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## Self-efficacy as a resource in managing the engagement of local government employees

### Abstract

**Research background and purpose:** The article analyzes the importance of self-efficacy in shaping the work engagement of local government administration employees. Referring to Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, it discusses the relationships between individuals' beliefs in their own effectiveness and their levels of energy, dedication, and engagement at work. The aim of the study was to explore the relationship between self-efficacy and the declared level of professional engagement, as well as to identify the areas in which local government employees rate their personal effectiveness the highest.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study was conducted using a quantitative method based on the Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) developed by R. Schwarzer and M. Jerusalem, adapted into Polish by Z. Juczyński. The sample included 163 employees of a local government administration unit located in southern Poland. Data were analyzed using nonparametric tests (Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA, and Spearman's rank correlation). The measurement of work engagement was exploratory in nature and based on simplified self-assessment by the respondents.

**Findings:** The results showed that respondents rated their ability to solve problems and cope with difficult situations the highest, indicating the dominance of the task-oriented component in the structure of self-efficacy. These findings suggest that the ability to overcome obstacles may constitute a potentially relevant personal resource for work engagement in a public-sector context, although no direct, statistically significant relationship was found between overall self-efficacy and declared engagement.

**Value added and limitations:** The article contributes to the development of research on the psychological resources of public sector employees, presenting self-efficacy as a potential yet context-dependent factor supporting professional engagement. It also formulates practical recommendations for building a work environment based on trust, cooperation, and appreciation. The study's limitations include its cross-sectional design, purposive sampling, and simplified measurement of engagement. The obtained results are exploratory and constitute a starting point for further research using the full Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES).

**Keywords:** *self-efficacy, employee engagement, local government administration, human resource management*

JEL

**Classification:** M12, M51, J24, D23, H83

**Received:** 2025-11-10; **Revised:** 2026-01-18; **Accepted:** 2026-01-30

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## 1. Introduction

Contemporary public sector organisations face growing expectations regarding efficiency, quality of service to citizens and the ability to adapt to dynamically changing socio-economic conditions. In this context, the psychological resources of employees are of particular importance, among which self-efficacy is a key factor determining how they cope with professional challenges.

The influence of individual psychological resources on engagement in Poland's local government sector has received limited empirical attention, creating a clear research gap. Recent Polish analyses note that work engagement research is still developing, with calls for more studies in public administration contexts.

Despite the widespread recognition of this construct in the field of human resource management, its significance in the context of local government administration in Poland remains a relatively under-researched area. The novelty of the issue stems from the need to deepen our understanding of how individual beliefs about effectiveness can translate into professional commitment in administrative structures, which are characterised by a high level of formalisation and limited flexibility of action.

Notably, Polish public-sector studies have identified systemic obstacles to employee engagement, such as excessive bureaucracy and chronic underfunding. These structural factors can lower workplace prestige and morale, hindering engagement. For example, Rosiak et al. (2024) found that in a Polish government agency, severe underfunding and rigid procedures negatively impacted staff engagement. Likewise, other Polish research has highlighted how highly formalized bureaucratic environments can dampen the effect of personal resources on work attitudes (Postuła et al., 2024).

Management literature increasingly emphasises that 'employee engagement management' is a strategic competence of modern public organisations. It encompasses not only the design of a work environment conducive to motivation and satisfaction, but also the ability to actively shape the relationship between individual psychological resources and organisational factors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In this context, self-efficacy can be treated as a key element of the concept of engagement management – its source and tool. Beliefs about the effectiveness of one's own actions are the basis for maintaining energy, perseverance and loyalty to the organisation's goals. The results of the empirical research presented in this article illustrate how the psychological dimension – understood as belief in agency and control over one's actions – can strengthen or limit the effectiveness of engagement management processes in local government administration, where the formalisation of procedures often weakens individual motivation.

The main objective of the study was to determine the relationship between self-efficacy and the level of professional engagement of local government employees. Within this

objective, the following research tasks were formulated: to identify areas in which local government employees rate their personal effectiveness highest and to determine their significance for work engagement; to examine whether employees' sense of personal effectiveness is higher in relation to coping with unexpected situations than to routine problems.

The study used a survey technique employing the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES). The analyses were conducted using non-parametric tests (including Mann–Whitney U, Kruskal–Wallis ANOVA, and Spearman's rank correlation). The study covered 163 employees of a selected local government unit located in southern Poland. However, it should be emphasised that the sample selection used makes it difficult to generalise the results to the entire population of local government employees.

The main goal (MG) of the study was to determine how self-efficacy serves as a resource in managing the engagement of local government employees. For the purposes of the research, a main research question and specific research questions were formulated (MRQ): How does the sense of self-efficacy among local government employees foster their engagement in performing professional duties? (SRQ1): In which areas do local government employees rate their personal effectiveness the highest, and how might this influence their active engagement at work? (SRQ2): Is the perceived personal efficacy of local government employees higher in relation to coping with unexpected situations than when dealing with routine problems?

The theoretical basis for this study is Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (1997) and the Job Demands–Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which enable the interpretation of the relationship between individual resources and professional engagement. These theories emphasise the importance of interactions between personal factors, such as a sense of efficacy, and environmental conditions that can strengthen or weaken motivation to act (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Their combination allows for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of engagement, in which both the individual beliefs of employees and the structural characteristics of the organisation contribute to the dynamics of professional behaviour in the public sector (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009).

The article is divided into five main parts. The first chapter presents the theoretical assumptions concerning the concept of self-efficacy in an organisational context, the determinants and mechanisms of employee engagement, and differences in engagement between the public and private sectors. The second chapter describes the methodological basis of the research, while the third chapter presents its results. The fourth chapter presents the conclusions from the research along with a discussion, and the article concludes with the fifth chapter, which indicates the limitations of the adopted research perspective, directions for further research, and recommendations for management practices and strengthening the culture of engagement in local government administration.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The concept and functions of self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is a key construct explaining why people differ in their perseverance, quality of effort, and coping with difficulties. This concept was proposed by A. Bandura as part of his social cognitive theory as a key mechanism explaining how an individual's beliefs about their own capabilities influence behaviour, motivation and achievement (1997). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief that they can organise and carry out the actions necessary to achieve a desired outcome (Bandura, 1977). Unlike self-esteem, it is not so much about self-worth as it is about an individual's belief in their ability to perform a given task under specific conditions, which in turn translates into initiating activity, effort and persistence in action (Bandura, 1982).

Social cognitive theory assumes triadic mutual determination, which means that behaviour, personal factors and environmental factors interact with each other (Bandura, 1986, 2001). In this system, self-efficacy acts as a regulatory mechanism that mediates between an individual's information about the world and themselves, and their choice of goals, strategies for action, and perseverance (Bandura, 1997). It has been shown that in the area of professional work, self-efficacy correlates positively with better self-regulation, more ambitious goals and higher performance (Zimmerman, 2000; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

There are four main sources of self-efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1997). These mechanisms, often reinforced by the environment, increase an individual's motivation and resistance to stress (Bandura, 1982; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Organisational conditions can support or limit effectiveness in this regard- access to modern training, support from management, clear definition of social and professional roles, feedback, etc. (Sulaiman, Effendi & Aladwan, 2024).

According to A. Bandura (1997), self-efficacy influences behavior through several processes- cognitive (shaping goals and plans), motivational (increasing effort and persistence, especially when facing obstacles), affective (reducing stress and negative emotions), and selection processes (guiding individuals to pursue tasks and environments where they expect to succeed).

It should be noted that Bandura originally conceived self-efficacy as a domain-specific belief tied to particular tasks or contexts. In contrast, later researchers introduced the notion of generalized self-efficacy as a broad trait-like confidence across situations (Judge & Bono, 2001; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). This distinction remains a matter of debate, as some evidence suggests that domain-specific measures (e.g., occupational self-efficacy; Schyns & von Collani, 2002) may better predict corresponding work-related outcomes than a one-size-fits-all efficacy measure. The

present study acknowledges this nuance by employing a generalized self-efficacy scale, which captures overall confidence rather than specific skill-related efficacies.

A sense of efficacy influences many variables in the context of work. Firstly, in terms of motivation, effort and perseverance, people with high efficacy are more willing to take on challenges, maintain a high level of effort and are resilient to obstacles (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1982). Secondly, in terms of planning and regulating behaviour: a strong sense of efficacy promotes better organisation of activities, monitoring of one's own progress and adjustment of strategies in difficult situations (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1982). Thirdly, in terms of coping with stress and building mental resilience: a higher sense of efficacy is associated with the ability to withstand difficulties and a lower perception of stress and burnout (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Fourthly, in terms of professional performance and engagement beyond basic duties: a sense of efficacy has a positive impact on efficiency, task quality and extra-task activities (Fida et al., 2025). And fifthly, in terms of mediating and moderating effects: a sense of efficacy can mediate the relationship between organisational support, leadership style and employee engagement (Ashfaq et al., 2021; Ni et al., 2024).

## 2.2. Determinants of employee engagement

Employee engagement is defined as a mental state filled with energy and focused on work, which is both positive and manifested in vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Kahn's (1990) classic approach emphasises psychological conditions (meaning, security, accessibility) that promote engagement and involvement in performing a specific professional role. Currently, the most widely used concept explaining engagement and its consequences is the JD-R (Job Demands–Resources) model, according to which job resources (e.g. autonomy, social support, feedback) and personal resources (e.g. positive attitudes, sense of efficacy) trigger a motivational process leading to higher energy and better performance, while excessive or insufficient demands initiate a process of exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Crawford et al., 2010).

We distinguish between two levels of interpretation of employee engagement determinants: the work and organisational level, and the leadership and relationship level. In the case of the former, it is pointed out that key job characteristics (e.g., skill variety, autonomy) increase perceived meaningfulness and responsibility, which in turn increases energy and commitment to one's professional role (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). In the JD-R model, these characteristics function as resources that build engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). A sense of procedural, distributive and interactive justice, as well as perceived organisational support, strengthen social exchange, which increases engagement and influences behaviour that goes beyond the formally defined

scope of duties (Colquitt, 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberg, 2002). In the case of the second level – leadership and relationships – it is pointed out that transformational behaviours undertaken by superiors increase employee engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014), and a high-quality leader-employee relationship provides psychological information resources, which is consistent with the JD-R model and social exchange theory (Breevaart et al., 2014; Rich et al., 2010).

Engagement mechanisms are understood as psychological and organisational processes that mediate between work resources and professional behaviour and performance (Salanova et al., 2010). There are three types of engagement mechanisms:

- motivational mechanisms – they determine that access to work resources strengthens the internal sense of competence and agency (which translates into increased energy and determination in action) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017);
- emotional mechanisms – positive affective states play a self-reinforcing role (the higher the level of positive emotions and feelings, the greater the likelihood of maintaining engagement over time) (Sonnentag et al., 2010);
- cognitive mechanisms – these are determined by the employee’s identification with their professional role and the organisation’s goals (engaged employees perceive their work as meaningful and important and in line with their personal values, which promotes concentration and the investment of mental resources in the performance of assigned tasks) (Christian et al., 2011).

The literature on the subject also points to mechanisms at the organisational level that support engagement: learning culture, organisational flexibility, and inclusive management practices. Organisations that create an environment conducive to knowledge sharing and experiential learning strengthen employees’ sense of autonomy and influence on work performance (Saks, 2019; Shuck et al., 2016). At the same time, an organisational culture based on participation and trust promotes the internalisation of organisational goals and the perception of work as a source of meaning (Deci et al., 2017). An appreciative approach is also important, which, thanks to the art of asking positive questions, influences positive organisational change (Wójcik-Chodorowska, 2025).

### 2.3. Public vs private sector engagement differences

Employee engagement levels and drivers can differ markedly between the public and private sectors. Broad surveys indicate that public-sector employees tend to be less engaged than their private-sector counterparts, with a higher proportion of “not engaged” employees (Lavigna, 2019; Best Place do Work, 2023). In the United States, for instance, only about one-third of government employees are fully engaged, lagging behind the private sector and suggesting sector-specific challenges (Best Place do Work, 2023).

On the other hand, public employees are often driven by public service motivation (PSM)- a desire to serve the public good- which can positively fuel their work engagement. A recent meta-analysis confirmed that PSM has a significant positive effect on public servants' engagement across cultures (Ding & Wang, 2023). This intrinsic motivation may partly counterbalance weaker financial incentives in government roles.

Additionally, public organisations tend to be more rule-bound and hierarchical, potentially limiting autonomy and innovation. Such bureaucratic constraints can suppress engagement, whereas private firms often have more flexibility to empower employees. Conversely, studies have noted that when conditions are supportive, public employees can be highly engaged- for example, local government workers with empowering leadership and recognition report engagement levels approaching those in private firms (Lavigna, 2019; Ding & Wang, 2023).

This sectoral context is important for the present study: examining engagement in a public administration setting allows us to account for these distinctive factors (e.g., job security, civic duty, procedural red tape) that differentiate public-sector engagement from the private-sector experience.

### 3. Methodological approach

Given the under-researched context and the small, non-random sample, the study was approached as an exploratory pilot study intended to yield initial insights rather than definitive tests.

The results presented in this article refer to research conducted in the third quarter of 2025 among people employed in a local government administration unit located in southern Poland, in a city with a population of over 200,000.

The main goal (MG) of the study was to determine how self-efficacy serves as a resource in managing the declared engagement of local government employees. For the purposes of the research, a main research question (MRQ) and specific research questions (SRQs) were formulated. (MRQ): How does the sense of self-efficacy among local government employees foster their declared engagement in performing professional duties? (SRQ1): In which areas do local government employees rate their personal effectiveness the highest, and how might this influence their active declared engagement at work? (SRQ2): Is the perceived personal efficacy of local government employees higher in relation to coping with unexpected situations than when dealing with routine problems?

Based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which posits that job resources (e.g., autonomy, support) and personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy) foster a motivational process leading to higher engagement, the following hypotheses were formulated. Main hypothesis (MH): A higher level of self-efficacy among local government employees contributes to greater declared engagement in performing professional duties. This expectation is rooted in JD-R theory's view of self-efficacy as

a personal resource triggering engagement. Specific hypothesis 1 (SH1): Employees will rate their problem-solving efficacy the highest, providing a strong personal resource base for active work engagement. This reflects the idea that confidence in task-related capabilities can translate into greater dedication on the job. Specific hypothesis 2 (SH2): Employees' sense of efficacy will be particularly high for coping with unexpected challenges (as opposed to routine tasks), indicating readiness to remain engaged despite difficulties, as reflected in their declared level of engagement, aligning with JD-R, which suggests personal resilience resources help sustain engagement under job demands (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007).

The research was carried out in a local government administration unit located in the southern part of Poland, in a city with a population of over 200,000. The case selection was deliberate and dictated by research and organisational availability and the specific nature of the functioning of the analysed unit, where it was possible to capture the relationship between self-efficacy and employee declared engagement. The choice of the local government unit was deliberate and justified by the diverse socio-economic structure of the region and dynamic changes in the public sector. In such conditions, it is particularly interesting to examine how employees' sense of self-efficacy constitutes a resource conducive to their professional declared engagement.

The study used a quantitative method with a questionnaire survey tool. The survey was descriptive in nature, as its purpose was to present the respondents' perceptions of the analysed phenomenon, i.e. self-efficacy. This type of research is used to describe attitudes, behaviours and declared interactions of respondents with a specific issue (Lenart-Gansiniec & Sułkowski, 2021).

The study used the Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES), which was developed by R. Schwarzer and M. Jerusalem (1995) and adapted to Polish scientific practice by Z. Juczyński (1999). The original layout and scaling were retained in this study (Juszczynski, 1999). It is important to note that this scale has been used in studies of public administration employees (Czechowska-Bieluga et al.) and public institution staff, which confirms its validity and usefulness in the context of research on professional effectiveness in the public sector (Bidzan et al., 2020).

This tool is used to measure an individual's overall belief in their ability to effectively cope with difficulties and achieve their goals. The questionnaire consists of 10 statements describing various situations requiring independent action and decision-making. Respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement using a four-point Likert scale (the assigned values were: 1- no, 2- rather no, 3- rather yes, 4- yes). The overall score is the sum of the points obtained from all items on the scale and ranges from 10 to 40 points. A higher score indicates a stronger sense of self-efficacy, while a lower score indicates a belief in one's reduced ability to cope with problematic situations. The scale is one-dimensional and is characterised by high measurement reliability - Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient in adaptation studies ranges from 0.76 to 0.90 (Schwarzer

& Jerusalem, 1995; Juczyński, 1999). In this study, the reliability of the tool was high, reaching a value of  $\alpha = 0.88$ ,  $\omega = 0.86$ . The questionnaire ended with a form containing socio-demographic questions (gender, age, Job position, and length of job tenure in the surveyed administrative unit).

It should be emphasised here that the full UWES scale (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) was not used in the study. The measurement of declared engagement was exploratory in nature and was based on an original self-assessment question about the overall level of declared engagement. The solution used was pilot in nature and served to preliminarily identify declarative attitudes towards work, which is a starting point for further, more detailed research using the full UWES (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale) tool.

This single self-assessment item was chosen to keep the survey concise and encourage participation in an applied organisational setting. We acknowledge that this simplified measure provides only a broad indicator of engagement, covering the general level of commitment rather than all facets of engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption). Its use is justified here as a pilot gauge of “declared” engagement, suitable for an initial exploratory analysis, with the understanding that more comprehensive tools, such as the UWES, will be used in future research to provide more granular insight.

The questionnaire was distributed to respondents in paper form and took participants an average of 5 to 7 minutes to complete. It should be emphasised that the research participants were informed that participation was voluntary and assured of complete anonymity at the stage of data processing and description of the research results.

The research sample consisted of 163 people and was selected on a non-probabilistic basis in two stages, which was the authors' intention, given the specific nature of the organisation under study. Firstly, 12 departments of the administrative unit under study were deliberately selected based on the following criteria: number of employees (departments with the largest number of staff were included) and diversity of employees' substantive responsibilities (departments with different employee task profiles were selected). Secondly, questionnaires were distributed to all employees working in selected departments, and were completed by volunteers, so in this situation voluntary sample selection (self-selection sampling) was used.

The sample selection used had both advantages and methodological limitations. Purposive sampling (stage I) allowed for the analysis of departments that were key from the point of view of the research issue and captured the internal diversity of the organisation under study (Patton, 2015). Nevertheless, the selection criteria established by the researchers introduce an element of subjectivity and limit the possibility of fully generalising the results obtained (Babbie, 2020). On the other hand, voluntary selection (stage II) ensured that respondents were completely voluntary and anonymous, which translates into a high ethical standard of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lenart-Gansiniec & Sułkowski, 2021), but at the same time limits the representativeness of the sample and carries the risk that the data obtained may reflect the opinions of people who are more active, communicative and positively

disposed towards participating in the study than the entire population of employees of the analysed departments (Etikan et al., 2016).

The respondent structure was dominated by women (60.1%), individuals aged 36–45 (54.6%), employees holding middle management job positions in the surveyed administrative unit (89.6%), and those with a job tenure of 6–10 years in the surveyed administrative unit (44.8%). Detailed data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. **Sociodemographic structure of respondents (N=163)**

Sociodemographic characteristics		N	%
Gender	Women	98	60,1
	Men	65	39,9
Age	Up to 25 years	4	2,5
	26-35 years	21	12,9
	36-45 years	89	54,6
	46-55 years	31	19,0
	Over 55 years	18	11,0
Job position in the surveyed administrative unit	Auxiliary administrative position	2	1,2
	Middle-level administrative position	146	89,6
	Senior-level administrative position	15	9,2
	Other	0	0,0
Job tenure in the surveyed administrative unit	Less than 1 year	5	3,1
	1-5 years	23	14,1
	6-10 years	73	44,8
	11-20 years	45	27,6
	Over 20 years	17	10,4
<b>Total</b>		<b>163</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: own study

The calculations were performed using SPSS Statistics 26 software, while the statistical tests used were the Shapiro-Wilk test (testing the normality of distribution) and non-parametric tests: Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA, and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (rhoSpearman). Relationships with a significance level of less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

Overall, given the non-probabilistic sampling and the preliminary nature of the measures (e.g., a single-item engagement indicator), the analysis is intended to be exploratory rather than a strict confirmatory test of the hypotheses.

#### 4. Results

In the first stage of the research, the level of self-efficacy, understood as the strength of an individual's general belief in their ability to cope with difficult situations and obstacles, was analysed among employees of the local government unit under study. The GSES (General Self-Efficacy Scale) psychological test was used for this purpose.

The mean self-efficacy score was 29.12 (SD=3.53); the distribution deviated from normality (Shapiro-Wilk  $W=0.968$ ,  $p < .001$ ), therefore non-parametric tests were applied.

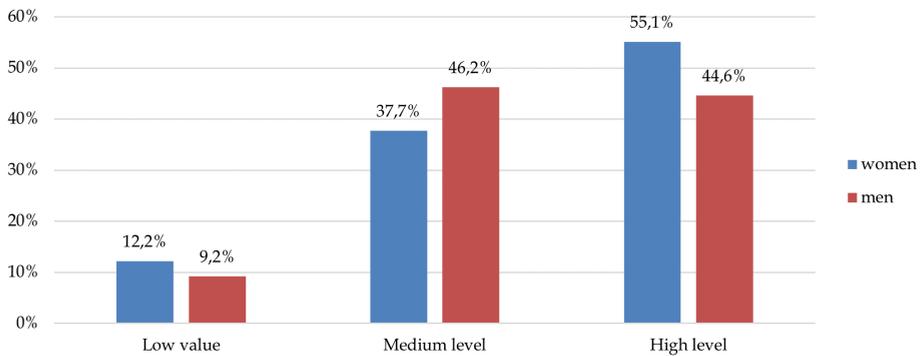
The Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) test showed that 50.9% of respondents had a high level of self-efficacy, 38.0% had an average level and 11.1% had a low level. Detailed results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Level of self-efficacy among local government employees (N=163)

Number of points	Result	N	%
10 – 24 (Sten 1 - 4)	Low level	18	11,1
25 – 29 (Steny 5 - 6)	Medium level	62	38,0
30 – 40 (Sten 7 – 10)	High level	83	50,9
<b>Total</b>		<b>163</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: own study

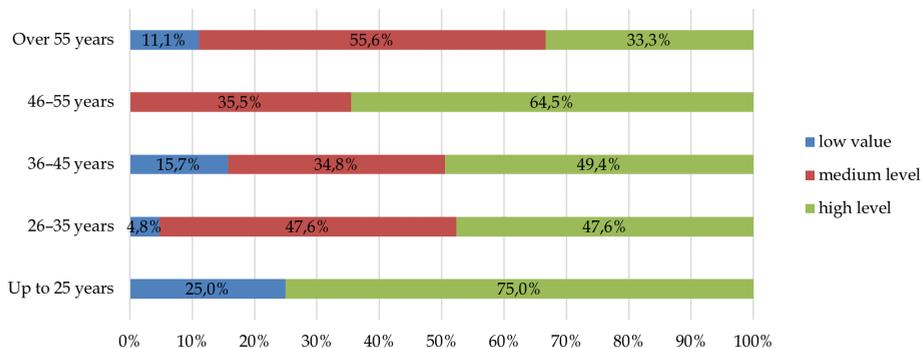
Women showed a slightly higher incidence of high self-efficacy (55%) than man (45%), but this difference was not statistically significant (Mann-Whitney  $U = 2953.0$ ,  $p = 0.43$ ). Detailed results are presented in Graph 1.



Graph 1. Distribution of GSES test responses by gender

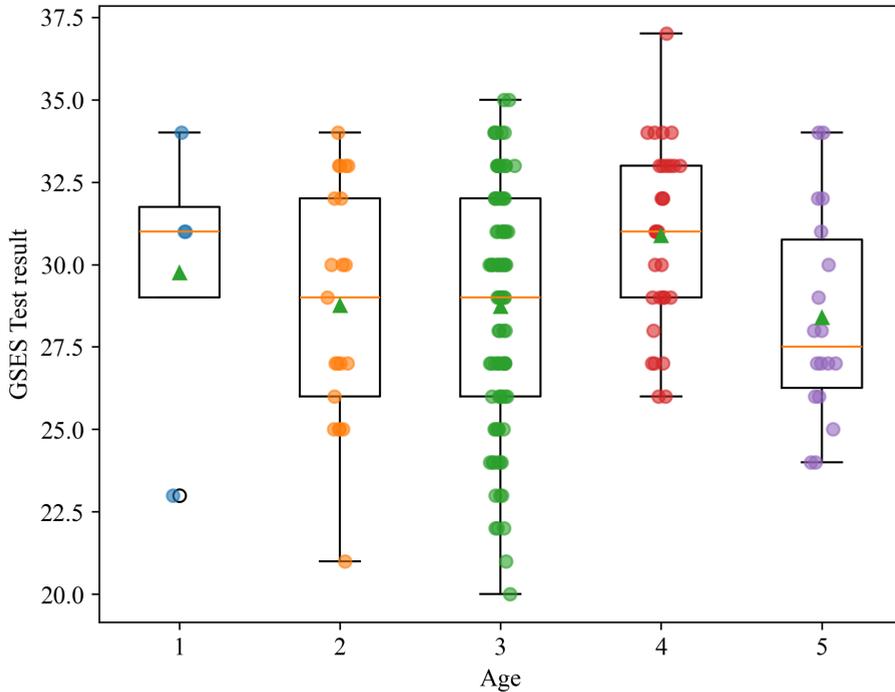
Source: own study

Self-efficacy scores were high across most age groups, with the highest proportions of high self-efficacy observed among employees under 25 and those aged 46–55. However, differences between age groups were not statistically significant (Kruskal–Wallis  $H=9.36$ ,  $p=0.053$ ). The distribution of results is shown in Graph 2 and Graph 3.



Graph 2. Distribution of GSES test responses by age

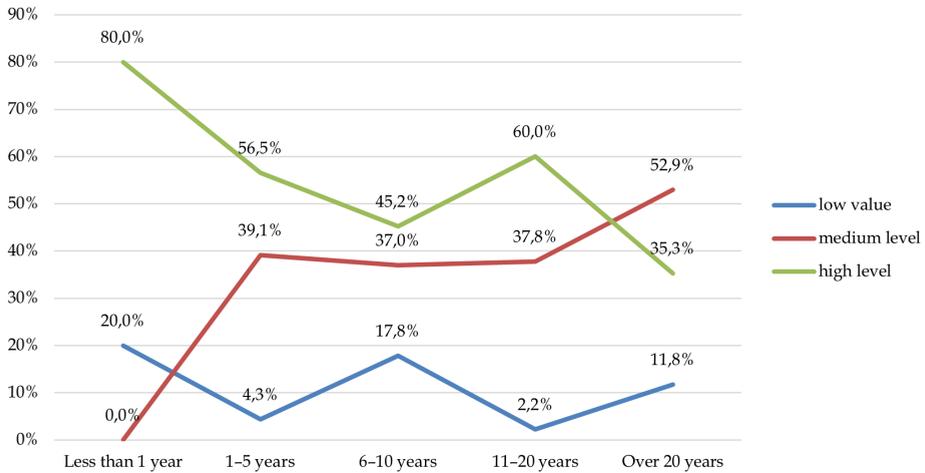
Source: own study



Graph 3. Distribution of GSES test responses depending on the age of respondents.

Source: own study

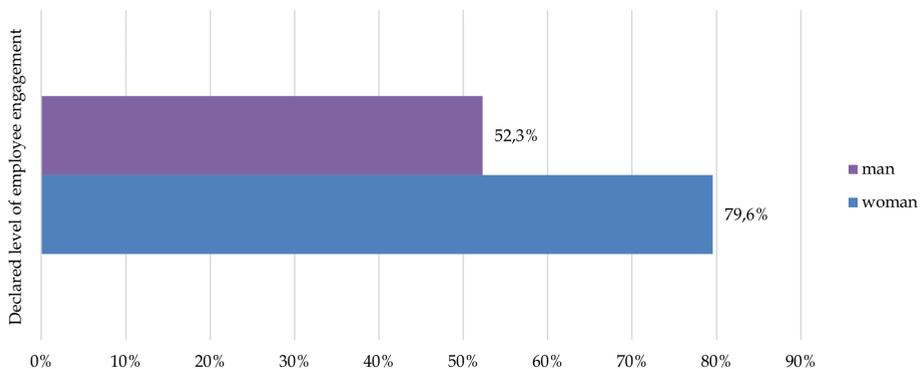
A trend was observed whereby employees with shorter job tenure reported higher self-efficacy, which gradually declined with increasing length of service; however, these differences were not statistically significant ( $H=7.69$ ,  $p=0.104$ ). Detailed findings are presented in Graph 4.



Graph 4. Distribution of GSES test responses depending on respondents' length of service

Source: own study

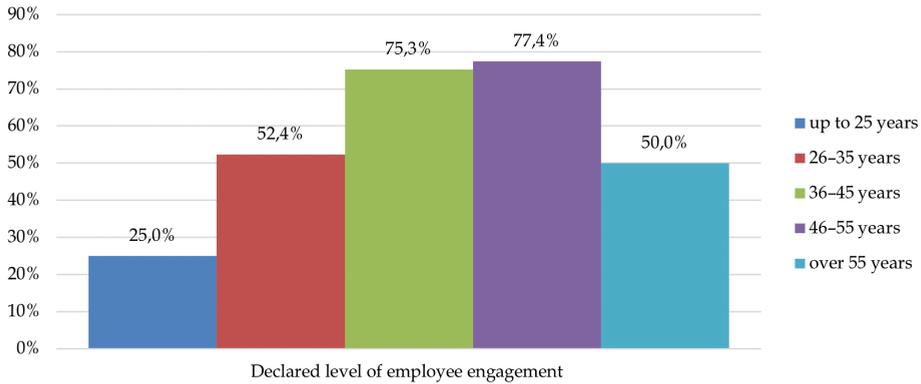
The detailed structure of the results is presented in Graph 5.



Graph 5. Distribution of responses regarding the declared level of employee engagement by gender

Source: own study

Declared engagement differed significantly by age, peaking among employees aged 36–55 (approximately 76% reporting high engagement) and being lowest among the youngest group (25%; Kruskal–Wallis  $H=12.51$ ,  $p=0.014$ ). The detailed structure of the results is presented in Graph 6.



Graph 6. Distribution of responses regarding the declared level of employee engagement by gender

Source: own study

Declared engagement tended to increase with job tenure up to approximately 20 years; however, differences across tenure groups were not statistically significant ( $H=9.44$ ,  $p>0.5$ ).

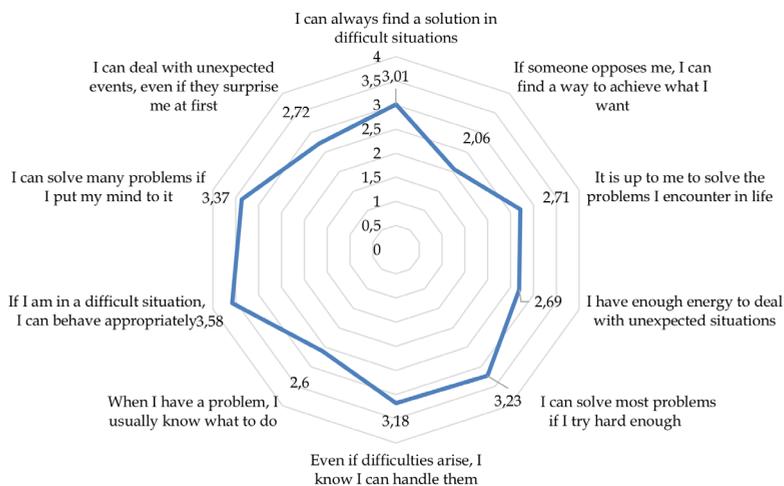
Importantly, no significant correlation was found between overall self-efficacy and declared engagement (Spearman's  $\rho=-0.027$ ,  $p=0.74$ ), meaning MH (the main hypothesis) was not supported. This suggests that, in this sample, higher general self-efficacy did not correspond to higher work engagement.

In contrast, Hypothesis 1 was supported: respondents rated their task-related efficacy the highest. The three highest-scoring GSES items all involved solving problems and handling difficulties (mean scores 3.01 to 3.23 on the 1–4 scale), indicating a dominant belief in one's problem-solving capabilities. Detailed results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of GSES test responses by individual statements (N=163)

Statements	Average of responses
I can always find a solution in difficult situations	3,01
If someone opposes me, I can find a way to achieve what I want	2,06
It is up to me to solve the problems I encounter in life	2,71
I have enough energy to deal with unexpected situations	2,69
I can solve most problems if I try hard enough	3,23
Even if difficulties arise, I know I can handle them	3,18
When I have a problem, I usually know what to do	2,60
If I am in a difficult situation, I can behave appropriately	3,58
I can solve many problems if I put my mind to it	3,37
I can deal with unexpected events, even if they surprise me at first	2,72
<b>Average of all responses</b>	<b>2,91</b>

Source: own study



Graph 7. Distribution of responses to the GSES questionnaire

Source: own study

Finally, Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed – efficacy in dealing with unexpected situations was not especially high. In fact, items about handling unexpected events scored below the overall scale average (e.g., “I can deal with unexpected events...” had a mean of 2.72, vs. the overall mean of 2.91), suggesting that respondents feel less efficacious with unforeseen challenges than with routine problems. Detailed results are presented in Graph 7.

## 5. Discussion

The results show that although the overall level of self-efficacy among respondents was high, at over 50% (50.9%), no statistically significant relationship was found between this personal resource and the declared level of professional engagement. Our analysis revealed a high overall self-efficacy in the sample (with over half of respondents scoring in the high range), yet crucially no direct relationship between self-efficacy and declared engagement was observed. This null finding is somewhat unexpected in light of social cognitive theory and previous research on work engagement. Accordingly, the absence of a significant relationship should not be interpreted as conclusive evidence against the theoretical link between self-efficacy and engagement, but rather as an exploratory finding constrained by methodological choices.

Bandura's theory (1997) assumes that self-efficacy shapes an individual's motivation and perseverance through the belief in their ability to control events, while Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2007) indicate that self-efficacy affects engagement indirectly and is associated with the activation of a positive spiral of resources. One possible explanation for the lack of correlation is the presence of demotivating organisational factors. It is plausible that factors such as limited autonomy, weak supervisory support, or inflexible procedures within the administrative unit could be undermining the engagement of even highly self-efficacious employees. However, since these organisational resources and constraints were not directly measured in the present study, this interpretation remains speculative. Another possibility is a lack of organisational resources, which causes a decline in activation and professional engagement. Among such deficiencies in the studied institution could be, for example, insufficient autonomy in action, insufficient support from superiors, or a lack of feedback (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This is confirmed by the observations of Aveya, Reichard, Luthans and Mhatre (2011), which show that positive psychological capital increases effectiveness and engagement only in the context of supportive leadership and an organisational climate based on trust. It is also worth noting that, according to Kim's (2002) findings, structural factors in public institutions can suppress the impact of psychological resources on professional behaviour.

It is noteworthy that previous research generally reports a positive association between self-efficacy and work engagement. For instance, Avey et al. (2011) demonstrated in a meta-analysis that overall psychological capital, a construct

encompassing self-efficacy, has a significant positive impact on employee attitudes and engagement. Similarly, in a public-sector context, Sulaiman et al. (2024) found that Nigerian civil servants with higher levels of self-efficacy and autonomy exhibited greater engagement and performance. These findings stand in contrast to the null result obtained in the present study. One possible explanation for this discrepancy may be contextual in nature. It is conceivable that Polish local government employees operate under specific institutional conditions, such as extensive bureaucratic procedures, limited reward systems, or restricted autonomy, which may weaken the motivational effects of self-efficacy observed in other settings. Another potential explanation relates to methodological differences. Studies such as those by Avey et al. and Sulaiman et al. employed multi-item measures of engagement and larger, more diverse samples, which may have been more sensitive in detecting associations between self-efficacy and engagement. Taken together, the present findings offer a more nuanced insight into the relationship between self-efficacy and work engagement. They are consistent with suggestions in the literature that the antecedents of engagement may vary across organisational contexts, particularly in highly formalized public institutions. At the same time, the divergence between the current results and more consistently positive findings reported in previous studies highlights the importance of examining work engagement within specific institutional and cultural settings.

Another potential reason for the null result may lie in the measurement approach adopted in this study. The use of a single-item, self-reported measure of declared engagement may have lacked sufficient sensitivity to detect subtle relationships between self-efficacy and engagement. Consequently, any small positive effects of self-efficacy on engagement might not have been captured due to this methodological limitation. This possibility aligns with previous research indicating that declarative, self-reported engagement measures may be subject to response bias and self-presentation effects (Podsakoff et al., 2012). The absence of a significant self-efficacy–engagement link might also reflect genuine organisational constraints in the public sector environment. High levels of bureaucracy and formalization can prevent employees from translating personal confidence into actual engagement—essentially creating a context in which “hands are tied,” as suggested in prior public administration research (Kim, 2002). Alternatively, this finding may reflect a measurement-related limitations, as engagement was assessed in a very general, self-reported manner. A coarse single-item metric could introduce noise or ceiling effects that mask relationships that a more nuanced, multi-item engagement scale (such as the UWES) would be able to detect. We acknowledge both interpretations: structurally, the public-sector setting may not be sufficiently empowering for self-efficacy to manifest as engagement; methodologically, the tools used in this study may have been too blunt to capture this effect.

Given the absence of a general self-efficacy–engagement relationship, it is informative to examine the internal structure of self-efficacy and its variation across employee characteristics. The presented research also showed that the highest level of self-efficacy concerned problem-solving skills, which indicates the importance of the task component. The literature indicates that self-efficacy in the context of professional work is most strongly associated with goal-oriented activities, and less strongly with emotional and adaptive areas (Fida et al., 2025).

The analysis of the results also provided interesting conclusions from the point of view of the relationship between length of service and self-efficacy. Respondents with the shortest length of service in the administrative unit surveyed showed the highest level of self-efficacy. This distribution of results can be explained by the adaptation effect – new employees often join an organisation with a high level of motivation and commitment, which decreases over time, mainly due to structural barriers (Judge & Bono, 2001). The decline in self-efficacy over time may also be related to deficits in supportive leadership, which is crucial for maintaining long-term professional commitment (Breevaart et al., 2014).

Another interesting finding from the study concerns the relationship between the age of respondents and their sense of self-efficacy. The study showed that the highest scores in terms of self-efficacy were reported by people aged 30-39, and the lowest by those over 50. This may suggest that middle age is conducive to a high sense of efficacy (although the sample size does not allow for excessive generalisation). This may be related to the professional experience already acquired at the age of 30-39, and at the same time to the fully preserved professional motivation and energy to act. Schyns and von Collani (2002) point out that self-efficacy increases in the first decades of professional activity and then may decrease.

Another issue worth mentioning is the gender of the respondents. The results of the study showed that women have a higher level of self-efficacy than men. Although this study found very small differences between the sexes, it can be concluded that women in the study group show greater confidence in performing professional tasks and greater resilience to difficulties. Other studies indicate that women are more likely than men to have a higher level of belief in their own ability to effectively cope with organisational tasks and challenges (Łuszczynska et al., 2005).

The results did not confirm the assumption that employees' sense of self-efficacy is particularly pronounced in coping with unexpected situations, which would indicate their readiness to maintain declared engagement despite difficulties. This situation can be explained by the specific nature of work in public administration, which is characterised by a high level of formalised structures, predictable procedures and limited autonomy in decision-making. The low level of flexibility of public institutions may limit decision-making capabilities, which in turn may translate into reduced effectiveness in responding to unpredictable situations (Vigoda-Gadot,

2008). This is also confirmed by Kim's (2002) research, which shows that public sector employees rarely declare high self-efficacy in managing change and responding to unforeseen problems, especially when the organisational system is not conducive to experimentation. Confirmation of this state of affairs can be found in Bandura's theory (1997), according to which self-efficacy develops through the experience of success in coping with challenges.

When analysing the results obtained in the light of the concept of engagement management, it can be seen that the lack of a statistically significant relationship between self-assessment of effectiveness and the level of declared engagement indicates the complex nature of this phenomenon. Engagement management is not simply a matter of strengthening individual characteristics, but requires the creation of an organisational environment in which employees can realistically use their potential and agency (Saks, 2019). In the context of the administrative unit under study, it can therefore be assumed that high self-efficacy does not automatically translate into higher declared engagement if the organisational structure does not allow for autonomous action, competence development or influence on decisions.

This interpretation brings the analysed results closer to the concept of managing engagement through empowerment and participatory leadership, which strengthen the relationship between personal resources and work effectiveness (Breevaart et al., 2014; Deci et al., 2017). The results therefore suggest that engagement management requires a balance between individual and systemic factors – only then can the potential resulting from self-efficacy fully activate the resource spiral described in the JD-R model.

This research offers several contributions. Empirically, it provides novel data on psychological resources and engagement in a Polish local government setting – a context that has been underrepresented in engagement research. The findings highlight the potentially context-dependent role of self-efficacy (a usually positive resource) in public organisations, thus extending the JD-R theory into the public sector domain. Theoretically, our results emphasize the importance of organisational context in the personal resource-engagement link, suggesting that models like JD-R should explicitly incorporate public-sector conditions (e.g., high formalization) when applied outside the private sector. Methodologically, the study demonstrates a pilot approach to measuring engagement in a constrained field setting, and the lessons learned (e.g., the need for multi-faceted engagement measures and inclusion of organisational variables) chart a course for more robust future studies. In sum, the paper's value lies in its exploration of engagement through the lens of self-efficacy in the public sector, which opens avenues for refining both theory and practice in this area.

## 6. Conclusions

Although the present findings are exploratory and should be interpreted with caution, they nevertheless suggest several tentative implications for management practice, particularly in the context of human resource management in local government administration. The perspective of human resource management in local government administration should be expanded to include the need to emphasise building employees' sense of self-efficacy. This involves creating work environments that promote autonomy in decision-making and learning through experience, which is consistent with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997). It is also proposed to build an organisational culture based on trust, cooperation and appreciation (Młyński et al., 2024), which promotes the development of a high sense of self-efficacy. It is also worth emphasising that building a sense of self-efficacy among local government employees not only contributes to an increase in their individual effectiveness, but also strengthens the overall psychological capital of the organisation, which improves the adaptation of public sector institutions to social and organisational changes (Avey et al., 2011).

In this perspective, it seems important to conclude that management in the area of local government administration should include not only knowledge and skills (compensatory dimension), but also the employees' sense of self-efficacy (psychological dimension), which promotes the development of more flexible, resilient to change and effective organisations, which is extremely important in the current conditions of growing social expectations and transformation of the public sector.

In conclusion, the research limitations of the adopted perspective should also be acknowledged. First and foremost, the professional engagement indicator used in the study was general in nature, allowing only an approximate assessment of the level of declared employee engagement. Such a simplified measure does not capture the full multidimensional structure of the construct, including vigor, dedication, and absorption, and therefore the results should be interpreted as a starting point for more detailed analyses. This limitation reduces the construct validity of the engagement assessment; that is, the indicator employed does not encompass all core dimensions of work engagement, and the resulting conclusions should be viewed as tentative and specific to this narrowly defined, declarative measure. It should also be emphasised that the present analysis is exploratory in nature and reports the results of pilot research, the continuation and extension of which are planned for 2025–2026. Second, the cross-sectional design of the study precludes causal inference and limits the examination of changes over time (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). Because the sample was drawn from a single organisation with non-random selection, the generalizability of the findings is limited (external validity). Consequently, the results cannot be assumed to apply to

all local government units. Likewise, the cross-sectional design constrains internal validity with respect to causal inference, as it does not allow for determining the direction of effects or ruling out the influence of unmeasured third variables. Third, the declarative, self-reported nature of the engagement measure may have introduced self-presentation bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Future research should address the limitations identified in the present study. First, the implementation of the full Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) in similar research designs would enable a more comprehensive and multidimensional assessment of work engagement and may allow for the identification of relationships that could not be detected using simplified indicators. The use of validated, multidimensional measurement instruments would enhance construct validity and should therefore be prioritised in subsequent studies. Second, the inclusion of direct measures of organisational factors, such as autonomy, feedback, and leadership style, would strengthen future analytical models. The findings of the present study suggest that these factors may function as moderators in the relationship between self-efficacy and work engagement; empirical testing of such moderation effects could clarify whether high self-efficacy translates into higher engagement primarily under supportive organisational conditions. Third, longitudinal research designs are recommended. Tracking employees over time, particularly during the early stages of employment, would facilitate verification of the “adaptation effect” indicated by the results and allow for the establishment of temporal and causal ordering between changes in self-efficacy and engagement. Finally, expanding the sample to include multiple local government units and incorporating comparative analyses between public and private sector organisations would provide valuable insight. Such comparative designs could help determine whether the observed patterns are specific to particular institutional settings or reflect broader public-sector dynamics. Including diverse organisational, regional, or international contexts would further support the examination of cultural and structural influences on the self-efficacy-engagement relationship.

Based on the research conducted, an empirical model was developed to illustrate the relationships between self-efficacy and the socio-demographic variables of the respondents. This model (Figure 1) provides a synthetic summary of the results obtained and an attempt to graphically capture the key trends observed in the study.

The model is exploratory in nature and serves as a starting point for further research on the issue. In subsequent stages, empirical verification of the model is planned using the full UWES questionnaire, which will allow for a more accurate determination of the relationship between self-efficacy and specific dimensions of professional engagement.

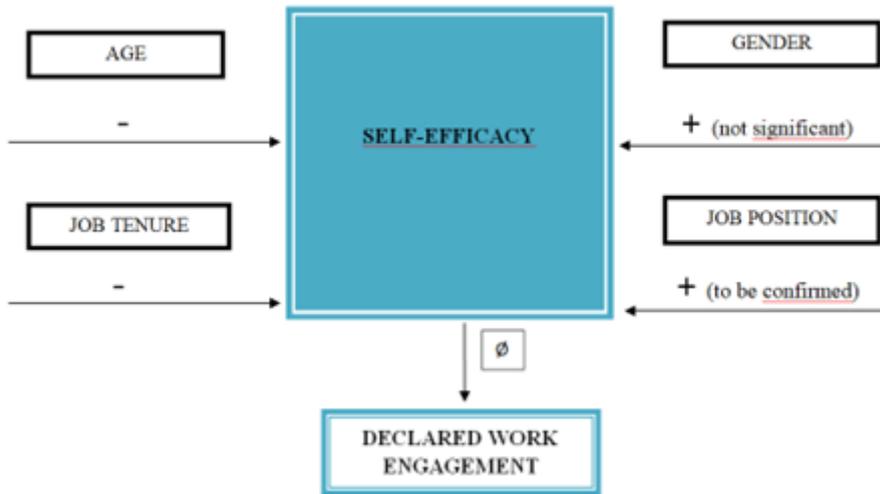


Figure 1. Model of relationships between self-efficacy, declared work engagement and sociodemographic characteristics

Source: own study

**Legend**

- (+)- positive trend (the variable is associated with a higher level of self-efficacy)
- (-)- negative trend (the variable is associated with a lower level of self-efficacy)
- ∅- no statistically significant relationship between the variables

In summary, the presented research results indicate that self-efficacy is an important but complex and multidimensional resource in the functioning of local government units. In conclusion, the concept of employee engagement management provides an appropriate interpretative framework for understanding the role of self-efficacy in public administration. The study proves that individual effectiveness is not so much an autonomous predictor of declared engagement as a resource whose importance only becomes apparent in a favourable organisational context. In practice, this means that engagement management strategies must be based on three pillars: (1) strengthening employees' self-awareness and sense of efficacy, (2) ensuring autonomy and trust in relations with superiors, and (3) developing an organisational culture based on appreciation and shared responsibility. The integration of these elements forms the basis of a modern engagement management model in the local government sector, where the psychological resources of individuals are seen as strategic capital for the entire organisation.

## Authors' contribution

**J.W.-Ch.:** article conception, theoretical content of the article, research methods applied, conducting the research, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, draft manuscript preparation. **Ł.S.:** article conception, theoretical content of the article, analysis and interpretation of results, draft manuscript preparation. **S.J.-K.:** article conception, theoretical content of the article, draft manuscript preparation.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the management of the local government unit for granting permission to conduct scientific research.

## Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

While preparing this work, the authors did not use any tool/service.

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