# ASSESSING MANAGERS’ KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN A TERTIARY INSTITUTION AMIDST EVOLVING SOCIO-ECONOMIC FRAMEWORKS

**Abstract**

Economic inequality remains a concern for management practice in developing countries despite technological and industrial advancements as these inequalities impede both organisational and overall economic growth of a country. This study aimed at qualitatively assessing the intricacies of identifying the various internal, external and contextual factors that affect managers’ perceptions of performance management within the security sector of a South African tertiary institution. A constructivist phenomenological case study employed semi-structured in-depth interviews with twelve security managers. Thematic analysis revealed challenges which interactively span organisational and contextual dimensions. Research findings revealed that organisational factors of inadequate technological competencies, training and development are critical determinants of successful performance management, highlighting the imperative of supportive management and leadership commitment. Contextual influences stemming from apartheid's legacy and current socio-economic disparities highlighted the importance of addressing historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors in performance management strategies. In alignment with social constructivism, the study underscores the dynamic interplay between cultural, contextual and individual perceptions urging a shift from traditional eurocentric performance management approaches. Practical implications require holistic strategies that bridge internal organisational gaps while sensitively navigating external contextual complexities. By addressing these factors, organisations can cultivate equitable and effective performance management systems, thus contributing to broader socio-economic development goals in South Africa.

**Keywords:** Economic inequality, Performance management, Contextual factors, Organisational challenges, Sustainable development

## Introduction and Background of the Study

South Africa's nuanced cultural diversity, historical challenges, and evolving economic landscape offer a unique backdrop for examining performance management applications. The transition from apartheid to democracy has created a complex amalgamation of corporate structures and employment practices influenced by historical inequalities and transformation policies (Cowan, Müller, Kirman and Barnard, 2023). Culturally and contextually effective performance management systems are hence crucial for fair reward determination, managerial feedback, and assessing training needs amidst evolving socio-economic landscapes (Özçelİk and Uyargİl, 2018). Traditional performance management systems focus on appraisal criteria and job behaviours, while contemporary systems include both task and contextual performance dimensions, highlighting the need for a contextual approach in the higher education security sector (Özçelİk and Uyargİl, 2018).

Majority of research conducted on performance management supposes a quantitative approach, focusing on rating scales and organisational outcomes. This study therefore explores the complexities of performance management by qualitatively assessing security managers' knowledge and perceptions at a tertiary institution as performance management is essential in maintaining long-term sustainable development of organisational growth for both employers’ and employees’ (Brown, O’Kane, Mazumdar, and McCracken, 2018). The research hence addresses the gap between theoretical presumptions and contextual applications of performance management in the security sector (Van Waeyenberg and Decramer, 2018).

This study examines how effective performance management can promote equitable growth and development through identifying and addressing the need to mitigate economic inequalities in developing countries like South Africa. By understanding performance management in higher education security sector, this study offers insights into developing culturally and contextually relevant performance management systems providing insights which aim to ensure the benefits of industrialisation and economic growth are equitably distributed through effective human resource practice (Bapuji, Patel, Ertug, and Allen, 2020).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Defining Principles of Performance Management

Armstrong and Taylor (2020) define performance management as a systematic strategic process which produces well-managed success for organisations through improvements in employee performance as the behaviour achieves organisational targets and results (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). One can therefore conceptualise performance management as a strategic process of shared understanding alongside the development and management of employees in a collaborative effort which allows organisational goals to be achieved (de Waal, Hofste, Benthem, Bonnier and Hedde, 2015). Performance management as a term that encompasses a continual process of performance planning, agreement, measurement, positive appraisal, review, and feedback with the intention of aligning individual performance with the strategic goals of an organisation (Aguinis and Burgi-Tian, 2023). Armstrong and Taylor (2020) mention performance management should develop the capacity of employees in a manner that allows them to realise their full potential in order to meet and exceed both career and organisational goals.

* 1. **Overview of Performance Management in Developing Countries**

Significant drivers for organisational performance in developing countries were institutional regulations and accountability, management commitment, stakeholder involvement and cultural-cognitive beliefs and values (Jia, Zuluaga-Cardona, Bailey and Rueda, 2018). However, these drivers are often hampered in developing countries due to barriers such as weak enforcement of policies and regulations, lack of financial aid, an existence of a large knowledge gap between management and employees regarding performance related processes. Poor socio-economic conditions, lack of infrastructure, organisational and contextual cultural clashes further exacerbate the negative perceptions and understanding of performance management in developing countries (Jia et al., 2018).

Rapid technological and market changes further compel organisations to manage resources sustainably, posing challenges for economic and sustainable development. These countries often struggle economically due to lagging political reforms, underdeveloped financial markets, and inefficient public sector management such as the security sector (Gupta, 2018). Industrialisation has and continues to exacerbate socio-economic disparities through wage and skill inequalities, urban-rural divides where lower-skilled workers experience poor living conditions (Haraguchi, Martorano and Sanfilippo, 2019).

### Despite three decades of democratic reforms, apartheid's legacy still hampers efforts to uplift marginalised and underprivileged groups. Management theories often reflect eurocentric perspectives, which lack relevance to South Africa's diverse cultural context. The country's unique cultural background necessitates performance management practices that consider these influences (Nxumalo, Goudge, Gilson and Eyles, 2018).

### In a meta-analytical study on performance management practices, Gerrish (2016:48) claimed that “the act of measuring performance of employees in an organisation may not improve performance but managing performance might improve”, hence the proposition of this study. The study proposes a need to shift the knowledge of performance management from measurement to understanding of managing performance effectively so that it is applicable to the socio-economic context, especially in developing countries such as South Africa (Gerrish, 2016).

### Performance Management in the higher education security sector

Effective management in the security sector relies heavily on the socio-economic context and the ability to manage both personnel and processes, which are integral to performance outcomes (Vignieri, 2018). From a managerial standpoint, the recruitment and effective performance of line managers are hindered by educational and skill deficits. The limited conceptual knowledge of performance management processes among managers, coupled with insufficient resources, impedes their ability to adapt to fast-evolving technological and performance measurement demands (George, Corbishley, Khayesi, Haas and Tihanyi, 2016). These challenges underscore the importance of contextual understanding in managing operations and processes within the security sector (Vignieri, 2018). A survey of Kenyan security firms found that only three percent of operating budgets was allocated to security service resources, which poses a major challenge due to critical skill shortages, and low levels of education, training, and development. As a result, the security sector has declining employee engagement in terms of performance management knowledge and skills (Odhong, Were and Jonyo, 2018).

Additionally, there is a notable deficiency in empirical and contextual research on security performance appraisals, which hampers the development of effective strategies tailored to the unique challenges faced in this sector (Baloch, Iqbal, Ikramullah, van Prooijen and Khan, 2021). The reviewed literature on performance management practice shows that, despite the regulatory practices of performance management, lower-graded occupation (blue-collar) levels such as the security and public service sectors still experience limited performance improvement due to hidden motives, poor execution, and the bias and subjectivity common in the appraisal process due to inadequate allocation of resources (Govender, 2020). These systemic issues undermine the integrity of performance management, making it difficult to achieve fair and effective evaluations. The lack of research specifically focused on the security sector's performance appraisal systems indicates a critical gap in understanding and addressing these challenges (Baloch et al., 2021). da Veiga, Astakhova, Botha and Herselman (2020) define organisational culture is the collective values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape the social and psychological environment of an organisation.

### One of the main theoretical frameworks of this study adopted Schein’s (1983) organisational culture theory which postulates that organisational culture is a prevailing set of beliefs, ideologies, values, and behaviours within an organisation. According to Schein (1983), organisational culture should imply stability, continuity and applicability at all levels within an organisation. Secondly, it should also share a conceptual understanding, meaning that is most commonly shared through common language, communication, and experience. Patterning is also a shared aspect of organisational culture where ideologies, paradigms and certain stereotypes are prevalent. Lastly, culture also suggests the existence of hidden power dynamics within an organisation, which may not be objectively observable but nonetheless exist (Önday, 2016).

### *Training, development and Resource Allocation*

### Performance management practices suffer from a lack of training and development, particularly at lower job levels, as both managers and employees often lack the skills and training necessary for effective performance evaluations. Although training and development are critical components of performance management systems, they are frequently neglected due to inadequate resource allocation in various sectors (Schleicher, Baumann, Sullivan, Levy, Hargrove and Barros-Rivera, 2018).

### Unclear performance measurements further complicate the appraisal process, making it difficult to rate employees objectively. Ambiguous and inapplicable performance metrics confuse both managers and employees, hindering their ability to align efforts with performance targets (Gabriel and Villaroman, 2019).

* 1. **Contextual Factors Affecting Performance Management**

### *Language and Cultural Context*

### South Africa is characterised by its rich cultural diversity, with many ethnic groups, languages, and traditions. Understanding South Africa’s history of social, economic, and cultural inequalities is important in performance management practice. DeNisi, Murphy, Varma and Budhwar (2021) mention that an effective performance management system should be culturally congruent with a country’s broader cultural context. Aguinis and Burgi-Tian (2023) further state that, in the western implementation of performance management, objective and strategic outputs are emphasised; whilst in other contexts, cultural influences serve as more prominent performance measurements. This implies that subjective, contextual factors also play a role in the success of performance management systems (Aguinis and Burgi-Tian, 2023).

### Mooney and Evans (2015), in their discourse on language, ideology and power, define ideology as a set of beliefs, ideas and values that shapes and informs political, societal, cultural, and economic systems. Ideology refers to the social world, which serves as a framework and shapes the manner in which individuals perceive, interpret, understand, and behave in a society. Ideology as a belief system plays a crucial role in shaping political, social, and institutional norms and reflects in the implicit way societies and cultures operate (Mooney and Evans, 2015).

### Contextual significance becomes important in addressing socio-economic discrepancies in developing countries, such as South Africa, where there is a need for education, technology, and development in order to sustain competitive advantage in keeping with rapid industrialisation and evolving corporate structures (Cappelli, Tambe and Yakubovich, 2018).

### While traditional performance management theories offer valuable insights and tools for organisational effectiveness, their application in developing countries is fraught with challenges as contextual realities, rapid industrialisation, and pervasive economic inequalities necessitate a re-evaluation in contextual applications (Aguinis and Burgi-Tian, 2023). Hence, adapting performance management practices to be more culturally sensitive, technologically adaptive, and equity-focused is essential for fostering sustainable development and inclusive economic growth in developing countries.

### Performance management systems focused on sustainable development goals ensure employees acquire necessary skills, promoting lifelong learning and educational advancement (Chams and García-Blandón, 2019). Investment in training ensures a skilled and adaptable workforce, essential for economic growth and innovation. While technology can enhance performance management, it must balance efficiency with valuing employees (Mamman, Kamoche, Zakaria and Agbebi, 2018). Recognising the existing levels of inequality, organisations should tailor their performance metrics to improve opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups (Tyokwe and Naicker, 2021). By including corporate social responsibility (CSR) objectives in performance appraisals, organisations can promote community development and environmental stewardship, benefiting marginalised communities (Kim, 2022).

### However this can only be achieved through collaboration of governmental and institutional policies, public-private sector partnerships, poverty reduction and investment in technological infrastructure in developing countries ensuring all employees have fair and equitable access to opportunities and resources (Riaz, 2015). In South Africa, addressing unique socio-economic and cultural challenges through sustainable HRM practices can significantly contribute to promoting equitable opportunities, continuous development, and accountability which drive sustainable development and reduce inequalities amidst industrialisation (Guerci, Hauff, Panichella and Radaelli, 2022).

### DeNisi and Murphy (2017) note that the lack of broader contextual research in developing countries necessitates further study in order to comprehend performance management through understanding the wider organisational microclimate, culture, beliefs, norms, and socio-economic factors which affect performance outcomes (Bapuji, Ertug and Shaw, 2020). Performance management can therefore significantly address inequalities associated with industrialisation, by focusing on equitable development, skill enhancement, fair wages, and sustainability, helping bridge the gap between divisions of society, promoting inclusive and equitable growth thereby reducing inequality (Tweedie, Wild, Rhodes and Martinov‐Bennie, 2018).

## Research Design and Methodology

This section will hence discuss the research strategy, approach, design, sampling, data collection and analysis techniques as well as ethical considerations and limitations of this study.

### Research Question

### What are the underlying internal, external, and contextual factors that affect security managers’ perceptions about performance management in their institution?

### Research Objective

### To ascertain and explore the various internal, external, and contextual factors that security managers view as determinants of their performance management system that are context specific in the institution.

### Research Approach and Strategies

A qualitative interpretivist exploratory approach was employed to investigate the subjective experiences and challenges faced by security managers regarding the various factors influencing their knowledge and perceptions of performance management. The target population focused on security managers at a South African tertiary institution. Due to time constraints and the study's scope, the research was geographically limited to two campus sites in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The participants' work experiences with managing security officers and performance management processes aligned with the research objective.

* + 1. *Sampling & Sampling design*

The study employed a purposive sampling technique. From a total of twenty-four security managers across four campuses, the study focused on two campuses, comprising twelve management staff responsible for managing security personnel performance. Participants were chosen based on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria; being permanent employees with two or more years of experience in performance management systems, as well as the inclusion of female managers to account for gender diversity. Additionally, the study aimed to include participants from various age groups and races to ensure demographic inclusivity. The purposive sampling technique allowed the researcher to address practical constraints of qualitative research such as geographical location, sample size, and time while ensuring a representative sample of the target population and make generalisations about the population of interest (Neuman and Robson, 2018).

* + 1. *Data Collection Instruments*

This study utilised semi-structured, in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. Twelve in-person interviews were conducted with management staff at a tertiary institution, scheduled on participant availability and operational constraints (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Each interview was audio recorded and supplemented with participant notes for accurate transcription and data analysis. The interview schedule incorporated probing questions to facilitate detailed and nuanced responses from participants, aligning with the qualitative research objective of providing comprehensive descriptions and contextual understanding of human experiences (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2018).

* + 1. *Data Analysis and Reporting*

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework was used to identify, analyse, and report themes. This included familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and presenting research findings using NVivo software (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Findings were presented using NVivo-generated word clouds and tree maps to support, highlight and validate key themes and their relationships, enhancing the understanding of the data collected from interviews (Brough, 2018). Thematic data saturation was reached after conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews, as analysis revealed consistent repetition of themes and concepts across interviews, indicating no emergence of new themes or insights (Mwita, 2022).

* 1. **Strategies to Ensure Data Integrity and Quality**

This study employed several quality control measures which included credibility, ensured through participant informed consent. Confirmability/trustworthiness involved accurately reflecting participant perspectives and adhering to literature, lastly, transferability/applicability which assessed the potential for findings to be relevant in other contexts whilst dependability relied on articulate research designs and methods (Ahmed, 2024). Additionally, reflexivity, notetaking, record-keeping, and applying findings in various contexts further ensured quality of data analysis and research findings (Noble and Smith, 2015).

* 1. **Ethical Considerations**

Neuman and Robson (2018) emphasise that ethical considerations in social research guide moral conduct and balance scientific pursuits with participant rights. This study, adhered to and followed the following ethics procedures, in which application for full ethical approval was made to the Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, approval number is HSSREC/00006204/2023. Ethical conduct of research was facilitated through obtaining informed, voluntary consent from all participants, adhering to principles of anonymity, confidentiality, data security and non-maleficence throughout the data collection and research process (Neuman and Robson, 2018).

## Presentation and Interpretation of Results

### The results and interpretations are addressed through the following sub-themes:

### Organisational Factors Influencing Performance Management

### Aguinis and Burgi-Tian (2023) mention that traditional management theory focuses on objective, strategic outputs. However, in the 21st century there has been a shift to examining both organisational, external, and contextual influences, and their effect on the applicability of performance management in practice. More recent views on management, therefore, focus on assessing the objective, subjective and contextual factors, and their role in the success of performance management systems (Aguinis and Burgi-Tian, 2023).

### This sub-theme will look at organisational factors that influence performance management practice at the tertiary institution. Figure 1, below, shows a word cloud giving managers’ perspectives of the internal organisational factors that affect performance management.



**Figure 1:** Managers’ perspectives of organisational factors affecting performance management

Source: (Gouri Shankar and Ramsaroop, 2024).

The most prominent internal organisational factors affecting the implementation of performance management in the security department are training, development, time, rewards, and organisational culture. Challenges in skills, communication, and motivation were also contributing factors that stem from organisational factors.

### *Organisational Culture and Values*

The security managers provided the following responses in relation to organisational culture and values at the institution:

**Participant 8:** *“There's this certain type of people who actually have this attitude on what. But at the end of the day, we are serving under the principal of wisdom. But it's something that needs to be corrected, only if the organisational culture promotes it for us, the fairness and equality, if I can respect you, respect me back.”* **Participant 12:** *“The problem, even if you make an organisational culture, if the organisational culture will want to be a world class institution, how will you be a world class, when we don't have the resources? We don't pay employees according to their grades. It's a problem... There are politics, but mainly, just what I have learnt here is that it even happens outside. There is a lot of mistrust around people here... The other challenge that I find in terms of the cultural perspective of the organisation, and it's the division of getting people together.”*

Managers’ responses show that there is room for improvement in organisational culture, due to outdated resources and a lack of empowerment through employee development and training, which has a negative impact on motivation and performance. Managers also noted the discrepancy between the institution’s aspiration to be world class, and current practice, which fails to reflect those aspirations. A pervasive sense of mistrust and division was also highlighted, which negatively impacts performance. These findings coincide with both theoretical frameworks and the literature covered in this study. Schein’s (1983) organisational culture theory mentions artefacts and behaviours, which refer to structures and processes, that is performance management processes, in regard to the nature of this study. Espoused beliefs and values, which are the norms and goals of an organisation, present a discrepancy at the institution between practice and the application of performance management. Lastly, the basic assumptions and values that guide employee behaviour, perceptions, and feelings, as seen in the managers’ responses, have been brought to light (Mamatha and Geetanjali, 2020).

Overall, managers advocate for a shift towards a more supportive and inclusive organisational culture that values development, well-being, and respect of its employees. This validates the notion that the effectiveness of performance management is dependent on employees’ knowledge, awareness and understanding of the organisational culture. Organisational culture should, therefore, be able to promote adaptability and stability in the current world of work (Acar and Acar, 2014). The following section will elaborate on participant responses to management commitment and leadership:

### *Senior Management Commitment and Leadership*

**Participant 6:** *“We used to sit with them and talk, because I know how to express my concerns to somebody else in a good manner. They always give us hope. They say don't worry they’re gonna sort that out, but nothing is sorted (laughs).”*

**Participant 7:** *“The communication is not good. We have emails, but HR, they don’t communicate with us. Sometimes it's us. We will ask, if I want to do this, what must I do. So, the communication is a problem.”*

The above responses show that while communication with more senior management and HR is good, and there are channels for communication, managers feel that there is room for improvement, especially around the performance appraisal process (Govender and Bussin, 2020). In terms of leadership, the managers are concerned with the responsiveness and transparency in decision-making, and alignment with organisational values through inclusivity and employee empowerment. According to Gerrish (2016), functioning management and leadership commitment is a significant contributing factor to the success of performance management, as it allows for sustained competitive advantage, continuing improvement, retention, and job satisfaction (Gerrish, 2016).

The next section will provide insights into the relationships within the security department, as compared to the relationships with more senior management, as presented above, in which managers’ stated the following:

### *Inter-departmental Managerial Commitment and Leadership*

**Participant 5:** *“For now, it’s good, because now even if they do a mistake here and there. But you become as like a mother, and then you sit with him down and you explain to him. You not supposed to go like that. You supposed to sit and talk nice.”*

**Participant 9:** *“Big communication. I respect them, they respect me, especially if they do the right job.”*

**Participant 6:** *“My colleagues, we are very in a good relationship with them because I was on the shift A. Now, I'm on the shift C. Shift A is very rude, but whenever I talk to them, they will understand me.”*

The managers’ responses show that communication, commitment, and engagement are good within the security department. This suggests that the manager-employee relationship is strong and well maintained, as managers provide ongoing support and assistance to their staff, which promotes and fosters performance objectives in line with organisational goals. These findings show that managers take on the responsibility of managing performance as a constant process and do not only rely on appraisal methods. Furthermore, the findings show that managers foster employee engagement more than senior management, as they encourage active participation, commitment to organisational goals, motivation, and positive attitudes (Gerrish, 2016).

The next section will cover compensation, benefits and resources, as internal organisational factors that influence performance management. Managers’ stated the following in this regard:

### *Compensation, Benefits and Resource Allocation*

**Participant 11:** *“I think that there are a lot of benefits that I think the staff is not receiving and the key one is a risk pay or danger pay because the RMS staff is the frontline staff that has to deal with the students, as well as the criminal element out there. So, they are the first people who will face any sort of danger.”*

**Participant 5:** *“It's not good here. Medical aid see you only allowed to see the GPs when you need something. You not getting private hospital. It's like insurance, in fact, not a medical aid. That's why we are facing some problem when we were supposed to go to the private hospital.”*

**Participant 6:** *“I thought that you are not get paid enough, but if the job runs smoothly everyone is stick to their position the pay is fine. Because of the pressure, we think that the pay is not good, but if we have the resources the pay is fine, the work is just hard. I hope the communication is clearer. If the communication can change, like we are taking the juniors seriously, it’s not fair that the management takes us, anyhow.”*

These responses highlight concerns about inadequate compensation, bonus and reward schemes, limited benefits, and the need for better resource allocation. The findings show that both managers and employees are dissatisfied with pay grading and scales, and mentioned that the institution pays less than competitors, which may adversely affect retention levels. Inadequate health insurance coverage is highlighted, in light of high-risk jobs, and current unexpected medical-aid scheme expenses. Another manager mentioned that pay is enough, and that poor performance is attributed to a lack of resources. These concerns imply that the institution should invest in improving employee well-being and development by fostering strategic human resource approaches to performance management. As Armstrong and Taylor (2020) mention, human capital development and knowledge management are strongly linked to performance management. These facets of strategic HR are guided by organisational learning; training; KPAs; employee development; performance metrics; and feedback, in order to foster high levels of engagement, satisfaction, motivation, and retention amongst employees (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020).

The following sub-section will cover internal organisational factors, which include employee training and development, which was identified as one of the major challenges in earlier discussions. These were managers’ responses:

### *Training and Skill Development Challenges*

**Participant 7:** *“So we need training because the organisation, they are saying, that they are developing the people. But we only find that if there is a post here, and then you apply, and then they will say, okay you do not qualify, but why you do not develop us so that we can go up? So, the training is much needed.”*

**Participant 1:** *“It’s better you train them and provide them with the resources, because I can train them today how to do it, yes, six months later they forgot because they are not used to it.”*

**Participant 12:** *“The problem’s perceptions. People look at the security industry as a useless industry. The perception that was built, it was wrong from the start. So, it could attract low skilled people, that's the problem. So, the performance will be consistently poor because the number there are, unless you train them, you'll not meet the required level in order for you to perform for that organisation”*

**Participant 5:** *“Training, especially most, they need to improve. They need to give us more training. Some are not pushing enough for the training, because also when you work with technology, it is also make the job easy.”*

Once again, training and development as an internal organisational factor that affects performance management is especially lacking. Another key aspect found in this section of the data is the employees’ inabilities to be promoted due to the lack of employee training and development. Other managers also mentioned that the internal promotions available are filled by outsourcing, as employees do not have the qualifications needed to fill the vacancies. The managers viewed this as unfair, as internal staff should be given the opportunity to be promoted first; provided, they receive the development, the skills and qualifications needed. The participants also expressed their concerns about the challenges related to the educational backgrounds of the employees, as many are less educated. Addressing these barriers requires the institution to develop tailored approaches to performance management that accommodate the diverse education and skill levels of its employees. This also highlights the importance of aligning training and development with employees’ career aspirations and motivating them to value continuous learning. These findings and discussions agree with research conducted by Radebe (2015), which highlighted the importance of managers and employees receiving on-going skills development, education, and training, in order to foster managerial and performance measured competencies which reflects fairness in the performance management assessment and processes.

The next section will cover Sub-theme Two, which focuses on the external and contextual factors which affect the successful implementation of performance management in the security department.

###  Contextual Factors Influencing Performance Management

### DeNisi and Murphy (2017) explain that the theoretical extent of academic knowledge of performance management is extensive. However, there seems to be a lack of research on the contextual factors that affect performance management, or in understanding how culture, beliefs, norms, and social factors influence performance outcomes. This sub-theme, therefore, addresses the contextual approach of this study by contextualising performance management in the security department. Figure 2, below, is a word cloud indicating the relationship between contextual influences and performance management in the security department.



**Figure 2:** Contextual factors affecting performance management

Source: (Gouri Shankar and Ramsaroop, 2024).

The above figure shows strong relationships between employees’ work and contextual factors, such as apartheid, education levels, issues of alcoholism and debt. Gender demographics, family, and cost of living are also major sections highlighted under this theme. The first section of this sub-theme covering contextual factors will address the political and historical factors in a South African context, in which managers mentioned:

### *Political and Historical Factors Affecting Performance Management*

**Participant 11:** *“The legacy of apartheid still lives on because most of the employees are either direct victim for the older staff, and the rest are children of victims of apartheid. So, it's either they've experienced direct oppression, or it's either transgressed to what they've learned from their parents and the positions they've been put in, is directly because of apartheid. Their education was stifled because of apartheid. The places where they're living is not conducive because of apartheid; and, yes, all of this can directly affect his performance at work.”*

**Participant 9:** *“Yes, like me I'm old. I experienced a lot of things like apartheid. That is why I know. I’m start work in 1983, so I know it was bad. I worked under pressure.”*

**Participant 3:** *“I think that they needed to support their family. That is why they didn't finish school. I think that apartheid is still affecting our jobs. Things are still difficult. People are not getting jobs. I did not finish school because of politics. It is hard. The rent is high. Everything is high. Yes, if I finished school life would be easier.*

The above excerpts reflect the persistent impact of apartheid, as its legacy continues to affect both the lives of managers and employees, particularly in aspects related to their education levels, employment opportunities, psychological well-being, and socio-economic status. The managers noted that apartheid has had both direct and indirect repercussions, which reflect in the inequalities in limited education and resources, and discrimination, which has affected employees’ lives, having a direct impact which contributes to poor performance. These findings concur with Nxumalo, Goudge, Gilson and Eyles (2018), that the management field, however vast, still continues to reflect a predominance of eurocentric, first world views on performance management. A common criticism of management theory, therefore, stems from its lack of awareness of contextual and cultural significance. Due to the historical influence of apartheid on South Africa, the substantial influence of contextual and culturally diverse phenomena cannot be ignored when assessing performance management practices in South Africa. The managers also mentioned the following in relation to cultural dynamics and interpersonal relationships influenced by contextual factors:

### *Socio-cultural and Language Barriers in Performance Management*

**Participant 2:** *“We have so many, and some of them cause, uhm, these employees they talk and their language, and that is why I said earlier on we do make time in setting up the meeting and talking to them in a language they understand better on a ground floor”*

**Participant 5:** *“It affects them because most of them got Standard 6 and it's hard to understand because we are working with different colours, different people do others they don't understand exactly when they come here with Zulu when you were supposed to know everything in English. So, if you got Standard 6 some of them find it difficult to understand.”*

These findings discuss how interpersonal dynamics and the influence of language and culture impact on employees’ attitudes to, and perceptions of, performance management. Due to language barriers, managers are left to fill the gap using cultural and linguistic approaches which reflect their adaptability and practical approach in understanding and applying a culturally sensitive and contextually significant style in their management. Managers’ responses regarding both the historical influences of power and the ideology of apartheid also highlight the importance of culture, language, and context. As Mooney and Evans (2015) explain, ideology as a belief system plays a crucial role in shaping political, social, and institutional norms and reflects in the implicit way societies and cultures operate (Mooney and Evans, 2015). Societal and cultural attitudes and the influence of historical experiences, therefore, shape how individuals perceive themselves and their role in society and the workplace. These findings imply that the diverse cultural and historical context of South Africa impacts employee knowledge and perceptions of, and attitudes to, performance management. Aguinis and Burgi-Tian (2023) argue that performance management should be culturally congruent and should account for the impact that both objective organisational and subjective contextual factors have in the success of performance management systems and processes. This highlights the need for a deep-seated understanding of how South Africa’s history of past social, economic, and cultural inequalities affects performance management in practice (DeNisi et al., 2021).

These findings and discussions, together, conclusively support the theoretical framework and research design of this study, which are Schein’s (1983) organisational culture theory, social constructivism, and phenomenology. The theoretical frameworks guide and highlight the importance of examining hidden cultural, social, and contextual influences and how subjective experiences shape the interpretation, knowledge and, perceptions of, and attitudes to, a particular phenomenon, that is, managers’ knowledge and perceptions of performance management (Ivanov, Dolgui and Sokolov, 2015). The following section provides brief responses regarding the socio-economic struggles presented by managers, which cover level of education, family background and financial concerns:

### *Socio-economic Challenges for Performance Management*

**Participant 11:** *“Definitely, education is key to better performance. So, in saying that, we do have a lot of staff that are not adequately educated but are performing well. So, I believe that they should be given an opportunity to be educated to a required standard level.”*

**Participant 12:** “*It's the environment, you know, like a rural area. It's a town, but it's surrounded by rural areas, low based areas; but if it's part of our history, but we can't complain about our history because things have remained the same.”*

**Participant 3:** *“I did not finish school and the others, some of them have finished and some of them did not finish. I did not finish school. If I did, I would understand performance management better.”*

These findings show that socio-economic factors, such as cost of living, lack of education, and unfavourable, informal living conditions are common struggles faced by security officers. The managers also mentioned that employees travel a distance, and poor living conditions contribute significantly to absenteeism and poor performance, which point out the extent to which economic disparities exacerbate the difficulties experienced by employees and adversely affect performance within the security department. Managers also described the social challenges that are prevalent due to the socio-economic struggles faced by employees:

**Participant 12:** *“I have an employee, they came. They are constantly drinking. They abuse alcohol. Some of them they live near the shacks... Men beat up women when they are drinking, and the other guy was crying, saying he has debts, and he is drinking too much. Every Monday and Tuesday he does not come to work. So those are the main problems..., I think it's a South African phenomenon, where they live in poverty.”*

**Participant 4:** “*They drink too much of alcohol. We found that when they were supposed to pitch for work, we found that they are drinking. If they came to work, they are drunk. We have to deal with that.”*

**Participant 8:** “*If we have females they can be empowered and given the chance to, probably, be in strategy position. Yes, women, they can do it even better. It's not diverse.”*

The research findings and discussions, still reflect the socio-economic, gender, educational and job inequalities and discrepancies left behind by the apartheid era, which still continue to affect and impact performance. These contextual challenges, therefore, have negative repercussions for managers and performance management as they impact how employees understand, comprehend, implement, and perceive these systems in specific contextual applications (Francis and Webster, 2019). In conclusion, the results pointed to objective organisational factors that negatively influence managers’ perceptions; while broader contextual factors and social, cultural, and historical aspects affect and exacerbate subjective perceptions, the experiences of managers, and employee struggles fostering socio-economic inequalities.

## Research Findings and Discussion

## The research objective of this study was to ascertain and explore the various internal, external, and contextual factors that security managers view as determinants of their performance management system that are context specific. The managers mentioned organisational factors that influence performance management are the lack of training and development, and the need for ongoing skills development to enhance employee performance. Research by Schleicher et al. (2018) noted that both managers and employees may lack the technical and necessary skills and training to conduct effective performance evaluations; and although training and development is an important aspect of performance management, it is often overlooked due to a lack of resource allocation. The above, coincides with the research findings of this study, in that both managers and employees require training and development in order for performance management to improve (Newman, Page, Rand, Shimeles, Söderbom and Tarp, 2016).

Research conducted by Radebe (2015) also mentions that it is important that managers receive ongoing skills development, training, and education in order to improve managerial competency and accuracy in performance management processes. Organisational culture was another internal factor affecting performance management, as managers expressed concerns about the lack of empowerment; a pervasive sense of division and mistrust between different departments; and a lack of resources (Haraguchi, Martorano and Sanfilippo, 2019). Managers advocated for a more supportive and inclusive organisational culture. Research findings on managers’ views on organisational culture validate both the social constructivist and Schein’s (1983) organisational culture theories.

Social constructivism places emphasis on shared understanding, which investigates the epistemological and ontological assumptions of what knowledge of performance management encompasses, as compared to the reality of shared understandings and the interpretation of performance management using a contextual lens. The reality of managers’ experiences, and organisational culture, values and norms, all influence perceptions and knowledge construction of performance management (Ivanov et al., 2015). Schein’s (1983) organisational culture model also corresponds to this section of research findings, that espoused beliefs, assumptions and values explain the philosophies’, beliefs, and goals; as compared to unconscious assumptions that guide employee behaviour beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. These underlying assumptions are deeply engrained and not explicitly articulated (Mamatha and Geetanjali, 2020). Managers’ experience of mistrust and segregation between departments agrees with research by Önday (2016), who states that organisational culture also suggests the existence of hidden power dynamics, ideologies, paradigms, and stereotypes, that may not be objectively observable but exist (Önday, 2016). Performance management should, therefore, be fair and consistent, providing continual and constructive feedback and communication; structured by realistic and achievable performance goals; and fostering good organisational values and a culture that values employee development (Sachane, Bezuidenhout and Botha, 2018).

A second organisational factor that was found to affect performance management was leadership engagement and management commitment. Managers expressed the need for responsive and transparent leadership; and effective communication and engagement between HR, senior management, and employees, in order to improve performance management processes. Gerrish (2016) emphasises the importance of leadership involvement and managerial support in the successful implementation of performance management systems, which is underpinned by fostering employee engagement, active participation, commitment to organisational goals, motivation, and positive attitudes, nurtured by continual improvement and organisational culture. Effective leadership, HR policies and management commitment are critical for the success of performance management systems, hence leaders must be responsive and transparent, fostering a supportive culture that values employee development and well-being (Pandeya and Oyama, 2019).

Contextual factors affecting the successful implementation of performance management, as expressed by managers, revolve around historical and political factors, particularly the impact of apartheid on inequalities in education and poor employment opportunities, and socio-economic challenges and social problems. The culturally diverse landscape of South Africa, along with language barriers, were identified as contextual factors that affect performance management (Guerci et al., 2022). Managers mentioned the importance of adapting management styles to accommodate the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of employees. These findings, once again, correspond to the theoretical and phenomenological case study design, as social constructivism emphasises cultural context and the role in which social interactions shape individual knowledge and understanding (McKinley, 2015). These findings additionally account for the lack of contextual relevance of various traditional content and process theories on performance management which emphasise and view performance management, employee behaviour and motivation as a primarily quantifiable, rational, and objective process (Tweedie et al., 2018). Social constructivism, in relation to performance management, highlights the purpose of this study, which is to understand how individuals (managers) and groups (their employees) within an organisation collectively construct meanings through their experiences with performance management systems and processes. It is important to consider that performance management applications are highly dependent on the context of their administration (Jung, 2019).

Aguinis and Jing Burgi-Tian (2023) mention that eurocentric theoretical stances view performance management as objective and strategic; whilst in other contexts, cultural values such as respect, communication and honesty are emphasised as performance measurements. This implies that subjective, contextual factors also play a role in the success of performance management systems (Aguinis and Burgi-Tian, 2023). From a managerial perspective, South Africa, along with other African countries, faces a significant challenge in the recruitment of line managers, especially in lower-level job posts. This challenges the rapid evolution of western perspectives of performance management, as managers possess low levels of education, inadequate language skills and have a limited understanding of the conceptual knowledge of performance management processes. Managers also lack the necessary resources to keep up with fast-paced performance measurement and technological advances (George et al., 2016). Mooney and Evans (2015) also explain the role of power, ideology, and language discourse in understanding how culture, society and language shape experiences, knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes. Nxumalo et al. (2018) share these views in stating that, despite South Africa’s transition into a democratic state, the effects of apartheid still continue to hamper efforts, especially in previously marginalised and underprivileged groups (Nxumalo et al., 2018).

The research findings also pointed to the socio-economic disparities that are as result of South Africa’s apartheid history. The managers mentioned their concerns about the social and contextual challenges of low education levels, alcoholism, rural living conditions, gender-based violence, and debt, which adversely affect employee performance, and are contributing factors to absenteeism and demotivation (Bapuji, Ertug and Shaw, 2020). Conclusive research findings that addressed the study’s research objective highlight that both organisational and contextual factors affect the implementation of performance management systems. The findings reiterate the purpose of this study in highlighting how the socio-economic and contextual influences of language and culture play a vital role in how managers and employees understand, manage, implement, and engage with these systems (Francis and Webster, 2019).

To improve performance management outcomes, the tertiary institution needs to address internal factors such as training and development, organisational culture, and leadership commitment; while also considering broader external contextual influences such as historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors, to ensure that managers and employees are able to adequately engage with performance management systems (Acar and Acar, 2014).

### Recommendations for Practical Applications at the Tertiary Institution

### Findings of this study, reveal several practical recommendations proposed to enhance performance management. Firstly, there is a critical need to prioritise employee education, training, and development. Managers highlighted significant gaps in basic skills such as computer literacy and comprehension of performance evaluation systems. Investing in upskilling through courses and adult basic education would empower employees, bridging educational disparities and enhancing overall competence and engagement.

### Secondly, implementing performance needs assessments via questionnaires would help identify specific skill gaps and resource shortages, fostering a more targeted approach to improving performance management. This approach not only supports employee development but also enhances alignment between current capabilities and organisational goals. Additionally, the institution should focus on fostering cultural sensitivity and inclusion. Addressing language barriers and promoting a supportive organisational culture would improve performance management's effectiveness across diverse cultural backgrounds. Employee counselling services should also be introduced to tackle social issues like alcoholism and gender-based violence, which negatively impact workplace performance and morale.

### In terms of rewards and promotions, shifting towards non-monetary incentives and ensuring fair resource allocation are crucial. This includes opening job vacancies internally to promote career growth among current employees, thereby enhancing loyalty and commitment. Improving communication and feedback mechanisms from HR and leadership would further motivate employees and increase engagement with the performance management system. Lastly, transitioning towards a service delivery-oriented performance approach would emphasise quality over mere productivity metrics, aligning organisational goals with delivering exceptional service and value. These recommendations collectively aim to create a supportive, inclusive, and development-focused environment that enhances performance management outcomes within the tertiary institution’s security department.

### Overall, linking these practical recommendations underscores their relevance in addressing economic inequality through targeted improvements in performance management and organisational practices. These recommendations not only aim to enhance employee well-being and organisational efficiency but also contribute to broader sustainable societal goals of equitable economic development amidst rapid industrialisation in South Africa. Figure 3 below depicts the proposed performance management model advocated by the study for adoption by the security fraternity in tertiary institutions.



**Figure 3:** Proposed performance management model for the security fraternity in tertiary institutions

Source: (Gouri Shankar and Ramsaroop, 2024).

The above model depicts the interrelationship of the performance management processes with individual, organisational and contextual factors as derived from this study’s research findings and discussions. The model also depicts the usual performance management-organisation relationship dynamics which is the common micro-level approach to performance management where numerous individual factors’ such employees’ perceptions, education levels, cognitive abilities are not considered in performance management system development.

This study then proposes that individual factors be included which then forms a meso-level method to performance management systems within the security department. Individual factors were seen as an important aspect as many security managers perceived performance management negatively due to a lack of consideration of individual influences both on and during the performance management process and systems implementation.

The results of this study additionally emphasised the high influence of contextual factors on performance management especially within a South African context, which has led to the need for a macro-level approach to performance management (circled in green) which holistically accounts for and depicts the importance of external contexts and highlights the need for more nuanced development and application of performance management systems. This model further summarises the findings of this study and reiterates the need for contextualised research on performance management in lower-skilled job levels. It is important to note that this model may not be generalisable but serves as a model for the tertiary institutions’ security departments and warrants further research in higher education security sectors.

### Scope for Future Research

Future research should focus on delving deeper into employees' knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes towards performance management, moving beyond traditional behavioural, content, and process theories. Future research could benefit from employing a mixed-method approach to quantitatively and qualitatively assess these aspects. There is also a need for further exploration into the contextual nature of performance management and its implications on addressing inequalities in developing countries, which has been predominantly studied through quantitative research focusing on process and system influences. Future qualitative studies can explore how social, cultural, and contextual factors shape the reception, management, and perception of performance management. Additionally, meta-analyses could provide valuable insights into the contextual influences on performance management across various sectors and contexts, contributing to a broader understanding of this research field.

### Limitations of the study

### The sample size was constrained by limited time and scope, which was addressed through validation of a case study approach emphasising the need for a contextual understanding of performance management. Secondly, inherent subjectivity in qualitative research was managed by promoting nuanced interpretations and researcher reflexivity further suggesting mixed methods for future studies. Lastly, the dynamic context of the South African security sector due to cultural and language barriers was mitigated through verbatim transcription and language clarification in interviews.

## Conclusion

## This research paper highlighted how historical legacies, such as apartheid, continue to influence educational disparities, socio-economic challenges, and cultural dynamics within a South African tertiary institution's security department. Grounded in social constructivism and phenomenology, the research features the pivotal role of organisational and contextual factors in shaping managers' and employees' perceptions of performance management. Key findings advocate for enhanced training and development, inclusive leadership practices and policies, and culturally sensitive approaches to improve performance management effectiveness. Moving forward, future research should focus on developing robust theoretical models and employing mixed-method approaches to deepen understanding across diverse organisational contexts especially in developing countries where social inequalities persist. By implementing these insights, organisations can foster equitable and effective performance management systems that contribute to organisational resilience and employee well-being amidst economic, social, and cultural complexities, placing emphasis on addressing economic inequality and cultural diversity using contextual applications of performance management, through the development and implementation of effective institutional, HRM and leadership policies.

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