engaged in their work.

Job Demands-Resources theory (JD-R; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) is the most widely cited and widely used theoretical explanation of engagement. The JD-R describes how job resources (e.g. autonomy, feedback, supervisor support, role clarity) provide a motivational pathway that has a direct and positive influence on employee engagement. Job resources are energising because they help satisfy employee needs and provide employees with what they need to successfully achieve work goals and other positive performance outcomes. Job demands (e.g. role conflict, role ambiguity, emotional demands), on the other hand, are proposed to deplete energy and directly result negative employee outcomes such as psychological strain, burnout, absence, and turnover. Numerous cross-sectional, meta-analytic and multi-level studies (e.g. Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014; Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Halbesleben, 2010) have supported the relationships proposed by the JD-R model.

“Take care of your employees and they will take care of your business. It is as simple as that. Healthy, engaged employees are your top competitive advantage.” (Richard Branson)

Recent extensions of JD-R theory acknowledge that it is important that the broader organisational context (e.g. senior leadership, organisational climate) is also taken into account when attempting to understand and manage the employee experience of work. Organisational resources both directly and indirectly influence employee engagement, job satisfaction, wellbeing and other attitudinal and behavioural outcomes through their influence on workgroup climate and job resources (Albrecht et al., 2018; Dollard and Bakker, 2010). Consistent with this extended view, organisational culture and organisational climate theorists and researchers have explained how ‘shared perceptions’ (Schein, 2010; Schneider et al. 2011) of ‘how things are around here’ have important implications for how employees experience their work and for downstream employee attitudinal, behavioural, and performance outcomes. Meta-analytic studies conducted across multiple organisations have shown that dimensions of culture and climate such as ‘core values’ and ‘capability development’, ‘team orientation’ and ‘empowerment’ influence important organisational outcomes such as employee satisfaction, quality of service, innovation, and overall organisational effectiveness (Denison, Nieminen, & Kotrba, 2014).

In addition to the more positive dimensions of organisational functioning, a long history of stress and burnout research has provided theories that explain how and why work can have an adverse effect on employee, team, and organisational health, wellbeing and performance. Burnout theory (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) explains how negative work environments can result in employees feeling chronically exhausted, cynical and socially disconnected. Stress and burnout have also been shown to result in serious health and psychological problems (Alarcon, 2011). Job Demands-Control (JDC) theory explains that work-related stress can result from job demands relating to workload, emotional demands, interpersonal conflict, and a lack of job control (Karasek, 1979).

Overall, there are a number of theories that help explain, for example, how senior leadership, organisational climate, work group climate, and job resources and demands influence outcomes such as employee engagement, wellbeing, satisfaction, turnover intention and performance.

Research Evidence Supporting the PMS Framework

In terms of evidence to support the PMS framework, research has shown that senior leadership influences organisational climate, that organisational climate influences job resources and job demands (e.g. Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter, 2011; Dollard & Bakker, 2010), that in turn influence personal resources such as the psychological experience of safety and meaningfulness, that in turn influence engagement (e.g. Kahn, 1990; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). Furthermore, employee engagement has been shown to influence a range of attitudinal, behavioural, performance and financial outcomes (e.g. Christian et al., 2011; Macey, Schneider, Barbera & Young, 2009; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2009).

Although the arrows in the framework (see Figure 1) suggest direct relationships between the elements within the framework, it needs to be noted that in practice there will also be indirect and reciprocal relationships. Organisational climate, for example, will over time directly influence the individual experience of psychological safety and engagement, and over time these factors will in turn influence organisational climate. Such reciprocal effects are consistent with research showing that outcomes such as organisational profitability also predict ‘upstream’ factors such as job satisfaction and organisational climate (e.g. Schneider, Hanges, Smith, & Salvaggio, 2003).

 Senior Leadership

Senior leadership in PMS terms represents the most senior group of managers in the organisation. The senior leadership group might include the Commissioner, CEO, Department Secretaries, Executives, Directors, Division Managers, and General Managers.

It is widely acknowledged that senior leadership have a prime responsibility for setting an organisation’s strategic agenda and organisational culture and climate (Albrecht & Travaglione, 2003). They set ‘the tone at the top’ (Gunz & Thorne, 2015) that permeates all levels of organisational functioning. Senior leaders embed a culture where the organisational vision, strategy, structure, values and performance expectations are clearly set and communicated (Carpenter, Geletkanycz, & Sanders, 2004; Cero, Lester, Dalton & Dalton, 2006; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Senior leaders “symbolise the values of the organisation, determine the flow of the organisational resources, and model employees’ ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting to important events” (Leiter & Bakker, 2010; p. 5).

There is clear theoretical and research support for the relationship shown in Figure 1 that senior leadership influences organisational climate (see Schneider, Ehrhart & Macey, 2010, 2011; Schneider et al., 2017). Research has shown, for example, that senior leadership can directly influence the extent to which organisational values become shared and experienced as organisational culture and climate (Gill, 2003). Senior leadership has also been shown to have an influence on an organisational climate of engagement (e.g. Albrecht, 2014).

Beyond having an influence on climate and culture, senior leaders have been shown to influence downstream employee attitudes and outcomes such as meaningful work, engagement, and wellbeing (Albrecht, 2014; Arnold et al., 2007; Barrick et al., 2015). Schneider et al. (2017) showed that when senior leaders provide clear direction, effectively communicate what the organisation is trying to accomplish, promote and support adaptive change, and create a culture of service, then employees will be more engaged, and in turn, the organisation will enjoy a range of financial returns.

Given the important influence of senior leadership on organisational climate and downstream attitudes and behaviours, the revised PMS asks employees for their perceptions about whether, for example, senior leaders…

…provide clear strategy and direction

…model my organisation’s values

…support staff to work in an environment of change

…actively support diversity and inclusion in the workplace

…demonstrate honesty and integrity

 Organisational Climate

Organisational climate is a fundamental construct to organisational research and practice. A Google search in October 2019 of the term ‘organizational climate’ yielded close to 100 million hits. Organisational climate, in the academic literature, has been defined as “the meaning employees attach to the policies, practices and procedures they experience and the behaviours they see getting rewarded, supported and expected” (Schneider & Barbera, 2014, p. 10). Climate surveys are widely used “as a diagnostic tool for organisational improvement and change” (Parker et al., 2003, p. 390).

Consistent with the PMS framework, organisational climate has been shown to be an important determinant of attitudinal, behavioural and performance related outcomes (Baer & Frese, 2003; Carr, Schmidt, Ford & DeShon, 2003; Parker et al., 2003). Researchers have shown, for example, that organisational climate has a direct influence on outcomes such as employee satisfaction, employee engagement, the quality of outputs, and overall organisational performance (Denison, Nieminen, & Kotrba, 2014; Halbesleben, 2010; Patterson, Warr, & West, 2004).

Overall organisational climates serve as the foundations for more functionally specific ‘climates for something’ (Schneider, Ehrhart & Macey, 2011). For example, Dollard and Bakker (2010) showed that psychological safety climate, as an “upstream organisational resource”, can indirectly influence employee engagement through its influence on skill discretion as a job resource. Albrecht, Breidahl and Marty (2017) similarly showed that organisational engagement climate (shared perceptions about the energy and involvement willingly focused by employees toward the achievement of organisational goals) directly influences employee engagement and employee perceptions about the availability of job resources.

The PMS framework shows that organisational climate has a direct influence on workgroup climate and on employees’ experiences of the job. The framework also recognises that values such as integrity, respect, human rights, diversity and inclusion, equal opportunity, opportunities for learning and development, and psychological and physical safety are core guiding principles that need to underpin policies, practices and behaviour for all organisations across the Victorian public sector. Many of these core values have been shown in various organisational contexts to lead to positive employee experiences and organisational performance. As previously noted, ‘core values’, ‘capability development’, ‘team orientation’, and ‘empowerment’ have been shown to influence important organisational outcomes such as employee satisfaction, quality of service, innovation, and overall organisational effectiveness (Denison, Nieminen, & Kotrba, 2014).

Given the important influence of organisational climate on the employee experience of work, the revised PMS asks employees for their perceptions about a range of organisational climate factors. Example survey questions include:

My organisation…

…motivates me to help achieve its objectives

…inspires me to do the best in my job

…is committed to earning a high level of public trust

…takes steps to eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination

…does not tolerate improper conduct

…has effective procedures in place to support employees who may experience stress

Disability/age/gender/sexual orientation/cultural background do not pose a barrier to success

There is a positive culture within my organisation in relation to employees who have caring responsibilities

I understand how the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities applies to my work

 Workgroup Climate

Workgroup climate can be regarded as a more localised or proximal form of organisational climate. Workgroups consist of individuals who identify as a group, and who interact regularly in order to perform work-related tasks and achieve work-related goals (Anderson & West, 1998). Workgroup climates are in effect sub-climates that are influenced by the wider organisational climate and by how individuals within the workgroup evolve norms, expectations, and ways of behaving.

Research has identified a number of factors that positively influence workgroup effectiveness. Workgroup climates characterised by team vision, shared goals, role clarity, effective relations with team leaders, psychological safety, clear communication, constructive conflict, task focus, and a collaborative mindset have been shown to be positively associated with team satisfaction, team commitment, team performance, and general workgroup effectiveness (Anderson & West, 1998; Banks et al., 2014; Hackman, 2002; Katzenbach & Smith, 1995; Richardson & West, 2010). Similarly, LePine et al.’s (2008) meta-analysis (combining the results of more than 20 studies) showed that team monitoring, team coordination, team conflict management, and team motivation were all positively associated with team member satisfaction and team member performance.

Overall, employees who experience workgroup environments that have clear objectives, and where participation, involvement, respect, diversity and innovation are supported and encouraged, will most likely be more effective than workgroups or teams that do not enjoy such climate characteristics. Furthermore, given the constant change that characterises contemporary private and public sector organisations (Tsaousis & Vakola, 2018), it is also important that workgroups are positively predisposed toward change (Jick & Sturtevant, 2017).

Given the important influence of workgroup climate on the employee experience of work, the revised PMS asks employees about a range of workgroup climate factors relating to innovation, responsiveness, impartiality, accountability, collaboration, change management, and team support or cohesiveness. Example survey questions include:

People in my workgroup…

…work together effectively to get the job done

…treat each other with respect

…actively support diversity and inclusion in the workplace

…are honest, open and transparent in their dealings

…appropriately manage conflicts of interest

…are politically impartial in their work

…generally coped well with the change.

My workgroup…

…strives to provide high quality advice and services

…strives to deliver services in a timely manner

…strives to make the best use of its resources

…focuses on making decisions informed by all relevant facts

…places a priority on acting fairly and without bias

…has clear lines of responsibility

…was provided with sufficient information on how the change would impact on the team

…was provided with adequate support during the change process

…was kept well informed throughout the change process

 Job and Role Factors

A long history of research has unequivocally established that the characteristics of a person’s job role can have significant effects on their engagement, satisfaction, wellbeing, turnover intentions, and performance. As noted above, numerous theories (e.g. Job Demands-Resources theory; Job Characteristics theory; Engagement theory; Job Demands-Control theory) help explain such effects.

Research shows that job characteristics or ‘job resources’ have a positive impact on employees’ experience of work. Numerous meta-analyses have shown that job role factors such as manager support, job autonomy, and role clarity positively influence desirable attitudes and behaviours such as employee engagement, job satisfaction, employee wellbeing, organisational commitment, and job performance (e.g. Crawford et al., 2010; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002; Nielsen et al., 2017). For example, supportive managers and colleagues who provide informational, instrumental or emotional resources and support may increase an employee’s capacity to complete their work goals, thus leading to greater job satisfaction and better performance. Learning and development opportunities, work-role fit, and feedback have also been identified as important job resources (Crawford, LePine & Rich 2010; Christian, Gaza & Slaughter, 2011).

As per the PMS framework, and as previously noted, there is clear research evidence that ‘upstream’ workgroup and organisational climate factors influence the extent to which employees report they have the resources they need to effectively fulfil the requirements of their role (Crawford, Rich & LePine, 2010; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Halbesleben, 2010; Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007).

Given the important influence that job resources have on the employee experience of work, the revised PMS asks employees about a range of job resources. Example survey questions include:

I have the authority to do my job effectively

I have a choice in deciding how I do my work

I clearly understand what I am expected to do in this job

My job allows me to utilise my skills, knowledge and abilities

There are adequate opportunities for me to develop skills and experience in my organisation

My manager…

…involves me in decisions about my work

…keeps me informed about what's going on

…provides feedback to me in a way that helps me improve my performance

…provides me with enough support during times of high workload

Job demands and the experiences of negative behaviours such as work overload, role conflict, role ambiguity, emotional demands, bullying, harassment and discrimination have consistently been shown to have a negative impact on employees’ experience of work. Beyond Blue estimates that bullying costs Australian organisations between $6 billion and $36 billion a year. Quite apart from the economic costs associated with bullying, numerous meta-analyses (e.g. Alarcon, 2011; Fernet et al., 2012; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012) have shown that excessive work demands and bullying are associated with employee anxiety, depression and burnout. Burnout is a syndrome consisting of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a lack of confidence (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Stress and burnout, as well as their predictors, are therefore important to identify because of their human and economic impacts. Organisational and workgroup climate factors have been shown to influence employee reports of negative work experiences (e.g. Alarcon, 2011; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Halbesleben, 2010).

The revised PMS asks employees about a range of job demands and negative behaviours. Example survey questions include:

The workload I have is appropriate for the job that I do

Thinking about the nature of your work and work demands, what are the main causes of stress?

During the last 12 months in your current organisation, have you personally experienced discrimination at work?

 Individual Psychological Conditions

The PMS framework shows job and role factors leading to individual level ‘psychological conditions.’ Psychological conditions are emotional and cognitive appraisals of the work context that represent the ‘felt experience of work’.

According to engagement theory (Kahn, 1990), positive experiences of work require the presence of three psychological conditions: meaningful work, psychological safety, and confidence in the availability of resources. The three conditions highlight that organisations need to address and understand the deeper needs of employees in order to attract them, retain them, and keep them motivated, engaged, and performing (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). In effect, the psychological conditions as represented in the PMS framework explain the influence that job resources and job demands have on engagement, wellbeing and satisfaction as outcomes.

“Work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread…; for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying.” (Louis ‘Studs’ Terkel, 1974)

**Meaningful Work**

Meaningful work is increasingly being recognised as a critical characteristic of organisational success in the changing world of work (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Steger & Dik, 2010). Kahn (1990) argued that the psychological state of meaningfulness refers to people feeling worthwhile, useful and valuable, that they make a difference, and are not taken for granted in their work-related activities and experience. Common to most definitions of meaningful work are the notions of importance, significance, purpose and contribution.

As shown in the PMS framework, and consistent with job characteristics theory, psychological empowerment theory, and engagement theory, job meaningfulness has been shown to have an important influence on employee engagement, wellbeing and performance (e.g. Arnold et al., 2007; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). Employees who experience their work as meaningful can help organisations achieve optimal and sustainable individual, team and organisational outcomes (Steger & Dik, 2010).

A number of the ‘upstream’ elements of the PMS framework have been shown to influence the employee experience of meaningful work. Organisational purpose, leadership, and job characteristics such as autonomy and co-worker support have all been shown to be important predictors. With respect to leadership, Rosso et al. (2010) argued that “leaders frame the mission, goals, purpose, and identity of the organisation for employees in ways that influence their perceptions of the meaning of their work … by prompting [them] to transcend their personal needs or goals in favor of those tied to a broader mission or purpose” (p. 101).

**Psychological Safety**

Psychological safety, or the experience of ‘feeling confident to speak up and speak out’, is also being increasingly recognised as a ‘condition’ fundamental to employee motivation and performance. Academic theory and research support the view that psychological safety is essential to employees feeling confident to voice their opinions, suggestions, and concerns. Psychological safety is also represented by feeling confident about seeking feedback, providing honest feedback to others, collaborating, and experimenting. More generally, psychological safety enables employees to show their true self “without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” (Kahn, 1990; p. 708). Google recently recognised psychological safety as the most important characteristic of their high-performing and innovative work teams (Bergmann & Schaeppi, 2016). Consistent with the PMS framework, psychological safety has also been found to influence outcomes such as organisational commitment and work engagement (May et al., 2004).

Given that meaningful work and psychological safety influence important organisational outcomes, the revised PMS includes questions that address these issues. Example survey questions include:

I get a sense of accomplishment from my work

I understand how my job contributes to my organisation’s purpose

I feel able to challenge inappropriate behaviour at work

I am confident that I would be protected from reprisal for reporting improper conduct

I would be confident in approaching my manager to discuss concerns and grievances

 Outcomes

The PMS framework includes a number of attitudinal and behavioural outcomes that help define the ‘experience of work’. In line with academic research, the framework identifies engagement, satisfaction, wellbeing, intention to stay, and innovative behaviour as ‘employee experience’ outcomes that public sector organisations should usefully pay attention to.

**Employee Engagement and Job Satisfaction**

Over the past ten to twenty years, employee engagement has emerged as a very popular topic of interest within and across academic, government and practitioner domains. This is because government agencies, academics and practitioners are interested in trying to identify the causes, correlates and consequences of people being ‘switched-on’, energetic, involved and focused on delivering high quality performance and outcomes at work.

“Within the Government context, task forces have been established to examine ‘if employee engagement and the principles that lie behind it were more widely understood, if good practice was more widely shared, if the potential that resides in the country’s workforce was more fully unleashed, we could see a step change in workplace performance and in employee wellbeing’.” (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; p. 3)

While there remains some disagreement among scholars and practitioners about how best to define and measure work engagement (see Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter, 2011), engagement is most usually defined within the academic domain as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind” (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74) that is characterised by positive energy, psychological involvement, and a clear willingness to work toward the achievement of organisational goals (Albrecht, 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Macey, Schneider, Barbera & Young, 2009).

As previously mentioned in this report, there is a wealth of research confirming that organisational and job resources influence engagement, and that engagement in turn has an important impact on employee attitudes and behaviours and organisational performance. More specifically, engagement has been shown to be associated with positive outcomes such as positive behaviour towards customers, customer loyalty (Bakker et al., 2008), organisational commitment (Halbesleben, 2010; Saks, 2006), lower absenteeism (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009), reduced turnover (Halbesleben, 2010; Peccei, 2013), and organisational reputation and profitability (Schneider et al., 2017).

The PMS framework shows job satisfaction as an outcome. Although quite strongly associated with engagement, job satisfaction can be considered a less ‘upbeat’ and less energetic expression of the employee experience of work. Job satisfaction represents the amount of pleasure, contentment and liking an employee derives from their job (Spector, 1997). Although shown to have positive associations with organisationally valued criteria, such as job performance, absenteeism, and turnover, job satisfaction as a reflection of employee wellbeing is an important construct in its own right (Spector, 1997).

Given that employee engagement and job satisfaction have been shown to represent and influence important organisational outcomes, the revised PMS includes questions that assess both constructs. Example survey questions include:

Thinking about the past three months in your current organisation, how often has your work made you feel enthusiastic?

I enjoy the work in my current job

Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your current job?

**Employee Wellbeing**

Employee wellbeing has been recognised as a fundamental to organisational success because of the influence it has on organisational outcomes such as job retention and individual and organisational performance (Harter et al. 2002; Warr, 1999). It is also being increasingly recognised by organisations and Governments that organisations have a moral obligation to create environments that protect and promote employee wellbeing.

Psychological wellbeing, in general, has been conceptualised in many different ways in the academic and practitioner literature. Wellbeing has been conceptualised to include self-acceptance, positive relations with others, personal growth, a sense of purpose in life, environmental mastery, and autonomy (Keyes, 1998). Wellbeing has also been conceptualised in terms of psychological outcomes such as a lack of distress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, and physiological outcomes such as blood pressure, heart condition, and general physical exhaustion (Danna & Griffin, 1999).

Within the context of work, researchers (e.g. Diener et al., 2009; Warr, 1990, 1994) tend to conceptualise work-related psychological wellbeing in terms of the presence of positive feelings about work, the absence of negative feelings about work, and a general satisfaction with the experience of work.

The PMS measure of wellbeing focuses on a number of psychological experiences and outcomes. Example survey questions include:

Thinking about the past three months in your current organisation, how often has your work made you feel…

…happy …worried

…enthusiastic …miserable

How would you rate your current level of work-related stress?

**Turnover Intentions**

Beyond the importance of engagement, satisfaction and wellbeing, it is also important to include survey questions that relate to turnover intentions and performance. Turnover can be costly for organisations in terms of the economics associated with recruiting, selecting and onboarding new employees, and also in terms of the intellectual capital lost as people leave to pursue alternative working options. As previously noted, the Victorian public sector aspires to attract and retain employees, and keep them motivated, engaged, and performing. Researchers have identified that many of the constructs contained in the revised PMS (e.g. organisational climates, opportunities for learning and development, job autonomy, engagement, and job satisfaction) are predictive of whether an employee intends to stay or leave (e.g. Vigoda-Gadot & Kapun, 2005).

**Innovative Behaviour**

Within the changing world of work there is an increasing emphasis on the importance of employees not only being proficient at their prescribed job tasks, but on also being able to come up with innovative and adaptive ideas and solutions that improve the quality of their work outputs. Proactivity, innovation, and continual improvement are ‘buzzwords’ in contemporary organisational contexts. It is incumbent on organisations to provide the context whereby such adaptive behaviours can be nurtured and supported (Griffin, Neal & Parker, 2007).

The PMS includes measures of turnover intentions and self-reported innovative behaviour. Example survey questions include:

Thinking about the past three months, how often have you…

…made changes to improve the way your main work tasks are done?

…suggested ways to increase efficiency and effectiveness within your organisation?

What major factors are influencing your decision to leave?

Measuring Constructs and Relationships within the PMS Framework: Issues of Validity and Reliability

The PMS framework (see Figure 1) includes, for example, the organisational level construct of organisational climate, and the job and work role constructs of manager support and role clarity. The outcomes include constructs such as engagement and wellbeing.

The report has provided example questions for each of the constructs included in the framework. The full set of questions included in the PMS in 2019 is included in Appendix 1.

In order to have confidence in survey measures (so that comparisons can be made with confidence across teams, units, divisions, organisations, and across time), it is important that the measures meet minimum statistical criteria that support their reliability and validity. Statistical procedures such as factor analysis, reliability analysis, and correlation analysis need to be applied to the PMS survey data to test whether the survey questions are reliably measuring what they are intended to measure.

Valid and reliable measures usually consist of a minimum of three survey questions that are averaged to provide a summary score for each construct. Beyond reporting the average score for each construct, the strength of the relationships between the constructs needs also to be calculated and reported. The relationships between constructs help identify the most influential ‘drivers’ of elements and outcomes in the framework. It would be expected, for example, that PMS scores for job resources such as manager support and job meaningfulness would be strongly associated with employee engagement scores. If such expectations are confirmed by statistical analysis, the results would therefore suggest that helping managers provide more support and provide opportunities for meaningful work will help develop and improve levels of employee engagement. Driver analysis, in effect, helps identify which organisational ‘levers to pull’ or which ‘buttons to press’ in order to most effectively and efficiently develop, manage and ‘drive’ desired organisational outcomes such as engagement.

In practical terms, however, given the number of constructs included in the PMS survey and a commitment provided by the PMSRP that the length of the survey should not be overly taxing on employees, some pragmatic concessions needed to be made with respect to the survey design. Additionally, in large and complex groups of organisations such as the Victorian public sector, the input of many stakeholders (who may have differing experiences and ideas about what should be included in the PMS) inevitably needs to be taken into account. These pragmatic considerations need to be in balance with academic perspectives requiring that items or questions included in surveys should be validated and have their reliability established.

Validation Results of the 2019 PMS – A Summary

Survey validation involves conducting statistical analyses to assess the degree to which a survey measures what it aims or claims to be measuring. For present purposes, validation refers to statistical analyses aimed at determining whether the PMS data yielded the factors proposed in the PMS model, whether the survey items relate to the factors as proposed, and whether the factors relate to each other as proposed. The PMS model included organisational, workgroup, job, and outcome level variables.

Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA), Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA), Key Driver analyses, and Structural Equations Modelling (SEM) were used in the validation process.

The EFA yielded a very clear structure consisting of 15 distinct and interpretable factors that, to a large extent, corroborated the dimensions represented in the PMS model. For example, factors focused on Senior Leadership, Human Rights, Psychological Safety Climate, Workgroup Change Management, Manager Support, Workload, Safe to Speak Up, Engagement, and Job Satisfaction, were all quite strongly represented in the data, and emerged as stand-alone factors.

A number of constructs in the PMS model such as Safety, Integrity, Impartiality, Organisational Engagement, Job Autonomy, Meaningful Work, and Intention to Stay did not emerge from the analyses as distinct and identifiable constructs.

With respect to the validity of the measures, the CFA results generally supported constructs derived from the EFA results and the academic literature. That is, the CFA fit statistics largely supported the proposed pattern of items-to-constructs for organisational, workgroup, job and outcome variables. As such, the results therefore supported the convergent, discriminant and construct validity of the measures. Additionally, the Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients supported the reliability of each of the constructs included in the CFA analyses. All alpha reliabilities exceeded the widely accepted criterion value of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

With respect to the relationships between the constructs, ‘key driver’ analyses were conducted to enable identification, in percentage terms, of the factors that have the strongest influence on each of the individual outcome factors included in the models: employees feeling safe to speak up, engagement, job satisfaction, positive affective wellbeing, negative affective wellbeing, innovative work behaviour. The ‘key drivers’ provide evidence-based targets for the design of organisational improvement interventions.

**At the organisational level**, key driver analysis showed that a Human Rights focus and a Psychological Safety Climate had the largest influence on engagement, job satisfaction, employees feeling safe to speak up, positive affective wellbeing, and negative affective wellbeing. Senior leadership support was also shown to have a relatively strong influence on engagement and positive affective wellbeing.

**At the workgroup level,** key driver analyses showed that workgroup change support was the strongest driver of engagement, job satisfaction, employees feeling safe to speak up, positive affective wellbeing and negative affective wellbeing. The analyses also showed that workgroup climates of service quality, continuous improvement, and respect and support also explained considerable (20-35%) variation in the outcomes.

**At the manager and job level,** key driver analyses showed that a combination of job characteristics such as role clarity, autonomy, and skill utilisation was the strongest driver of engagement, job satisfaction, employees feeling safe to speak up, and positive affective wellbeing. Learning and development opportunities also explained a relatively large amount of the variation in engagement and positive affective wellbeing. Additionally, the employee-manager relationship was a strong predictor of employees feeling safe to speak up, and workload was a strong driver of employee negative affect at work.

Structural Equations Modelling (SEM) analyses also generally supported the overall configuration of the variables in a modified PMS model. Moreover, despite the relative complexity of the models, all proposed paths in the final respecified models were statistically significant (although some not strong enough to be meaningful), and the models explained a significant amount of the variation in constructs.

Overall, the analyses provided considerable support for the validity of variations of the PMS model and measures. The analyses also suggested, however, refinements and revisions to items and constructs. Suggested revisions to the PMS survey are provided in the Recommendations section of the validation report.

Conclusion

It is important that the VPSC continues to routinely obtain feedback via the PMS that in effect ‘takes the temperature’ of public sector organisations. PMS feedback will help identify areas within the public sector that are doing well in terms of people management practices, and areas where there is room for improvement. It is important that improvement be based on data that decision-makers can have confidence in. It is therefore important that the PMS continues to undergo refinement on the basis of emerging VPSC people strategies and ongoing validation processes.

The VPSC is to be commended for engaging in the important process of validating the PMS and it is recommended the VPSC continues to conduct a range of validation processes that will help the sector respond with confidence to the PMS results aimed at enhancing the engagement, wellbeing and performance of Victorian Public Sector employees.

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