"Influence of employee-manager relationship on employee performance and productivity"

AUTHORS	Nosipho Pearl Dlamini [iD] Sachin Suknunan [iD] Anrusha Bhana [iD] [R]

NUMBER OF REFERENCES	NUMBER OF FIGURES	NUMBER OF TABLES
47	9	0

BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES

© Nosipho Pearl Dlamini, Sachin Suknunan, Anrusha Bhana, 2022

Nosipho Pearl Dlamini, Master of Commerce (Graduate), College of Law and Management Studies, School of Management, IT and Governance, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Sachin Suknunan, Doctor of Business Administration, Student Services Division, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. (Corresponding author)

Anrusha Bhana, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Accounting and Informatics, Department of Financial Accounting, Durban University of Technology, South Africa.

Nosipho Pearl Dlamini (South Africa), **Sachin Suknunan** (South Africa), **Anrusha Bhana** (South Africa)

INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEE-MANAGER RELATIONSHIP ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY

Abstract

Organizational performance can be seen as dependent on employee job performance and productivity. One of the factors that influence employee job performance and productivity is the working relationship between employees and their managers. This paper examines the influence of the relationship between employees and their managers on enhancing employee performance and productivity. The study was conducted in a financial organization based in Durban (South Africa). A quantitative approach was utilized with a census method targeting a total population of 40 administrative employees. A questionnaire was constructed based on the research aims and was administered to all 40 respondents. As a result, the response rate was 65%. Key findings indicated that the relationship between managers and employees did affect employee performance and productivity. A positive relationship with a manager is closely linked to increased motivation and performance, while a negative relationship is linked with poor performance. An overall negative impact and high level of dissatisfaction amongst employees were found due to the current bureaucratic management style that managers adopt in their organization. Thus, it makes employees less productive and decreases their work performance. Furthermore, it was found that employees' perception of their relationship with managers plays a significant role in predicting job performance. Recommendations for a better working relationship to promote employee performance and productivity include manager-employee training, team building activities, skills development programs for managers, employee rewards and recognition, increased communication platforms, and more consideration for employee well-being.

Keywords	management, organization, impact, recommendations, communication, challenges, skills
JEL Classification	J24, L25, M12

INTRODUCTION

The impact of the relationship between managers and employees should never be underestimated concerning employee performance and productivity, as this also affects organizational performance. Therefore, employee performance can be seen as a driving force in any organization. Employee performance can be defined as the degree to which a person can complete the important responsibilities to occupy a position in an organization (Conway, 2006). Employee performance in the job is of great importance, especially in relation to maintaining and growing productivity for organizations (Conway, 2006). Tsitmideli et al. (2016) similarly support Conway (2006) that job performance for an employee is one of the most crucial factors for sustaining and increasing production for organizations. However, poor relationships with managers can lead to employee stress, demotivation, counter-productivity, and poor performance.

According to Coyle-Shapiro and Conway (2005), the role of a manager is seen as the leading role in promoting employee job performance

and for employees to achieve their full potential. Furthermore, human capital is posited to be one of the most critical resources for organizational success. Hence, employee satisfaction should be considered a key factor by managers (Tsitmideli et al., 2016). Considering this, it becomes critical and beneficial for managers to promote good employee relations while also understanding the types of employee-manager relations aligned with employee job performance.

Tsitmideli et al. (2016) continue to discuss the actions assumed by both the administration and managers to sustain high employee satisfaction in order that they act/behave in a certain way. In addition, highly motivated employees can achieve higher levels of productivity and job satisfaction. In light of this, Conway (2006) assessed examples from existing research to comprehend the correlation between four dimensions of how managers and employees interact: trust in the manager, reward systems and employee job performance, perceived organizational support, and leader-member exchange. Hence, employee-manager relationships are critical in driving employee performance and productivity. It is, therefore, important that working relationships between managers and staff are healthy and commendable to obtain increased job performance and keep a healthy workforce (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). Furthermore, many organization executives affirm that the main factors connected to lesser-employee efficiency deal with the reduction of being motivated personally and demotivated work due to employee-manager relationship influence (Pothos et al., 2014).

There is, therefore, a need to continuously study the effect of the employee-manager relationship on employee job performance and productivity. Unfortunately, there is minimal research of this nature within South African settings; hence, this paper intends to address this gap and examine the relationship between managers and employees and its influence on job performance and productivity within a South African context. The presence of more research-based knowledge/evidence concerning the connection between the manager-employee relationship and job performance can allow organizations to examine and evaluate management-employee relations strategies to improve their productivity through increased job performance.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Sturman and Park (2016), performance has many definitions, but the most precise definition is that performance as the goal is relevant actions of an employee. In order to have strong performance in institutions, there must be high levels of employee satisfaction. Thus, performance increases when employees try to do better and succeed beyond instructions and job profiles. Rehman et al. (2020) denote that enhanced employee performance produces outcomes that mainly contain correspondence between employees, excellent production, and commitment in the workplace. According to Gentry and Shanock (2008), performance is the result or effect of activities over a certain period. Assessing an employee's competence and productivity is critical to the organization's overall strategy. For Arnolds et al. (2010), productivity is equivalent to efficiency and the rate at which goods are produced. As per Moletsane et al. (2019), productivity is defined as the output of goods and services with the least effort. Sturman and Park (2016) described productivity as an economic result per contribution element. Based on the above definitions, it can be safely assumed that productivity refers to the employee's continuous efforts to change inputs into outputs competently and sustainably to meet organizational goals. Employee performance is hence linked to the productivity and achievement of an organization (McLarty et al., 2021). However, this can be dependent on the type of managers and their relationship with employees (Sturman & Park, 2016).

Formal processes are used to manage employee performance to a considerable extent. Gentry and Shanock (2008) found that the formation of good supervisory relationships had a positive impact on job performance. However, it becomes vital to understand the significance of the relationship between manager feedback, guidance, direction, and relevance regarding effective performance (Dau-

Schmidt & Ray, 2003). Jane et al. (2009) define the role of a manager in promoting production as a little-understood phenomenon. The reputation of corporate managers is known to go through upswings and downturns periodically. Defining leadership styles is a way in which direction is provided, and plans are implemented as well as motivating people. For example, in autocratic style, this type of leader restricts employees, makes individual decisions, and places focus on institutional goals with high or complete disregard to employee input. This results in employees becoming less motivated and trusting (Baloyi et al., 2014).

Yang et al. (2016) believe that autocratic leaders' poor leadership quality is linked to negative employee performance. This is because these leaders make independent decisions and lack the capacity to direct employees on positive performance to achieve desired outcomes (Tsitmideli et al., 2016). The democratic style is one where the leader is more people-oriented and focuses on human interactions and teamwork. Individuals and groups are encouraged to take charge of setting goals and resolving issues, and the benefit of this approach is that it increases productivity (Baloyi et al., 2014). The participative style is when the leader analyses problems and proposals on his own and then presents them to the team plan of action. The leader welcomes criticism and comments but makes the final call (Arnolds et al., 2010). With the transactional style, a leader is more concerned with first-order changes and day-to-day transactions, including active and passive management and contingent rewards for followers who meet goals (Mafini, 2014). Lastly, the transformative style implies that a leader is a catalyst for change. In organizations with moderate to high levels of environmental uncertainty, their influence is stronger (Gok et al., 2015).

According to Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012), managers are in a rare position, the reason being that they need to work efficiently, not only with their superiors but also with their subordinates in the organizational structure. Therefore, having a good working relationship with others could result in a potential derailment and even avoid derailment altogether (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012). According to Gentry and Shanock (2008), there are two behaviors crucial to a manager's success, namely task and relationship behaviors.

Task behaviors are responsible for goal accomplishment, while relationship behaviors (also called consideration) provide a sense of comfort about the situation and the people implicated (Gentry & Shanock, 2008). Relevant to Shahzad et al. (2012), Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012) and Chang and Chen (2011) have shown how important it is to put people at ease. This refers to treating subordinates with warmth and supporting them as a prominent aspect of relationship behaviors (Chang & Chen, 2011). It has also been advocated that putting people at ease positively affects goal setting, work attitudes, and managerial well-being. For example, Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012) found that putting people at ease was critical for managers who wanted to be aware of their impact on subordinates, improve social relationships, and demonstrate compassion even when under stress.

Relationship management consists of various competences. These include essential interrelations skills, analyzing and being influential to others, and encouraging necessary responses from others (Shahzad et al., 2012). Effective relationship management assists in developing other relationships, which is a mark of being an effective manager since it portrays an image of those at a higher level (Shahzad et al., 2012). The ability to sense others' reactions, refine responses, and persuade is an important characteristic. Such an ability is vital for supervisors, managers, and those who manage front-line operations. It has also become a fundamental skill for effective leadership (Gentry & Shanock, 2008). Effective communication permits an exchange of emotional information, improved listening skills, and pleasant exchanging of knowledge and staying receptive. More employees would rather deal with managers with solid communication proficiency in relationship management (Tsitmideli et al., 2016). Conflict management proficiency is also an enhancement of relationship management. Moreover, empathy is essential when dealing with different people of different backgrounds and diplomatic situations, as well as convincing discussions (Shahzad et al., 2012).

Leaders pass over the energy by showing emotions, which are transmissible and more positive. A supportive and helpful culture signifies high perfor-

mance (Tsitmideli et al., 2016). Globalization has resulted in ever-changing trends and has also changed the business environment, which means effective change management is essential while developing relationships in organizations. To achieve the goal of subordinates working more effectively and improved performance, managers' competency in catalyzing change and creating relations affects many things (Hatch & Zilber, 2011). Hence, Hatch and Zilber (2011) conclude that relationship management and employee performance are significantly positively correlated. It is therefore believed that relationship management is linked with employee performance.

It is imperative that managers must be aware of what contributes to low employee performance, so these can be avoided. According to Sturman and Park (2016), low employee performance is connected to low employee morale. Moreover, a less motivated employee lacks originality, innovation, and motivation to accept responsibility for his or her work. As a result of this lack of motivation, employee performance suffers. In addition, employees tend to find it challenging to participate in the performance process when they are unclear about their roles and goals (Pothos et al., 2014).

Poor employee performance can also be attributed to the employees' lack of skills, incompetence, or knowledge (Pothos et al., 2014). Managers should be able to detect such inconsistencies in their employees' performance and make appropriate plans (Rehman et al., 2020). In addition, failure to create successful teams can lead to dysfunctional teams, leading to poor employee performance (Noe et al., 2017). According to Maddux (2016) and Raub et al. (2021), it is a must for today's managers to be able to build teams. The ability of employees to work as a team and individually is critical for the success of a department and the entire business. Managers must adopt a disciplined approach to leadership and cultivate a positive attitude to construct a cohesive team that is motivated toward common goals. Managers who use these abilities will see that their employees perform better and that the workplace is more efficient and productive (Raub et al., 2021).

Furthermore, an important point was made by Noe et al. (2017), who pointed out that how employees see their manager impacts various employee outputs linked to productivity. It is further explained that a positive relationship with a manager is closely linked with motivation while a negative relationship is linked with employee stress. Sturman and Park (2016) presented findings that in the first year of a relationship between manager and employee, employee's perceptions of fairness establish an important factor in determining whether future performance will be developed or not. The findings also indicated that performance is influenced by the way employees feel about their managers. Therefore, employees' perception of their relationship with the manager plays a significant role in predicting job performance. In addition, the manager's responsibility is to ensure that work performed by employees successfully adds value to the organization. Hence, if employees do not fulfill their duties, managers are not fulfilling theirs either (Mtimkulu et al., 2014).

Different types of social support have been known to reduce job stress enabling employees to cope better with specific job demands and improve job performance. Shuck et al. (2011) have observed work-related sources of social support and their regulating effects on work-related well-being, such as job satisfaction and performance. Perceived manager support is moreover and positively linked with job performance (Hammig, 2017). By getting employees to communicate their thoughts and concerns honestly up the hierarchy, organizations can effectively respond to unpredicted situations, avoid unnecessary mistakes, and implement unceasing process advances (Livari & Huisman, 2001; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012).

Therefore, it is vital to encourage consultation with employees regarding positive ideas and concerns on issues related to work regarding their managers (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012). Livari and Huisman (2001) underline a perspective that states that the manager's role is vital in encouraging consultation. Employees are believed to be more engaged when their managers are open to recommendations and actively seek their engagement (Livari & Huisman, 2001; Yukl, 2008). Furthermore, employees who believe they are independently competent at work are more likely to take advantage of participative leadership behaviors (Drury, 2008). Therefore, what is proposed is that managers' consultation will possibly improve

workers' sense of influence when employees develop work self-efficacy, that is, perceive that they have control and are capable of being effective on the job (Dau-Schmidt & Ray, 2003).

Conflict management is also essential as people spend most of their time in the organization where they are employed. As a result of certain challenges, employees can/will develop poor attitudes toward their current job environment, which will negatively impact their performance (Baloyi et al., 2014). For example, due to conflict with other staff, there can be minimal participation in group work, and employees can arrive late to avoid gathering with other employees and so forth (Azman et al., 2009). In addition, when employees appear disoriented and frustrated, other members of the workgroup are more likely to interpret their actions as an inability and/or unwillingness to bear their share of the workload. Hence, a manager must be ready to handle conflict management in a fair and equitable manner.

A manager is meant to work very closely with employees. As a result, employees can get most of their motivation from their manager. Therefore, according to Livari and Huisman (2001), manager conduct influences organizational culture and, as a result, subordinate performance. Critical thinking is very important as everyone comes from a diverse community. This is because every individual has to be respected as 'humans' and their cultural customs are to be respected as well. For example, not everyone can work on the same routine as everyone else, bearing in mind that there are procedures to be followed. Therefore, a flexible leadership style would be best always recommended (Drury, 2008; Raub et al., 2021).

Alavi et al. (2005), in examining different leadership behaviors and their impact on subordinate performance, acknowledged the role of each on task performance, task satisfaction, and overall productivity of a subordinate. There is a correlation between the manager and the subordinate; therefore, a healthy relationship needs to be kept between the two parties, and this is mainly because one cannot function with the other (Mafini, 2014). When employees feel valued at work and that their thoughts are heard, they sense great influence. On the contrary, when they feel unrec-

ognized and important decision-makers do not respect their efforts, they perceive low influence (Drury, 2008). Individual interaction with higher-level managers in the organization and/or perceptions that these managers are paying attention to their issues can be major drivers of employees' sense of having an impact at work in this situation (Livari & Huisman, 2001).

Employee rewards and recognition also improve performance and productivity. According to Edirisooriya (2014), reward refers to the benefits of completing a task, providing a service, or fulfilling an obligation. While income is the primary incentive for doing work, many businesses also provide incentive packages that include more than just wages and salaries. Bonuses, pension plans, health insurance, assigned automobiles, advantageous loans, subsidized lunches, profit sharing, stock options, and other benefits are common in these packages (Tessema et al., 2013). Intrinsic rewards and extrinsic rewards are the two types of rewards that can be found. Extrinsic rewards are typically monetary or material. Intrinsic rewards, according to Tessema et al. (2013), are inherent in the job itself and are enjoyed by the individual because of successfully completing the process of achieving his or her goal.

The literature review supports the need for a positive work relationship between manager and employee in relation to job performance and productivity. It further supports the need to establish if such is occurring in the current business setting even more so from a developing country perspective such as South Africa. This paper, therefore, aims to determine the relationship between employees and managers within an organization and its influence on employee productivity and job performance with the intention of making recommendations to promote a productive working relationship between employees and managers.

2. METHODS

The study was conducted in South Africa, within the city of Durban, and located in an organization based in the financial services sector. It is a financial services institution that is non-profit in nature and employed approximately 40 ad-

ministrative staff at the time of the study. The study used a census approach where a survey was sent out to an entire 'population' of the administrative staff at this organization. A census approach is used when the total population is small and manageable for research purposes to provide a greater representation of results (Saunders et al., 2016; Mouton, 2017).

Hence, the traditional sampling route would not be advisable due to a small population, and the census approach was best suited. In this case, the entire population of respondents was 40 administrative staff. The study adopted a quantitative approach and utilized a questionnaire distributed to all 40 staff respondents. Due to COVID-19 precautions, an electronic means of data collection was adopted, and this was done via an online questionnaire. There were 26 responses received out of 40, thus giving a 65% response rate from the entire population of employees. Reliability analysis was first performed using Cronbach's alpha. All applicable sections were ranked as reliable (0.7) and above. This implies the reliability of the results.

3. RESULTS

The majority of respondents were African (80%), and this can imply a high level of Employment Equity scorecard compliance. The Employment Equity (EE) Act No. 55 of 1998 was enacted to address apartheid-era labor market inequities. The Employment Equity Act established affirmative action policies intending to achieve workplace equity (Moraka & Van Rensburg, 2015). In addition, the majority of the respondents were female (73%). This can suggest that the organ-

ization promotes woman empowerment as introduced by the South African government (Landman & O'Clery, 2020). The majority of the respondents were between the ages of 26-30, and a significant number were between the ages of 31-40. This can imply that the organization consists mostly of employees who are mature in age and experience. According to Shipley et al. (2010), emotional intelligence and work experience have a positive relationship. It is considered that as one's professional experience grows, so does their maturity. Furthermore, majority of the respondents (17 = 65%) hold a Postgraduate degree/diploma. A significant percentage (6 = 23%) have an undergraduate degree/diploma. This indicates a high level of education and knowledge base that is employed within the organization.

3.1. Current working relationship with managers

Figure 1 shows the current working relationship between employees and managers.

Results indicate that 17 respondents had a fair to poor working relationships with their manager, and only 9 respondents had good to excellent relationships.

3.2. Current management style

Most respondents (14 = 54%) have indicated that the dominant management style currently is bureaucratic (Figure 2). A low number (4) indicated autocratic/dictatorship. Three respondents indicated coaching, while two stated democratic. Only 1 respondent felt that their managers use a pacesetting leadership style.
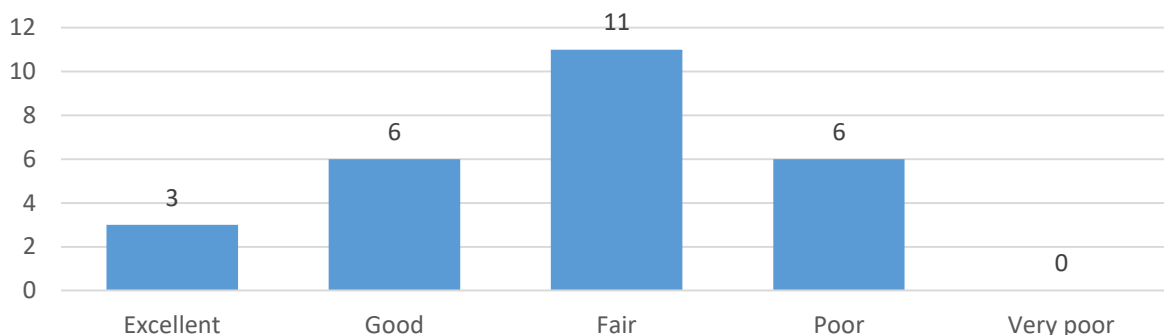

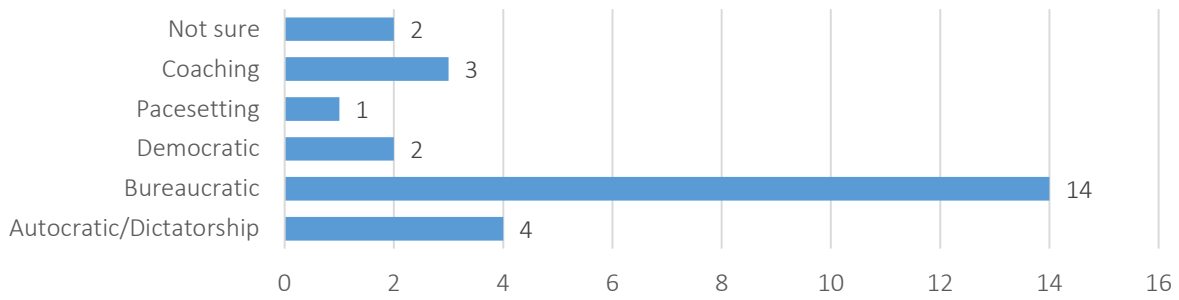**Figure 1.** Current working relationship with managers

Figure 2. Current management style

3.3. Satisfaction with current management style

The majority of the respondents (14) disagreed and strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with the current management style (Figure 3). Further 6 did not comment, indicating uncertainty. This indicated high dissatisfaction with the current management style.

3.4. Rating of current management style

Respondents were asked to rate their managers' current management style, where 1 = poor and 10 = excellent (Figure 4).

Most respondents rated the current management style as '5' and below. There were 10 respondents that rated it as '3'. Another 3 respondents said it is rather '4' while 2 respondents rated it as '5'. One respondent even ranked it as '1'. Hence, the majority found the current management style as poor.

3.5. Impact of current management style

Most respondents are negatively impacted by the current management style based on the findings (Figure 5).

Seventeen (65%) respondents reported being negatively impacted, 27% reported a positive impact,
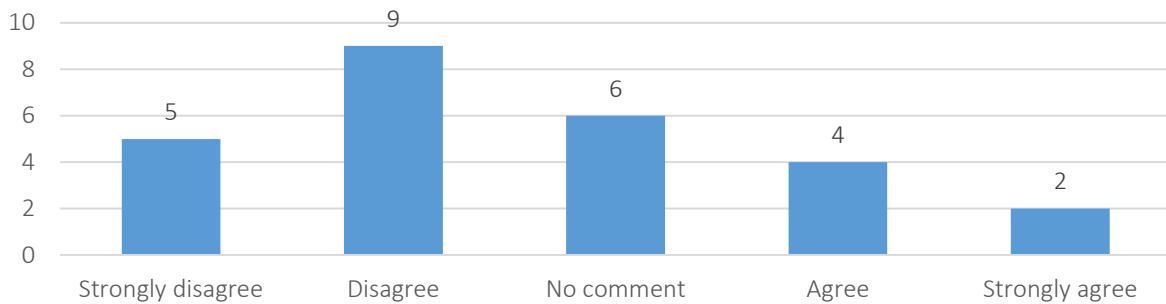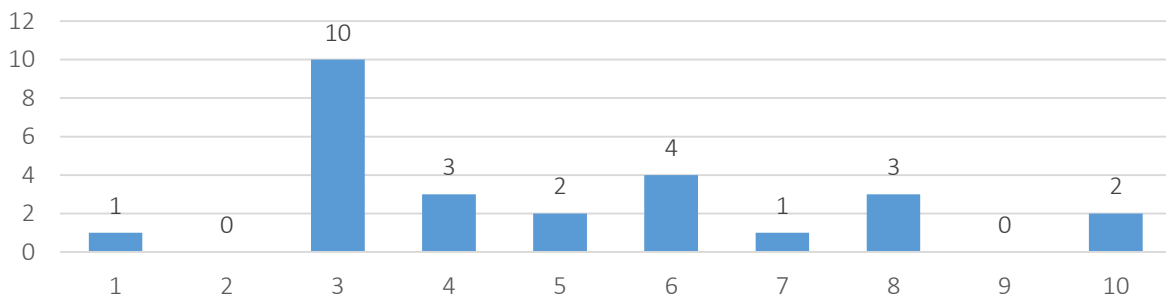

Figure 3. Satisfaction with current management style

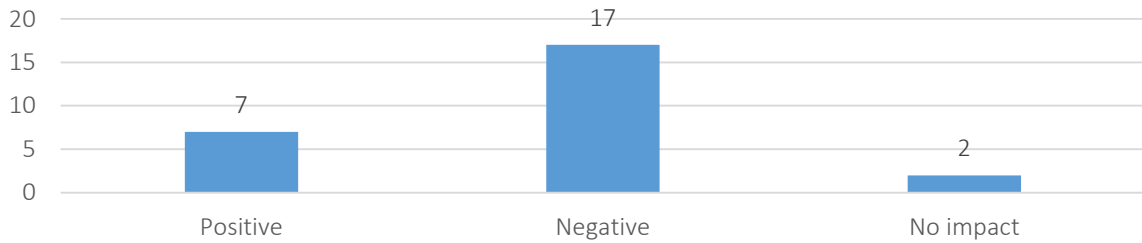**Figure 4.** Rating of current management style

Figure 5. Impact of current management style

while 8% stated no impact. This implied the negative impact experienced by employees under the current management style.

3.6. Impact of current management style on performance and productivity

Most of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that the current management style sometimes made them less productive (Figure 6). In addition, the majority of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that their work performance has become minimal, while 5 (19%) did not comment. It can, therefore, be concluded that most employees felt that their work performance was minimal due to the current management style.

73% (13 + 6) agreed and strongly agreed that the current management style did add to their stress and anxiety, while 3 did not comment. It can, therefore, be said that most employees in this organization did experience work-related stress and anxiety. Respondents also felt under-valued as the majority most agreed and strongly agreed on feeling under-valued under the current management style. 6 respondents (23%) did not comment. 65% (10 + 7) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that they did not feel recognized for their work. Hence, it can be deduced that most employees in this organization do not feel recognized for their work.

Furthermore, respondents did not feel as if they were part of a team at the organization as 50% (7+6) agreed and strongly agreed in this regard, while 3 did not comment. Lastly, 46% (9 + 3) of the respondents disagreed that they were happy and satisfied in their job, while 7 (27%) did not comment. Hence, it can be concluded that the majority of the employees in this organization are not happy and satisfied under the current management style.

3.7. Relationship strength between employees and managers

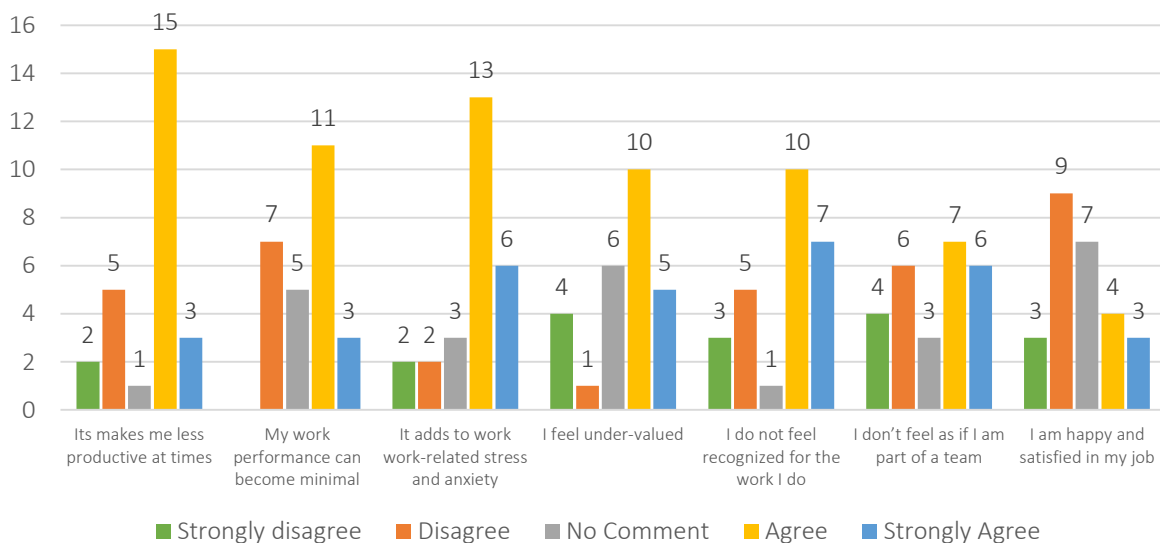The majority of the employees have a fair to weak relationship strength with their managers

Figure 6. Current management style impact on performance and productivity
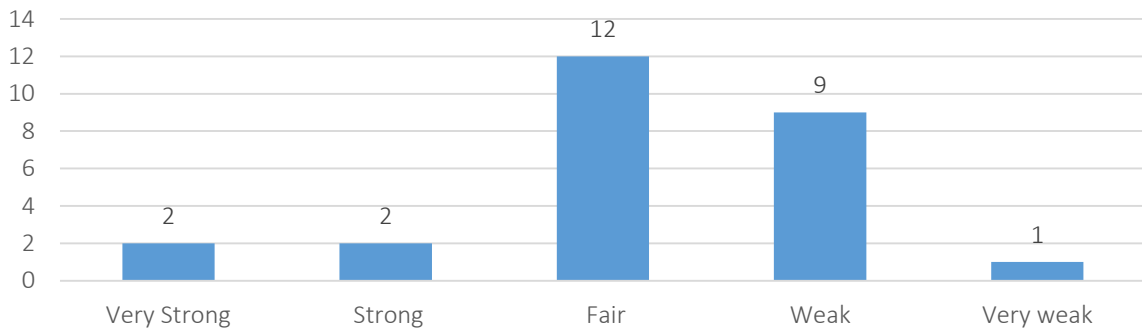
Figure 7. Relationship strength between employee and manager

(Figure 7). Twelve respondents reported a fair relationship strength, a significant number (9) reported a weak relationship, and one reported very weak. This reflected a rather weak relationship strength, which can be related to a management style.

3.8. Existing relationship challenges

Respondents were asked to comment on existing challenges within the organization (Figure 8).

It is evident from Figure 8 that all challenges listed were highly ranked and are currently being experienced by employees. Hence, the factors of poor communication, favoritism, lack of direction/guidance, being overloaded with work, lack of understanding by managers, managers' poor people skills, and difficulties in resolving staff problems severely affected employee-manager relationships.

3.9. Recommendations for a better working relationship

The majority (23 = 88%) of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that manager-employee relations training was needed (Figure 9). Similarly, teambuilding exercises ranked high as most respondents (22 = 85%) agreed and strongly agreed with this recommendation. Skills development programs for managers were also seen as a key recommendation as agreed and strongly agreed (23 = 88%). There was agreement from 85% of respondents (22) that employee rewards and recognition were necessary. There should be a platform created to promote better/increased communication for employees as agreed by almost 100% of respondents. Lastly, respondents recommended that more consideration for employee well-being be practiced as indicated by all respondents.
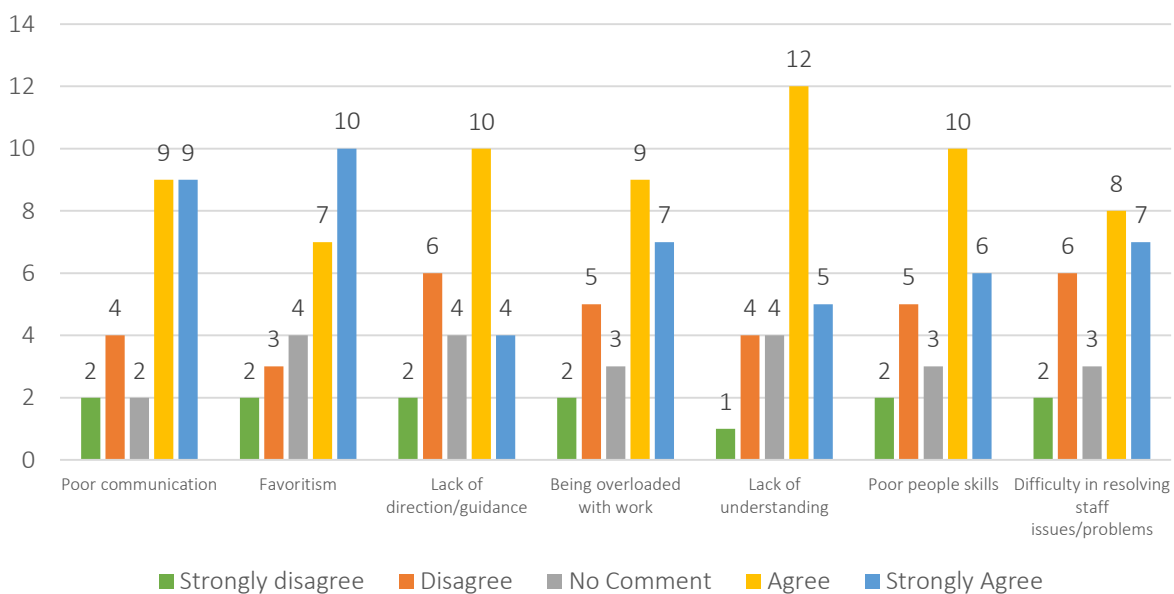

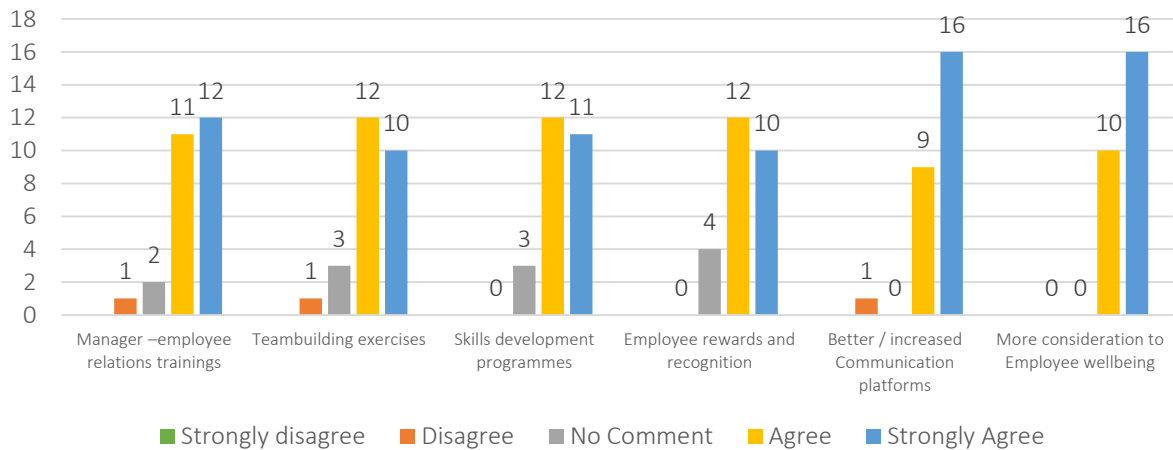**Figure 8.** Existing relationship challenges

Figure 9. Recommendations for a better working relationship

4. DISCUSSION

There was currently a fair working relationship between employees and their managers and this affected their performance levels. This is related to Mtimkulu et al. (2014), who found that the perception that an employee has regarding their relationship with the manager plays a significant role in predicting their job performance. Noe et al. (2017) further explained that a positive relationship with a manager is closely linked with motivation and performance, while a negative relationship is linked with stress. This is concurrent with the study results.

The current management style is primarily bureaucratic and means that there was little flexibility and inclusiveness of employees, which also negatively affected performance. This concurs with Singh (2013), whereby this style of management has negative implications as strict adherence to rules prevents individual creativity (Singh, 2013). Furthermore, the bureaucratic leadership pattern that focuses on the administrative needs an organization is also blamed for the slow pace of technical growth because it restricts employee independence and innovation (Mtimkhulu et al., 2014; Singh, 2013). Employees were hence highly dissatisfied with the current management style, and this was due to the bureaucratic management style, which resonates with the findings of Singh (2013) and Abun et al. (2021).

The majority of respondents reported being negatively impacted by the current management style. Hence, employees in the organization see their managers as having poor management styles, which results in poor performance. This resonates with Sturman and Park (2016) and Singh (2013), who argued that in order to have excellent performance in an organization, employees need to be satisfied in a variety of ways and dependent on type manager skills, for instance, having employees involved in decision making. In addition, most of the respondents felt that the current management style made them less productive at times. This is related to Alavi et al. (2005) and Noe et al. (2017), who argued that the way employees view their manager impacts various employee outputs linked to productivity.

In addition, most employees felt their work performance was minimal due to current management. Rehman et al. (2020) and Raub et al. (2021) recognized the need to explore various management styles and what impact they had in shaping employees' performance as the type of managerial style greatly influences employee performance in achieving a goal. Performance is increased when an employee performs beyond instructions/job roles, and this is influenced by management styles (Sturman & Park, 2016). The current management style also added stress and anxiety as most employees in this organization did experience work-related stress and anxiety. This is supported by Stranks (2005), who argued that occupational stress is associated with competing job demands, poor managers/supervisors, working excessive hours, and work-family conflicts.

Respondents further felt under-valued under the current management style. This concurs with Abun et al. (2021), who found that employ-

ees can feel undervalued under the bureaucratic style of management, and as a result, refuse to take responsibility for any faults that harm the company. Similarly, Singh (2013) stresses that the performance of every employee needs to be recognized and appreciated to maintain a healthy workplace. Stranks (2005) share similar sentiments that if there is lack of stimulation from management in terms of rewarding employees for their achievements, they will rapidly easily become demotivated, and their performance deteriorates. Furthermore, respondents did not feel as if they were part of a team at the organization. According to Cloutier et al. (2015), Noe et al. (2017), and Raub et al. (2021), failure to build effective teams may result in dysfunctional teams, which then results in poor employee performance.

There was poor communication between managers and employees, and an effective communication procedure should be established in the organization in order to sustain a healthy work culture for its employees, as supported by Singh (2013). Managers must hence successfully comprehend and function within the five levels of communication: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, organizational, and intercultural (Shahzad et al., 2012). Unhealthy communication within an organization leads to a bad work culture, which causes high employee turnover and lowers productivity, as evident in this study. Hence, relationship strength seemed to dwindle between managers and employees. According to Abun et al. (2021) and Cloutier et al. (2015), strong relationships are managers' most powerful leadership asset and organizations are successful when managers understand that the power of their leadership lies in the strength of their relationships.

Results also imply that managers in this organization show a lack of understanding of employee needs, as most respondents agreed on this. Staff relationships are built on understanding, and if understanding is lacking, then the relationship between managers and employees can fail. Furthermore, employees tend to find it difficult to participate in the performance process when they are unclear about their roles and goals, which corresponds with Maddux (2016).

As a result, concerns, including motivation, satisfaction, and working relationships, have become a new approach to increasing productivity, supported by Cloutier et al. (2015). Tsitmideli et al. (2016) denoted that employees would rather deal with managers and executives with solid communication proficiency for relationship management.

There was also favoritism between managers and certain employees and this negatively impacted performance and productivity. This resonates with S. Brown and T. Brown (2012) and Rubio (2016), who affirmed that favoritism is one of the most damaging factors in any organization. Favoritism creates a toxic culture, and employees are unable to effectively cooperate and be high-performing in their jobs due to it. The lack of direction given by managers to employees was also evident. When employees perceive role ambiguity, they lack information and direction in their job and are unclear about how they can contribute to the effort of their workgroup (George & Mallery, 2016). Furthermore, employees find it challenging to participate in the performance process when they are unclear about their roles and goals (Maddux, 2016). A high number of employees also felt overworked in the organization, and this can lead to employee stress and burnout, and decreased performance, as confirmed by Stranks (2005) and Biondi et al. (2021).

Based on the findings, most managers in the organization seem to have poor people skills. Managers must value and accommodate a varied staff complement by providing training sessions that improve basic job abilities and also soft skills, and emotional intelligence (Singh, 2013). In addition, the majority of respondents agreed that managers do not easily resolve employees' issues/problems. Managers are meant to play a role in promoting a harmonious working environment and resolving staff issues/problems was a key part of this. Conflict management and communication skills must be learned and exercised by managers. As per Moraka and Van Rensburg (2015) and Rubio (2016), failure to resolve staff issues/problems may result in ineffective teams, causing poor employee performance, as evident in this study.

Recommendations for improving manager-employee relations revolved around many factors. Teambuilding exercises ranked high, which was in support of Maddux (2016), who found that it is pertinent for managers to be able to build teams. Managers must adopt a disciplined approach to leadership and cultivate a positive attitude to construct a cohesive team that is motivated toward common goals. Managers who use these abilities will see that their employees perform better and that the workplace is more efficient and productive. This is further supported by Raub et al. (2021) and Noe et al. (2017). Manager-employee relations training and skills development programs for managers were also seen as a key recommendation. The reason for such programs is that poor employee performance could be linked to employees' lack of skills, incompetence, and knowledge (Pothos et al., 2014). Therefore, such programs can also allow managers to be able to identify employee performance gaps and plan according to employee job needs in a collaborative manner (Rehman et al., 2020). Relating to this, a platform should be created to promote better/increased communication for employees, as agreed by all respondents. This is in strong support by Gentry and Shanock (2008) and Tsitmideli et al. (2016). They posit that management needs effective communication and a transparent line of interaction which is crucial to the success of an organization and permits for an exchange of emotional information and knowledge.

There was high agreement among respondents that employee rewards and recognition were necessary. This relates to Drury (2008), whereby employees perceive significant influence when they feel valued at work and that their opinions are heard. However, they perceive minimal impact when they feel unnoticed and that their efforts are not regarded by key decision-makers (Drury, 2008). Therefore, employee rewards and recognition can improve performance and productivity. Tessema et al. (2013) further support this when they argued that apart from just income, many businesses also provide intangible rewards such as the capacity to use one's abilities, a sense of achievement, receiving appreciation, positive acknowledgment, and being treated with care and consideration.

Furthermore, in light of this, respondents recommended that more consideration for employee well-being be practiced as indicated by all respondents. It has been said by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012) that putting people at ease, or treating subordinates with support and warmth, yields positive effects on goal setting, work attitudes, and managerial well-being. Abun et al. (2021) further contend that workplace well-being encompasses all aspects of working life, including working environment, safety, health, workplace climate, and how employees feel about their jobs.

CONCLUSION

The paper aimed to determine the relationship between employees and managers within an organization and its influence on employee productivity and job performance. It also established recommendations to promote a productive working relationship between employees and managers.

It was found that there was a fair to poor relationship between employees and their managers and that a positive relationship with a manager is closely linked with motivation, performance, and productivity, while a negative relationship is linked with stress and decreased performance. The current management style is primarily bureaucratic and has an overall negative impact, which makes employees less productive and work performance becomes minimal.

Some key relationship challenges with managers included poor communication, favoritism, lack of direction/guidance, lack of understanding, poor people skills, and difficulty in resolving staff issues/problems. In addition, even though employees perform their duties well, they do not feel that their job is valued or that they are recognized for their hard work. This contributes to employees having low morale in performing duties. However, employees were confident in their recommendations for a better working relationship.

The recommendations for a better working relationship included manager-employee training, skills development programs for managers, team building activities, employee rewards and recognition, increased communication platforms, and more consideration for employee well-being. The study, therefore, concluded that there is currently a poor working relationship between employees and their managers, which is fraught with challenges that lead to decreased performance and productivity. However, the study further concluded that potential recommendations could lead to motivated employees, increased work performance, and job satisfaction.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Nosipho Pearl Dlamini, Sachin Suknunan, Anrusha Bhana.
Data curation: Nosipho Pearl Dlamini.
Formal analysis: Nosipho Pearl Dlamini.
Investigation: Nosipho Pearl Dlamini, Sachin Suknunan.
Methodology: Nosipho Pearl Dlamini, Sachin Suknunan, Anrusha Bhana.
Project administration: Sachin Suknunan, Nosipho Pearl Dlamini.
Resources: Nosipho Pearl Dlamini, Sachin Suknunan.
Software: Sachin Suknunan.
Supervision: Sachin Suknunan.
Validation: Nosipho Pearl Dlamini, Sachin Suknunan, Anrusha Bhana.
Visualization: Nosipho Pearl Dlamini.
Writing – original draft: Nosipho Pearl Dlamini.
Writing – review & editing: Sachin Suknunan, Anrusha Bhana.

REFERENCES

1. Abun, D., Calamaan, S. M. T., Magallanes, T., Encarnacion, M. J., & Sallong, M. (2021). Bureaucratic Management Style and Workplace Well-being of the Divine Word Colleges. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science, 10*(3), 477-489. https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v10i3.1094

2. Alavi, M., Kayworth, T. R., & Leidner, D. E. (2005). An Empirical Examination of the Influence of Organizational Culture on Knowledge Management Practices. *Journal of Management Information Systems, 22*(3), 191-224. https://doi.org/10.2753/MIS0742-1222220307

3. Arnolds, C., Boshoff, C., & Mazibuko, N. (2010). The Motivational Impact of Job Security, Recognition, Monetary Incentives and Training on the Job Performance of Blue-Collar Employees. *South Africa Journal of Labour Relations, 34*(1). Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC59636

4. Azman, I., Sieng, L. L., Ajis, M. N., Dollah, N. F., & Boerhannoeddin, A. (2009). Relationship Between Supervisor's Role and Job Performance in the Workplace Training Program. *Scientific Annals of The "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi, 59,* 237-251. Retrieved from http://anale.feaa.uaic.ro/anale/resurse/20_M01_Azman.pdf

5. Baloyi, S., van Waveren, C., & Chan, K. (2014). The Role of Supervisor Support in Predicting Employee Job Satisfaction from Their Perception of the Performance Management System: A Test of Competing Models in Engineering Environments. *South African Journal of Industrial Engineering, 25*(1), 85-95. https://doi.org/10.7166/25-1-739

6. Biondi, F. N., Cacanindin, A., Douglas, C., & Cort, J. (2021). Overloaded and at Work: Investigating the Effect of Cognitive Workload on Assembly Task Performance. *Human Factors, 63*(5), 813-820. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0018720820929928

7. Brown, S., & Brown, T. (2012). Workshop: Improving Organizational Performance Through Territorial Mapping. *Proceedings of Academy of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict, 17*(1), 1-2.

8. Chang, P., & Chen, S. (2011). Crossing the Level of Employee's Performance: HPWS, Affective Commitment, Human Capital, and Employee Job Performance in Professional Service Organizations. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 22*(4), 883-901. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.555130

9. Cloutier, O., Felusiak, L., Hill, C., & Pemberton-Jones, E. J. (2015). The Importance of Developing Strategies for Employee Retention. *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics, 12*(2), 119-129. Retrieved from http://m.www.na-businesspress.com/JLAE/Pemberton-JonesEJ_Web12_2_.pdf

10. Conway, J. (2006). *Effects of Supervisor-Employee Relationship on Job Performance*. Applied Psychology Opus. Retrieved from https://wp.nyu.edu/steinhardt-appsych_opus/effects-of-supervisor-employee-relationship-on-job-performance/

11. Coyle-Shapiro, J., & Conway, N. (2005). Exchange Relationships: Examining Psychological Contracts and Perceived Organizational Support. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*(4), 774-781. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.90.4.774

12. Dau-Schmidt, K. G., & Ray, M. D. (2003). *The Definition of "Employee" in American Labor and Employment Law*. Retrieved from https://www.jil.go.jp/english/events/documents/clls04_dauschmidt2.pdf

13. Drury, D. (2008). *The Supervisor-Employee Relationship*. Retrieved from https://pdf4pro.com/cdn/the-supervisor-employee-relationship-1cc7d.pdf

14. Edirisooriya, W. A. (2014). Impact of Rewards on Employee Performance: with Special Reference to ElectriCo. *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Management and Economics* (pp. 311-318). Retrieved from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.703.9382&rep=rep1&type=pdf

15. Gentry, W. A., & Shanock, L. R. (2008). Views of Managerial Derailment from Above and Below: The Importance of a Good Relationship with Upper Management and Putting People at Ease. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 38*(10), 2469-2494. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2008.00400.x

16. George, D., & Mallery, P. (2016). *IBM SPSS statistics 23 step by step: A simple guide and reference* (14th ed.). New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315545899

17. Gok, S., Karatuna, I., & Karaca, P. O. (2015). The Role of Perceived Supervisor Support and Organizational Identification in Job Satisfaction. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 177,* 38-42. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.02.328

18. Hammig, O. (2017). Health and Well-Being at Work: The Key Role of Supervisor Support. *SSM – Population Health, 3,* 393-402. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2017.04.002

19. Hatch, M., & Zilber, T. (2011). Conversation at the border between organizational culture theory and institutional theory. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 21*(1), 94-97. https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492611419793

20. Jane, W., San, G., & Ou, Y. (2009). The Causality Between Salary Structures and Team Performance: A Panel Analysis in a Professional Baseball League. *International Journal of Sport Finance, 4*(2), 136-150. Retrieved from https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Causality-between-Salary-Structures-and-Team-A-Jane-San/e4425e2ef481-71684059a85eeb6cc00551437587

21. Landman, M. S., & O'Clery, N. (2020). *The Impact of the Employment Equity Act on Female Inter-industry Labour Mobility and the Gender Wage Gap in South Africa* (WIDER Working Paper No. 2020/52). Helsinki: UNU-WIDER. http://dx.doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2020/809-2

22. Livari, J., & Huisman, M. (2001). The Relationship Between Organizational Culture and the Deployment of Systems Development Methodologies. In K. R. Dittrich, A. Geppert, & M. C. Norrie (Eds.), *Advanced Information Systems Engineering* (pp. 234-250). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/3-540-45341-5_16

23. Maddux, R. (2016). *Team Building: An Exercise in Leadership*. Kogan Page Publishers.

24. Mafini, C. (2014). The Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction: Empirical Evidence from Logistics Practitioners in A South African Steel-Making Company. *International Business & Economics Research Journal (IBER), 13*(3), 453-462. http://dx.doi.org/10.19030/iber.v13i3.8585

25. McLarty, B. D., Muldoon, J., Quade, M., & King, R. A. (2021). Your Boss Is the Problem and Solution: How Supervisor-induced Hindrance Stressors and LMX Influence Employee-Job Neglect and Subsequent Performance. *Journal of Business Research, 130,* 308-317. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.03.032

26. Moletsane, M., Tefera, O., & Migiro, S. (2019). The Relationship Between Employee Engagement and Organisational Productivity of Sugar Industry in South Africa: The Employees' Perspective. *African Journal of Business & Economics Research (AJBER), 14*(1), 113-134. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-149c0fdc06

27. Moraka, N. V., & Van Rensburg, M. (2015). Transformation in the South African Mining Industry – Looking Beyond the Employment Equity Scorecard. *Journal of the Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, 115*(8), 669-678. Retrieved from http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/jsaimm/v115n8/05.pdf

28. Mouton, J. (2017). *Understanding social research*. Van Schaik Publishers.

29. Mtimkulu, D. S., Naranjee, N., & Karodia, A. M. (2014). An Evaluation of The Leadership Styles of Managers and Their Impact on Human Capital Factors of Motivation, Performance and Absenteeism of Employees at Selected Hospitals in Eastern Free State, South Africa. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (Nigerian Chapter), 2*(10), 10-41. https://doi.org/10.12816/0011632

30. Noe, R., Hollenbeck, J. R., Gerhart B., & Wright P. M. (2017). *Human resource management: Gaining a competitive advantage*. McGraw Hill.

31. Pothos, N., Skordoulis, M., & Chalikias, M. (2014). *Contemporary Industrial and Organisational Psychology*. South Africa.

32. Raub, S., Borzillo, S., Perretten, G., & Schmitt, M. (2021).

New Employee Orientation, Role-related Stressors and Conflict at Work: Consequences for Work Attitudes and Performance of Hospitality Employees. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 94,* 102857. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102857

33. Rehman, S. U. R., Shahzad, M., Farooq, M. S., & Javaid, M. U. (2020). Impact of leadership behavior of a project manager on his/her subordinate's job attitudes and job outcomes. *Asia Pacific Management Review, 25*(1), 38-47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apmrv.2019.06.004

34. Rubio, E. (2016). *The Damage of Favoritism and How to Avoid Toxic Organizational Culture.* LinkedIn. Retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/damage-favoritism-how-avoid-toxic-organizational-culture-rubio/

35. Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2016). *Research methods for business students.* Pearson Education Limited.

36. Shahzad, F., Luqman, R. A., Khan, A. R., & Shabbir, L. (2012). Impact of Organizational Culture on Organizational Performance: An Overview. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business, 3*(9), 975-985. Retrieved from https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2012-22425-035

37. Shipley, N. L., Jackson, M. J., & Segrest, S. L. (2010). The Effects of Emotional Intelligence, Age, Work Experience, and Academic Performance. *Research in Higher Education Journal, 9*(1), 1-18. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/fac_publications/335/

38. Shuck, M. B., Rocco, T. S., & Albornoz, C. A. (2011). Exploring Employee Engagement from the Employee Perspective: Implications for HRD. *Journal of European Industrial Training, 35*(4), 300-325. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090591111128306

39. Singh, P. (2013). Transforming Traditional Bureaucratic Management Practices By Employing The Collegial

Leadership Model Of Emancipation. *International Business & Economics Research Journal (IBER), 12*(8), 953-968. http://dx.doi.org/10.19030/iber.v12i8.7991

40. Spector, P. E., Dwyer, D. J., & Jex, S. M. (1988). Relation of Job Stressors to Affective, Health, and Performance Outcomes: A Comparison of Multiple Data Sources. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 73*(1), 11-19.

41. Stranks, J. (2005). *Stress at Work: Management and Prevention.* India: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann publications. Retrieved from https://cdn.preterhuman.net/texts/employment/Stress%20at%20Work%20Management%20and%20Prevention%20-%20Jeremy%20Stranks.pdf

42. Sturman, M., & Park, S. (2016). *The Changing Relationship Between Supervisors and Subordinates: How Managing This Relationship Evolves Over Time.* Cornell University School of Hotel Administration: Center for Hospitality Research Report. Retrieved from https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/71243

43. Tangirala, S. A., & Ramanujam, R. (2012). Ask and You Shall Hear (But Not Always): Examining the Relationship Between Manager Consultation and Employee Voice. *Personnel Psychology, 65*(2), 251-282. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2012.01248.x

44. Tessema, M. T., Ready, K. J., & Embaye, A. B. (2013). The Effects of Employee Recognitions, Pay, and Benefits on Job Satisfaction: Cross Country Evidence. *Journal of Business and Economics, 4*(1), 1-12. Retrieved from http://www.academicstar.us/UploadFile/Picture/2014-6/2014615104651386.pdf

45. Tsitmideli, G., Skordoulis, M., Chalikias, M., Sidiropoulos, G., & Papagrigoriou, A. (2016). Supervisors and subordinates relationship impact on job satisfaction and efficiency: The case of obstetric clinics in Greece. *International Journal of Strategic Innovative Marketing.* Retrieved

from https://www.academia.edu/41989734/Supervisors_and_subordinates_relationship_impact_on_job_satisfaction_and_efficiency_The_case_of_obstetric_clinics_in_Greece

46. Yang, T., Shen, Y., Zhu, M., Liu, Y., Chen, Q., Deng, J., & See, L. (2016). Effects of Co-Worker and Supervisor Support on Jon Stress and Presenteeism in an Aging Workforce: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 13*(1), 72. http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/ijerph13010072

47. Yukl, G. (2008). *How Leaders Influence Organizational Effectiveness.* Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/27893893/How_leaders_influence_organizational_effectiveness