



Navigating VUCA Realities in the Security Sector: Building Workforce Resilience through Effective Performance Management

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Abstract: Objectives: In an era defined by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA), organisations must prioritise workforce resilience to maintain operational continuity and long-term sustainability. This study objectives explored security managers' perceptions and application of performance management in VUCA environments, identified key factors influencing effective PM and workforce resilience and examined how inclusive, context-sensitive PM strategies strengthen adaptability and institutional continuity. **Prior Work:** The study used theoretical frameworks of Schein's Organisational Culture Theory and Social Constructivism of which, research findings indicated that lack of training, inadequate resource allocation and rigid performance appraisal methods hinder managers' abilities to foster resilience within their teams. **Approach:** Using a qualitative phenomenological case study approach, the research gathered insights from twelve security managers across two campus sites based in Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal, via in-depth, semi-structured interviews. **Results:** Thematic analysis discovered gaps between theoretical PM models and real-world applications, which contribute to challenges in employee engagement, motivation and retention. Integrating performance management with resilience strategies enhances employee adaptability and workforce stability amid social, economic, and technological uncertainties in VUCA environments. **Implications:** To navigate the challenges of an unpredictable business environment, security managers recommended context-specific PM strategies that integrate continuous training, flexible evaluation frameworks and improved communication channels. **Value:** This research contributes to the discourse on human resource and PM as a driver of business resilience, offering practical recommendations for organisations seeking to navigate VUCA realities to ensure operational continuity.

Keywords: Performance management; Workforce resilience; Business continuity; Human resource management; VUCA environment

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1. Introduction

In South Africa, navigating volatile business environments is exacerbated by deep-seated socio-economic challenges, including persistent inequality, institutional fragility and the fragments of apartheid-era policies that continue to shape public systems (Cowan, Moritz Müller, Kirman & Barnard, 2023). Research by Sempijja and Letlhogile (2020) indicate within higher education sector, security departments bear the responsibility of safeguarding both institutional assets and human capital. However, despite their critical role in maintaining operational stability, the PM systems governing these departments are often outdated, inconsistent and disconnected from both the socio-political realities and the evolving needs of the workforce (Cowan et al., 2023). The contemporary organisational environment is increasingly defined by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, collectively conceptualised as the VUCA world. These were the research question and objective the study sought to answer:

1.1. Research Questions

- How do security managers conceptualise the purpose and function of PM in VUCA environments?
- What organisational and managerial factors are seen as enablers or barriers to implementing effective PM in security departments?
- How do inclusive and context-sensitive PM practices impact employee engagement, adaptability and organisational continuity in security functions?

1.2. Research Objectives

- To explore how security managers in higher education institutions perceive and apply performance management (PM) in volatile and uncertain (VUCA) environments.
- To identify key organisational and managerial determinants that enhance or inhibit effective performance management and workforce resilience in security operations.
- To examine the extent to which inclusive and context-sensitive PM strategies contribute to strengthening workforce adaptability, engagement and long-term institutional continuity.

In contrast, contemporary models recognise both task performance and contextual performance including adaptability, engagement, emotional intelligence and resilience as vital to effective people management, especially in high-pressure environments such as campus security (Awan, Habib, Akhtar & Naveed, 2020). This study investigates how PM can function as a lever for inclusive growth and resilience building, characterised by a VUCA environment in the higher education security sector. The study explored security managers' perceptions and experiences with performance management processes in a higher education institution (HEI) in South Africa (Sempijja & Letlhogile, 2020).

The study applies a qualitative, constructivist approach to highlight the lived realities of managers who operate within constrained environments but are expected to deliver professionalised, high-performance outcomes. By critically examining how PM is understood and applied, this paper aims to bridge the gap between theoretical models and real-world practices in institutions grappling with socio-economic transformation and institutional restructuring (Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018). If

designed and applied appropriately PM systems can go beyond evaluation and be used to empower, develop and support frontline security staff, thereby promoting broader goals of organisational resilience and sustainable development (Bapuji, Ertug & Shaw, 2020; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018).

The next sections will discuss literature review by highlighting the impact of strategic human resource management in a VUCA World. This is then followed by a discussion on research design and methodology, presentation of results, research findings, recommendations and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

This section provides an overview of the literature review by discussing the intersection of a VUCA world and strategic human resource management (SHRM). In addition, the literature covers the impact that PM has on VUCA realities and contexts within higher institution security faculties, indicating the impact of the lived realities of security officers in volatile environments. Furthermore, the study espouses barriers to effective PM and how PM can be used as a catalyst for workforce resilience and inclusive PM.

2.1. Effect of VUCA World to Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM)

In recent years, organisations have faced major disruptions, including financial crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions and trade conflicts that have deeply affected global economic and social systems (Baran & Woznyj, 2020). These unpredictable and dynamic changes are often described using the acronym VUCA, as operational resilience and competitive advantage has become increasingly challenging for organisations (El Hathat, Venkatesh, Zouadi, Sreedharan, Manimuthu & Shi, 2023). In order to navigate a VUCA environment successfully, both organisations and employees must prioritise continuous learning and the development of adaptive competencies (Nowacka & Rzemieniak, 2021; Kim, Kwon & Choi, 2023). Failure to adapt may result in skill obsolescence, career stagnation and reduced organisational competitiveness (Bourne, 2021).

The current literature on competencies and organisational resilience tends to be a focus on technical or industry-specific skills rather than the dynamic, flexible capabilities needed today (Nowacka & Rzemieniak, 2021). By embedding skill development, strategic goal alignment and continuous feedback mechanisms into human resource (HR) practices, organisations can foster a workforce that is agile, resilient and capable of adapting to the demands of a VUCA world. PM systems and strategic human resource management (SHRM) ensures that employees are equipped to respond to volatility, manage uncertainty, tackle complexity and thrive amidst ambiguity (Kim et al., 2023; Shet, 2024).

PM frameworks that emphasise regular performance evaluations, goal-setting, skill assessments and developmental feedback facilitate a culture of agility and lifelong learning, directly addressing the needs of a VUCA world (Savo, Rusike & Sena, 2024). Therefore, SHRM highlights that investing in employees' knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) is essential for sustaining competitive advantage and enhancing organisational adaptability (Savo et al., 2024; Shet, 2024).

In a VUCA world, PM systems and SHRM are more than administrative tools but rather are strategic imperatives that ensure employee competencies are continuously developed, aligned with organisational goals and responsive to VUCA environments (Shet, 2024). In South Africa, socio-

political volatility, technological disruptions and economic uncertainty have deeply impacted both large institutions and small security businesses (Savo et al., 2024; Sempijja & Letlhogile, 2020).

2.2. Understanding the Role of PM in VUCA Realities

PM refers to a strategic and integrated approach to enhancing organisational effectiveness by improving the performance of individuals and teams (Aguinis, 2019). Traditionally viewed as an administrative process focusing on evaluations and appraisals, modern PM emphasises continuous feedback, development and alignment with broader organisational goals (Pulakos, Hanson, Arad & Moye, 2015). In dynamic contexts, PM moves beyond performance evaluation to include building employee capabilities for resilience, adaptability and innovation, which are essential in VUCA contexts (Shet, 2024).

In environments characterised by rapid change, PM must be flexible, developmental and resilience-oriented (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). SHRM integrates PM processes with organisational strategies hence creating agile workforces capable of navigating volatility. By fostering continuous learning, proactive feedback and adaptive goal-setting, PM contributes directly to workforce stability and operational continuity amidst disruption (Georgescu, Bocean, Vărzaru, Rotea, Mangra & Mangra, 2024).

2.3. Conceptualising VUCA Effect on Security Sector

In the South African context, VUCA factors include political unrest, economic instability, rapid technological adoption and evolving socio-cultural dynamics amongst various other factors (Bapuji et al., 2020). Campus security staff, including both permanent university staff and outsourced staff have gained attention as a strategic function amidst rising crime, student protests and social unrest in South Africa. However, PM in these units often mirrors outdated bureaucratic approaches, neglecting development, inclusion and contextual realities (Sempijja & Letlhogile, 2020).

Hence is a clear need for context-sensitive PM systems that accommodates socio-political and economic constraints present within the security sector (Shapiro, 2022). Smaller security businesses in South Africa are especially vulnerable to VUCA conditions, limited financial buffers, dependence on unstable contracts and socio-political instability. Furthermore, protests or regulatory shifts significantly affect their operational resilience (Nzonzo, Du Plessis & Sivotwa, 2022). In higher education, security managers must safeguard institutions while adapting to rapidly evolving threats, highlighting the need for resilient workforce management strategies (Sempijja & Letlhogile, 2020).

2.4. PM as a Catalyst for Workforce Resilience

Organisational resilience is defined as the capacity to absorb stress, recover from shocks and adapt positively to change (Khan, Ozkan, Deligonul & Cavusgil, 2024), whilst workforce resilience is defined as the capacity of employees to absorb, adapt and thrive amidst disruption. In security settings, workforce resilience ensures the continued ability to protect institutional assets and stakeholders against protests, threats or policy changes. PM systems that foster autonomy, competence and relatedness are shown to contribute to resilience (Sempijja & Letlhogile, 2020).

Empirical studies show that organisations with strong PM systems experience fewer operational disruptions during crises (Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018). Continuous feedback loops, clear performance expectations and investment in employee capabilities help maintain service delivery and staff morale during turbulent periods, directly contributing to operational continuity (Awan et al., 2020).

2.5. SHRM and People Management in the Security Sector

Collings, Wood and Szamosi (2019) mention that SHRM integrates HRM practices into the strategic goals of organisations, necessitating that people management is proactive and future-oriented. Zhang-Zhang, Rohlfer and Varma (2022) states that strategic people management (SPM) expands beyond traditional SHRM by focusing on people as knowledge workers within dynamic, fast-changing environments. Leaders play a critical role by setting strategic direction in shaping innovation and flexibility necessary for navigating uncertain environments (Nzozzo et al., 2022). The ability of leaders to absorb diverse knowledge and promote a transformational leadership style helps organisations remain innovative and resilient (Georgescu et al., 2024). Transformational leaders empower employees to self-develop, take initiative and adapt to environmental changes, which is crucial for building dynamic capabilities and achieving strategic goals (Zhang-Zhang et al., 2022).

Small security firms often lack formalised HR systems, relying on ad-hoc performance monitoring. Whilst other research shows that in resource-constrained contexts, adopting SHRM practices such as structured performance reviews, coaching and resilience training can improve workforce stability, client satisfaction and business survival (Georgescu et al., 2024; Nzozzo et al., 2022).

In the security sector, security managers must go beyond traditional HR practices, adopting transformational leadership to foster a learning-oriented, innovative culture among security personnel (Savo et al., 2024). By emphasising leadership development, continuous learning, knowledge sharing and strong internal networks, SHRM can equip security teams to better anticipate risks, respond to crises and adapt strategies in volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous VUCA environments (Sempijja & Letlhogile, 2020; Zhang-Zhang et al., 2022).

2.6. Empirical Perspectives on PM in the Security Sector

According to Shankar and Ramsaroop (2024) effective PM in the security sector is deeply influenced by socio-economic factors and the operational challenges of managing both people and processes. Educational and skill deficits among line managers along with scarce resources, limit their capacity to keep pace with technological advancements and modern performance demands (Chetty, 2024; Shankar & Ramsaroop, 2024).

The security sector also suffers from hidden biases, poor implementation and subjective evaluations persist, especially at lower occupational levels such as the security sector, due to inadequate resource allocation and flawed appraisal systems. SHRM in this context must move beyond regulatory compliance to build fair, evidence-based and context-specific PM strategies that address systemic issues and promote sustainable improvement in employee performance (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

SHRM practices must therefore prioritise investment in continuous learning, clear communication of expectations and strategic resource deployment to strengthen PM systems and enhance organisational

effectiveness across all levels of security operations (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Shankar & Ramsaroop, 2024). A mismatch between theoretical models and on-the-ground realities can demotivate staff, reduce accountability and deter resilience within the private security sector. Understanding these perceptions is therefore critical for designing effective PM systems in complex contexts (Shankar & Ramsaroop, 2024).

2.7. Determinants and Barriers to Effective PM

Georgescu et al. (2024) mentions that effective PM systems are underpinned by several critical determinants that collectively enhance workforce resilience and operational effectiveness in high-pressure and volatile sectors such as security services (Sempijja & Letlhogile, 2020). These elements not only improve employees' technical competency and adaptability but also reinforce their psychological commitment to organisational goals (Kai & Siti-Nabiha, 2023; Pulakos et al., 2015). In security contexts where rapid response and proactive decision-making are vital, the absence of these enablers can severely constrain performance during crises and sudden strategic shifts (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014).

Several common obstacles prevent meaningful engagement in PM activities and rigid appraisal systems that fail to reflect the realities of the operational environment (Vignieri, 2023). These challenges also consist of inadequate tools and training, as well as the burden of meeting performance expectations with minimal support. Another major impediment to effective PM in dynamic contexts is the breakdown in communication between management and frontline employees (Kai & Siti-Nabiha, 2023; Vignieri, 2023). This communication gap excluding inclusive dialogue and participatory processes, PM systems risk alienating employees rather than engaging them (Awan et al., 2020). This undermines efforts to foster a resilient workforce, as individuals feel unsupported, underappreciated and disconnected from organisational objectives (Nzozzo et al., 2022). Addressing these barriers through leadership engagement, investment in capacity building, culturally and contextually adaptive PM systems, can enhance operational continuity and workforce stability in uncertain and evolving business landscapes (Bourne, 2021; Kai & Siti-Nabiha, 2023).

2.8. Building Workforce Resilience Through Inclusive PM

Inclusive PM is increasingly recognised as a critical facilitator of workforce resilience in VUCA environments (Enwereji, van Rooyen & Joshi, 2024). Inclusive strategies go beyond traditional appraisal systems by acknowledging the diverse needs, challenges and contributions of employees who come from vulnerable or historically marginalised backgrounds (Bapuji et al., 2020). In security sectors where, frontline personnel often operate under high stress, with limited resources, inclusivity hence becomes a vital lens through which performance is assessed and supported (Shankar & Ramsaroop, 2024).

Training and development initiatives ought to be aligned with emerging risks such as technological advancements, cyber-crime or unrest-related scenarios should be accessible to all levels of employees, equipping them with the skills required to adapt in real time (Kim et al., 2023; Shankar & Ramsaroop, 2024; Vignieri, 2023).

This mind-set not only nurtures self-efficacy but also strengthens loyalty and trust which are essential traits for navigating instability and maintaining operational continuity (Kai & Siti-Nabiha, 2023).

Supportive structures further amplify the effectiveness of inclusive performance systems by addressing holistic employee well-being. Therefore, performance cannot be isolated from the broader socio-emotional and economic contexts in which employees' function (Bapuji et al., 2020).

In VUCA conditions, institutions should offer support mechanisms, such as mental health services, financial counselling and wellness programmes in order to foster sustainable performance (Bourne, 2021; Volderauer, Raich, Bierwisch, Stummer & Som, 2024). When implemented together, these inclusive strategies transform PM from a compliance tool into a strategic mechanism for organisational resilience and growth (Kai & Siti-Nabiha, 2023).

2.9. Contextualised PM in a VUCA World

South Africa's deeply ingrained socio-economic inequalities, a legacy of apartheid and structural discrimination, continue to shape the lived experiences of the workforce, especially in sectors like private security (Bapuji et al., 2020). When PM systems fail to acknowledge these disparities, they unintentionally reinforce systemic barriers, perpetuating cycles of underperformance and inequality (Akanpaadgi, Kuuyelleh & Adam, 2024).

Schein's (1985) Organisational Culture Theory provides a valuable lens through which to examine how deeply held beliefs, values and assumptions shaped by both historical legacies and current leadership practices inform the design and execution of PM systems (Peniwati, 2025). According to Schein (1985), organisational culture operates on three levels to include artefacts (visible structures and processes), espoused values (strategies and goals) and underlying assumptions (unconscious beliefs) (Curado, Henriques, Oliveira & Martins, 2021).

In South African security sectors, ongoing inequality often manifests as unspoken assumptions about employee competence, loyalty and leadership potential. If unchallenged, such cultural undercurrents can reinforce marginalisation and undermine efforts to build inclusive and adaptive systems (Shankar & Ramsaroop, 2024). Complementing Schein's work is social constructivism, which asserts that meaning, knowledge and reality are co-created through social interactions and shared experiences (Peniwati, 2025).

In a VUCA world, especially in South Africa's fragmented socio-economic context there is rarely a single, objective notion of performance. Instead, understandings are shaped by lived realities, including poverty, access to education, cultural norms and workplace relationships (Bapuji et al., 2020; Boikanyo, 2024). Social constructivism thus offers a powerful tool for unpacking the tensions between top-down performance frameworks and the bottom-up, contextually rooted interpretations held by employees.

SHRM practices must therefore adopt a contextualised approach by embedding socio-economic awareness into performance standards, rewards and developmental interventions. Recognising and addressing these inequities is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for building resilient and high-performing teams in a delicate socio-economic landscape (Akanpaadgi et al., 2024; Bourne, 2021). Political instability, frequent protests (including student-led disruptions on campuses) and shifting regulatory landscapes such as changing labour laws or wage negotiations directly impact how security services and other frontline sectors operate (Sempijja & Letlhogile, 2020; Mukhuty et al., 2022).

PM systems must therefore be agile and capable of accounting for sudden external shocks, including shifts in policy, resource re-allocation, or workforce re-deployment (Mukhuty et al., 2022). Leaders and HR practitioners must develop the capacity to navigate unpredictability while maintaining employee engagement and service delivery (Wood & Bischoff, 2020). As businesses operate in VUCA environments, especially in contexts shaped by historical injustice and socio-political transformation, there is a growing need for SHRM to evolve into a strategic partner in adaptation and sustainability (Georgescu et al., 2024). This means integrating inclusive practices, contextual intelligence and adaptive learning mechanisms into all facets of people management. A PM system that is attuned to the socio-economic and political realities of the South African workforce is more likely to foster trust, loyalty and discretionary effort which are core components of resilience (Zhang-Zhang et al., 2022). Ultimately, such systems will not only enable continuity in the face of disruption but will also contribute to a more equitable and sustainable future for South African organisations. By linking PM with SHRM practices in emphasising inclusivity and addressing socio-political realities, organisations can create adaptable, motivated and stable workforces (Zhang-Zhang et al., 2022).

3. Research Design and Methodology

This section outlines the overall research design, methodological approach, sampling strategy, data collection and analysis procedures, as well as ethical considerations and study limitations.

3.1. Research Approach and Strategy

A qualitative, interpretivist, exploratory approach was adopted to investigate the subjective experiences of security managers in relation to the various influences on their understanding and perceptions of PM (Makri & Neely, 2021). The study focused on security managers employed at a tertiary institution in South Africa. Given time constraints and the study's defined scope, data collection was restricted to two campuses located in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Participants were selected based on their relevant experience in overseeing security staff and engaging with PM processes, aligning with the study's objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

3.1.1. Sampling Strategy and Design

A purposive sampling method was applied, from a broader group of twenty-four security managers, the study concentrated on twelve individuals from two specific campuses. Inclusion criteria required participants to be permanent employees with a minimum of two years' experience in performance and security management. Gender representation was also considered by including female managers (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The purposive sampling technique effectively addressed practical constraints common to qualitative research, such as geographic accessibility, sample size and time limitations, while enabling the selection of participants best suited to provide rich, relevant data (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020).

3.1.2. Data Collection Methods

Data was gathered through twelve face-to-face in-depth interviews at the participating campuses, scheduled in accordance with participant availability and operational demands (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This method of data collection was selected due to the qualitative nature of the study in addition to participants' lack of knowledge and infrastructure to use online interview methods. All

interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented by observational notes to support accurate transcription and analysis. The interview guide included probing questions to prompt rich narratives, consistent with the qualitative aim of capturing complex, contextually grounded human experiences (Mezmir, 2020).

3.1.3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Thematic analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model, which includes data familiarisation, code generation, theme identification, theme review, theme definition and naming and final reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2021). NVivo software supported the coding and visual representation of findings, using word clouds and tree maps to illustrate dominant themes and their interrelationships (Dalkin, Forster, Hodgson, Lhussier & Carr, 2021). Data saturation was achieved when recurring themes and patterns emerged across multiple interviews where no new insights were identified (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

3.2. Ensuring Data Quality and Integrity

To ensure rigour, the study engaged in several data quality strategies. Credibility was addressed through informed consent and participant engagement. Confirmability and trustworthiness were achieved by faithfully presenting participant views and cross-checking with existing literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Transferability was considered by assessing the relevance of findings in comparable contexts and dependability was established through a transparent and well-documented research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Reflexivity, detailed field notes, systematic record-keeping and thoughtful application of findings across contexts further supported the reliability and validity of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

3.3. Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), ethical principles in social research are essential to maintaining the balance between scientific rigour and participant protection. This study followed all required ethical protocols, securing approval from the Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee under reference approval number HSSREC/00006204/2023. Ethical research conduct was upheld by obtaining voluntary informed consent and ensuring participant anonymity. Confidentiality, maintaining data security and avoiding harm at every stage of the research process was adhered to (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

4. Presentation and Interpretation of Results

This section presents the key findings of the study, organised according to the primary theme: Strengthening Workforce Resilience: The Role of PM in Navigating VUCA Challenges and its four sub-themes. Each sub-theme is introduced, followed by verbatim participant responses and concluded with an interpretation that links the evidence to the research objective. By examining each sub-theme, the study highlights the impact of these strategies on workforce resilience and operational continuity in times of uncertainty (Kai & Siti-Nabiha, 2023). Word clouds, followed by participant responses below show the results for each sub-theme derived from this study.

4.1. Managerial Perceptions of PM in Uncertain Environments This sub-theme explores how PM is understood and applied by security managers in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous

(VUCA) environment (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Their responses reveal PM as not merely evaluative but as a motivational and developmental tool, capable of fostering resilience and growth.



Figure 1. Managerial perceptions of PM in uncertain environments

Source: Gouri Shankar & Ramsaroop, 2024.

Participants' mentioned in relation to this sub-theme that:

P1: *"I want to motivate those who don't have matric to improve and go to university so we can open doors for others. If you have qualifications, there's another door you can go through and leave previous jobs to get better jobs."*

P3: *"Better communication and more assistance with problems could help us. We need more equipment and education to adapt to the technological demands of the job."*

P12: *"Recruiting the right quality of people and ensuring they have the right tools and training will improve performance and organisational stability."*

Participants conveyed a clear understanding of PM as a tool to inspire learning and adaptability in uncertain contexts. Motivating employees through education, recognition and supportive communication emerged as vital elements in stabilising and developing the workforce (Kim et al., 2023).

This aligns with research by DeNisi and Murphy (2017), who argue that PM systems in dynamic environments must evolve beyond rigid evaluations to support continuous learning and motivational feedback loops. Security managers' emphasis on recognising educational achievement and effort reflects transformational leadership practices which empower employees to seek self-improvement despite institutional volatility (Zhang-Zhang et al., 2022). Furthermore, these findings illustrate that PM can serve as a psychological buffer in VUCA contexts, reducing disengagement and strengthening employees' belief in their own efficacy and growth potential (Lyons & Bandura, 2022).

4.2. Determinants of Effective PM

This theme highlights specific strategies security managers believe enhance workforce resilience, namely training, communication and recognition. These determinants were repeatedly linked to improved preparedness, engagement and adaptability in the workplace (Georgescu et al., 2024).



Figure 2. Determinants of Effective Performance Management

Source: Gouri Shankar & Ramsaroop, 2024.

Participants' expressed the following during interviews:

P6: "I would give them physical training and theory on technology. Security officers need to be updated on the latest tools and have trust in themselves, as they deal with constantly evolving threats."

P7: "We need more training in areas like crime prevention and self-defence, and a 'thank you' from management would uplift us. That appreciation drives better performance."

P10: "If they could organise workshops for everyone to be in one place, it would improve communication. Some employees don't even know each other's roles, and better communication would help us understand expectations."

The findings aligns with the broader literature which shows that developmental PM systems, those grounded in training, real-time communication, and recognition enhance not only performance but also resilience and psychological safety (Pulakos et al., 2015). The importance of "thank you" gestures and physical presence in training also reflect intrinsic motivational drivers, as supported by the Self-Determination Theory, which links autonomy, competence, and relatedness to employee engagement and well-being (Gagné et al., 2022).

4.3. Challenges in Implementing PM in Dynamic Contexts

This sub-theme investigates the obstacles to effective PM. Participants reflected on systemic, technological and logistical constraints that hinder the execution of performance strategies in volatile environments (Sempijja & Letlhogile, 2020).



Figure 3. Challenges in Implementing Performance Management in Dynamic Contexts

Source: Gouri Shankar & Ramsaroop, 2024.

Participant responses for this sub-theme were:

P1: “The challenge is the system, we don’t have enough access to it. If we had access to the system and better resources, it would make it easier for us to manage KPAs.”

P9: “We need better equipment for security. Sometimes we are left unarmed, with only a phone, and that compromises our ability to respond effectively during incidents like student protests.”

P11: “There should be a thorough understanding of each department’s needs before creating an evaluation system, so it serves both the institution and the employee.”

The security managers emphasised the need for resource adequacy, time and system accessibility to ensure accurate and meaningful performance assessment (Kim et al., 2023; Nowacka & Rzemieniak, 2021). These challenges mirror those noted by Shankar and Ramsaroop (2024), who argue that outdated, inaccessible PM systems limit the development of strategic human resource capabilities in the security sector. Limited technological infrastructure, such as lack of real-time performance tracking, undermines transparency and feedback, key pillars in adaptive PM (Georgescu et al., 2024). Additionally, resource constraints and misaligned KPAs perpetuate confusion and disengagement, highlighting the critical need for systems that are tailored to specific institutional pressures and workforce realities (Vignieri, 2023).

4.4. Building a Resilient Workforce Through Inclusive Performance Strategies

This sub-theme focuses on the role of inclusive and supportive PM practices in promoting employee engagement and workforce resilience, especially in high-pressure environments (Kai & Siti-Nabiha, 2023).



Figure 4. Building a resilient workforce through inclusive performance strategies

Source: Gouri Shankar & Ramsaroop, 2024.

Participant’ indicated their recommendations for this sub-theme in the following manner:

P8: “Feedback is crucial. Employees need to know if they’re meeting performance expectations, and if the system could be simplified or translated, it would help them better understand how to improve.”

P7: “Management should also invest in team-building activities to understand us better and create an environment where we can close the gap between management and employees.”

P5: “Provide training on job descriptions and offer counselling for employees dealing with financial or personal issues. It’s important to address these aspects for better work performance.”

Security managers advocated for empathetic and accessible performance systems that integrate feedback, team building and personal support (Boikanyo, 2024). This aligns with research by Enwereji et al. (2024) who emphasise that inclusive PM practices enhance employee resilience by acknowledging diverse needs and reducing structural disadvantage. Managers’ calls for counselling, feedback, team building and language-appropriate systems reflect the essence of human-centred design, which prioritises lived experiences and workplace dignity (Bapuji et al., 2020). In line with Schein’s (1985) organisational culture theory, these findings suggest that inclusive PM strategies can shift underlying assumptions about employee capacity, replacing deficit-based views with strength-based, developmental approaches (Curado et al., 2021).

5. Research Findings and Discussion

The research findings underscore the importance of PM systems in enhancing workforce resilience within VUCA environments (Bourne, 2021). The research revealed that security managers perceive PM not only as an evaluative tool but also as a critical mechanism for employee motivation and career development in uncertain times (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). Participants emphasised the role of PM in promoting personal growth, such as encouraging employees to pursue further education and professional qualifications (Enwereji et al., 2024; Sempijja & Letlhogile, 2020).

The study further reveals that security managers adapt formal performance management processes pragmatically to fit the unpredictable and fast-changing conditions of VUCA environments. This

includes prioritising informal feedback and coaching over rigid evaluations and making real-time decisions to balance operational demands with developmental needs (Makri & Neely, 2021).

Motivational strategies that recognise effort, even in cases of partial success have been shown to increase employee morale and engagement, nurturing an environment conducive to continuous improvement (Kim et al., 2023; Lyons & Bandura, 2022).

In line with this, the second sub-theme explored key strategies that security managers believe enhance workforce resilience, mainly training, feedback and recognition. Responses from participants highlighted the need for continuous training in areas such as crime prevention and technological proficiency. These findings are consistent with research that links training and development to enhanced workforce adaptability and resilience (Georgescu et al., 2024; Nowacka & Rzemieniak, 2021).

It was also found that skills development equips employees with the tools to navigate evolving challenges, such as emerging security threats or changes in technological demands. Recognition, on the other hand, fosters positive employee attitudes, encouraging them to persist in the face of challenges and reinforcing the value of their contributions (Boikanyo, 2024). Participants highlighted systemic issues, such as insufficient access to management systems, time constraints and limited resources.

Additionally, the lack of appropriate technological resources was a common issue that hampered the ability of managers to track performance accurately and in real time. As Nowacka and Rzemieniak (2021) point out, investing in technological infrastructure is crucial for improving the efficacy of PM systems in organisations operating in volatile environments where agility and timely decision-making are critical (Nzonzo et al., 2022). The findings also highlight the critical importance of addressing workforce diversity in PM systems. Managers emphasised the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate communication and feedback mechanisms that reflect the demographic composition of the security workforce (Shankar & Ramsaroop, 2024). Inclusive PM strategies that acknowledge differences in background, experience and personal circumstances contribute to equitable treatment and enhance engagement across diverse employee groups, fostering a cohesive and resilient organisational climate (Roberson, 2019).

The responses revealed that security managers see value in investing in employee engagement through team-building activities, feedback mechanisms and personal support systems such as counselling (Georgescu et al., 2024). The focus on communication and feedback also mirror findings from literature, which highlights the importance of trust and open communication channels between management and staff in fostering a positive work environment (Boikanyo, 2024). Furthermore, the discussion on inclusive performance strategies links to the broader conceptual framework of resilience in organisations, which views resilience not merely as the ability to bounce back from adversity but also as the capacity to adapt and thrive in changing environments (Georgescu et al., 2024).

This aligns with the work of Shet (2024), who argues that PM systems must be context-sensitive and capable of evolving in response to changing circumstances. By emphasising customisation and adaptability, organisations can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of their PM systems, ensuring that they remain valuable even in the most uncertain environments (Akanpaadgi et al., 2024).

Lastly, the research findings reaffirm the critical importance of leadership in driving successful PM practices (Zhang-Zhang et al., 2022). Leadership that is empathetic, communicative and supportive not

only drives higher employee engagement but also cultivates a culture of resilience and adaptability (Peniwati, 2025). Leaders who understand the complexities of VUCA environments and are able to adopt a supportive and transparent PM culture will be better equipped to guide their organisations through uncertainty (Wolanin, 2022).

The research underscores organisational culture and managerial competencies as pivotal determinants in PM effectiveness. Cultures that promote open communication, learning orientation and psychological safety, empower managers to navigate uncertainty proactively (Edmondson, 2019). Managerial skills in emotional intelligence, conflict resolution and change management further enable resilience-enhancing PM practices, reinforcing the need for targeted leadership development aligned with institutional volatility (Lyons & Bandura, 2022).

5.1. Recommendations and Scope for Future Research

Based on research findings, several key recommendations emerge to enhance the effectiveness of PM systems in dynamic institutional environments. First, organisations in the higher education security sector, should adopt a holistic and inclusive approach to PM that integrates continuous training, psycho-social support and regular feedback mechanisms. Such systems should focus not only on outcomes but also on the effort and development journey of employees.

Leadership training should also be prioritised to help managers adopt empathetic and adaptive approaches with a particular emphasis on improving communication and trust across hierarchical levels. Furthermore, investment in technological tools and resource availability will ensure performance data is collected, analysed and utilised effectively, thereby strengthening transparency and responsiveness. Future research, should explore PM strategies across different functional departments within higher education institutions to assess whether similar resilience-related dynamics are present.

Additionally, a comparative study across multiple institutions or geographic regions could offer broader insights into the contextual nuances of PM in VUCA environments. Longitudinal studies could add depth by tracking the impact of PM interventions over time, especially during periods of organisational crisis or transformation.

5.2. Limitations of the Study

While the study provides rich insights into the experiences of security managers within a South African tertiary institution, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The study focused on a single institution's security department, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other departments, institutions or sectors. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study, while offering depth, relied heavily on self-reported data from participants, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future studies employing mixed-methods designs could strengthen the validity of findings by triangulating qualitative responses with quantitative performance metrics or broader employee surveys.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the role of PM in navigating uncertainty, particularly within South Africa's higher education security sector. It reveals that PM is perceived by security managers not merely as a compliance tool, but as a developmental mechanism that fosters resilience, motivation and adaptability in VUCA environments. The study addressed three research objectives, to explore perceptions and applications of PM, to identify determinants and barriers to effective implementation and to examine the role of inclusive, context-sensitive strategies in workforce resilience.

Findings show that when PM is aligned with high-pressure operational realities through ongoing training, recognition and inclusive leadership PM can strengthen engagement and continuity. Security managers view PM as a pathway for empowerment and team alignment, especially when systems prioritise empathy, developmental feedback and opportunities for advancement. This human-centred approach is enhanced when performance expectations are clearly communicated and supported through culturally and emotionally responsive practices.

At the same time, the study identified several critical barriers, including limited access to systems, resource shortages, poor communication and outdated technologies. Addressing these systemic issues requires investment in infrastructure, flexible digital tools and the cultivation of leadership that is empathetic, communicative and contextually aware.

Ultimately, the study affirms that adaptive and inclusive PM systems can contribute not only to improved performance but to social equity and institutional transformation. In South Africa's diverse and historically complex environment, PM must go beyond metrics to support psychological safety, equity and long-term sustainability. By embedding human dignity and inclusion into PM design, organisations can cultivate both operational excellence and a resilient workforce capable of thriving amidst future disruptions.

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