Employee Engagement in Swedish Public Sector Organizations: The Impact of Organizational and Social Factors on Employee Net Promoter Scores

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Abstract

Many public organizations are striving to develop sustainable workplaces with a focus on employee engagement. Different models are used in different countries and contexts to measure employee engagement. In Swedish public sector workplaces, a model consisting of three components is used: motivation, leadership and strategic management. There is a need to enhance understanding of the model and its relation to employee advocacy. This study aims to provide greater understanding of employee engagement dynamics in the public sector, including team climate and work-life balance components, and how this relates to aspects of employee advocacy. Statistical analyses of key components were carried out using survey results from 6 020 employees and managers in municipal workplaces. The findings highlight significant relations between the components investigated and the employee-advocacy-related measurement *employee Net Promotor Score*. Based on OLS regressions, motivation emerged as the most influential component, followed by leadership. It was possible to classify the participants into three categories: Promoters, Passives and Detractors. The promoters exhibited higher scores on all components, and managers had higher scores on several components compared to employees. The results confirm that it is important to use a multi-dimensional approach when studying employee engagement in public sector workplaces.

Practical Relevance

- ➤ This study contributes new knowledge about employee engagement and employee Net Promotor Score in public sector workplaces.

- ➤ Employee engagement components as motivation, leadership and strategic management were significantly associated with the employees' and managers' willingness to recommend their organizations to others.

- ➤ Based on the study results and theoretical perspectives the models for measuring employee engagement and employee net promoting score should incorporate additional questions derived from prior research and theoretical framework to enhance their face- and construct validity

- ➤ The results confirm the importance of using a multi-dimensional approach when studying employee engagement in public sector workplaces.

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Introduction

Many organizations are striving to become sustainable by improving the well-being and quality of life of employees (Di Fabio 2017). One important component for developing healthy workplaces is a focus on Employee Engagement (EE) to achieve competitive advantage through engaged employees with a satisfactory level of well-being, performance and career opportunities (Di Fabio 2017). Improved EE is associated with higher individual performance, productivity, reduced turnover and low sick-leave in organizations (Bakker and Schaufeli 2008; Rayton, Dodge and D'Analeze 2012; Bailey 2017). A lot of EE research has focused on private organizations while other research has focused on identifying the fundamental antecedents and consequences of EE in the public sector (Kişi 2024). In many countries, public sector workplaces encompass the largest section of the workforce. In Sweden around 1.5 million (out of around 5 million in the total workforce) people were employed in the public sector in 2022. Of these, 1.2 million were employed in the municipal sector and regions (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions 2024).

Several instruments exist for measuring EE, even though none are universal. Previous studies have revealed that standardized measurements of EE in public sector organizations are limited (Dent 2024). There is therefore a need for more research investigating EE and its measurements in different cultures and contexts. To advance this research, this study investigates a model developed by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities (SALAR) called Sustainable Employee Engagement (SEE) which measures employees' and managers' perception of motivation, leadership and strategic management. In addition, an employee-advocacy-related metric has been studied - employee Net Promotor Score (eNPS) - which evaluates individuals' propensity to recommend their employer to others. Many Swedish public sector workplaces use both SEE and eNPS as measurements for evaluating EE. There is a need for further investigation into these measures, as they are widely used in the public sector. A deeper understanding could provide more precise insights, serving as a foundation for enhancing employee engagement. Additionally, it is crucial to critically examine the components underlying SEE and eNPS, particularly given the limited number of items in these measures and the uncertainty surrounding the theoretical basis of the components, an area that remains underexplored in existing research. From a theoretical perspective, there is a need to further explore the associations between the components of SEE and eNPS, and to assess whether any of these components serve as stronger predictors of employee advocacy-related measures.

Public sector organizations in Sweden and in other countries are large and complex entities with networks of relationships between different organizational levels. The Swedish public sector has been strongly influenced by the Nordic model which is a democratic model where the rules are set by the labour market partners (Gustavsen 2011). However, this has been changing in the Nordic countries in recent decades with the introduction of the so-called New Public Management principles and their increased focus on market-like relationships, outsourcing and privatization (Kamp, Klemsdal and Gonäs 2013). Public sector employees and their first-line managers work in units organized in sectors, which are in turn managed by middle-managers and top management (Härenstam, Björk and Corin 2024). Public sector work environments in Sweden are often demanding, and employee health problems are not uncommon. Most public sector organizations are human service organizations, characterized by special relations with clients and endlessly demanding situations which are stressful for the employees (Rasmussen 2004; Berntson, Wallin and Härenstam 2012).

In studies of public sector organizations in the Nordic countries, decreasing resources and new forms of government have been put forth as explanations for the increased workload and decreased professional autonomy reported by employees (Rasmussen et al. 2024). Stress-related health problems in these organizations are being discussed at the national level in Sweden (Albin, Toomingas and Bodin 2016) due to increased rates of sick-leave. Studies show that gender differences in rates of sick-leave, i.e. higher figures among women, may be attributable to the way work is organized in female and male-dominated occupations, sectors and industries (Albin, Toomingas and Bodin 2016; Sverke et al. 2016). Studies of Swedish public sector organizations show that a positive experience of time management at work and in personal life, satisfaction with everyday life and proper recovery are associated with a positive work-life

balance (Nilsson, Blomqvist and Andersson 2017; Törnquist, Bringsén and Andersson 2017). Work-life balance (WLB) is defined as the harmonization and management of personal and family commitments alongside professional responsibilities (Carlson, Grzywacz and Zivnuska 2009; den Dulk et al. 2013). Furthermore, other studies reveal that the interplay between employees in work teams is an important component for positive work-life experiences (Schultz, Sjøvold and Andre 2017; Geue 2018), referred to as the Team Climate (TC).

Extensive research on managers in the Swedish public sector (Berntson, Wallin and Härenstam 2012; Björk and Härenstam 2016; Corin and Björk 2016) shows that many managers are exposed to demanding working conditions with inadequate supporting structures in their organizations. Other research reveals that these managers can be placed in different clusters according to health, motivation and performance (Berntson, Wallin and Härenstam 2012). In clusters where support and recognition were lacking, managers had worse health, and lower motivation and performance. Several of these clusters are female dominated with demanding working conditions and health problems and a lot of client contact (Berntson, Wallin and Härenstam 2012; Björk and Härenstam 2016).

In summary, working conditions in public sector organizations indicate a need to improve EE, and there are several existing models that measure important components of EE. However, research is limited when it comes to standardized measurements of EE in public sector organizations (Dent 2024), which is the empirical base of this study. To our knowledge no previous studies have explored the relations between EE and eNPS in this sector.

The aim of this study is to provide a greater understanding of EE dynamics in the public sector, including TC and WLB components, and how these dynamics relate to employee advocacy aspects. Second, the study contributes knowledge about potential differences in key variables related to hierarchical position and gender, and how different categories of employees and managers rate EE in the Swedish public sector. Third, the study analyses the applicability of the Swedish EE model as an employee engagement measurement survey for employees in the public sector.

The following research questions were posed in the study:

Q1: Are the EE components of motivation, leadership and strategic management robust as measurements of EE?

Q2: What relations can be found between the EE components, TC, WLB and eNPS?

Q3: Are there any differences between eNPS categories ("Promoters", "Passives" and "Detractors") regarding their ratings of EE components, WLB and TC?

Q4: Are there any differences regarding hierarchical position and gender in the public sector regarding the EE components, eNPS, WLB and TC?

Employee Engagement

One main challenge encountered in the research on employee engagement is the absence of a universally accepted definition of this concept. Different studies tend to adopt different definitions, although certain components recur with greater frequency than others (e.g. Ababneh and Macky 2015; Shrotryia and Dhanda 2019). EE is often construed as a measure of the emotional investment individuals have in their work. It encompasses various dimensions, including job satisfaction, interpersonal relationships and alignment with organizational values (Kahn 1990). According to Kahn, EE is related to employees' experience of meaningfulness (i.e. feeling that work is valuable and worth doing), availability (i.e. having physical, mental and emotional energy to devote to work) and psychological safety (i.e. having the freedom to be oneself at work).

Measuring EE entails evaluating these facets through methods such as surveys, feedback sessions or performance appraisals. Robinson, Perryman and Hayday (2004) argue that EE should be seen as attitudes (positive) held by the employee towards the organization. Furthermore, it should be seen as a two-way relationship between employer and employees (Robinson, Perryman and Hayday 2004). Over the years, several models have been developed for measuring EE, for example, Copsoq III (Berthelsen et al. 2020), Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey – Employee Engagement index (Byrne, Peters and Weston 2016), Federal

employee Viewpoint Survey 2020 (Dent 2024), Job Engagement Scale (Rich, LePine and Crawford 2010), Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al. 2002), ISA Engagement Scale (Soane et al. 2012), and the survey of Employee perceptions of diversity and inclusion (Trochmann, Stewart and Ragusa 2023). Several of the models address individual factors (e.g. engagement, burnout, meaningfulness) more than organizational factors (e.g. leadership, strategic management, advocacy).

In scientific discourse, research on employee advocacy encompasses a broader scope than what is captured by the eNPS. Employee advocacy is often linked to the concept of organizational citizenship behaviour (Walden and Kingsley Westerman 2018; Thelen and Formanchuk 2022). The significance of employee advocacy for organizations lies in its potential to influence key outcomes, such as operational efficiency and profitability. Prior studies have shown that employee advocacy can enhance organizational effectiveness (Kim and Rhee 2011) and yield positive outcomes (Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Gremler, Gwinner and Brown 2001). However, most research in this field focuses on the private sector, with a notable gap in studies addressing employee advocacy within welfare-oriented roles in municipal organizations. Moreover, previous research has established that employee advocacy tends to grow when internal communication is transparent and open (Thelen and Formanchuk 2022). This highlights the need for further exploration of the dynamics of employee advocacy in the public sector, particularly in the context of welfare-related jobs.

Another aspect frequently assessed by employers is the degree to which employees endorse their organization to friends and acquaintances. This evaluation typically involves employees rating their likelihood, on a 10-point scale, to recommend their employer to others. Termed eNPS, this metric emerged in the early 2000s in the United States (Reichfeld 2003). The eNPS was originally used in the car rental and aviation sectors and has since gained prominence as a singular measurement tool advocated by Reichfeld (2003). According to Reichfeld, eNPS serves as a comprehensive indicator for employers, as employee advocacy bolsters organizational reputation, while detractors pose a risk to brand perception. Consequently, eNPS facilitates the identification of effective leadership within an organization, enabling the rewarding of managers with high eNPS scores and corrective action for those where critics outweigh advocates (Reichfeld 2003). Scholarly inquiry has delved into employees' propensity to advocate for their organization in various contexts, investigating this phenomenon across diverse settings and scenarios, most often in corporate environments (e.g. Jacobs 2003; Meier 2014; Anderson 2019).

Research on eNPS in the public sector remains limited, with only a few studies examining its implications across diverse organizational and cultural contexts. For instance, Kharchenko (2022) investigated loyalty within a major financial institution in Russia, conducting a comparative analysis of eNPS scores alongside key HR metrics such as engagement, satisfaction and motivation. The findings of this study were instrumental in suggesting modifications to the organization's personnel management policy. Similarly, Stambulska and Peredalo (2022) highlighted the positive aspects of eNPS implementation within organizations, focusing on the same cultural context. Furthermore, Yaneva (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of eNPS within a Bulgarian company, drawing parallels with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and emphasizing the significance of belonging as a key determinant of eNPS (Thomas 2020). Since its inception in the United States, the adoption of eNPS has increased within the realm of HR consultancy and has subsequently made in-roads into the public sector in Sweden. An appropriate question arises regarding the continued relevance of eNPS scoring within the public sector. It is undeniable that there are substantial gaps between the roles of a manager in a car rental company in Michigan and an elderly-care nurse in northern Sweden. Moreover, there is reason to question the single-item approach since it is statistically weak as it is composed of only a single item (Grisaffe 2007). Instead, a more multi-dimensional perspective with a larger number of indicators should give a better understanding of employees' perceptions of the organization (e.g. Grisaffe 2007). From a scientific perspective, there is a need for more research comparing the relatively unexplored concept of eNPS with key work-life components such as motivation, leadership, and strategic management. Additionally, there is a gap in understanding how eNPS relates to other factors like WLB and TC, a gap that this study aims to address.

It is reasonable to imagine that an individual's hierarchical position within an organization, whether managerial or non-managerial, may have a distinct impact on their perception of work-life conditions. This is because managers bear the responsibility of establishing and delineating the goals that guide organizational activities. Presumably, such distinctions in organizational roles could potentially generate variances in the perception of work-life conditions, encompassing aspects such as motivation, leadership and managerial practices. Furthermore, it can be hypothesized that managers, by virtue of their formal responsibility for overseeing the working conditions of employees, may typically perceive that their job demands are greater compared to non-managerial employees. Prior research has revealed that managers who are engaging leadership enhances perceptions of autonomy, support from colleagues and opportunities for learning and development. These perceptions are intricately intertwined with the dimensions of engaging leadership and are positively associated with employee work engagement (Nikolova, Schaufeli and Notelaers 2019).

Employee engagement in the Swedish public sector

In the Swedish public sector, SALAR plays a central role in shaping public employer policies. SALAR recommends a focused approach to employee surveys, emphasizing the evaluation of three core factors: motivation, leadership and strategic management. These components collectively constitute what SALAR terms Sustainable Employee Engagement (SEE) (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions 2020). The ambition of such frameworks underscores a recognition within the public sector of the importance of fostering EE to enhance organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. By aligning measurement strategies with these core factors, public organizations aim to gain valuable insights into areas for improvement and formulate targeted interventions to cultivate a more engaged workforce. This type of holistic approach not only serves to bolster organizational performance, but it may also support the fulfilment of public sector objectives and the delivery of quality services to citizens. However, the question is, how robust are these measurements and how might they be improved?

The initial metric assessed within the SEE index pertains to *motivation*. How motivation influence both work performance and job satisfaction has been extensively substantiated through a multitude of investigations within the field of organizational psychology (e.g. Paais and Pattiruhu 2020; Spector 2021). From a theoretical perspective, motivation is frequently delineated into two primary categories: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation stems from internal sources within the individual, prompting engagement due to an inherent enjoyment or satisfaction derived from the task itself. Conversely, extrinsic motivation is driven by external incentives, such as monetary rewards or acknowledgment (Ryan and Deci 2000).

The second factor, *leadership*, is a well-explored domain. Considerable attention has been devoted to exploring the impact of leadership on both work performance and organizational well-being. Commencing with Kurt Lewin's early work and culminating in factors such as transformational leadership, leadership has become one of the most rigorously investigated factors within the domain of organizational psychology over the last decade (Lewin 1943; 1944; Bass and Riggio 2010). Consistent with the SALAR framework, leadership is intricately linked with what is commonly referred to as relational leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006; Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011; Hollander 2012). This pertains to the extent to which employees perceive managerial acknowledgment of their efforts, the demonstration of trust, and the delegation of responsibilities to employees as indicative of effective leadership practices. In addition to relation-oriented leadership behaviours, structure- and change-oriented behaviours have shown to be related to employee-well-being and job satisfaction, group performance and leader efficiency in organizations (Larsson and Vinberg 2010; Harms et al. 2017; Montano et al. 2017; Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise 2022). Extensive research confirms that leadership behaviours are of great importance for the physical and psychosocial working conditions and health of employees (e.g., Arnold 2017; Montano et al. 2017; Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise 2020), the performance outcomes of employees (Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise 2022), and the quality and efficiency of organizations (Larsson and Vinberg 2010; Yukl 2013). However, there is inconsistent evidence regarding the

influence of leadership behaviours, partly due to methodological heterogeneity and also due to inconsistencies regarding definitions of leadership styles and behaviours. This research has been criticised for being too narrow and for mainly investigating single styles and behaviours rather than full-range behaviour models (Dumdum et al. 2013; Rudolph, Murphy and Zucker 2020). Additionally, studies of leadership behaviours have received criticism for not considering the context in which the leadership takes place (Porter and McLaughlin 2006).

From a human resource perspective, the third factor, *strategic management*, is closely related to aspects such as job design, performance management and EE. Human resource professionals are concerned with ensuring that employees understand their roles, responsibilities, and the goals of the organization (Albrecht et al. 2015). The purpose of the assessment questions should therefore be to measure employees' familiarity with workplace goals and their clarity regarding job expectations. If it emerges that there is a lack of management, HR practitioners can identify areas for improvement in communication and goal-setting within the organization. They can also examine the effectiveness of performance evaluation processes for providing feedback and recognizing employee contributions. It is easy to assume that employees who feel clear about workplace goals and expectations are more likely to experience a sense of competence and autonomy, leading to higher levels of motivation and job satisfaction (Judge, Zhang and Glerum 2020).

Although SALAR recommends focusing on the three factors mentioned above, it is typical for different Swedish public organizations to augment their assessments using additional work-related questions. These often include evaluations of how employees and managers perceive their interactions with colleagues (i.e. TC) and their ability to achieve a satisfactory balance between work and personal life (i.e. WLB).

Methodology
Procedure and participants
Data was collected between March and April of 2023 in a Swedish municipality with approximately 100 000 inhabitants. The survey was distributed online via e-mail to all 7 717 employees and managers at the different workplaces within the municipal domain and its associated corporate entities. After three reminders, responses were collected from a total of 6 020 participants (4 482 women, 1 504 men and 34 individuals that did not specify their gender), yielding a response rate of 78 percent. The response time for answering the survey was three weeks and two reminders were sent out during this period. Results of the drop-out analysis show a variation between 59 to 100 percent. The lowest response rate was found for the Care and Welfare administration, which can be explained by language difficulties and a lack of access to computers. The highest response rate was found for the Land Surveyor office and Superintendent office, which can be explained by their having proper access to computers.

Demographics for the study participants are presented in Table 1. Of the participants, 75 percent were women, almost 50 percent were older than 50 years, around 90 percent were employees, and areas that were particularly female dominated were schools, social care, the Environment and Municipal management administration, and Care and Welfare administration. Emergency services and municipal companies were male dominated. There are approximately 400 work teams within the different municipal operations. Sixty-eight percent of the managers were women. Among women, 6.5 percent held managerial positions, compared to 9.1 percent of men in the total population. The gender disparity in the population can be attributed to the types of roles typically found in municipal operations, many of which are traditionally occupied by women.

Table 1. Demographics N (Percent)

	All	Men	Women
Gender	6 020	1 504 (25.1)	4 482 (74.9)
Age			
<20	4 (0.01)		
21 – 30	416 (6.9)		
31 – 40	1 087 (18.1)		
41 – 50	1 647 (27.4)		
51 – 60	2 020 (33.6)		
61 –	834 (13.9)		
Hierarchical position			
Managers	428	137 (32.0)	291 (68.0)
Employees	5558	1 367 (24.6)	4 191 (75.4)
Percent in managerial position	(7.2)	(9.1)	(6.5)
Type of operations			
Compulsory school- and preschool	2 164 (35.9)	382 (17.6)	1781 (82.3)
Social care	536 (8.9)	109 (20.3)	427 (79.7)
Administrative office	717 (11.9)	222 (40.0)	495 (60.0)
Culture and leisure	233 (3.9)	88 (37.9)	144 (62.1)
Land surveyor office	22 (0.04)	12 (54.5)	10 (45.5)
Environment office	40 (0.07)	11 (27.5)	29 (72.5)
Superintendent office	13 (0.02)	1 (7.7)	12 (92.3)
Rescue service	96 (1.6)	79 (82.3)	17 (17.7)
Municipal enterprises	501 (8.3)	323 (68.3)	150 (31.7)
City planning office	115 (1.9)	56 (48.7)	59 (51.3)
Care and welfare administration	1 580 (26.2)	221 (14.0)	1358 (86.0)

Note: 34 participants did not indicate gender; 12 participants did not indicate age; 34 participants did not indicate hierarchical position, 3 men and 31 women; 3 participants did not indicate type of operation

Measurements

The survey consisted of 85 items regarding the background variables, nine statements regarding SEE, four statements regarding TC, three statements regarding WLB, one question for eNPS, and questions on other work-related areas such as harassment, discrimination and physical activity. This study focused on the SEE, TC, WLB and eNPS statements (17 items), and demographic variables (hierarchical position/gender).

Two distinct indices were subsequently constructed from the survey responses. The initial index, SEE, was devised to determine motivation, leadership and strategic management, thereby serving as a comprehensive metric for overall employee engagement. Using a Likert-type scale, respondents were prompted with positive statements that had response options ranging from "1 - Does not apply at all" to "5 - Applies very well", accompanied by a "Don't know/No opinion" alternative. The nine statements comprising this index align with the nationally standardized measurement of SEE, conducted in collaboration with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (2020).

The internal consistency for SEE was found to be high, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.88, indicating strong reliability. The underlying factors of SEE are motivation ($\alpha = 0.80$), leadership ($\alpha = 0.90$) and strategic management ($\alpha = 0.78$), each demonstrating good internal consistency. **Motivation** consists of the statements, "My work feels meaningful, I learn new

things and develop in my workday, I look forward to going to work." **Leadership** consists of the statements, "My immediate manager shows appreciation for my contributions at work, My immediate manager shows confidence in me as an employee, My immediate manager provides me what I need in order for me to take responsibility in my work." **Strategic Management** consists of "I know the objectives of my workplace, The objectives of my workplace are followed up and evaluated well, I know what is expected of me in my work."

The second index integrated within the survey is the **eNPS,** which evaluates employees' and managers' propensity to recommend their employer to acquaintances such as family and neighbours. This metric is derived from a single item which asks participants "How likely is it that you would recommend your employer to a friend or acquaintance?". Responses are recorded on a scale ranging from 0-10, the higher the score the more favourable the recommendation likelihood. Individuals scoring 9-10 are categorized as Promoters, those scoring 7-8 as Passives, and those scoring 0-6 as Detractors, consistent with Reichfeld's recommendations (2003). The mean eNPS value across the entire sample (n = 6,020, 144 missing cases) was calculated as m = 8.58, SD = 2.17. The distribution across the three groups was as follows: Promoters = 2 701, Passives = 1 613 and Detractors = 1 562.

Additionally, the survey encompassed questions concerning the participants' perceptions of TC and WLB. **TC** (α = 0.90) was assessed using a sub-scale comprising four items. These items evaluated the perception of the work group's social dynamics and included the statements: "In my work group, we treat each other with respect even when we have different opinions, we work well together, there is a commitment and a will to do things better, we show each other appreciation when someone does something well."

WLB (α = 0.80) was determined through a composite index derived from three distinct statements The items in this index included statements asking individuals' perceptions of their ability to manage workload demands effectively in relation to maintaining a balanced work-life dynamic. WLB consists of the statements "I think that my workload is acceptable, I have a good balance between my private life and work, I can set aside thoughts of work in my free time".

The data collected was initially entered into Microsoft Excel for preliminary analysis, followed by final data analyses conducted using SPSS version 29.

Analysis strategy

The analyses were structured into the following steps. First, descriptive statistics for the study participants were analysed. The second step involved factor analysis (principal component analysis) and reliability analyses (Cronbach alpha) of the SEE components, WLB and TC. Step three was the analysis of correlations between the components for SEE, TC, WLB and eNPS. The fourth step involved analysing the participants' eNPS in relation to the independent variables using OLS regressions. Tests for multicollinearity tolerance were performed. The final part of the statistical analysis was to compare the three groups (Promoters, Passives and Detractors) and analyse differences regarding gender and hierarchical position using ANOVA analysis.

Ethics

In addressing research ethics within our study, our research group has conscientiously navigated the complexities inherent in survey-based research. We have been mindful of potential ethical difficulties, such as privacy breaches and participant discomfort, and therefore implemented stringent protocols for data anonymization and provided clear informed consent procedures for upholding ethical standards while conducting research. The data collected and methodology used in the study have been approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (registration number: 2023-06718-01).

Results

Regarding the first research question, the findings from the factor analysis presented in Table 2 underscore the resilience of the components encompassing motivation, leadership and strategic management as three factors within the SEE index. The other seven items form two factors, TC

and WLB. Together, these elements elucidate a significant portion of the total variance, which represents 68.69% of the variance elucidated. The analysis revealed the presence of five factors with eigen values surpassing 1. The first factor ($\lambda_1 = 4.70$) accounted for 29.3% of the variance, followed by the second factor ($\lambda_2 = 2.17$) with 13.5% of the variance. Similarly, the third factor ($\lambda_3 = 1.70$) explained 10.6% of the variance, the fourth factor ($\lambda_4 = 1.30$) explained 8.1% of the variance, finally the fifth factor ($\lambda_5 = 1.13$) explained 7% of the variance.

Table 2. Factor analysis of the five key components Motivation, Leadership, Strategic Management, Team Climate and Work-life Balance

Factor		1	2	3	4	5
Motivation	My work feels meaningful	**.802**	.127	.257	.069	.026
	I learn new things and develop in my everyday work	**.782**	.192	.116	.147	.010
	I look forward to going to work	**.713**	.161	.109	.156	.305
Leadership	My immediate manager shows appreciation for my contributions at work	.145	**.889**	.189	.104	.081
	My immediate manager shows confidence in me as an employee	.113	**.872**	.163	.069	.117
	My immediate manager provides me what I need in order for me to take responsibility in my work	.238	**.800**	.193	.097	.035
Strategic Management	I know the objectives of my workplace	.118	.118	**.852**	.059	-.006
	The objectives of my workplace are followed up and evaluated well	.141	.211	**.765**	.149	.174
	I know what is expected of me in my work	.187	.186	**.707**	.006	.016
Team Climate	In my workgroup we treat each other respectfully	.052	.049	.096	**.821**	.066
	We work well together in my workgroup	.125	.012	.096	**.794**	.065
	In my workgroup there is a will to make things better	.119	.068	-.006	**.789**	.059
	In my work group we give each other praise	.057	.134	.030	**.770**	.014
Work Life Balance	I don't think about work issues during my spare time	-.052	.048	.011	.038	**.803**
	I have a good balance between work and private life	.127	.007	.033	.083	**.788**
	My workload is acceptable	.154	.129	.097	.045	**.707**
	Variance explained	29.4%	13.6%	10.6%	8.1%	7.0%

Note: 1 = Motivation, 2 = Leadership, 3 = Strategic Management, 4 = Team Climate, 5 = Work Life Balance.

Regarding the second research question, Table 3 shows significant correlations between the dependent variable eNPS and the independent variables: motivation, strategic management, leadership, TC and WLB. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha values for the variables utilized are provided in the table. Positive relationships between the independent components of motivation,

strategic management, leadership, TC and WLB were also observed (p < .001). The Cronbach's alpha values for the variables range from 0.78 to 0.90, indicating a high level of reliability (Taber 2018).

Table 3. Correlation matrix, Pearson correlations between the components

					Correlation (Pearsons r)					
Components	M	SD	N	a	eNPS	MOT	SM	Lead	TC	WLB
eNPS	8.58	2.17	5 876	.	-	.				
Motivation	4.06	.74	5 876	.80	.56***	-				
Strategic Management	4.13	.70	5 876	.78	.39***	.52***	-			
Leadership	4.19	.87	5 876	.90	.42***	.53***	.51***	-		
Team Climate (TC)	4.15	.78	5 867	.90	.35***	.45***	.36***	.36***	-	
Work-life Balance (WLB)	3.73	.93	5 865	.80	.43***	.46***	.37***	.37***	.27***	-

***<.001; (n=5 865-5 876)

Furthermore, regarding the second research question, Table 4 displays the results from OLS regressions comprising five models. These models illustrate a strong relationship between eNPS and employees' and managers' perceptions of SEE, TC and WLB. Further analysis revealed a clear trend, with motivation and leadership emerging as the primary factors significantly influencing eNPS. The final model accounted for 39 percent of the variance in eNPS. Collinearity tolerance variance values ranged from 0.55 to 0.76, while Variance inflation factor (VIF) values varied from 1.3 to 1.8, indicating robust measurements (Tabachnick and Fidel 2001).

Table 4. OLS-regressions. The effect of eNPS and EE components, WLB and TC. Unstandardized B-coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable: eNPS. (n=5 865-5 876)

Components	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Motivation	1.63** (.032)	1.20** (.036)	1.14** (.038)	.99** (.039)	.93** (.040)
Leadership		.69** (.031)	.64** (.033)	.56** (.032)	.54** (.033)
Strategic Management			.18 (.040)	.11** (.037)	.093** (.040)
Work-life Balance				.17** (.028)	.40** (.028)
Team Climate					.18** (.066)
Intercept	1.97** (.13)	.82** (.14)	.52** (.15)	.23 (.15)	-.08* (.16)
R2(adj)	.31	.36	.36	.39	.39

Note: * P<.05 ** p<.01

For the third research question, Table 5 presents results from an analysis conducted to discern variances between the variables across the three eNPS categories. Notably, the post-hoc tests reveal that individuals who endorse their employer demonstrate significantly more positive attitudes toward the organization and their working conditions. Specifically, Promoters exhibit significantly higher scores compared to those who are passively satisfied (Passives), who in turn report higher levels of satisfaction than the Detractors. Overall, scores are remarkably high, with mean values exceeding four for all aspects among the Promoters. Similarly, Passives also have scores higher than four for all but one question. Regarding gender distribution in the eNPS categories, men were more likely to be promoters and women were slightly more likely to be detractors (see note in table 5).

Table 5. Analysis of Variance. eNPS Across Three eNPS Groups and Mean Values for Workplace Variables

	Category	N	Mean	SD	f	Post hoc	η^2
Employee Engagement	Promoters (1)	2 701	4.46	.44	1 233	(1) > (2)	.30
	Passives (2)	1 613	4.06	.50		(1) > (3)	
	Detractors (3)	1 562	3.63	.69		(2) > (3)	
Motivation	Promoters (1)	2 701	4.43	.52	1 098	(1) > (2)	.27
	Passives (2)	1 613	4.00	.60		(1) > (3)	
	Detractors (3)	1 562	3.50	.80		(2) > (3)	
Strategic Management	Promoters (1)	2 700	4.39	.56	467	(1) > (2)	.14
	Passives (2)	1 613	4.05	.62		(1) > (3)	
	Detractors (3)	1 562	3.77	.80		(2) > (3)	
Leadership	Promoters (1)	2 701	4.57	.60	758	(1) > (2)	.21
	Passives (2)	1 613	4.15	.74		(1) > (3)	
	Detractors (3)	1 562	3.61	1.02		(2) > (3)	
Team Climate	Promoters (1)	2 696	4.40	.64	363	(1) > (2)	.11
	Passives (2)	1 611	4.09	.70		(1) > (3)	
	Detractors (3)	1 560	3.78	.91		(2) > (3)	
Work-life Balance	Promoters (1)	2 700	3.73	.77	605	(1) > (2)	.17
	Passives (2)	1 613	3.68	.82		(1) > (3)	
	Detractors (3)	1 561	3.16	.98		(2) > (3)	

Note: $\eta^2 = 0.01$ indicates a small effect, $\eta^2 = 0.06$ indicates a medium effect, $\eta^2 = 0.14$ indicates a large effect. Gender distribution in percentage of each category. (1) Women: 25.7%, Men: 31.5%; (2) Women 36.2%, Men 38.4%: (3) Women 37.9%, Men 30.0%

In terms of research question four, Table 6 presents results from the comparisons of gender and hierarchical positions. Men exhibit significantly higher mean values on the components of eNPS, WLB, TC and leadership. Women, conversely, exhibit significantly higher values on the strategic management component. A potentially more noticeable issue than the disparity in their willingness to recommend is the differences between individuals in managerial roles and those who are not in such roles. People in managerial positions exhibit significantly higher values on all components compared to their non-managerial counterparts, except for WLB where the non-managerial employees had higher scores.

Table 6. Differences according to gender and hierarchical position in mean values of key factors

	Women	Men	*f*	η²	Managers	Employees	*f*	η²
SEE	4.13	4.11	1.22	.001	4.30	4.11	34.73***	.006
eNPS	7.75	8.09	20.61***	.007	8.96	7.76	97.68***	.016
Motivation	4.07	4.03	3.08(*)	.001	4.35	4.04	71.00***	.012
Strategic Management	4.16	4.04	34.25***	.010	4.23	4.12	9.19**	.002
Leadership	4.17	4.26	13.73***	.005	4.33	4.18	11.35***	.002
Team Climate	4.14	3.86	4.11*	.003	4.25	4.14	7.31*	.001
Work-life Balance	3.69	3.86	26.93***	.010	3.52	3.75	23.22***	.004
N	4 482	1 504			431	5586		

* $p<.05$ *** $p<.001$(*) $p<.08$

Discussions and Conclusions

This study provides greater understanding of EE dynamics in the public sector and of how EE relates to eNPS, TC and WLB. EE is particularly important in public sector workplaces due to demanding working conditions, health problems and, sometimes, challenges with performance in this sector (Berntson, Wallin and Härenstam 2012; Sverke et al. 2016). Validated models for measuring EE are of great importance for the investigation of organizational and social factors, within and between organizations, and as a base for individual and organizational-oriented interventions for improving EE. As far as we are aware, there are no studies of the validity of the Swedish employment scale (SALAR) consisting of the components of motivation, leadership and strategic management. Furthermore, it is essential to conduct further research into the relationships between the SEE components, as well as to examine the relative strength of these components, in relation to eNPS.

Research question, Q1, examined whether the SEE components of motivation, leadership and strategic management were robust as measurements. The results revealed that the SALAR model, with its nine items, measures the underlying three components of motivation, leadership and strategic management with high internal consistency reliability. The results gleaned from the factor analysis highlight the robustness of these components within the SEE index. Collectively, these components explain a substantial proportion of the overall variance, accounting for 69 percent of the explained variance. However, when it comes to validity, there is reason to question whether they really measure the three components scientifically. For example, the leadership component only consists of three items related to relation-oriented behaviours and has nothing related to structure- and change-oriented behaviours (Larsson and Vinberg 2010; Yukl 2013). The component motivation only measures internal factors and the component strategic management only measures items related to workplace goals. Building on this, it is important to incorporate additional questions derived from prior research and theoretical frameworks into the measurement instruments to enhance their face- and construct validity. Nevertheless, the scale remains statistically robust and effectively captures key work-life factors.

Research question, Q2, examined the relations that can be found between the SEE components, WLB, TC and eNPS. The results revealed noteworthy correlations between eNPS and the SEE components, TC and WLB. The strongest correlations were between eNPS and the SEE components of motivation and leadership. The OLS regression analysis indicates that motivation has the most substantial influence on eNPS, followed by leadership, TC and WLB, respectively. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of these components in shaping employees' and managers' willingness to recommend their employer to others. The Swedish SEE measurements define motivation using questions related to intrinsic motivation, and the finding that motivation is the strongest factor indicates that employees and managers who are driven by an inner motivation to go to, and develop through, work also recommend the employer

to friends and acquaintances to a greater extent. This is in line with earlier research (Ryan and Deci 2000). The fact that leadership is also of great importance for eNPS is in line with extensive research showing associations between leadership behaviours and for instance job satisfaction among employees (Montano et al. 2017; Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2022), which in turn can lead to increased willingness for the employees to recommend the organizations. The results are consistent with previous research showing the importance of applying a multi-component approach to understand factors related to EE and eNPS (Kahn 1990; Robinson, Perryman and Hayday 2004; Byrne, Peters and Weston 2016; Byrne, Hayes & Holcombe 2017).

Research question, Q3, investigated whether there were any differences between different eNPS groups in terms of the components studied. The results revealed that differences between the three eNPS groups (Promoters, Passives, Detractors) are statistically significant. Notably, individuals who express a higher eNPS for their employer demonstrate significantly more favourable attitudes toward the organization and their working conditions. This sentiment is particularly pronounced among Promoters who exhibit substantially higher scores across all measured aspects compared to Passively satisfied (Passives). Even among employees categorized as more critical (Detractors), certain indicators such as the meaningfulness of their work and their understanding of organizational goals and expectations remain relatively high. These results are in accordance with Kahn (1990), who emphasizes the importance of meaningfulness for EE. The fact that it is possible to cluster groups of individuals based on eNPS and significant differences regarding the five independent components used, indicates the usefulness of the SALAR model together with measures of TC and WLB. This suggests that these measurements hold potential for guiding various individual and organizational interventions in public sector organizations. It is particularly important to investigate mechanisms beyond the lower component values for Detractors as a base for improvement processes for this group.

Regarding *research question Q4,* looking at whether there are any differences based on hierarchical position or gender and respondents' ratings of the SEE components, the results show differences between managers and non-managerial employees and between female and male employees. Those in managerial positions demonstrate significantly higher values across various components and related items compared to non-managerial employees. Research shows that managers often have highly demanding jobs, high control over their jobs and enjoy a greater level of well-being than their employees (Hessels et al. 2018; Stephan 2018). In addition, research from other fields shows that managers, in general, tend to score themselves higher regarding different working condition variables than employees do (Alimo-Metcalfe 1998). Specifically, female employees exhibited higher mean scores in the area of strategic management, whereas male employees demonstrated greater eNPS and heightened trust in leadership compared to their female counterparts. Explanations beyond the scope of these results could be that men and women tend to work in different public sector workplaces, where women are exposed to greater demands and poorer resources (Sverke et al. 2016).

In summary, the SALAR model including the three SEE components together with components of TC and WLB, seems to be relevant for measuring individuals' willingness to recommend public sector workplaces and organizations. In relation to other models for measuring EE (e.g. Schaufeli et al. 2002; Rich, LePine and Crawford 2010; Byrne, Peters and Weston 2016), which measure aspects of engagement, leadership, motivation, meaningfulness, work experiences and characteristics, the SALAR model studied combined with components of TC, WLB and eNPS, measures several of these aspects. However, the theoretical basis for both the SALAR model and eNPS is weak. To strengthen the validity of the SALAR model, more perspectives concerning motivation and leadership should be included. For eNPS, a more developed measurement related to employee advocacy should be applied when evaluating employees' attitudes to the organization.

Strengths and limitations
One strength of this study includes the use of a relatively large number of employees and managers in more than 400 different work groups, and operational areas in one public sector

organization. As this municipality has a similar organizational structure (including most operations that exists in Swedish municipalities), size and distribution between rural and urban areas, the results can be transferable to other municipalities using the SALAR model. Another strength is that the study, according to our knowledge, is the first to scientifically analyse the Swedish SALAR model together with components regarding eNPS, WLB and TC. A third strength is the high response rate compared to many other research studies of today's working life. Although the study includes several statistical analyses, it is important to recognize that while the model indicates a robust association between these variables, causality cannot be inferred. Another possible limitation might be that the data was collected as self-reported statements, although this is how data most often is collected in these kinds of studies. Lastly, the respondents had a high number of female participants, this could be seen as a limitation. Another concern could be the difference in distribution according to gender and hierarchical position. In this study, 68% of the managers were women. However, the gender distribution in managerial positions differed, with 9% of men holding managerial roles compared to 6.5% of women. However, this is how the workforce is distributed in Swedish municipalities.

Conclusions and implications

The SALAR model, encompassing the components of leadership, motivation, and strategic management alongside those of TC and WLB, appears to be a robust framework for examining associations with eNPS in public sector organizations. Furthermore, the model offers potential for identifying individual employees and managers, as well as groups, who exhibit high or low scores, thus providing a basis for prioritizing targeted improvement initiatives. However, the components of SEE and eNPS could benefit from further refinement, incorporating additional items that align with existing research and theoretical perspectives. While the SALAR model offers a quick and efficient measurement tool, with a limited number of items that contribute to high response rates, it is not without its limitations. We propose that the model should be expanded on theoretical grounds to include additional items that address both individual and organizational factors. Regarding the eNPS, its validity and credibility should be enhanced by incorporating more questions, particularly those grounded in theories of employee advocacy, among other relevant frameworks.

The findings underscore the importance of fostering EE and cultivating a positive work environment to enhance overall organizational performance and employee satisfaction in public sector organizations. Additionally, they highlight the potential impact of managerial roles on employee perceptions and suggest implementing targeted interventions aimed at optimizing workplace dynamics and employee well-being. The association between eNPS and the five components underscores the importance of employee perceptions and experiences in shaping their likelihood to advocate for their organization. A workplace characterized by high SEE scores, a positive work environment and manageable workloads is more likely to engender positive sentiments from employees, leading to higher levels of employee advocacy aspects and endorsement. By attending to these aspects, not only can organizations increase their attractiveness to current and prospective employees, but they can also foster a culture of positivity and support that contributes to overall organizational development.

Further research is needed to explore the underlying mechanisms driving these relationships and to identify actionable strategies for organizations to optimize employee experiences and cultivate a culture of advocacy and support. One way of doing such research involves conducting interviews with employees across various work groups to gain deeper insights into their experiences. Specifically, one approach could entail interviewing employees from work groups that have high levels of SEE and eNPS. Conversely, interviews could also be conducted with employees in groups displaying lower scores in both SEE and eNPS. Additionally, it would be valuable to interview employees from work groups demonstrating high levels of SEE but comparatively lower eNPS scores. This comparative analysis across different work groups can provide nuanced perspectives on the factors influencing EE and advocacy within the organization. Moreover, interviews with managers from the same groups could give valuable insights related to SEE and eNPS.

In addition, more quantitative studies related to the five components are needed in a larger number of public organizations. Longitudinal studies are particularly important for establishing causal relationships between the components studied and for evaluating different EE-oriented interventions. Of relevance is also to do structural equation models to study mediating components between SEE components and eNPS.

Availability of Data Materials

To protect the identity of the participants, the data-sets generated and analysed as part of this study are not publicly available. However, sections of the data without identifiers are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Acknowledgements/Funding

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