

**The influence of leader workplace aggression on work engagement, moderated  
by timing.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

One of the sources of tension in the workplace is leader workplace aggression, which remains a significant challenge among organisations. Leader workplace aggression presents in various forms – bullying, incivility, and unjustified rage against an employee; when these destructive behaviours manifest, employees, managers, onlookers, and organisations suffer. A toxic culture is created, and that creates challenging conditions for organisations to retain talent, resulting in business performance being compromised and employee dissatisfaction leading to an increase in turnover.

Leader workplace aggression is considered one of the key reasons behind the reduction in employee performance, dissatisfaction, and disengagement. It has also been found to affect employee work motivation and attitudes adversely. The conduct of leaders, whether it be leaders being uncivil towards employees, shouting, demeaning or making unwarranted threats, which can today be described as abusive, is not new in the workplace; however, it is only in the last two decades that dedicated scholarship on the topic of leader workplace aggression has emerged.

Whilst there has been significant progress in the development of literature relating to leader workplace aggression, much more is still unknown, such as the extent of the influence of organisational context in enabling leader workplace aggression, as well as the influence of certain organisational events, such as going through a time of crisis, business reporting times and other busy periods, on the relationship between on leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

In this study, the researcher developed a composite leader workplace aggression scale by combining three related scales measuring supervisor behaviour, incivility and workplace bullying. A questionnaire comprising of the leader workplace aggression scale and Timing factor was distributed to a sample of Financial Services professionals. The results revealed that while leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement, timing, as hypothesised, is not a moderator of the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement, as the effect was insignificant.

**Keywords:**

**Leader workplace aggression** refers to elements of destructive leadership that relate to the actions of a leader, and that is the phrase adopted in this study (Sharma, 2018).

**Abusive supervision** refers to “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact”(Tepper, 2000, p. 126).

**Organisational context** refers to the "situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organisational behaviour as well as functional relationships between variables" (Sharma, 2018, p. 1)

**Timing** refers to Time-dependent factors such as When, Duration, Life Cycles and Organisational Events (Sharma, 2018)

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy: Corporate Strategy at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to conduct this research.

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## **1. DEFINITION OF PROBLEM AND PURPOSE**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Employees spend the better part of their time at work, and this is the place where they go to fulfil their career aspirations and realise their personal and economic goals (Dingel & Neiman, 2020). Employees usually experience the workplace through their immediate supervisor, the quality of exchanges between the supervisor and the employee has a significant influence over the employee's experience (Verdorfer et al., 2023). Work is an excellent place to be in the ordinary course of events, especially in the South African labour market, where jobs are scarce and as much as 55% of youth is unemployed (Mazorodze, 2020). The workplace is however fraught with potential conflicts and abusive supervision as different personalities, cultures, backgrounds, and personal attributes converge to form teams and deliver on organisational outcomes (Naeem et al., 2020).

One of the sources of tension in the workplace is destructive leadership which remains a major challenge among global organisations (Fischer et al., 2021). Destructive leadership presents in various forms – bullying, incivility, and unjustified rage against an employee; when these destructive behaviours manifest, employees, managers, onlookers, and organisations suffer (Chen et al., 2021). A toxic culture is created, and that creates challenging conditions for organisations to retain talent; resulting in business performance being compromised and employee dissatisfaction leading to an increase in turnover intentions (Paltu & Brouwers, 2020). In an abusive climate, employees feel a sense of disempowerment, lack of security and without any perceived prospect of success their self-efficacy is affected as well as their commitment to organisational outcomes (Sun et al., 2023).

In reviewing the literature on abusive supervision, Sharma proposed the phrase Leader Workplace Aggression to refer to elements of destructive leadership that relate to the actions of a leader, and that is the phrase adopted in this study (Sharma, 2018). Leader workplace aggression, abusive supervision and destructive leadership are commonly applied in the literature to refer to supervisor behaviours that negatively affect workplace satisfaction (Verdorfer et al., 2023). Leader workplace aggression is considered one of the key reasons behind the reduction in employee performance, dissatisfaction, and disengagement (Vranjes et al., 2022). It has also been found to adversely affect employee work motivation and attitudes (Wang et al., 2020). The conduct of leaders, whether it be leaders being uncivil towards employees, shouting, demeaning or making unwarranted threats, which can today be described as abusive is not new in the workplace; however, it is only in the last two decades

that dedicated scholarship on the topic of leader workplace aggression has emerged (Fischer et al., 2021)

Over the years, the topic has received significant attention from scholars who have sought to understand the relational dimensions of leader workplace aggression – the contribution of organisational context (Pradhan et al., 2020; Xiong et al., 2021), a supervisor's attributes as the drivers of workplace aggression (Deng et al., 2021; Naeem et al., 2020; Pan & Lin, 2018) and a victim's behaviour as the trigger of leader workplace aggression (Lian et al., 2014; Liang et al., 2016; Park et al., 2019), and more recently, the interaction between abusive supervision and employees taking charge among others (Sun et al., 2023).

This is a topic that continues to attract the interest of scholars, the business community, and governments alike and it is for this reason that the researcher ventured into this territory to contribute to the improvement of workplace relations and leadership development (Sharma, 2018).

## **1.2 Background to the research problem**

It is often argued that organisations across the world seeking to attract and retain top talent and remain sustainable struggle with maintaining work engagement as they battle with the prevalence of abusive supervision (Almeida et al., 2021). Significant efforts and resources are deployed by organisations to develop leaders, foster a conducive culture and develop and implement strategic objectives; yet the attainment of a return on these investments is often compromised by the destructive and harmful behaviours of leaders in the workplace which impact both co-workers and the organisation negatively (Ng et al., 2020).

Leader workplace aggression has negative outcomes for an organisation as it affects the employees' overall experience of the workplace including their attitudes, organisational commitment and overall satisfaction (Ju et al., 2019). The understanding of the causes, drivers and enablers of abusive supervision that, among other negative outcomes for the organisation, exacerbate employees' deviant behaviours and their intention to leave is essential for organisations to enable them to formulate appropriate and effective responses to these challenges (Mackey et al., 2017).

This dissertation explores the influence of Leader workplace aggression on work engagement, moderated by timing. Over the years, numerous studies focusing on the relationship between abusive supervision and work engagement, including those (Huh & Lee, 2022) Pan and Lin (2018) and (Wang et al., 2020) have been conducted; these studies largely have sought to

establish the antecedents of abusive supervision and employee responses to abusive supervision (Sharma, 2018).

In this dissertation, the researcher argues that to understand the drivers and enablers of leader workplace aggression, it is prudent to predict when supervisors are prone to conduct themselves abusively towards subordinates, hence, the relevance of timing as a moderator. Certain times or events in the life of an organisation are precursors of the occurrence of leader workplace aggression (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). For instance, among other scholars, Barnes et al. (2015) have considered the influence of sleep deprivation on leader workplace aggression and concluded that lack of sleep by supervisors leads to the depletion of coping resources and the inability to contain outbursts which in turn may lead to instances of abusive supervision being reported by employees.

Barnes et al. (2015), Mackey (2017) and (Ng et al., 2020) are some of the scholars who have in recent years contributed towards understanding the relevance of timing in triggering or causing leader workplace aggression. There is still a gap in the literature about the influence of timing as an antecedent or moderator of leader workplace aggression.

Are leaders more prone to conduct themselves aggressively in times of crisis when their coping resources are depleted or during busy company reporting periods; these are some of the insights this paper attempts to uncover by focusing on the professional services sector in South Africa and, thus, contributing to Sharma's (2018) invitation and direction for future research.

### **1.3 Definition of leader workplace aggression**

In this study and in keeping with the growing body of literature seeking to understand the drivers, enablers and mitigators of leader/supervisor-mediated aggression against employees, the phrase 'leader workplace aggression' is adopted and includes abusive supervision, social undermining, incivility, bullying, destructive leadership, and related conduct (Sharma, 2018). Leader workplace aggression will be used where appropriate for the context. In the context of the current study and in keeping with literature with regards to the use of terminology, the researcher makes use of the term supervisor/leader to refer to manager, supervisor, or team leader, while the term employee is used to refer to subordinate, follower and team member (Fischer et al., 2021).

Scholars have widely adopted Tepper's definition of abusive supervision defined as referring to "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000,

p. 126). Other definitions, including one by Qin et al. (2020), define leader workplace aggression as all forms of negative behaviour towards subordinates, excluding physical contact, through which a leader may attempt to harm others. Abusive supervision involves consistent nonverbal and verbal actions towards subordinates and it does not have an ethical component (Fischer et al., 2021). From these definitions, one can deduce that the definition of a leader's aggression within the workplace context is characterised by three broad attributes:

- It is the leader's conduct as experienced and attributed by the employee that is the centre of focus.
- Within the workplace context and in leadership studies, it excludes extremely violent situations, such as the physical assault of employees by their leaders.
- The conduct is however harmful – mentally, psychologically, emotionally and otherwise – to the target of the aggression.

The subjective nature of abusive supervision, that is perceiving it from the target's experience and attribution, differentiates it from "other constructs such as supervisor bullying and undermining in that it does not describe the intentions of the supervisor" (Mackey et al., 2017, p. 8)

Although Tepper's (2000) definition of abusive supervision is generally accepted and serves as a significant starting point, it could be argued that emerging literature suggests that abusive leadership does not necessarily manifest in a structured, linear, and sustained fashion (Pan & Lin, 2018). Barnes et al. (2015) also question the deliberate and sustained nature of abusive supervision by observing that a supervisor's mood may change several times throughout the day, week or month and may even be triggered by external factors which, in turn, may lead to subordinates' observations of such behaviour as abusive leadership.

These recent developments suggest that abusive leadership is a dynamic process with numerous causes, triggers, interpretations, and attributions; there is no one-size-fits-all definition, particularly because the prevailing definitions are centred on a target's subjective perceptions of a supervisor's behaviour (Ng et al., 2020)

#### **1.4 Relevance of the study to the corporate world and the field of leadership development**

The Workplace Bullying Alliance 2014 reports that as much as half of the US workforce has experienced workplace bullying, with even more than half being aware of someone who has been bullied (Sharma, 2018). The World Health Organisation describes bullying in the

workplace as the most dangerous psychosocial ill, with a prevalence rate of up to 78% in South Africa (Burton, 2010). Evidence suggests that workplace bullying in general remains a serious and ongoing problem. Recent reports, including that by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, found that 27% of employees have been affected by leader workplace aggression (Young & Gifford, 2022).

Closer to home, the South African National Department of Employment and Labour has recently gazetted a Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace –Employment Equity Act: Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace (Badenhorst & Botha, 2022). The code aims to broaden the scope of workplace harassment to include victimisation, bullying and other related acts that may pass insecurities to the receivers of such acts (Badenhorst & Botha, 2022). Workplace bullying and other forms of abusive supervision are relevant for this study as, in line with Sharma's proposition, the phrase 'leader workplace aggression' is adopted and it broadly includes abusive supervision, social undermining, incivility, bullying, destructive leadership, and related conduct (Sharma, 2018).

Abusive supervision leads to turnover intentions – this is at a time when people have been recognised as a source of competitive advantage (Teece et al., 2016). Seo and Chung (2019) found a positive relationship between abusive supervision and turnover intentions in China. Dai et al., (2019) discovered that employees who were subjected to workplace maltreatment were much more likely than those who were not to have such intentions.

According to recent studies, elevated levels of subordinate job discontent and work disengagement largely explain the positive relationship between abusive treatment and inclinations to quit; being the target of hostile behaviour is intrinsically a bad experience which causes negative emotional reactions and affects employees' attitudes towards their jobs (Hartmann et al., 2020). Needless to say, working in an abusive environment is not a condition subordinates would tolerate when they have other options, hence, they start formulating the turnover intention.

Leader workplace aggression in all its various permutations impacts employees who are already in vulnerable situations in South Africa. Workers normally refer grievances to the bargaining councils or the Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) if management fails to solve the grievances. The CCMA reports that in the 2022/23 financial year, 156 777 disputes were referred to it by workers – a 2% increase from the previous year (CCMA, 2022). These figures suggest a higher prevalence of leader workplace aggression in



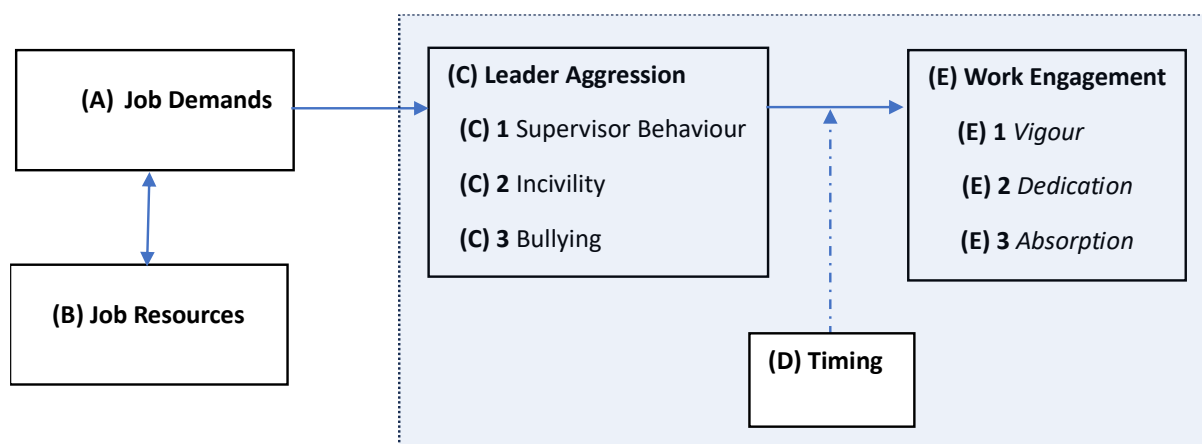
South Africa. Thus, the topic of this study addresses current and relevant organisational challenges in the South African context.

### 1.5 Theoretical grounding of the study

The study is premised on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory developed by Bakker and Demerouti (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The JD-R theory is normally associated with work-related stress and burnout; this is when the demands made by the job on the employee exceed their available coping resources (Rhee et al., 2017). Without early warning systems built into ongoing coaching processes, performance management systems or organisational employee programmes, the employee may experience burnout. Burnout is defined as “a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion resulting from a prolonged response to long-term exposure to demanding situations” (Rhee et al., 2017, p. 132).

### 1.6 Conceptualisation of research purpose

To factor in the effect of timing as a catalyst for leader workplace aggression, an adapted model (Figure 1.2) is applied to reflect timing as a moderator between job demands and the manifestation of leader workplace aggression.



**Figure 1.1**

*The conceptual framework*

The framework is a five-stage framework that makes assumptions that are supported by the literature. In the main, the framework is based on the JD-R theory borrowed from Bakker and Demerouti’s (2007) model with adaptations to incorporate Sharma’s (2018) proposition (E) which suggests that the timing of certain organisational events, such as time of crisis and business reporting times, may influence the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

Timing in this framework serves as a moderator between the leader workplace aggression and work engagement. Timing refers to the when, sequence, and order of events that may give rise to leader workplace aggression and this study seeks to explore the significance of timing (Sharma, 2018).

Engaged employees are less likely to leave their employers and more likely to contribute towards the achievement of organisational outcomes. Contrary to leader workplace aggression, work engagement entails employees who bring their whole to work, have their focus on organisational goal attainment and serve as ambassadors outside of the organisation (Ju et al., 2019). Teng et al. (2021) submit that work engagement refers to the positive and affective-motivational work-related state of mind. These are ideal employees who are desirable for a company to generate the desired value for shareholders (Chong et al., 2018).

Several studies have been conducted which seek to understand the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017; Vranjes et al., 2022). These studies have contributed significantly to uncovering the manifestations of leader workplace aggression and have even seen alternative views emerging as to the influence of leader workplace aggression in developing resilience in the hospitality sector (Yu et al., 2020). What is apparent from the literature is that leader workplace aggression negatively impacts work engagement and it is in the employer's best interest to eliminate or manage all forms of leader workplace aggression (Johnson et al., 2018)

### **1.7 Defining the research problem.**

This study finds its foundation in Sharma who sought to explore "the role of organisation context in leader workplace aggression" (Sharma, 2018, p. 205). Sharma views organisational characteristics as linked to goals, culture, processes, state or conditions, people, timing and structure. Thus, this study contributes to Sharma's work and the literature by setting out to prove the following hypotheses:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement.

**H<sub>2</sub>** The timing factor has a moderating effect on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

This study applies a comprehensive approach that considers the above hypotheses within the context of the influence of leader workplace aggression on work engagement while also exploring the moderating role of timing.

## **1.9 Research aim**

### **1.9.1 Primary aim**

The primary aim of this study is to determine the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

### **1.9.2 Secondary aim**

The secondary aim is to explore the influence that has on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

## **1.10 Justification of the Study**

This study is of vital importance to organisations at large as they will become aware of when their leaders are likely to exhaust their coping mechanisms and become aggressive towards employees. The insights drawn from the study will enhance the human resource (HR) functions to be fully aware and know when to monitor, anticipate and empower leadership and employees alike to mitigate leader workplace aggression. By so doing, the organisational outcomes, including employee performance, retention of talented individuals and high performance, may be achieved and sustained over time (Saleem et al., 2022).

Additionally, the study will also be of importance to managers themselves. Leaders should exercise their influence and power carefully in the workplace (Fischer et al., 2021). Once managers are fully aware that their periodic aggressiveness is being monitored, they may be prompted to behave more ethically as expected.

Employees suffer at the hands of supervisors who also happen to be employees and are merely replicating their experiences and passing them down to their subordinates (Lu et al., 2018). Greater levels of self-awareness by those who are in positions of leadership are essential if the tide of leader workplace aggression is to be contained; by developing the literature in this area, supervisors and employees alike may gain further insights into when leaders are likely to behave or act aggressively and even contextualise the supervisor's behaviour (Qin et al., 2018). South Africa is in an even more perilous situation with persistent unemployment which may limit employment choices for victims of leader workplace aggression (Erten et al., 2019).

Finally, literature is increasingly seeking to understand what causes supervisors to behave in a manner that is harmful to their subordinates, to an extent, the literature focuses on the subjective experiences of subordinates to determine whether the supervisor's conduct is

abusive (Johnson et al., 2018). Advances in the literature are now exploring additional insights from both the context, supervisor and the employee (Sharma, 2018). From the supervisor, there is a need to understand why they abuse and from the employee, there is a need to understand why they assume that the conduct is abusive and what informs their attribution of the supervisor's conduct to abuse, the organisational context then provides the platform on which the interaction between the supervisor and the employee takes place (Sharma, 2018).

It is anticipated that the insights drawn from this study will be of value to the business sector and contribute to the advancement of scholarships towards finding practical solutions to address leader workplace aggression in the workplace.

### **1.11 Research scope**

The research is premised within the leadership development field, in the sub-field of abusive supervision. The focus is on the employee's assessment of the leader's conduct towards the employee at or during specified times (Mackey et al., 2017).

The scope of this study is limited to the invitation from Sharma (2018) in two ways:

- Applying the JD-R to explore the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement, moderated by the timing.
- Exploring the influence of time of crisis and business reporting time on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement

While several theories and models are referred to in the literature review, they are cited to contextualise the argument; however, they do not form the foundation upon which this study is premised.

This research does not purport to address all possible permutations associated with leader workplace aggression and work engagement; there are countless possibilities and with the limited time available, these aspects are out of the scope of this research. The research also does not explore the objective causes of leader workplace aggression in the workplace.

Lastly, the study is conducted in the South African professional services sector which includes audit, risk, insurance, financial services and legal professionals.

### **1.12 Research scope and report structure**

This research aims to investigate the moderating effect of timing on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

### **1.13 Report structure**

This report is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study and research problem. The remaining chapters contain the following:

- Chapter 2: A literature review of recent academic work
- Chapter 3: The theoretical framework and hypotheses
- Chapter 4: The Research Methodology and approach to data analysis
- Chapter 5: Data analysis results
- Chapter 6: A discussion of data analysis results relative to the literature
- Chapter 7: Research conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future studies.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter includes both the theoretical and empirical literature review and defines the parameters of the study. The theoretical literature centres on the conceptual framework and the theories that underpin this study and their relevance. The empirical literature review concentrates on the studies that have been conducted by other researchers; the thorough review and synthesis of their work identifies the research gap in the literature.

The literature review reflects and synthesises current literature on the topic of leader workplace aggression and its influence on work engagement. In approaching the literature review, the following sub-sections/topics are addressed:

- A review of various theoretical models, primarily situated on the JD-R model and referring to Sharma's seven-component framework.
- The subjective nature of leader workplace aggression and differences in how employees attribute supervisor behaviour conduct is considered. Among other factors, this may be a function of culture, personal attributes or employee differences (Lyubykh et al., 2022).
- The relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement is discussed.
- The relevance of timing in triggering or causing leader workplace aggression, drawing on the JD-R theory to explore if job demands, such as an emotionally charged environment, crises and resource scarcity, have any bearing on the likelihood of leaders behaving badly, is examined.
- The antecedents of leader workplace aggression are explored in the work of several scholars with some bias towards organisational context to define the parameters and expose the research gap in the literature.
- The impact and consequences of leader workplace aggression further contribute to the justification of these and similar studies and the understanding and addressing of leader workplace aggression.
- An exploration of whether abusive supervision is bad for the workplace (Zhang & Liu, 2018) or whether positive outcomes can be attained from it with consideration of the leader-member exchange theory and the ego depletion theory.
- An overall assessment of the literature is conducted, and a conclusion is provided.

## 2.2 The JD-R model

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory was developed by Bakker and Demerouti (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The JD-R theory is normally associated with work-related stress and burnout. This is when the demands made by the job on the employee exceed their available coping resources (Rhee et al., 2017). Without early warning systems built into ongoing coaching processes, performance management systems or organisational employee programmes, the employee may experience burnout. Burnout is defined as “a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion resulting from a prolonged response to long-term exposure to demanding situations” (Rhee et al., 2017, p. 132).

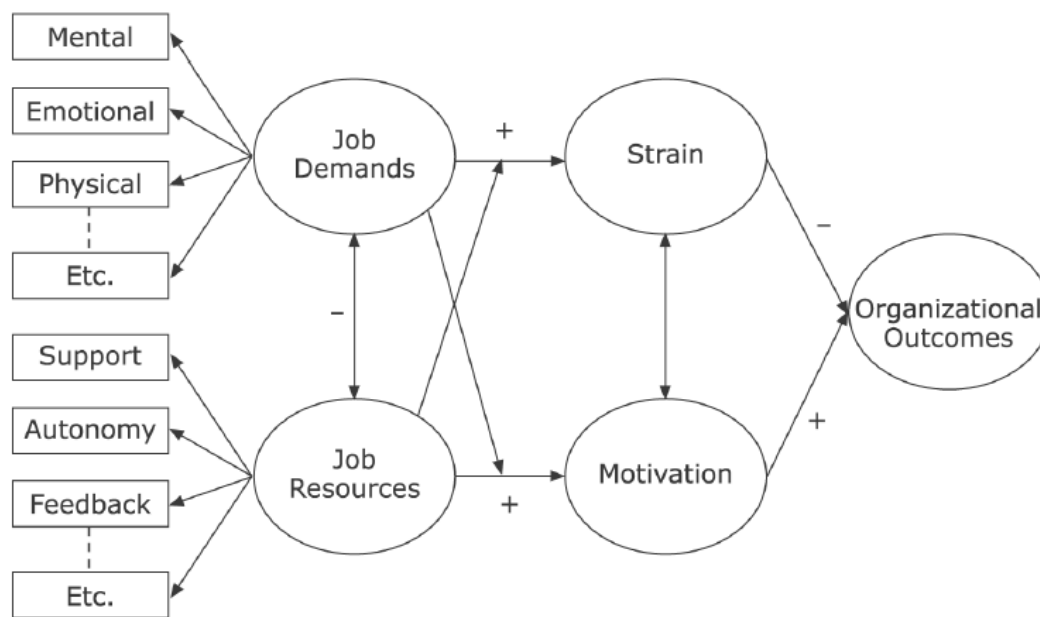
The JD-R theory suggests tension between the organisational, work demands such as productivity, driving growth and innovation, working longer hours, job insecurity, unclear roles, dealing with abusive supervisors and lack of resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job demands are those aspects of the job that are associated with social, mental and physical pressures and strain resulting in anxiety and fatigue (Rhee et al., 2017). Job demands, if not managed, may result in negative attitudes towards the organisation and job. Job demands create tension in an employee’s life and relate negatively to organisational outcomes such as employee retention and engagement and the achievement of strategic objectives (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

It is argued that job demands are negatively related to work engagement, leading to increased strain, fatigue and disengagement (Wang et al., 2020) Leader workplace aggression is a salient job demand as it has the effect of inducing anxiety and mental strain and leads to poor occupational outcomes (Huh & Lee, 2022).

The relevance of the JD-R theory in the manifestation of leader workplace aggression is mainly two-fold: on the one-hand, in the form of job demands as an antecedent of leader workplace aggression and on the other hand, in terms of the impact it has on subordinates. Job demands according to the JD-R model include those aspects of the job that require sustained effort – be it physical, mental, psychological or skill (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). When job demands exceed available resources, the quality of the leader-member exchange, including experienced or perceived abusive supervision, may be negatively impacted.

As observed by Wang, abusive supervision leads to the depletion of resources as it introduces strain into the work environment which is in addition to normal job demands (Wang et al., 2018). Interestingly, abusive supervision is one of the most prevalent job demands; it is emotionally draining to employees and leads to energy depletion (Huh & Lee, 2022)

Conversely, there are job resources that enable an employee to perform and cope with their job (Mackey et al., 2017). These are factors such as access to decision-makers, adequate tools of trade, an enabling culture, training and development, attractive rewards and incentives and annual leave (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). These tend to create positive sentiments towards the organisation and job. They are motivators and relate positively to the organisational outcomes mentioned above. The JD-R model includes personal resources which consist of the individual's perception of strengths, ability to complete a task and resilience (W. B. Schaufeli, 2017). The JD-R model is depicted below.



**Figure 2.1**

*JD-R model*

Note: Reprinted from Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). The job demands-resources model: State of the art. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(3), p.323

<https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940710733115>

In the ordinary course of events, there are constant interactions between job demands and job resources; thus, they moderate and buffer each other to the extent that the impact on organisational outcomes is a combined effect of both variables (Huh & Lee, 2022). Job demands and job resources are negatively related. Depending on which one of the variables is stronger, the net effect on organisational outcomes may be diluted, eliminated or strengthened. Job demands and consequent strain diminish job outcomes whereas job resources and resulting motivation enhance job outcomes (Wang et al., 2020).



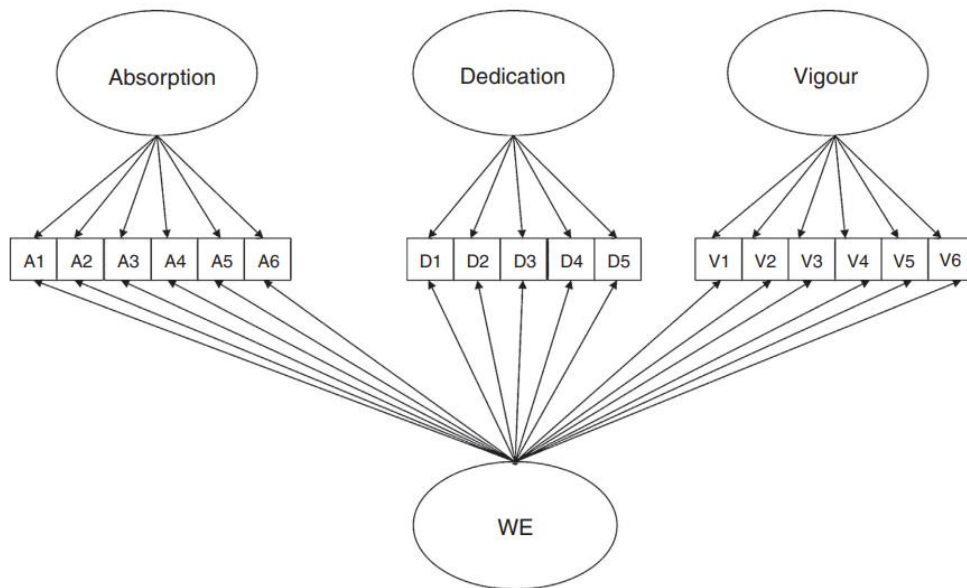
Incivility, a type of workplace aggression, among co-workers is a predictor of job stress, poor overall wellness and intention to leave (Rhee et al., 2017). In the ordinary course of events, there is a balance between job demands and job resources, enabling employees to cope and experience a degree of congruence with the job. However, when one emotional demand is introduced, coping with the job becomes difficult and affects job outcomes negatively (Grover et al., 2017).

Employees who are subjected to abusive supervision, also experience stressors which deplete their resources. To protect themselves, employees adopt creative strategies, such as withdrawal, silence or withholding of discretionary effort, to help themselves preserve their energy (Huh & Lee, 2022). In practice, employees may avoid meetings with the supervisor and insist on communicating via email; they may do the bare minimum to meet job expectations and may become a bit more risk-averse. This leads to negative organisational outcomes as employees are hired for their intellectual capacity and when they go silent, they do not share their opinions and experiences or give input and suggestions (Wang et al., 2020).

I submit that the JD-R model is therefore relevant because it explains how job demands such as leader workplace aggression exacerbate strain and anxiety and lead to poor job outcomes and consequently, affect work engagement (Wang et al., 2020)

## **2.6 An Overview of Work Engagement**

This section provides an overview of work engagement within the context of leader workplace aggression, in line with the research hypotheses exploring the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement, moderated by timing. Work engagement refers to the employee's sense of satisfaction, positive attitude and sentiments towards their job and comes with many positive outcomes for the organisation as employees contribute discretionary effort towards organisational outcomes (Wang et al., 2020). There are numerous positive outcomes related to work engagement such as creativity, commitment and retention among others (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) is the most common engagement scale in academic research and there have been several versions of the scale developed over the years, i.e., UWES-17, UWES- & UWES-3; this study makes use of the UWES-17 version (Mazzetti et al., 2023). The scale measures engagement with reference to three factors as depicted below:



**Figure 2.2**

*Bi Factor model of the UWES-17*

*Note:* Reprinted from Vallières, F., McAuliffe, E., Hyland, P., Galligan, M., & Ghee, A. (2017). Measuring work engagement among community health workers in Sierra Leone: Validating the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. *Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, p.44

The three factors used in the UWES-17 to measure engagement are:

- Vigour refers to the employee's high spirits and willingness to withstand challenges and endure to achieve organisational outcomes (Mazzetti et al., 2023).
- Dedication refers to a commitment to one's work, taking ownership and deriving meaning from it (Vallières et al., 2017)
- Absorption refers to the immersion into one's work and giving it time, attention and interest in such a way that time could pass easily when an employee is busy with work (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

Vigour and dedication are deemed to be the core factors while absorption may fluctuate and be temporary in nature hence the scholarly suggestion that engagement may fluctuate within person (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

The literature is consistent in demonstrating that leader workplace aggression has detrimental effects on the organisation and the individuals concerned, which in turn leads to lower levels of work engagement (Pan & Lin, 2018). There are numerous root causes of this effect, the prominent one being the disturbance of equilibrium between the job demands and available

motivators in the form of job resources (Mazzetti et al., 2023). When this happens, the stressors overpower the motivators and the net effect is lower work engagement (Li et al., 2019). There is therefore a strong link between JD-R and work engagement; even in the presence of jobs demands, resources are deemed to be a significant predictor of work engagement because they enable employees to handle the demands and perform in their jobs (Mazzetti et al., 2023)

As demonstrated in the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1), there is ongoing buffering between the job demands and job resources with the net effect being high to low engagement; abusive supervision is one of the most prevalent stressors in the workplace and consequently, leads to lower levels of work engagement (Mazzetti et al., 2023). In recent years, the JD-R model was developed to include personal resources. Job resources are those aspects of the job that help the employee to get the work done whereas job demands are coping mechanisms such as resiliency, self-efficacy and self-esteem (Huh & Lee, 2022). The extension is important because it has the effect of augmenting job resources, contextualising stressors and even converting them into motivators (Dai et al., 2019). When this happens, the relationship between abusive leadership and work engagement is altered and not as predictable as has previously been thought.

The interaction of certain cultures and personal resources suggests that abusive supervision may not be as bad as it has always been perceived to be ( Zhang & Liu, 2018). Srivastava (2013, as cited by Zhang & Liu, 2018) has found that cultures, such as those of the Asian-Pacific region – Japan and South Korea – mentioned above, that are characterised by higher power distance, have been shown to yield positive results where moderate forms of abusive supervision are applied. This perception does not automatically translate to positive work engagement though as that is influenced by the culture-based perceptions of the value of work; Western countries perceive work to be some means towards self-realisation whereas in Asian countries, work is perceived to be a duty with some measure of sacrifice (Mazzetti et al., 2023)

Dai et al. (2019) found that under certain conditions, abusive supervision enhanced resilience in travel agency sector employees. The subordinate's attribution of abusive behaviour by the supervisor may also produce some positive spin-offs where the subordinate makes a positive attribution as would be the case where an employee is reprimanded for poor performance and the attribution made by the employee is that the supervisor's behaviour is aimed at improving performance as opposed to attacking the subordinate's personally (Huh & Lee, 2022).

While there could be some advantages to the moderate application of abusive supervision, it is still a harmful practice. Watkins et al., (2019) found that supervisors who think that abusive supervision improves employee performance tend to overdo things and be a bit more abusive than their counterparts, which could have an adverse effect on workers' unproductive work habits.

In what appears to be a need for social inclusion, employees condition themselves to adopt positive coping strategies, such as anticipating supervisor requirements, working overtime or soliciting input from colleagues; this form of response shields employees from future abusive behaviour while also improving organisational outcomes (Zhang & Liu, 2018).

In a workplace context, employees may at times act rebelliously. Refusing to take instruction and ignoring such a situation would not yield any positive outcome but may instead aggravate the culture of delinquency and affect organisational outcomes. A leader taking charge of that situation and applying appropriate pressure for corrective reasons may derive positive outcomes as employees respond favourably to the intervention (Zhang & Liu, 2018)

Although Wang (2020) has found that abusive supervision leads to lower levels of engagement and satisfaction, this cannot be said to be the case conclusively given the above development, i.e., the addition of personal resources and the consideration of cultural aspects.

The next section reviews the relevance of timing which is used as the moderator in this study.

## **2.7 The relevance of timing**

The essence of this research project is to explore whether timing has any influence on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement. When are supervisors likely to act in an aggressive or abusive manner? As correctly pointed out by Sharma (2018), no abundance of literature deals directly with the issue of whether leaders are more abusive during the day, when they work night shifts, at month-end or when going through a time of crisis.

In this report, timing is applied as a moderator between job demands and abusive supervision to determine the resultant effect, if any. Certain events in the literature point to timing as a precursor to abusive supervision. When supervisors perceive organisational injustice or go through interpersonal conflicts, these events deplete resources and, in turn, lead to leader workplace aggression (Pan & Lin, 2018). Subtle manifestations of leader workplace aggression – snide comments, inappropriate responses etc. – take place over a period and get compounded as time progresses (Mackey et al., 2017).

Kelemen, Matthews & Breevaart (2020) make an interesting observation when they note that daily activities that supervisors undertake as part of their responsibilities, including coaching and role modelling behaviour, drain supervisors and increase the likelihood of abusive conduct the following day. The implication here is that if it is known that managers once drained by certain activities, such as coaching, act inappropriately towards their subordinates, it should follow that such activities are timed in such a way that managers have sufficient time to recover the depleted resources. This can also be the case when the organisation is going through a hostile period (Tepper et al., 2017)

It is rare for employees to experience leader workplace aggression all the time. There are fluctuations which may be within shorter or longer periods. There may even be same-day fluctuations depending on what is happening on that day; when a high-stakes meeting, which causes the supervisor to be anxious, takes place in the morning, their coping resources could be depleted and they could become aggressive (Zhang & Liu, 2018).

Probably the most prominent study to date on this topic is that by Barnes et al. (2015) who found that leadership behaviour varies from day to day; good people may behave in an abusive manner occasionally and bad people may behave in a good manner from time to time. They describe these fluctuations as within-person variations which is a departure from the established thinking that there are good and bad supervisors (Tepper et al., 2017). Leaders who were sleep deprived, for instance, and have had their coping resources depleted, consequentially act in an abusive manner over time (Barnes et al., 2015). The significance of this revelation is the role of overall wellness in ensuring adequate and regular replenishing of resources, which is a major challenge as leaders are expected to run around all day managing people, attending meetings and ensuring that deliveries happen to customers as promised.

In essence, therefore, and as opposed to early thinking of leader workplace aggression as being structured, linear and black or white, now the thinking is that it is dynamic, fluctuates and has triggers such as job demands, ego depletion, individual differences and culture. The understanding of events that are likely to trigger an extraordinary depletion of resources, cause strain and lead to lower work engagement is a step in the right direction towards finding adequate responses to anticipate and mitigate that risk (Ng et al., 2020).

While the theoretical foundation of the study is the JDR model, the focus is on how organisational context influences the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement; the next section explores Sharma's proposed framework of organisational conditions that enable leader workplace aggression.

## 2.2 Sharma's Seven Component Framework

The structure of this study is influenced by the framework that was developed by Sharma (2018) after he had assessed the influence of leader workplace aggression on work engagement, moderated by timing. Sharma's framework, consisting of several antecedents of leader workplace aggression, is depicted in Figure 2.1.

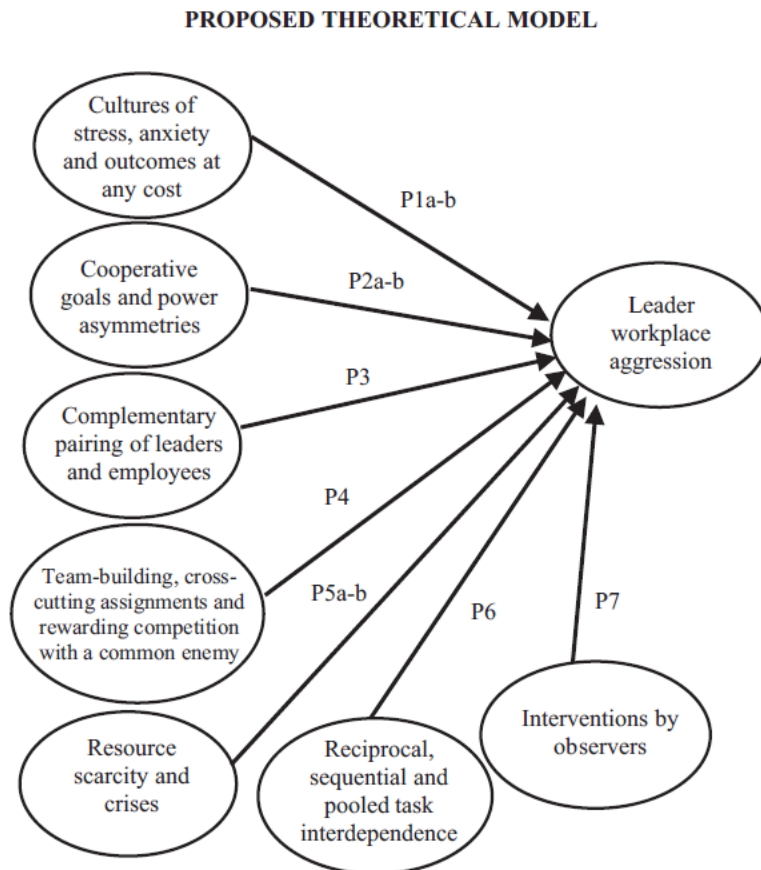


Fig. 1. Proposed theoretical model.

### Figure 2.3

#### *Sharma's proposed model*

*Note: Reprinted from Sharma, P. N. (2018). Moving beyond the employee: The role of the organisational context in leader workplace aggression. Leadership Quarterly, 29(1), p.207 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.12.002>*

The framework provides an overview of organisational conditions, such as cultures of stress, outcomes at all costs, anxiety, competitive goal setting and resource scarcity, as antecedents of leader workplace aggression (Sharma, 2018). The framework centres on the notion that organisational factors, whether in the form of the prevailing culture or climate, the way the

organisation is structured or an organisation going through a crisis of a temporary or long-term nature, may create an enabling ground for leader workplace aggression to thrive.

In his work, Sharma (2018) seeks to understand the organisational context as opposed to merely the relationship that exists between the two variables; these contextual factors give rise to aggressive behaviour by leaders/supervisors partly due to the demands that are placed on these individuals by the organisation.

The literature has so far mainly concentrated on leader workplace aggression from two perspectives:

- Enabling organisational contextual factors, including job demands and resources.
- Individual leader traits that drive aggression.

Sharma (2018) identifies several constructs making up the organisational context that may enable leader workplace aggression. These constructs are listed and explained in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1**

*Components of leader workplace aggression*

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>
Culture	Shared values, beliefs, and ways of doing things in the organisation.
Goals	Organisational outcomes that are sought.
Processes	The Systems, Governance Structure, and Policies provide the context in which work is performed and interactions take place.
Conditions	Resource availability, Reputation, and Tensions prevailing in the organisation.
Structure	Size, Shape, Hierarchy, and Decentralisation among other factors.
Time	Time-dependent factors such as When, Duration, Life Cycles and Organisational Events

*Note:* Adapted from Sharma, P. N. (2018). Moving beyond the employee: The role of the organisational context in leader workplace aggression. *Leadership Quarterly*, 29(1), p.205. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.12.002>

Sharma then proceeds to make an interesting observation that although there has been a significant contribution to exploring the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement, there has not been much work conducted to predict when leader workplace

aggression is likely to manifest in the organisational context and the constructs listed in Table 2.1.

Several studies have considered the relationship and influence between leader workplace aggression and work engagement (Dai et al., 2019; Huh & Lee, 2022; Scheuer et al., 2016). This study goes a step further and incorporates the timing of specific organisational events to determine if these have any impact on the occurrence of leader workplace aggression which, consequently, affects work engagement.

The ability to predict or isolate organisational events that occur on an ongoing basis during business operations – business reporting timings, year-end closure and crisis to be dealt with – and link these to their influence on the occurrence of leader workplace aggression has the potential of empowering leaders and human capital specialists with insights as to where to apply effort in a risk-based approach to anticipate and counter such acts of leader workplace aggression (Barnes et al., 2015).

It is against this background that this study responds to the research gap and the invitation by Sharma to explore the moderating role of timing in the relationship between leader workplace aggression and its influence on work engagement. For purposes of this study, 'leader workplace aggression' is used as an all-encompassing term for incivility, abusive supervision, bullying and related behaviour short of physical abuse or contact.

As mentioned above, leader workplace aggression considers the subjective attribution by the employee of the supervisor's conduct as abusive; the next section briefly discusses the literature about employees' perceptions of leader workplace aggression.

### **2.3 Subjective perceptions of leader workplace aggression**

The starting point in understanding the causes of leader workplace aggression and considering the definitions provided above is to consider the effect of the subjective nature of the perception and attribution of a supervisor's behaviour towards a subordinate. Attribution relates to sensemaking – the interpretation of what the conduct which is deemed to be abusive means to a particular employee (Ng et al., 2020).

Employee differences between and among employees play a significant role in this regard (Mackey et al., 2017). Some people are bold and confident and have high levels of self-efficacy, while others are anxious, with low levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem; these employees, depending on where they are located on the spectrum, may perceive and interpret the supervisor's actions differently. Indeed, as posited by Caesens et al., (2019), employees



who experience the same conduct from the same supervisor may interpret it differently depending on various attributes. Similarly, depending on context, the same employee who alleges supervisor aggression may view the same conduct differently in a different context (Tepper et al., 2017)

The emerging thinking from scholars is that if the subjective elements of the subordinate influence the sensemaking process then “it cannot be inferred that the costs associated with these perceptions are all due to abusive behaviours by supervisors” (Martinko et al., 2011, p. 2). Zhang & Liu found that even though the objective actions of the supervisor treatment are the source of abusive supervision, factors that are internal to the employee ultimately detect and assign an interpretation of a particular act as abusive (Zhang & Liu, 2018). Tepper et al. (2017) provide examples of leaders such as Steve Jobs of Apple Inc. and Vince Lombardi, an American football coach, who were hard on their subordinates; however, their actions were not generally deemed to be abusive but instead held to be tough love.

A study conducted by Brees et al. (2016, as cited in Johnson, 2018) found that negative affectivity, anger and entitlement were positively associated with perceptions of abusive supervision by subordinates; they suggested that any attempt to understand the root cause of abusive supervision and its treatment should factor in the subordinate’s characteristics. This is very important because, as organisations seek to create an inclusive, fair and respectful culture that treats employees with dignity, that cannot be done at the expense of alienating supervisors by endless accusations of abusive conduct which may be justified or at timing when viewed objectively found to be no more than an employee’s subjective perceptions and attribution of the supervisor’s conduct as abusive.

Individual traits and attributes also provide an engaging and interesting dyadic congruence perspective which suggests that the perception of leader workplace aggression, which is subjective to the target employee’s perception, could be a function of matching supervisors and employees (Qin, Huang, Hu et al., 2018). In this context, Qin, Huang, Hu et al. go on to suggest that employees whose values, morals and ethical differences are apparent to those of their supervisors may experience interaction challenges which may give a subjective perception of aggression. The converse is true; when the supervisor and the employee are more alike, they may get along well.

In addition to individual differences, there is also the aspect of individual perceptions of organisational justice, defined by Greenberg (as cited in O’Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019, p. 908) as “a degree to which an employee believes their relationship with the organisation is

fair, equitable and ethical". Hence, individual perceptions provide an appraisal by the employee of how they are valued by the organisation.

The conduct of the supervisor, who is the representative of the organisation in the distribution of rewards and meting out of punishment, may be considered by the subordinate to be abusive based on their perception of organisational justice. An argument can thus be advanced that what this demonstrates is to reiterate the complexity of crystalising the causes and triggers of leader workplace aggression and to ensure that the totality of circumstances, including the supervisor, subordinate and organisational context, is considered as the actor's behaviour is conditioned by their environment (Mackey et al., 2017). The literature review section has so far reviewed literature about contextual factors operational in the occurrence of leader workplace aggression, the remainder of the literature will explore antecedents of leader workplace aggression, grouped into organisational context and factors influencing attribution of supervisor conduct.

#### **2.4 Antecedents of Leader workplace aggression**

Attempting to take stock of all the causes and triggers of leader workplace aggression may be an impossible task. Although numerous causes have already been identified in the literature, there is yet more work to do as significant gaps in the literature still exist (Sharma, 2018). These dimensions from which leader workplace aggression may be viewed complicate attempts to understand its causes as there is no single or uniform cause; it is one of the main negative supervisory practices examined in the literature from the victim's perspective (Zhang et al., 2019).

Tepper's (2000) definition, which is widely relied on as an authority, suggests that in addition to the subjective experience of the victim, the target employee, the aggression complained of can span over a broad array of activities and may be verbal or nonverbal (Dai et al., 2019). In this context, the aggression perception may arise from activities such as physical contact, yelling at subordinates, punishing them with silence, showing anger, making fun of them in public and even the manner and form of eye contact through which one may appear to be intimidating (Ng et al., 2020)

Numerous studies have been conducted over the years to understand the antecedents of leader workplace aggression, mostly abusive supervision (Barnes et al., 2015). Leader workplace aggression and its causes manifest in various forms, some more apparent and direct than others, with several causes which may stem from the supervisor's attributes,

organisational context, culture or individual traits and characteristics such as personality, age and background (Johnson et al., 2018).

What further compounds an attempt to provide a complete account of the antecedents of leader workplace aggression is its subjective nature; leader workplace aggression considers the target's subjective views of their superior's conduct which is deemed to be aggressive. It is possible that factors about the alleged victim could also contribute to that perception (Pan & Lin, 2018). This review does not traverse the entire spectrum of literature in this regard but covers selected antecedents which are deemed to be relevant within the context of this research.

The review of leader workplace aggression antecedents commences with the consideration of the subjective nature of the reports and perceptions by subordinates. This is based on the dominant literature which, as mentioned above, bases reports of supervisor aggression on the subjective views of target subordinates. The antecedents are grouped into two categories as follows:

- Organisational context, which reviews the organisational factors such as culture organisational justice, crises, stress and unhealthy competition as some of the causes and enablers of leader workplace aggression (Sharma, 2018)
- Factors influencing the perceptions or attribution of leader behaviour as abusive supervision.

#### **2.4.1 Organisational context**

Sharma (2018) asked an important set of questions concerning when, why and how organisational aggression is likely to manifest; he further narrows down on the influence of the organisational context in creating an enabling environment for abusive supervision. The question of organisational context is a particularly important one to ask because employees must often function within a set of policies and cultural contexts which may be enabling, discouraging or even indifferent to abusive supervision (Zhang et al., 2019). Some of the drivers of leader workplace aggression from the organisational context are framed as a 'high-performance culture', 'results-driven team' and 'frank talk environment' when in fact these enable abusive supervision.

In the sections that follow, a review of the organisational factors that give rise to abusive supervision is conducted.

#### 2.4.1.1 *Organisational culture*

A review of corporate strategy literature highlights the integral role of human resources in the corporate strategy value chain. Organisational culture and values are among the determining factors on the organisation's ability to exploit its dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 2016). The suggestion made by Teece et al. is that organisational culture is intractably linked to organisational outcomes. Culture determines how things are done in an organisation and what is acceptable or unacceptable; further, culture determines the talent that is attracted and retained in an organisation and consequently, its success (Chong et al., 2018).

Culture plays a prominent role as an antecedent of abusive supervision in several ways, such as the following:

- Organisational culture refers to the manner of doing things in an organisation, thus, prescribing acceptable behaviour in an organisation and sanctioning unacceptable behaviour which is misaligned with organisational values (Chong et al., 2018). Abusive supervision is behaviour that can only thrive in an environment where such behaviour by supervisors towards their subordinates is deemed to be acceptable. After all, employees and their leader's success in an organisation is dependent on their ability to align their conduct to the value system of the organisation of the organisation (Maamari & Saheb, 2018).
- Determining what is acceptable provides a lens through which interactions are perceived and understood within an organisation as it informs the process towards the attribution of conduct (Zhang & Liu, 2018). This is the case because employees will make use of their experiences and perceptions about the organisation and its leadership to determine whether there is organisational justice and fairness. It is therefore possible that an employee may perceive and attribute conduct as abusive purely based on his or her sense of organisational justice (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019).
- Culture is positively related to work engagement, job satisfaction and performance (Maamari & Saheb, 2018). The organisational culture provides a boundary that limits and determines the conduct of both the employee and the manager and it is in that balancing act that each is given room to be given the opportunity and resources to be productive. Abusive supervision is negatively related to work engagement and job satisfaction and consequently, organisational outcomes (Maamari & Saheb, 2018).
- The top leadership of an organisation creates organisational culture over time through their actions and experiences; with their mandate to create shareholder value and build a sustainable business, culture must be linked to organisational financial outcomes

(Lundberg, 2007). Leaders must create a culture that enhances the organisation's competitive advantage and in so doing must ensure that the culture enables employees to excel and drive healthy high performance (Maamari & Saheb, 2018).

Thus, culture has a great deal of influence on how and when abusive leadership may find an opportunity to surface and the extent to which it may be allowed to thrive.

Hofstede (2011, as cited in Maamair & Saheb, 2017) points out that what is often seen as organisational culture is influenced by the national or regional culture; the national or regional values, power distance and even systems of government and religion have a profound influence on what is accepted as acceptable behaviour in an organisation. For instance, there is a marked difference between the tolerance of abusive supervision in Western countries and Asian countries when it comes to their perception and attribution of supervisor aggression (Qin, Huang, et al., 2018). These dynamics inform decision-making levels, who deals with complaints of abusive supervision, how the victim is dealt with and whether leaders are willing to speak out against such conduct.

In countries with a higher power distance, such as those in the Asian-Pacific region, authority, power, wealth and hierarchy are emphasised and that culture has persisted for over 2000 years (Zhang & Liu, 2018). An employee functioning in the Confucian culture would interpret the actions of a supervisor differently to someone born in a European or American country where there is a lower power distance. One employee may view the conduct as abusive while the other sees it as perfectly normal. More and more evidence suggest that it is all in the eye of the beholder. Some cultures are toxic, power-driven and chase results at all costs on the one extreme while others may be people and value-centric (Caesens et al., 2019).

Culture provides the context in which organisational actors interact with one another and the failure to recognise its impact in enabling leader workplace aggression may prove to be a grave omission in efforts to combat this practice (Akram et al., 2022). It may all come down to the concept of utility and the extent to which leader workplace aggression is perceived to be enabling the organisation to achieve its objectives.

#### **2.4.1.2**      *Employee performance*

Employee performance and attribution of lapse in performance may be a source of abusive supervision. Supervisors acting on behalf of an organisation that demands satisfactory performance from employees may seek to address poor performance as it may impact their performance (Oh & Farh, 2017). Performance in this context is defined as those activities that an employee engages in or undertakes in the course of employment to advance organisational

goals; these are formally recognised and form the performance contract between the supervisor and the subordinate (Maamari & Saheb, 2018).

Using a self-control framework and a sample of 206 subordinates and 50 supervisors, Liang et al. (2016) discovered that subordinates who performed poorly triggered abuse supervision and bullying in their supervisors. The level of abusive supervision and hostility was regarded as highly unrestricted in this case and considered to be more severe as supervisors considered it justified under the circumstances (Matthews, Kelemen, & Bolino, 2021).

Some examples of how organisations cause or enable leader workplace aggression through performance management include the following:

- Goal setting is unrealistic and becomes a source of contention as the goal is unattainable or requires significant effort to achieve; these types of goals have been linked to supervisor aggression through employee deviance and turnover intentions (Walter et al., 2015).
- The attribution that the supervisor makes at the prevalence of poor performance may be attributed to the employee's ability when in fact there may be organisational hindrances impacting the employee's performance; this becomes a source of abusive supervision due to the misalignment of the cause of poor performance (Lyubykh et al., 2022).

The supervisor may attribute the poor performance to the employee's incapacity whereas the employee, for instance, is of the view that there are extenuating circumstances, such as technology failures, workload, procurement delays and even personal circumstances, which impact their performance. These differences in attribution of performance lapses and how the manager responds to them may give rise to the perception of abusive supervision by the subordinate (Lyubykh et al., 2022). Poor-performing employees may also attract the ire of the supervisor because they threaten the supervisor's identity; after all, the subordinate's poor performance tends to reflect on the supervisor's ability to coach and manage others (Tepper et al., 2017).

- Finally, one would think that high performers would be spared from abusive supervision, however, it seems to be a proverbial 'catch-22' where even the high performers attract the supervisor's wrath as they are perceived to be a threat to the supervisor's identity and position within the team. Interestingly though, being a high performer does not cushion an employee against abusive supervision because high performance has the potential to take the limelight away from the supervisor and, thus, create feelings of envy which in turn may lead to abusive supervision. This would be

the case especially when the high-performing employee's visibility to top management threatens the hierarchical order within the department (Tariq et al., 2021).

When supervisors become envious, abusive supervision may manifest in several ways including withholding certain advantages from the subordinate and counterproductive behaviours such as yelling, overloading with work and not providing sufficient time for the subordinate to complete the task (Yu, Duffy, & Tepper, 2018). This suggests that the supervisor's attributes and their attribution of the subordinate's performance, good or bad, may lead to abusive supervision.

Even though in study conducted in the South African context, the researchers did not find that supervisor behavior could predict job performance, organisational culture is positively related to employee performance because it is the collective effort of all employees that ultimately delivers organisational results (Paltu & Brouwers, 2020). It is unthinkable that an organisation would retain a culture that is disabling for organisational outcomes (Chong et al., 2018).

#### *2.4.1.3 Employee attribution of perceived leader workplace aggression*

During the daily interactions between employees and managers and due to the dynamic nature of the employment relationship and individual factors impacting that relationship, it is conceivable that tensions may develop between employees and supervisors. Employees generally would forgive, forget and move on should there be conflicts in their private relationships, however, it tends to become an issue at work. Attribution of aggression and daily work conflict are the drivers of reports of abusive supervision at work (Rasool et al., 2020)

Attribution is a concept that is closely related to perceptions of organisational justice which, according to Akram et al. (2022), comprise distributive and procedural justice, the former being the perceived fairness of employment outcomes and the latter referring to the performed fairness of the process through which those outcomes were attained.

Employees attribute and react to abusive supervision based on their perceptions of organisational justice (Park et al., 2019). For instance, Qin et al., (2018) report that when supervisors do not like a subordinate, they are likely to behave in an abusive manner towards that subordinate and they may even use abusive language towards the subordinate. When the subordinate is aware of the negative sentiment, they may attribute the abusive behaviour to that instead of the real cause which may be poor performance or some other form of misconduct by the subordinate.

Leaders have access to resources, which also include people-related decision-making. The distribution of these falls within the scope of organisational justice. They decide who is deserving of this justice made up of organisational advantages and resources. In so doing, they base their decisions on utility and their assessment of conduct, deciding who is deserving of justice, and are more likely to mistreat subordinates whom they believe to be less deserving of justice (Tepper et al., 2017).

The criteria for inclusion or exclusion of employees from the scope of justice is not a rational one and may include considerations such as the like-mindedness of the supervisor and the subordinate. Subordinates may be deemed worthy of justice if they are like-minded whereas those who do not think, act or share value sets with the supervisor may be classified as disparate employees and be excluded as they are viewed as undeserving of justice (Ng et al., 2020).

This viewpoint contends that managers show favouritism for workers who are like them while abusing those who are different from them, explaining why a manager would mistreat one worker but not another. When the targeted employee is deemed to be deserving of abusive behaviour, even impartial third parties are ethically excluded as the targets of abuse with the focus being on the target employee (Mitchell et al., 2015).

#### *2.4.1.4 Social learning and the trickle-down effect*

Supervisors learn to lead others primarily by observing those in top management and these become their role models. They observe how they and others are treated by those in authority and the responses that elicit positive rewards; over time, they start imitating the same behaviours when engaging with their subordinates. Bandura (as cited in Chong et al., 2018) refers to this as the social learning system.

Social learning further suggests that abusive supervision and other behaviours may be acquired or learnt through social interactions and that the behaviour is adapted similarly to classical conditioning where, depending on whether the outcomes are positive or negative, behaviour is adapted accordingly (Chong et al., 2018). This concept is related to organisational culture in how it is established over time and sustained through the social learning system as the manner of doing things within the organisation.

Supervisors who have been recipients of abusive supervision from their superiors may find themselves imitating their supervisor's behaviour when dealing with subordinates; this is especially so because the supervisor's success is largely related to their ability to adjust their behaviour to align with that of their manager and consequently, that of the organisational



culture. This process of observing, learning and imitating their supervisor's behaviour is known as the trickle-down effect (Lu et al., 2018).

The trickle-down model which refers to supervisor's emulated leader workplace aggression based on his or her experience with his or her manager and passing it down to his or her team members as accepted behaviour is more relevant an antecedent to leader workplace aggression than the leader exchange theory (Lian et al. 2014). The suggestion that comes through the literature is that people who are higher up in the organisation influence those at lower levels and the ones at lower levels perceive those higher up to be doing the right things which are acceptable to the organisation; these behaviours, even those related to leader workplace aggression, may be perceived to be yielding positive results and, thus, worth imitating to the detriment of followers (Lu et al., 2018)

#### 2.4.1.5 *Times of crisis*

A supervisory role is a general emotionally draining function, which gets worse when a crisis emerges that must be dealt with by the organisation or the specific supervisor. Coombs (2014, as cited in Snoeijers & Poels, 2018, p. 65) defines crisis as a "perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders" and as related to several factors including organisational performance. What stands out in this definition is the subjective perceptions of a crisis which may attract different responses from the supervisor and the subordinate depending on whether there is a shared perception of the crisis.

Under normal circumstances, managers face demands from superiors, employees, clients etc. daily and even hourly and this results in ego depletion (Mackey et al., 2020). The pressures and demands on managers deplete the resources available to them to self-regulate, cope, restrain themselves and make rational decisions. As such, employees become victims of the outbursts and the outlet of the emotional consequences of exhausted supervisors (Verdorfer et al., 2023). These demands may emanate from various sources including how performance is reviewed and rewarded, the organisational structure and the leadership style of the top management. In an environment where the culture is punitive or there is an aggressive performance incentive scheme that rewards the individual for performance, these may drive supervisors to deplete their resources at a much higher rate, thus, creating opportunities for leader workplace aggression (Bhattacharjee & Sarkar, 2022).

Where the structure of the organisation is bureaucratic, for instance, this may lead to supervisors expending more energy to get tasks done. Although there have been questions recently about the validity of the ego depletion theory and its general application, Barnes et al.

(2015) find evidence to suggest that managers who have been deprived of sleep in some way, do not have sufficient coping resources and, as such, are more prone to behave abusively towards their subordinates.

Similarly, Huang et al., (2020) consider how emotional exhaustion mediates the association between abusive supervision and psychological withdrawal behaviour. From the review of ego depletion, it was found that when emotional exhaustion took its toll on supervisors, it was because of job demands or their personal lives. Lack of sleep after partying all night or dealing with family stressors may deplete coping resources and consequently, lead to the occurrence of abusive supervision. When employees feel particularly stressed or are going through a crisis, they may engage in deviant behaviour (Dang-Van et al., 2022). The deviant behaviour of employees under these circumstances has the effect of perpetuating the cycle of supervisor aggression.

While some literature seems to point to supervisor behaviour, depletion of resources and resulting abusive supervision, recent literature appears to point to employees being particularly sensitive during a time of crisis (Dang-Van et al., 2022). Dang-Van et al. (2022) conducted a study to determine the moderating role of the abusive supervision of psychologically distressed employees in the hostel industry during the COVID-19 pandemic; the study found that abusive supervision had a positive moderating role.

Organisational development practitioners may do well to consider how the way the organisation is structured, jobs are designed and crises managed impact the workforce's ability to conserve resources and mitigate against the risk of leader workplace aggression being triggered under crisis circumstances (Snoeijers & Poels, 2018)

#### ***2.4.2 Factors influencing supervisor's behaviour.***

At the core of this paper is the study of the role played by organisational context in the cause and enabling of abusive supervision in the workplace (Sharma, 2018). Even though the focus is on the organisational context, it is relevant to ponder on the question of why it is that some supervisors, not all, behave abusively towards employees and to consider why some employees who share the same supervisor may report incidents of abusive supervision when others do not experience it; the role of organisational context and how employees interact with it (Tagliabue et al., 2020)

#### 2.4.2.1 *Victim selection*

Despite any subjective attribution and organisational context that may lead to unjustified interpretation or cause of leader workplace aggression, supervisors do not generally mistreat everyone in their teams or the workplace. The selection of potential victims can be attributed to three schools of thought: the victim precipitation theory, social exchanges and perceived utility (Park et al., 2019). There is a suggestion in the literature that victim selection is a thought-out process, goal-oriented and to some degree personalised, dispelling the perception of a supervisor who cannot help his or her outburst (Pan & Lin, 2018)

Naturally, supervisors keen on conducting themselves in an abusive manner would look for potential victims who are unlikely to retaliate and who look weak or vulnerable (Tepper et al., 2017). In the same vein, supervisors depend on their teams to implement departmental or team strategic priorities; in other words, their success is closely linked to that of their team members.

The utility of team members to the supervisor's success also determines the likelihood of their being potential victims of supervisors; Harris et al., (2013) found that a subordinate's utility has a bearing on the quality of social exchanges between them and their supervisor which seeks to foster positive relations on the principle of reciprocity. Following that thinking, one can infer that a potentially abusive supervisor would not choose a victim who is likely to retaliate or who may engage in adverse exchanges including those that may impact output or quality of work (Pan & Lin, 2018).

Naeem et al. (2020) argue that a subordinate's cultural values and follower traits are considered vital variables that could influence the behaviour of supervisors or leaders in an organisation. The study, however, provided a comprehensive review of cultural values and follower traits of subordinates as being key points which could cause leader workplace aggression within organisations.

Personal and cultural preferences also play a role in giving rise to perceptions of leader workplace aggression as is the case where employees find themselves being subjected to leader workplace aggression merely because they are not liked by the supervisor for reasons which may be unknown to them (Mackey et al., 2017). This would be the case because the negative sentiment or discomfort the supervisor feels around a particular employee may lead to attempts to avoid interactions with that employee, keep conversations short or even lack the patience to explain tasks to the subordinate (Pan & Lin, 2018). The personal preference basis of leader workplace aggression may border on behaving in an unethical manner by

gossiping or secretly trying to find out what is happening in the subordinate's private life (Qin et al., 2018).

It is therefore submitted that victim selection is within the supervisor's control and, depending on the organisational culture, and determination of acceptable behaviour, the supervisor may be constrained from behaving in an abusive manner or the opposite where the environment permits (Watkins et al., 2019).

#### 2.4.2.2 *Displaced aggression*

Researchers have taken several interrelated viewpoints on why supervisors mistreat their subordinates, including the consideration of displaced aggression. Several studies, including those by (Park et al., 2019) and Pan & Lin (2018), have found that supervisors, in conditions where they suffer organisational unfairness and are unable to retaliate against the source because the cause of their frustration may be a powerful executive or board member, for instance, will in turn pass their experience on to their subordinates who are seen as safe targets (Tepper et al., 2017).

Displaced aggression is common in the workplace and it can be described as a supervisor's response to the organisational context in the form of social learning systems, culture and their trickle-down effect (Tepper et al., 2017). The supervisor would have learnt the way to behave and what responses produce favourable outcomes and, as such, can adapt their response accordingly (Park et al., 2019)

Various psychological effects of abusive supervision include self-blame and dehumanisation (Caesens et al., 2019). Dehumanisation refers to an instance where the employee feels that he or she is being treated by the organisation as if they are less than a human being and not given the space to be themselves; this, in turn, threatens their basic psychological need for recognition and identity which may trigger deviant behaviour (Caesens et al., 2019).

Employee deviance refers to a deviation from significant organisational norms that threaten human and organisational well-being; these actions include swearing, intimidation and refusal to take on or carry out an instruction by subordinates (Park et al., 2019). In exploring employee deviance as a cause of supervisor aggression, one is met with a predicament of what came first – the chicken or the egg. For instance, some scholars suggest that abusive supervision may give rise to a response from the subordinate while some suggest that it is the employee's deviant behaviour in the first place that triggers an abusive response from the line manager (Oh & Farh, 2017)

### 2.4.2.3 *Stress, self-control and personality*

Stress and self-control theory has also been applied as a cause of abusive supervision. Scholars contend that these theories explain why leaders are more susceptible to abusive supervision temptations at timing of high stress and limited self-control. For instance, Scheuer et al. (2016) discovered a link between leader-reported stress and harsh supervision as reported by employees. Stress emanating from the depletion of coping resources leads to abusive supervision by drawing on the ego depletion theory as does poor quality of sleep by supervisors (J. Li et al., 2019)

According to research, abusive supervision is predicted by personality; certain leaders have a higher propensity than others to mistreat their workers (Barnes et al., 2015). In general, leadership research has long believed that a leader's personality is a significant predictor of their actions, including destructive behaviour (Tuncdogan et al., 2017). Recent studies (Mackey et al., 2017; Martinko et al., 2011) have clarified the part personality plays in abusive supervision. On the one hand, leaders who are cordial, trustworthy and modest mistreat their workers less frequently (Mackey et al., 2017); on the other hand, aggressive and sceptic leaders are more prone to practise abusive supervision (Martinko et al., 2011). Depending on their personality, some leaders are predisposed to using abusive monitoring.

While there are numerous explanations for the prevalence of leader workplace aggression, it may in effect come down to personal choices; supervisors may be narcissistic and thrive on blaming everyone and taking no responsibility for their abusive actions (Ellen et al., 2019). Parker et al. (as cited in Ellen et al., 2019) found that employees who had narcissistic supervisors, compounded by instances where the target employee had lower levels of resource management proficiency, were likely to report having experienced abusive supervision. Such a situation is a disaster waiting to happen as these employees may be too sensitive to direct feedback on the constant criticism.

## **2.5 Effects of Leader workplace aggression**

Leader workplace aggression in its various forms affects employees and employers negatively, causing severe stress to employees and their families and resulting in financial losses for employers (Johnson et al., 2018). Employees who endure ongoing and persistent attacks by those in leadership positions are likely to suffer from mental health issues, resulting in diminished performance and low levels of engagement (Dai et al., 2019).

The impact of abusive supervision on employees, their families and employers are serious. Liang et al. (2016, p. 3) describe abusive supervision as a workplace stressor "that has

profound implications for the well-being of victims”. The net impact is that the organisation’s ability to meet organisational outcomes is compromised. Talented individuals are likely to leave the organisation and it could suffer from reputational damage; eventually, the negative experience is passed on to the customers (Caillier, 2021).

Studies have found that abusive supervision has a detrimental impact on organisational outcomes, motivation and general employee attitude (Deng et al., 2021). Given the emotive nature of a climate created by abusive supervision, tension and anxiety are created which also affect employee attitudes and performance. Harris et al. (2013) aver that the wounds created by abusive supervision are often long-lasting because for some reason abusive supervision receives less urgent attention and is allowed to persist as compared to physical violence, for instance, which gets attention and is stopped as soon as it begins; this leaves the victim to their demise.

Beyond looking at organisations and organisational outcomes, studies have found that the emotional exhaustion emanating from abusive supervision in the workplace may have a spillover effect on family life, causing tensions and ill health (Johnson et al., 2018).

Victims of leader workplace aggression have been found to suffer from symptoms that are akin to post-traumatic stress symptoms and persistent exposure is likely to cause stress and low overall well-being (Liang et al., 2018). The observation from Liang et al. (2018) is that the effects of abusive supervision go beyond the mental, psychological and distress aspects to include physical ailments such as headaches and high blood pressure which are detrimental to health outcomes.

Abusive supervision encourages subordinate feelings of dissatisfaction, impotence and alienation. Tepper (2000) discovered that abusive supervision had a negative impact on how subordinates perceived organisational fairness. Research suggests that harsh supervision can serve as a precursor to employee misbehaviour (Mitchell et al., 2015). Additionally, Almeida et al. (2021) found that interpersonal abuse caused subordinate dissatisfaction and self-threats, which then fuelled aggressive conduct. While the principles of social exchange theory are frequently used to explain how abusive supervision affects subordinate behaviour based on the norm of reciprocity where a subordinate retaliates directly at an abusive supervisor, displaced aggression suggests that an abused subordinate not retaliates against the abusive supervisor who may be perceived to be powerful and for fear of further reprisal, instead would direct his or her take out their frustration against someone else (Pan & Lin, 2018).

The impact of leader workplace aggression is adverse on the victim, their family life and overall well-being and detrimental to organisational outcomes, hence, the need for further research to be conducted on the role of supervisors, contextual factors and how organisations can anticipate and proactively manage the likelihood of leader workplace aggression (Sharma, 2018). The impact on the organisation may additionally come because the target employee perceives the organisation to have failed in its duty to create a safe working environment by developing and enforcing adequate policies and training supervisors (Yu et al., 2018)

## **2.8 Conclusion and Literature Assessment**

As demonstrated in the literature reviewed, several studies have been conducted concerning leader workplace aggression and work engagement as well as its impact on organisational outcomes and performance. However, the studies have not adequately explored the relevance of organisational context such as timing, climate and organisational crisis in enabling leader workplace aggression in its various forms, especially in the context of South Africa.

Sharma (2018) contributed by conducting a review of the work already done in the field and highlighting opportunities for future research. Additionally, the questions to do with how often and when leader workplace aggression is likely to occur seem not to have been addressed. This study, therefore, intends to fill this literature gap by concentrating on the relevance of timing on leader workplace aggression towards work engagement in the South African context, paying particular attention to abusive supervision.

This chapter reviewed the relevant literature applicable to the research problem. The chapter started with the introduction to the literature review, unpacking the theoretical models and referencing Sharma's organisational context framework. It then proceeded to define and explore the subjective nature of the reports of leader workplace aggression together with the antecedents from organisational and individual difference perspectives that speak directly to the research questions of this study. In this regard, the causes of abusive supervision in the workplace, the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement and the relationship between leader workplace aggression with consideration of the influence of time were considered.

The next chapter presents the research hypotheses which are being tested by the study.

### **3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

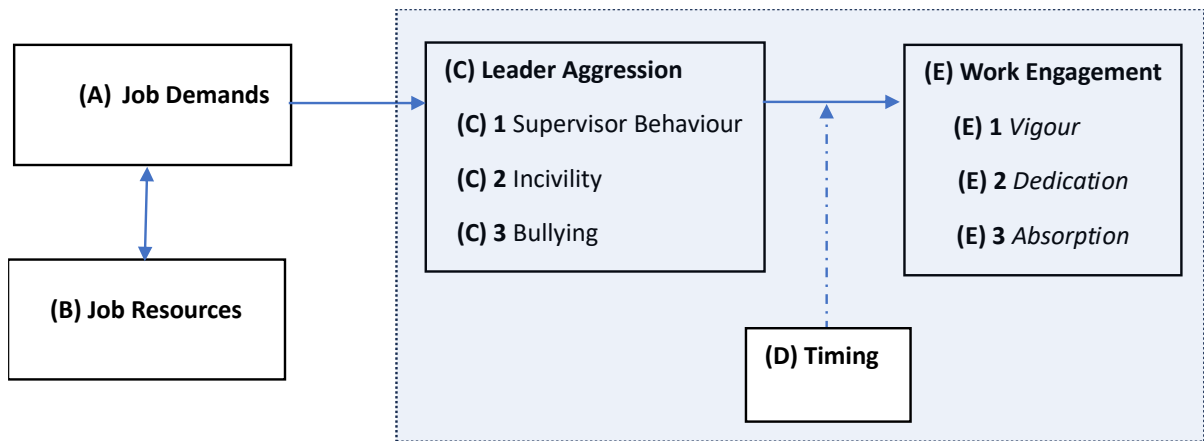
In Chapter One of the report, the background to the study and the research aims, objectives, scope and hypotheses were presented. The common thread across the literature concerning the research problem and hypotheses is that:

- Leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement and consequently, performance and organisational outcomes (Dai et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2018; Schaufeli, 2017).
- Job demands lead to resource depletion, thus, creating a strain which leads to leader workplace aggression (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Wang et al., 2018).
- Certain events or occurrences which increase job demands on an employee such as times of crisis, reporting periods and an abusive work environment deplete resources and are negatively related to work engagement (Barnes et al., 2015; Sharma, 2018; Tepper et al., 2017).

On these premises and to address the research aims – to explore the influence of leader workplace aggression on work engagement moderated by timing – and the literature gap as identified by Sharma and confirmed by the literature review, the two hypotheses are presented in this section. The hypotheses are pegged on the JD-R theory as presented in Chapters One and Two and the adapted model to include timing as a moderator between the JD-R model and the occurrence of leader workplace aggression and the resultant influence on work engagement.

This section covers the conceptual frameworks and hypothesis of the researcher, as guided by the conceptualised model from the literature review presented in Chapter One and depicted below.

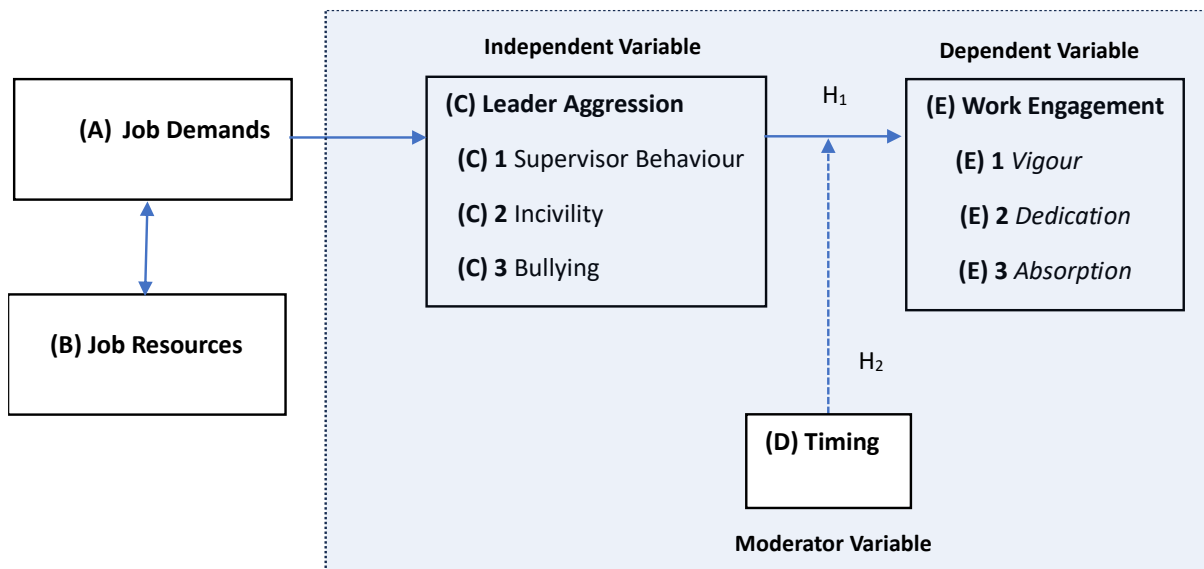




**Figure 3.1** *The conceptual framework*

The use of visual communication and diagrams is vital for scientific research and in hypothesising, as it provides a means for visualising relationships between variables and mitigating information overload (Chigbu, 2019).

Figure 3.1 above shows the conceptual framework and Figure 3.2 the theoretical framework. These depict the applicable constructs and the relationships (arrows) that the researcher will investigate. Straight arrows indicate direct relationships and dotted arrows the moderating relationship. The focus of the study is on the shaded area.



**Figure 3.2**

*The theoretical framework*

## 3.2 Hypotheses

- **The relationship between Leader workplace aggression and Work Engagement**

Leader workplace aggression has been identified as a stressor which elicits negative employee attitudes and responses to their work (J. Li et al., 2019). When this stressor is introduced into the workplace, it depletes employees' emotional and physical resources. For them to conserve their resources, employees adopt several strategies – avoidance, deviant behaviours, silence and withholding of discretionary effort – and these have the effect of adversely impacting organisational outcomes (Liang et al., 2018). This situation is contrary to work engagement which indicates employees that are immersed in their work, engaging freely in discretionary effort and showing high energy (Wang et al., 2020)

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement.

- **The influence of the Timing factor on the relationship between Leader workplace aggression and Work Engagement**

Abusive supervision is influenced by contextual and organisational factors such as perceptions of injustice, busy production periods and resource scarcity (Tepper et al., 2017). Unlike earlier thinking, which relied on Tepper's (2000) definition of abusive leadership as sustained over a period, recent literature indicates that there are variations in when and how abusive supervision occurs; hence, employees may report abusive supervision for different reasons from the same supervisor (Zhang & Liu, 2018). Leaders may be abusive towards subordinates at certain times of the day but not throughout the day, to some employees but not to others. For instance, Barnes et al. (2015) found that sleep deprivation is positively related to abusive supervision but not necessarily all the time. When leaders act in an aggressive manor towards subordinates, work engagement is negatively affected (Wang et al., 2020)

**H<sub>2</sub>** The timing factor has a moderating effect on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

The following chapter presents the research design and methodology applied to test the two hypotheses.

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The methodology of the study addresses the general framework and roadmap that the study follows in finer detail. It covers the research design, population, sampling, data collection, instruments that were used in the collection of data and data analytical techniques.

### **4.2 Research design**

The research design provides the framework to conduct the research, make methodology choices and ultimately arrive at the research conclusion (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018a); it can therefore be described as the foundation upon which the study is built. Bell, Bryman and Harley (2018) define research design as “a framework for the collection and analysis of data”, whereas a research method is “simply a technique of how data will be collected”.

To adequately approach the critical task of research design, approaches or research paradigms which inform the approach to the research, methodology and the treatment of data must be considered. Research paradigms are the philosophical assumptions viewed concerning perspectives –ontology and epistemology (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018a). Ontology concerns itself with the nature of reality and whether there is one, single, objective reality or whether there are multiple realities which may vary depending on the context. With this understanding of the nature of reality, epistemological choices can then be made on how to approach the knowledge concerning this reality – whether it can be objectively measured or because of its contextual nature, may require interpretation. In turn, the choices made inform the research methodology about what is the most appropriate option for data collection, analysis and reporting (Sanchez et al., 2023).

This study sought to objectively establish the influence of leader workplace aggression on work engagement, moderated by timing. Only one objective truth had to be established – whether there was an influence or not. As such, a positivist view was chosen (Sanchez et al., 2023).

In line with the positivist design, this study made use of the deductive approach in its assessment of the relevance of timing on leader workplace aggression towards work engagement in the South African context. This approach is considered when there is an investigation of changes concerning physical properties or elements (Proudfoot, 2023). The rationale behind the deductive approach is that it is an assessment of a phenomenon that has

already existing theories rooted in the body of literature. The choice of this approach was justified through the nature of the research questions crafted for this study.

Given the positivist nature of the study, quantitative research methods were employed to collect and analyse data.

#### **4.3 Considerations in choosing the research method.**

A quantitative approach using a questionnaire is deemed to be the most suitable approach as it allows the researcher to collect primary data from a large population (Proudfoot, 2023). This approach is further suitable for testing hypotheses as is the objective of this research and the data collected using a questionnaire can be statistically analysed to understand the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variables (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018).

To address potential validity and reliability challenges, various existing questionnaires related to the subject of leader workplace aggression (supervisor behavior, incivility & bullying) were used to create a leader workplace aggression composite scale.

This research is conducted in partial fulfilment of study requirements towards Master of Philosophy, which renders it limited in both scope, resources and time available to conduct it and it is for this reason that a cross sectional study was chosen, which is the most utilised design for similar single source surveys (Spector, 2019). The data was collected in a single phase over a period of four months.

#### **4.4 Population**

Population is described as “the universe of units from which a sample is to be selected where the sample is the segment of the population that is selected for research; it is a subset of the population” (Bell et al., 2018, p. 638). The information was gathered to address the research questions and was extracted from professional services firms in South Africa. The relevant population, which also formed the unit of analysis, consisted of all categories of employees in the sector (interns, experienced, supervisors).

#### **4.5 Access**

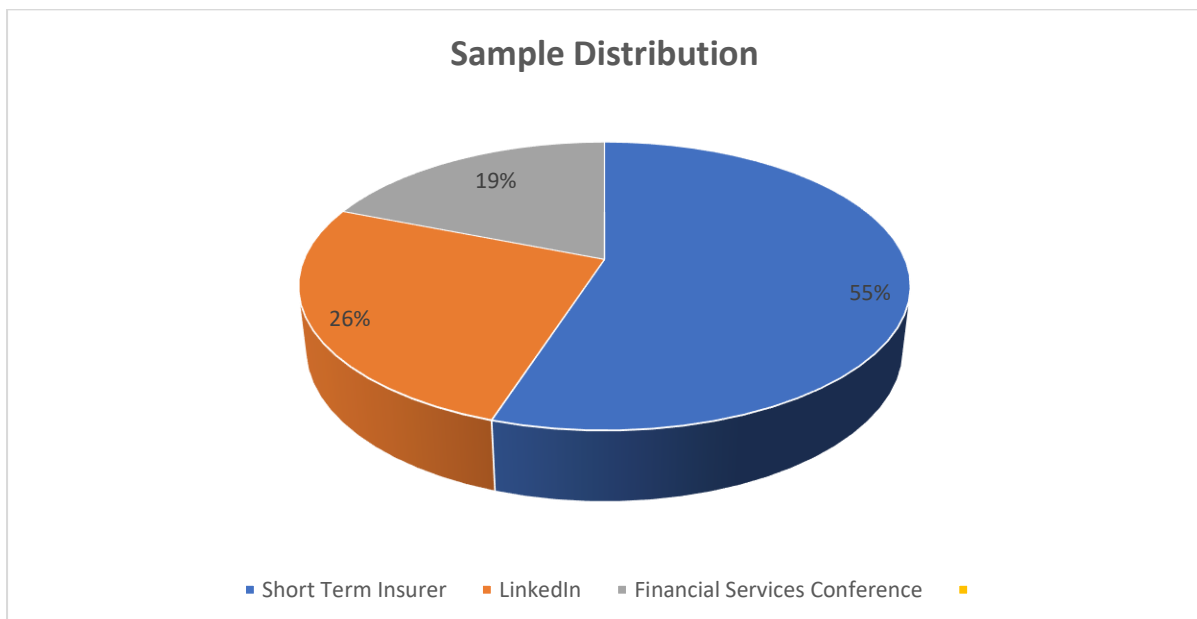
Access considerations included the availability of professional service professionals on LinkedIn and access to them through connection networks as well as various industry bodies. The study did not focus on an individual organisation; hence, the pool was widely available.

#### 4.6 Sampling and sample size

This study made use of purposive sampling in the selection of its respondents. Purposive sampling falls under the non-probabilistic sampling method and this type of sampling is confined to people who can provide the required information by their employment or availability on a platform (Bell et al., 2018). As submitted above, respondents were selected from the population of employees who work in the professional services sector and, in the main, maintain some presence on LinkedIn.

The professional services sector in South African employs over 250 000 professionals as per the QLFS 2021Q1 (Statistics SA, 2021); this was the basis for the population.

The study made use of a sample of 703 sent respondents which culminated in 126 returned respondents, resulting in a response rate of 17,9%. The sample size is deemed adequate from a precision and confidence perspective. This is calculated at a sample of 346 using the Qualtrics tool and alternatively based on the 'ten times rule' that in multivariate research the sample should be ten times the number of (Hair et al., 2017) The sample distribution is depicted in Figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.1**

*Questionnaire distribution sample.*

#### **4.7 Data collection**

The study made use of quantitative primary data collection. A questionnaire was used as the research instrument for data collection in this study. The study identified the participants for questionnaire administration. The questionnaire was then distributed electronically to the participants employed in professional services firms in South Africa or who indicated on their LinkedIn profiles that they were employed as such.

#### **4.8 Data analysis**

Data analysis is about “reducing the large corpus of information gathered to make sense of it” (Bell et al., 2018, p.56). It is the systematic arrangement of the searched materials that have been collected from the field to address the research problem and objectives (Bell et al., 2018). Data were extracted from the questionnaires and entered a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for coding. The data were analysed using the SPSS and Stata software packages. The descriptive and inferential statistics were obtained from the software outputs and interpretations were then made in terms of the research context.

##### ***4.8.1 Descriptive statistics***

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarise the Likert-derived data. In the context of Likert scale data, descriptive statistics help summaries, to determine central tendencies, such as the mean or median, and measures of variability, such as the range or standard deviation. These statistics provide insights into the distribution of responses and the overall pattern of agreement or disagreement among participants.

##### ***4.8.2 Correlational analysis***

Correlational analysis was used to determine whether there was a positive or negative correlation between independent variables and employee performance, as well as the strength and direction of the relationship (Mu et al., 2018). In research, correlational analysis is a statistical technique used to examine the relationship between two or more variables; it measures the extent to which variables are related or associated with one another (Mu et al., 2018).

Correlation coefficients, such as Pearson’s correlation coefficient or Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient, are commonly used measures in correlational analysis (Pallant et al., 2016). However, it is important to note that correlation does not imply causation, meaning that a correlation between variables does not necessarily mean that one variable causes changes in the other.

### 4.8.3 Multivariate regression analysis

Multivariate regression, also known as multiple regression, is a statistical technique used to examine the relationship between a dependent variable and two or more independent variables (Benjamin et al., 2018). It extends the concept of simple linear regression, which only examines the relationship between a dependent variable and a single independent variable.

The regression can be written as an equation:

$$Y (\text{work engagement}) = \alpha + \beta (\text{supervisor behaviour}) + \beta (\text{inclusivity}) + \beta (\text{bullying}) + \beta (\text{timing}) + \text{error term},$$

where  $\beta$  is the beta coefficient and  $\alpha$  =constant.

### 4.9 Measurement

In this study, quantitative primary data were collected using a questionnaire (see Appendix C). A Likert scale was used on the questionnaire as a standard unit of measurement concerning the respondents' responses. Responses were allocated codes from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), not sure (3), agree (4) to strongly agree (5). The data collected were useful in answering the research questions which enabled the study to contribute to the literature gap that exists.

Five questionnaires were consolidated to create an adapted questionnaire that addressed the objectives of the study; these were sourced from academic sources and are presented in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1**

*Concepts of the study and sources*

Concepts	Sub- Concept	Source
Leader workplace aggression	Bullying	Gupta, R., Bakhshi, A., & Einarsen, S. (2017). Investigating workplace bullying in India: Psychometric properties, validity, and cutoff scores of negative acts questionnaire–revised. <i>Sage Open</i> , 7(2), 2158244017715674, p.6
	Supervisor Behaviour	Taftaf, S. (2018). <i>Examining the dark side of leadership: The role of gender on the perception of</i>

		<i>abusive supervision</i> (Master's Thesis, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey), p.46
		<b>Shaw, J. B., Erickson, A., &amp; Nassirzadeh, F. (2014). Destructive leader behaviour: A study of Iranian leaders using the Destructive Leadership Questionnaire. <i>Leadership</i>, 10(2), 218-239.</b>
	Incivility	Handoyo, S., Samian, Syarifah, D., & Suhariadi, F. (2018). The measurement of workplace incivility in Indonesia: evidence and construct validity. <i>Psychology Research and Behavior Management</i> , 217-226.
Work Engagement	Vigour	Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2003). Utrecht work engagement scale-9. <i>Educational and Psychological Measurement</i> .
	Absorption	
	Dedication	
Timing	None	Barnes, C. M., Lucianetti, L., Bhawe, D. P., & Christian, M. S. (2015). "You wouldn't like me when I'm sleepy": Leaders' sleep, daily abusive supervision, and work unit engagement. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> , 58(5), 1419-1437.

#### 4.10 Validity and reliability

This study ensured that the questionnaire that was going to be used as the research instrument met the criteria of reliability and validity. (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018) proposes that the validity of a research instrument looks at the ability of the research instrument to measure the constructs that it intends to capture. Similarly, reliability looks at the consistency of the measurement of the data collection instrument. It measures the accuracy, stability and predictability of the research instrument. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was used to check for reliability. It normally ranges between 0 and 1. However, there is no lower limit to the coefficient. The closer Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to 1.0 the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale. George and Mallery (2003, p. 231) provide the following rule of thumb: "\_ >.9 – Excellent, \_ >.8 – Good, \_ >.7 – Acceptable, \_ >.6 – Questionable, \_ >.5 – Poor and \_ <.5 – Unacceptable".



Four of the five scales used in the study were existing questionnaires with a reliability of over 0.80 each based on previous researchers, which is deemed to be an acceptable threshold for reliability (Greco et al., 2018)

The reliability for each of the scales is presented below.

### Reliability Analysis Result for the Abusive Supervision Scale

The Supervisor Behaviour scale is based on Tepper’s 15-item Abusive Supervision Scale (Tepper, 2000), which has a reliability rating of 0.95, as depicted in table 4.2 (Taftaf, 2018, p. 41)

**Table 4.2**

*Abusive Supervision reliability*

Construct	Number of Items	Reliability
Abusive Supervision	15	0.95

*Note:* Adapted from Taftaf, S. (2018). Examining the dark side of leadership: The role of gender on the perception of abusive supervision (Master’s Thesis, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey), p.46

Table 4.3 provides a sample of items from the Abusive Supervision scale (Taftaf, 2018, p. 46).

**Table 4.3**

*Sample of Abusive Supervision scale items*

Supervisor behaviour	Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the statements below in relation to your current supervisor.						
	No.		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
		<i>My supervisor...</i>					
	1.1	Ridicules me					
	1.2	Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid					

	<b>1.3</b>	Gives me the silent treatment					
	<b>1.4</b>	Puts me down in front of others					
	<b>1.5</b>	Invades my privacy					

*Note:* Adapted from Taftaf, S. (2018). Examining the dark side of leadership: The role of gender on the perception of abusive supervision (Master’s Thesis, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey), p.6

### **Incivil (Uncivil) behaviour scale reliability**

The scale comprises 28 items distributed over five factors; in the current study, 10 items borrowed from factor 1 and factor 4 were utilised to form the Leader workplace aggression scale. The scale has a reliability of 0.86, as shown in table 4.4 (Handoyo et al., 2018, p. 222).

**Table 4.4**

#### *Incivil Behavior reliability*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>	<b>Reliability</b>
Personal affairs intervention	6	0.86
Abandonment	8	0.85
Unfriendly communication	5	0.80
Inconsiderate behaviour	4	0.80
Privacy invasion	5	0.72
Total scale	28	0.94
h		
Note: N=561.		

*Note:* Adapted from Handoyo, S., Samian, Syarifah, D., & Suhariadi, F. (2018). The measurement of workplace incivility in Indonesia: evidence and construct validity. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, p.222

Table 4.5 provides a sample of items from the Incivil Behaviours Scale (Handoyo et al., 2018, p. 222).

**Table 4.5**

*Sample of Incivil Behaviours scale items*

<b>Incivility</b>	Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the statements below in relation to your current workplace, position, and supervisor/ line manager.						
	<b>No.</b>	<i>My Supervisor/ Leader/ Manager...</i>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
	<b>3.1</b>	Talked about me behind my back					
	<b>3.2</b>	Secretly tries to know what I am are doing					
	<b>3.3</b>	Ignored opinions I offered in a meeting					
	<b>3.4</b>	Responded to my question in short and unfriendly manner					
	<b>3.5</b>	Raised their voice while speaking to me					

*Note:* Adapted from Handoyo, S., Samian, Syarifah, D., & Suhariadi, F. (2018). The measurement of workplace incivility in Indonesia: evidence and construct validity. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, p.222

### **Bullying**

The Negative Acts Questionnaire–Revised (NAQ-R) is a widely used workplace bullying questionnaire, with an acceptable reliability of 0.98, as per table 4.6 below (Gupta et al., 2017, p. 6).

**Table 4.6**

*Negative Acts Questionnaire - Revised (NAQ-R) Scale reliability*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Reliability</b>
Work related bullying	0.98
Person related bullying	0.95
Physically intimidating bullying	0.79

Note: Reprinted from Gupta, R., Bakhshi, A., & Einarsen, S. (2017). Investigating workplace bullying in India: Psychometric properties, validity, and cutoff scores of negative acts questionnaire–revised. *Sage Open*, 7(2), 2158244017715674, p.6

Tabel 4.7 provides a sample of the items used in the scale (Gupta et al., 2017, p. 6).

**Table 4.7**

*Sample of Negative Acts Questionnaire - Revised (NAQ-R) Scale items*

<b>Workplace Bullying</b>	<i>Please indicate the degree of likelihood for you to experience each of the statements listed below in relation to your current workplace, position, and supervisor/ line manager.</i>						
	<b>No.</b>	<i>“The likelihood of me being...”</i>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
	<b>2.1</b>	Being bullied or ridiculed in connection with your work					
	<b>2.2</b>	Being ordered to do work below your level of competence					
	<b>2.3</b>	Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks					
	<b>2.4</b>	Spreading of gossip or rumours about you					
	<b>2.5</b>	Being ignored or excluded					

Note: Reprinted from Gupta, R., Bakhshi, A., & Einarsen, S. (2017). Investigating workplace bullying in India: Psychometric properties, validity, and cutoff scores of negative acts questionnaire–revised. *Sage Open*, 7(2), 2158244017715674, p.6

**Utrecht Work Engagement Sub-scale**

The UWES is a widely used scale for measuring work engagement, consisting of three dimensions or subscales, i.e., Vigour, dedication and absorption. The reliability of the engagement scale is 0.93, vigour 0.90, dedication 0,87 and absorption 0,83 as depicted in Table 4.8 (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023, p. 452)

**Table 4.8**

*UWES Sub-scales reliability*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Reliability</b>
Vigour	0.900
Dedication	0.877
Absorption	0.831
Engagement	0.936

*Note:* Adapted from Dunlop, R., & Scheepers, C. B. (2023). The influence of female agentic and communal leadership on work engagement: vigour, dedication and absorption. *Management research review*, 46(3), 437-466.

Table 4.9 depicts a sample of items from the UWES Sub-scales (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003, p. 6).

**Table 4.9**

*Sample of UWES Sub-scales items*

<b>Work Engagement</b>	Please indicate the frequency (how often) are the below statements applicable to how you feel about your work						
	<b>No.</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Almost never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
Vigour	<b>5.1</b>	At my work, I feel bursting with energy					
	<b>5.2</b>	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous					
Dedication	<b>5.6</b>	I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose					
	<b>5.7</b>	I am enthusiastic about my job					

Absorption	5.11	Time flies when I'm working					
	5.12	When I am working, I forget everything else around me					

Note: Adapted from Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2003). Utrecht work engagement scale-9. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*.

### Time Factor Scale

The Timing scale was developed by the researcher and while it does not have a reliability history however presented with a reliability of 0.941 as well, which is within the acceptable threshold of 70% (Greco et al., 2018)

Table 4.10 provides a sample of Time Factor scale items.

**Table 4.10**

*Sample of Time Factor (Timing) Scale items*

<b>Time Factor</b>	Please indicate the likelihood of when the behaviour indicated above is likely to be experienced from your Leader/ Supervisor/ Manager						
	<b>No.</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Very Unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Very Likely</b>
	4.1	Immediately before the weekend (end of the work week)					
	4.2	At the commencement of the work week					
	4.3	During busy periods, such as financial year end					
	4.4	In times of crisis					
	4.8	At business reporting times					

## 5. RESULTS

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the data collected for the study using Microsoft Forms. The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 703 professionals working in the financial services sector in South Africa. Various techniques were used to reach participants and maximise response participation depending on access. These included the following:

- Distribution via LinkedIn to 405 selected individuals who indicated in their LinkedIn profiles that they worked in the financial services sector in South Africa and indicated that they held a professional role. Professional roles included the following:
  - Actuary
  - Financial adviser
  - Underwriter
  - Auditor
  - Accountant
  - Risk and compliance manager
  - Interns in these jobs(Administrative/support staff were excluded).
- Further email distribution via the Young Insurance Professionals (YIP), a professional development body for up-and-coming insurance professionals with a membership of 220 as of 15 October 2022.
- An email with a survey link was sent to employees a short-term insurer with an estimated 161 employees as of 31 March 2023.
- In March 2023, a further attempt was made to solicit more responses by sharing a QR code at a conference of financial services professionals in Johannesburg where about 137 professionals from the insurance sector were in attendance.

Using a combination of these techniques, a total of 126 responses were received – a response rate of 17.9%. The response rate is in line with the expected response rate of 17% – 21% from similar studies (Holtom et al., 2022).

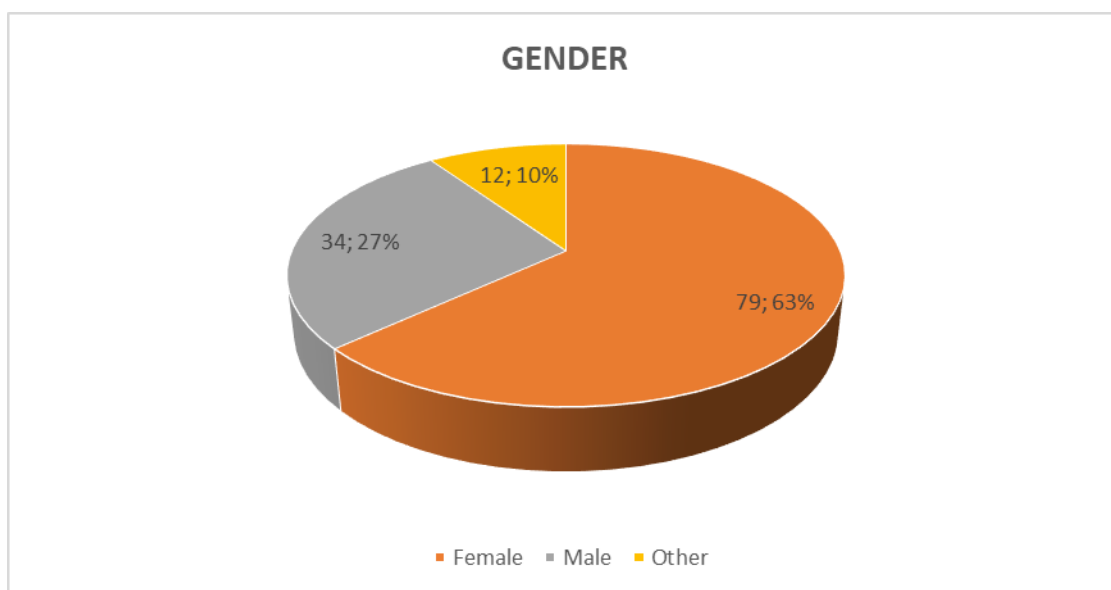
### 5.2 Demographic breakdown

The sample was drawn from a wide population of over 3000 individuals and using online channels. Limited demographic data as necessary for considerations of data analysis and policy implications in the workplace were collected. Factors that were deemed to be essential included the following:

- Gender
- Age group
- Educational qualifications.

Factors such as race, home language and tenure in the organisation were not included as they had not been factors in the literature. Culture and geography were considered relevant for determining the influence of power distance on leader workplace aggression (Qinet al., 2018).

The responses were received from a diverse group of participants. Figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 present the demographic composition of the participants.

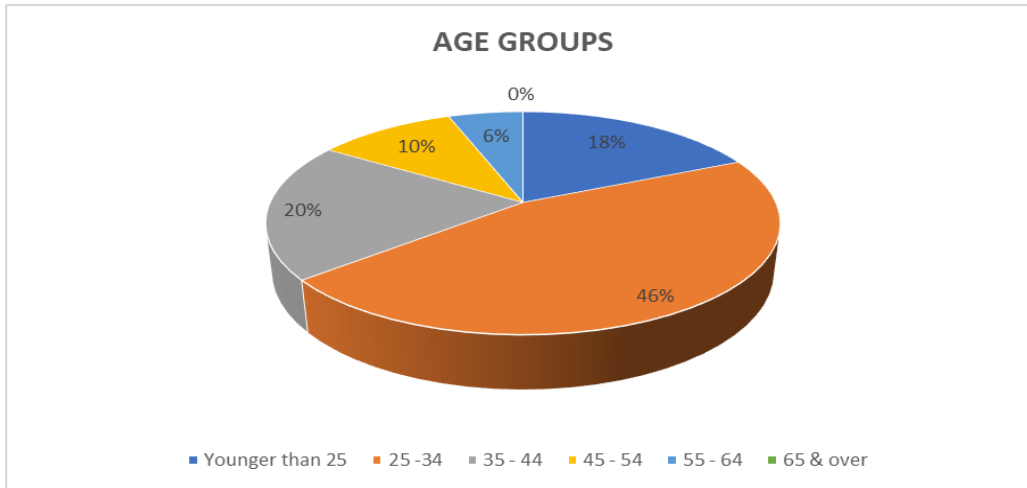


**Figure 5.1**

*Gender Composition*

The gender composition (Figure 5.1) was 63% females, 27% males and 10% other. Other denotes those non-binary participants or may, for personal reasons, do not wish to disclose their gender.

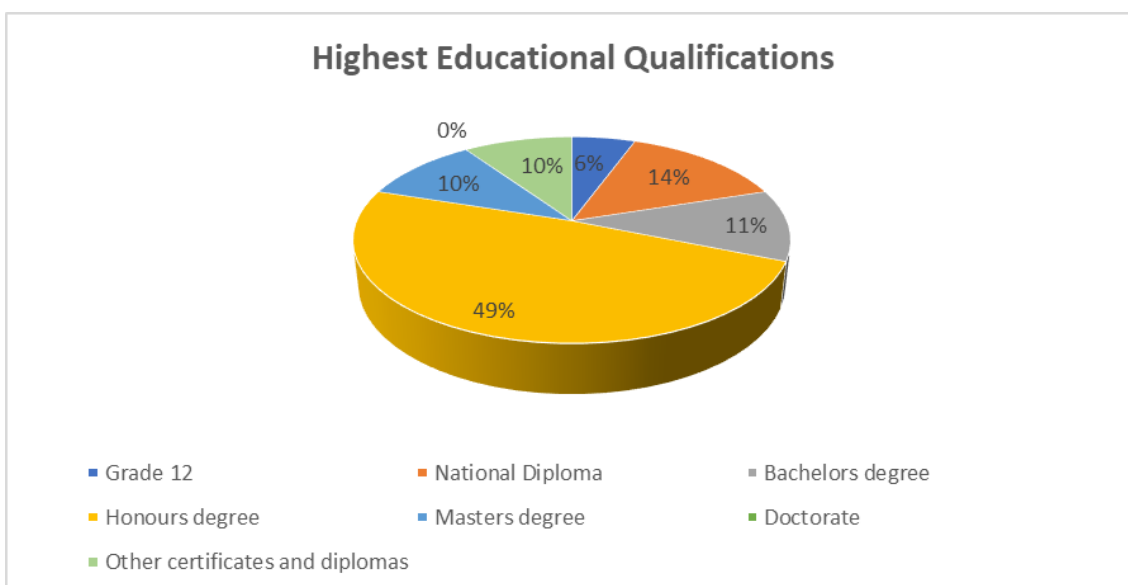




**Figure 5.2**

*Age Groups Composition*

Regarding age groups (Figure 5.2), these were aligned to life and career stages. Of the responses, 46% were received from developing professionals in the 25–34 years group. These typically would be individuals who had completed their academic study journey and professional certification and might be supervising junior professionals/interns in assignments or teams. No responses were received from individuals over 65, most glaringly because these participants would typically have reached retirement age and may not be in formal employment.



**Figure 5.3**

*Educational Qualifications*

In the highest educational qualifications category (Figure 5.3), 70% had a bachelor’s degree or more advanced qualification such as an honours or master’s degree. This is not surprising considering that these are professionals in the financial services sector, where formal educational qualifications are often an entry requirement.

### 5.3 Analysis and Findings

This chapter provides the results of the study. The data were analysed in SPSS software version 27 at a 95% confidence interval as appropriate in all social sciences studies. The chapter provides descriptive results in the form of frequency tables and mean scores and presents regular distribution tests. This is followed by correlation analysis to test associations and the paired t-test to check for significant relationships among the variables and work engagement.

### 5.4 Frequency tables

This section, comprising Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5, reflects the participants' responses to questions on supervisor behaviour, incivility, bullying, Timing and work engagement, respectively.

**Table 5.1**

*Factors constituting supervisor behaviour.*

<b>Supervisor Behaviour</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
Invades my privacy	54.3	36.2	1.7	6.9	0.9
Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid	53.3	35.8	5.0	5.0	0.8
Is rude to me	48.2	37.5	6.3	6.3	1.8
Puts me down in front of others	53.1	30.1	3.5	12.4	0.9
Gives me the silent treatment	48.3	33.9	3.4	11.9	2.5
Ridicules me	50.4	31.2	6.4	9.6	2.4
Reminds me of my past mistakes and/or failures	45.2	35.7	4.3	11.3	3.5
Does not give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort	41.5	39.0	4.2	9.3	5.9
Makes negative comments about me to others	44.1	33.1	9.3	11.0	2.5

*SD = Strongly disagree, D = Disagree, U = Unsure, A = Agree, SA = Strongly agree*

Note: Adapted from Taftaf, S. (2018). Examining the dark side of leadership: The role of gender on the perception of abusive supervision (Master's Thesis, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey), p.6

The respondents were asked to describe their supervisor's behaviour (Table 5.1). 90.5% disagreed that their supervisor invaded their privacy; 54.3% strongly disagreed and 36.2% disagreed. 89.2% disagreed that their supervisor told them their thoughts or feelings were stupid; 53.3% strongly disagreed while 35.8% disagreed. Very few – less than 10% – felt that their supervisors invaded their privacy and told them their feelings were stupid.

85.7% of the respondents disagreed that their supervisors were rude to them, that they put them down in front of others (83.2%) or gave them the silent treatment (82.2%). The percentages are cumulative of strongly disagree and disagree percentages. 82.2% of the employees did not feel that their supervisors ridiculed them, did not feel that they reminded them of their past mistakes or failures (80.9%) or did not give them credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort (80.5%). At least three-quarters (77.1%) of the employees disagreed that supervisors made negative comments about them to others, while only a fifth (22.9%) agreed that this was true.

The results indicate that a tenth of employees felt that their supervisors made negative comments about them to others (13.6%), that they did not give them credit for their past mistakes or failures (15.3%) and that they reminded them of their past mistakes (14.8%). Very few – less than 10% – agreed that the supervisors invaded their privacy, told them their thoughts were stupid and were rude to them (employees).

**Table 5.2**

*Factors constituting incivility.*

<b>Incivility</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
Intervened in my personal affairs	49.6	42.7	2.6	4.3	0.9
Used an inappropriate tone when speaking to me	47.5	37.3	2.5	9.3	3.4
Raised their voice while speaking to me	43.2	40.7	4.2	9.3	2.5
Responded to my question in a short and unfriendly manner	43.2	37.3	7.6	10.2	1.7
Secretly tries to know what I am doing	37.6	35.0	12.0	12.0	3.4
Talked about me behind my back	33.1	33.1	18.6	10.2	5.1

*SD = Strongly disagree, D = Disagree, U = Unsure, A = Agree, SA = Strongly agree*

*Note: Adapted from Handoyo, S., Samian, Syarifah, D., & Suhariadi, F. (2018). The measurement of workplace incivility in Indonesia: evidence and construct validity. Psychology Research and Behavior Management, p.222*

Regarding incivility (Table 5.2), 92.3% of employees disagreed that the supervisors intervened in their personal affairs; 49.6% strongly disagreed and 42.7% disagreed. Very few – less than 5% – agreed with this. 84.7% of the employees disagreed that the supervisors used an inappropriate tone when speaking to them, that the supervisors raised their voice while speaking to them (83.9%) and that supervisors responded to their questions in a short and unfriendly manner (80.5%).

72.6% disagreed that the supervisors secretly tried to know what the employees were doing, a tenth were doubtful about this aspect, while 15.4% agreed that this was the case. Two-thirds of the employees disagreed that the supervisors talked about them behind their backs (66.1%), 18.6% were doubtful and 15.3% agreed on this.

These results show that generally, there was no social behaviour lacking in civility or good manners from supervisors, as few agreed that supervisors talked about them behind their backs (15.3%), that supervisors secretly tried to know what they were doing (15.4%) or that supervisors responded to their questions in a short and unfriendly manner (11.9%).

**Table 5.3**

*Factors constituting bullying.*

<b>Bullying</b>	<b>Very unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Very likely</b>
Having insulting or offensive remarks made about my person	44.4	44.4	4.3	6.0	0.9
Intimidating behaviour such as finger-pointing	47.5	40.7	3.4	5.1	3.4
Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger	44.5	39.5	5.0	8.4	2.5
Constantly being threatened with dismissal and/or disciplinary action	46.2	37.8	1.7	11.8	2.5
Being bullied or ridiculed in connection with your work	44.8	36.0	5.6	10.4	3.2

Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	37.4	36.5	9.6	15.7	0.9
Being ignored or excluded	35.9	34.2	8.5	14.5	6.8
Being ordered to do work below your level of competence	33.9	35.5	7.4	18.2	5.0
Being compelled to change your approach or decision	34.5	31.9	4.2	20.2	9.2

*Note:* Reprinted from Gupta, R., Bakhshi, A., & Einarsen, S. (2017). Investigating workplace bullying in India: Psychometric properties, validity, and cutoff scores of negative acts questionnaire–revised. *Sage Open*, 7(2), 2158244017715674, p.6

Regarding bullying (Table 5.3), 88.9% of the employees indicated that it was unlikely that supervisors insulted or were offensive to them (88.9%) and were unlikely to intimidate them by finger-pointing (88.1%). Very few – less than 10% – felt that such actions were likely to occur. 84% of the employees felt that being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger was unlikely to occur (84%), constantly being threatened with dismissal and/or disciplinary action was unlikely (84%) and that being bullied or ridiculed in connection with their work was unlikely (80.8%). 73.9% of the employees felt that having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks was unlikely and being ignored or excluded was unlikely to happen (70.1%). Lastly, employees felt that being ordered to do work below their level of competence (69.4%) or being compelled to change their approach or decision was also unlikely (66.4%).

The results indicate that slightly above a quarter of the employees felt that supervisors were likely to compel them to change their approach or decisions (29.4%). A fifth felt that supervisors were likely to order employees to do work below the employees' level of competence (23.1%) and that they were likely to ignore or exclude employees (21.4%).

**Table 5.4**

*Timing factor*

<b>Timing factor</b>	<b>Very unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Very likely</b>
Immediately before the weekend (end of the work week)	43.4	32.0	17.2	5.7	1.6

Towards payday	39.7	32.8	21.6	4.3	1.7
At the commencement of the workweek	39.0	31.4	16.1	11.9	1.7
In the afternoon	35.7	37.4	15.7	10.4	0.9
In the morning	38.3	30.4	15.7	14.8	0.9
At business reporting times	34.5	26.7	3.4	17.2	18.1
During business reporting times, such as financial year-end	33.0	26.1	6.1	25.2	9.6
In times of crisis	31.6	23.9	3.4	24.8	16.2

Table 5.4 indicates that three-quarters of the employees felt that aggressiveness from the manager was unlikely to happen immediately before the weekend (end of the work week) (75.4%), few (17.2%) were uncertain whether this was the case while very few (7.4%) felt abuse was likely to happen immediately.

70% of employees felt that aggressiveness was unlikely to take place towards payday or at the commencement of the week (72.4%). A fifth was doubtful whether this behaviour was likely to take place towards payday (21.6%), while less than 10% felt this was likely to take place towards payday. Few (16.1%) were doubtful that aggressiveness was likely to take place at the beginning of the work week and a tenth felt this was likely (13.6%).

Further results indicate that 73% of the employees felt manager aggressiveness was unlikely to occur in the afternoon, 11% felt this was likely to happen, while 15.7% were doubtful. At least two-thirds (68,2%) of the employees felt that manager aggressiveness was unlikely to take place in the morning; fewer (15.7%) were doubtful while others (14.8%) felt this behaviour was likely to take place in the morning.

61.2% of employees felt that manager aggressiveness behaviour was unlikely to take place at business reporting timings (61.2%), a third felt this was likely to happen (35.3%) while very few (3.5%) were doubtful. The employees felt that manager aggressiveness behaviour was unlikely to take place during business reporting times, such as financial year-end (59%); a third felt this was likely to happen during this period and very few were doubtful about this. Lastly, just above half of the employees felt manager abusiveness was unlikely to take place in times of crisis (55.6%); 44.4% felt this behaviour was likely to be displayed during this period.

**Table 5.5***Work engagement.*

<b>Work engagement</b>	<b>Almost never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Some-times</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very often</b>
I am proud of the work that I do	1.7	2.5	19.2	41.7	35.0
I am immersed in my work	1.7	5.1	17.8	61.9	13.6
At my job, I am very resilient mentally	0.8	5.1	20.3	53.4	20.3
Time flies when I am working	0.8	4.2	22.0	50.0	22.9
I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose	0.8	8.4	18.5	49.6	22.7
To me, my job is challenging	1.7	6.8	19.7	50.4	21.4
I am enthusiastic about my job	1.7	5.9	21.0	46.2	25.2
My job inspires me	2.5	4.2	22.7	47.1	23.5
I feel happy when I am working intensely		4.2	27.1	54.2	14.4
I get carried away when I am working	2.6	6.0	25.9	50.0	15.5
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	4.2	5.9	27.1	50.8	11.9
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	0.8	9.2	27.7	54.6	7.6
I can continue working for very long periods at a time	1.7	8.4	28.6	45.4	16.0
When I am working, I forget everything else around me	0.8	11.8	27.7	47.9	11.8
At my work, I am bursting with energy	1.6	9.8	30.1	50.4	8.1

*Note:* Adapted from Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2003). Utrecht work engagement scale-9. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*.

As Table 5.5 indicates, three-quarters of the employees were generally often proud of the work that they did (76.7%) and were immersed in their work (75.4%). There were 19% and 17% of employees who were doubtful about these two aspects, respectively, with less than 10% who disagreed that this was true. Seven 73.7% employees felt that at their job, they were very resilient mental and that time seemed to fly when they were working (72.9%). A fifth of them were doubtful of these two aspects, while very few disagreed that this was not true. A further seven 72.3% felt that they found the work that they do full of meaning and purpose and that

their job was challenging (71.8%). There were very few – fewer than 10% – who disagreed on these two aspects and between 17 and 19% of them were doubtful of the two aspects.

Most were enthusiastic about their job (71.4%) and inspired (70.6%). A fifth of them were neither enthusiastic (21%) nor inspired (22.7%), with a few – less than 10% – who did not feel so. At least six to seven 65.6% of the employees felt happy when working intensely (68.6%) and felt carried away when working (65.5%). A quarter of them felt neither carried away (25.9%) nor happy when working intensely (27.1%).

62.7% of the employees felt that when they got up in the morning, they felt like going to work felt like continuing working for very long periods at a time (28.6%) and felt strong and vigorous (27.7%). At least a quarter of them doubted whether they felt so and very few – a tenth – felt this happened to them.

Lastly, 59.7% of the employees felt that when they were working, they forgot everything else around them; a quarter were uncertain about this (27.87%) and a tenth (12.6%) agreed that this was true. Furthermore, 58.5% of them felt that at their work, they felt bursting with energy; three 30.1% were uncertain (30.1%), while a tenth felt they felt bursting with work (11.4%).

## 5.5 Reliability

Cronbach’s Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the instruments. Table 5.6 indicates that all constructs were highly reliable, with a high level of internal consistency (>0.7).

**Table 5.6**

*Reliability test - overall*

Responses	Alpha coefficient
Supervisor behaviour	0.941
Leader workplace aggression	0.671
Employee engagement	0.926
Time factor	0.941

The next section provides reliability tests for Leader workplace aggression and Work Engagement subscales.



## 5.6 Reliability test: work engagement sub-scales

**Table 5.7**

*Reliability tests for Work engagement sub-scale items – Vigour.*

<b>Work engagement</b>	<b>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Corrected Item-Total Correlation</b>	<b>Squared Multiple Correlation</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted</b>
At my work, I feel bursting with energy	14,64	7,337	0,657	0,653	0,789
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	14,60	7,312	0,732	0,674	0,771
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	14,59	6,875	0,691	0,502	0,779
I can continue working for very long periods at a time	14,54	7,654	0,517	0,358	0,830
At my job, I am very resilient, mentally	14,32	7,817	0,569	0,392	0,814

*Note:* Adapted from Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2003). Utrecht work engagement scale-9. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*.

Work engagement Construct Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted: This statistic estimates the internal consistency reliability of the scale if each item is removed one at a time. A higher value indicates better internal consistency. Table 5.7 indicates that the Cronbach's Alpha, if item deleted ranges from 0.771 to 0.830. These values indicate good internal consistency, as they are generally above the recommended threshold of 0.70. This suggests that the items in the scale are measuring the Work engagement construct and are reliable in assessing work engagement.

**Table 5.8***Reliability tests for Work engagement scale items – Dedication.*

<b>Work engagement</b>	<b>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Corrected Item-Total Correlation</b>	<b>Squared Multiple Correlation</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted</b>
I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose	15,70	8,056	0,714	0,580	0,833
I am enthusiastic about my job	15,66	7,828	0,781	0,664	0,816
My job inspires me	15,66	7,776	0,834	0,723	0,803
I am proud of the work that I do	15,47	8,616	0,621	0,417	0,855
To me, my job is challenging	15,73	8,858	0,517	0,293	0,882

*Note:* Adapted from Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2003). Utrecht work engagement scale-9. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*.

Here is the interpretation of the reliability indicators for this Work engagement questions shows that the Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted ranges from 0.803 to 0.882. These values indicate good internal consistency, as they are above the recommended threshold of 0.70. This suggests that the items in the scale are measuring the Work engagement construct and are reliable in assessing work engagement.

**Table 5.9***Reliability tests for Work engagement scale items – Absorption.*

<b>Work engagement</b>	<b>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Corrected Item-Total Correlation</b>	<b>Squared Multiple Correlation</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted</b>
Time flies when I'm working	14,88	6,950	0,599	0,385	0,800
When I am working, I forget everything else around me	15,19	6,858	0,584	0,481	0,805
I feel happy when I am	14,98	7,807	0,471	0,352	0,832

working intensely					
I am immersed in my work	14,97	6,718	0,708	0,614	0,769
I get carried away when I'm working	15,08	6,108	0,764	0,650	0,748

Note: Adapted from Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2003). Utrecht work engagement scale-9. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*.

The Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted for this sub-scale Work engagement ranges from 0.748 to 0.832. These values indicate good internal consistency, as they are above the recommended threshold of 0.70. This suggests that the items (questions) in the scale are reliable in measuring the respondents' perceptions on work engagement.

### 5.7 Reliability test: Leader workplace aggression Subscales

**Table 5.10**

*Reliability test: Leader workplace aggression subscale - Supervisor Behaviour*

Supervisor behaviour	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Ridicules me	13,71	38,964	0,846	0,776	0,931
Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid	13,87	41,87	0,815	0,713	0,935
Gives me the silent treatment	13,59	37,919	0,771	0,647	0,935
Puts me down in front of others	13,67	37,551	0,853	0,745	0,93
Invades my privacy	13,82	42,783	0,602	0,471	0,943
Reminds me of my past mistakes and/or failures	13,54	37,802	0,786	0,635	0,934
Does not give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort	13,45	37,108	0,77	0,637	0,936
Makes negative comments about me to others	13,53	37,905	0,827	0,731	0,931
Is rude to me	13,67	39,735	0,789	0,72	0,934

Note: Adapted from Taftaf, S. (2018). Examining the dark side of leadership: The role of gender on the perception of abusive supervision (Master's Thesis, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey), p.6

Above are the interpretation of the reliability indicators for the "Supervisor Behaviour" scale. Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted: The Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted ranges from 0.930 to 0.943. These values indicate excellent internal consistency, as they are above the recommended threshold of 0.70.

**Table 5.11**

*Reliability test: Leader workplace aggression subscale - Incivility*

Incivility	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Talks about me behind my back	9,22	17,571	0,744	0,65	0,906
Secretly tries to know what I am doing	9,34	18,064	0,718	0,586	0,909
Responds to my questions in short and unfriendly manner	9,54	17,614	0,848	0,818	0,89
Raises their voice while speaking to me	9,59	17,843	0,853	0,879	0,889
Uses inappropriate tone when speaking to me	9,63	17,89	0,815	0,812	0,895
Interferes in my personal affairs	9,79	20,966	0,645	0,511	0,918

Note: Adapted from Handoyo, S., Samian, Syarifah, D., & Suhariadi, F. (2018). The measurement of workplace incivility in Indonesia: evidence and construct validity. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, p.222

Table 5.11 provides the interpretation of the reliability indicators for the "Incivility" scale. The Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted ranges from 0.889 to 0.918. These values indicate good to excellent internal consistency, as they are above the recommended threshold of 0.70.

**Table 5.12***Reliability test: Leader workplace aggression subscale - Bullying*

<b>Bullying</b>	<b>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Corrected Item-Total Correlation</b>	<b>Squared Multiple Correlation</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted</b>
Being bullied or ridiculed in connection with my work	15,86	56,596	0,765	0,627	0,938
Being ordered to do work below my level of competence	15,56	54,689	0,8	0,806	0,936
Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	15,65	56,139	0,774	0,743	0,938
Being ignored or excluded	15,55	54,048	0,789	0,711	0,937
Having insulting or offensive remarks made about my person	15,97	58,687	0,788	0,714	0,938
Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger	15,88	56,16	0,829	0,804	0,935
Constantly being threatened with dismissal and/ or disciplinary action	15,85	55,391	0,828	0,751	0,935
Experiencing intimidating behaviour such as finger pointing	15,96	57,76	0,758	0,715	0,939
Being compelled to change my approach or decision	15,38	52,899	0,768	0,621	0,94

Note: Reprinted from Gupta, R., Bakhshi, A., & Einarsen, S. (2017). Investigating workplace bullying in India: Psychometric properties, validity, and cutoff scores of negative acts questionnaire–revised. *Sage Open*, 7(2), 2158244017715674, p.6

Table 5.12 shows the interpretation of the reliability indicators for the "Bullying" scale: The Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted ranges from 0.935 to 0.940. These values indicate excellent internal consistency, as they are well above the recommended threshold of 0.70, suggesting that the items in the scale are measuring a similar construct and are highly reliable in assessing employee bullying experiences.

*The next section provides inferential statistics to test the associations and relationships between the predictor variables and work engagement.*

### 5.8 Pearson's correlation

Correlation is a bivariate analysis that measures the strength of the association between two variables and the direction of the relationship (Mu et al., 2018). In terms of the strength of the relationship, the value of the correlation coefficient varies between +1 and -1. A value of  $\pm 1$  indicates a perfect degree of association between the two variables; the correlation coefficient value goes towards 0, the relationship between the two variables will be weaker (Mu et al., 2018). The direction of the relationship is indicated by the sign of the coefficient; a + sign indicates a positive relationship and a - sign indicates a negative relationship. Table 5.13 displays the correlations.

**Table 5.13**

*Associations between leader workplace aggression, timing factors, and Work Engagement*

Description		Leader workplace aggression	Work engagement	Time Factor
Leader workplace aggression	Pearson Correlation	--		
Work engagement	Pearson Correlation	-.532**	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
Time Factor	Pearson Correlation	.823**	-.477**	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 5.13 indicates that there was moderate negative association between Leader workplace aggression and Work Engagement, suggesting as proposed in the hypothesis and in line with literature, that an increase in Leader workplace aggression is likely to lead to a decrease in Work Engagement. The table further shows *strong* positive associations between leader workplace aggression (incivility, supervisor behaviour, bullying) and work engagement ( $r = 0.823$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The results are significant at a 5% level. The results suggest that Leader workplace aggression and Timing factor move in the same direction, as more of times of crisis, busy reporting periods, business reporting times, was likely to result in leader workplace aggression.

### Multivariate regression analysis

#### **Model: $H_1$ – influence of leader workplace aggression on work engagement**

**Table 5.14**

*Model Summary -  $H_1$*

<b>Model Summary</b>						
R	R-sq.	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5479	.3002	.2657	15.7273	3.0000	110.0000	.0000

The R-squared value of 0.3002 can be interpreted as follows: The model explains 30.02% of the variance in the dependent variable (employment engagement), the remaining 69.98% of the variance is unexplained by the model. The following is the regression model showing the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement, business reporting times as moderator.

**Table 5.15 Model: Outcome variable-work engagement**

<b>Model: Outcome variable-work engagement</b>						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.7568	.0630	59.6679	.0000	3.6320	3.8815
Leader_a	-.1037	.0287	-3.6089	.0005	-.1607	-.0468
Q5.3_Dur	-.0663	.0488	-1.3582	.1772	-.1629	.0304
Int 1	.0036	.0161	.2213	.8253	-.0283	.0355

Moderator: Q5.3\_Timing

The Leader workplace aggression (bullying, supervisor behaviour and aggression) variable has a p-value of 0.0005, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the Leader workplace aggression variable is a significant predictor of work engagement. This means that for every

one-unit decrease in Leader workplace aggression ( $\beta=-0.104$ ), work engagement is expected to increase by 0.1037 units.

The Q5.3\_Dur variable has a p-value of 0.1772, which is greater than 0.05. This suggests that the Q5.3\_Dur variable is not a significant predictor of work engagement in this model. This means that we cannot say with certainty whether Q5.3\_Dur has a real effect on work engagement. The interaction is not significant ( $p>0.05$ ), which means that no significant moderation takes place. Lastly, the Int\_1 (interaction term) has a p-value of 0.8253, which is much greater than 0.05, not a significant predictor of work engagement in this model.

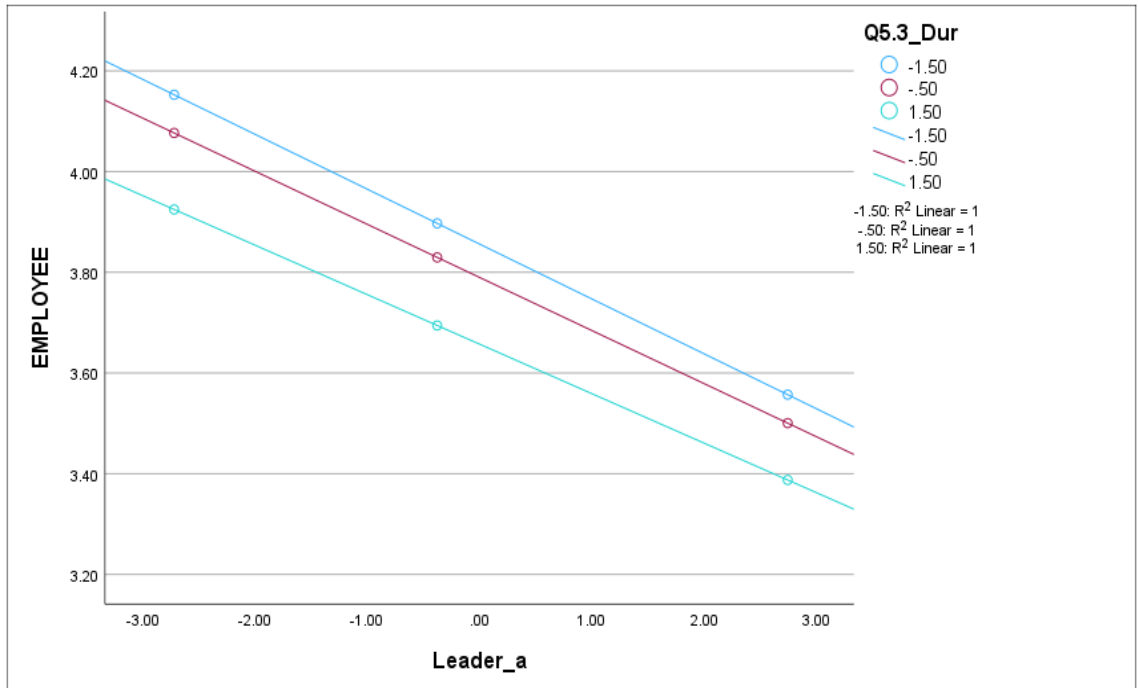
**Table 5.16**

*Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s)*

<i>Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):</i>					
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0003	.0490	1.0000	110.0000	.8253

The R-squared value of the moderating model is 0.003, which means that the model explains 3% of the variance in work engagement. The interaction term only adds 0.03% of variance to the model and does thus not make a significant contribution ( $p>0.05$ ) indicating no moderation. The F-statistic of 0.49 and the p-value of 0.825 indicate that the interaction term X\*W is not statistically significant. This means that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the interaction term has a zero effect on the dependent variable. There are other factors that are not included in the model that are also influencing work engagement.





**Figure 5.4**

*Relationship between Leader workplace aggression and Work Engagement*

The graph shows the strong negative relationship between Aggression and Work Engagement at all levels of the moderator.

**Model: H<sub>2</sub> moderating effect of Timing**

**Table 5.17**

*Model Summary: H<sub>2</sub>*

Model Summary						
R	R-sq.	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5331	.2842	.2651	14.9551	3.0000	113.0000	.0000

The R-squared value of 0.2842 in the model summary indicates that the model explains 28.42% of the variance in the dependent variable (work engagement). This means that the model can predict the dependent variable with a fair degree of accuracy.

**Table 5.18***Model: Outcome variable-work engagement*

<b>Model: Outcome variable-work engagement</b>						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.7313	.0682	54.7066	*.0000	3.5961	3.8664
Leader workplace aggression	-.1217	.0341	-3.5701	*.0005	-.1893	-.0542
Q5.4_Int	-.0213	.0514	-.4143	.6795	-.1230	.0805
Int_1	.0118	.0163	.7230	.4712	-.0205	.0440

The Leader workplace aggression (bullying, supervisor behaviour and aggression) variable has a p-value of 0.0005, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the Leader workplace aggression variable is a significant predictor of work engagement, times of crisis as a moderator. This means that for every one-unit decrease ( $\beta=-0.122$ ) in Leader workplace aggression, work engagement is expected to increase by 0.12 units.

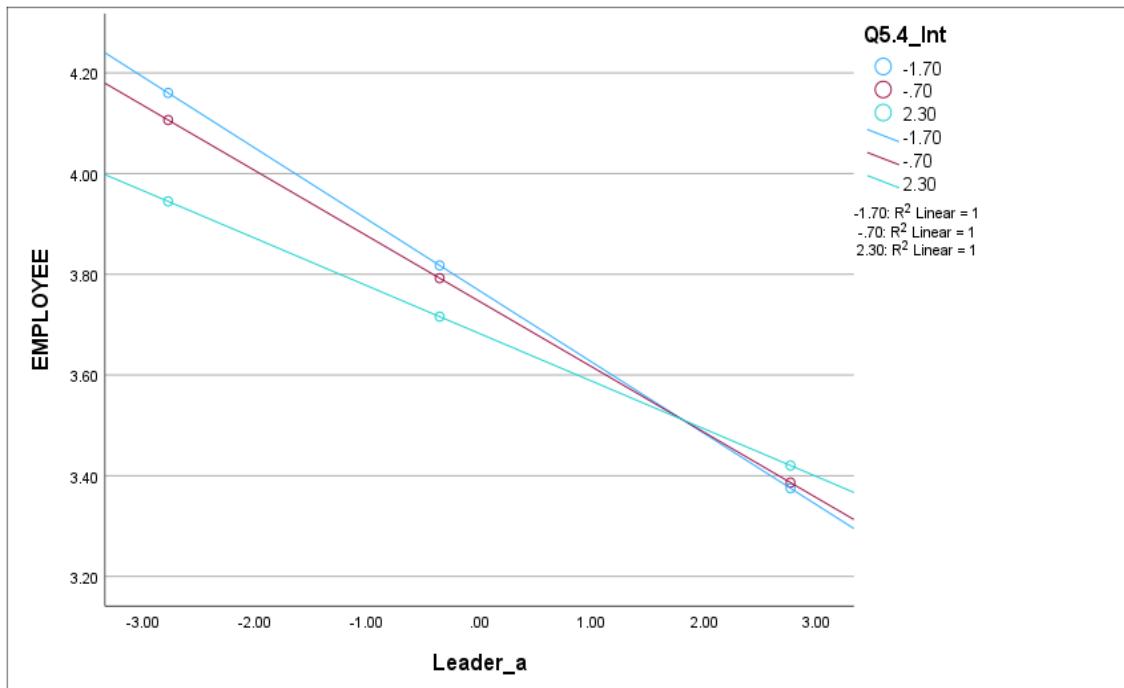
The Q5.4\_variable has a p-value of 0.679, which is greater than 0.05, not a significant predictor of work engagement in this model. The Int\_1 (interaction term) has a p-value of 0.471, which is much greater than 0.05, not a significant predictor of work engagement in this model. The interaction is not significant ( $p>0.05$ ), which means that no significant moderation takes place because of the times of crisis variable.

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

**Table 5.19***Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction*

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0033	.5228	1.0000	113.0000	.4712

The R2-change value of 0.0033 in the table indicates that the addition of the interaction term X\*W to the model increased the R-squared value by 0.33%. The F-statistic of 0.5228 and the p-value of 0.4712 indicate that the interaction term X\*W is not statistically significant. This means that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the interaction term has a zero effect on t/he dependent variable.



**Figure 5.5**

*Relationship between Leader workplace aggression and Work Engagement*

The graph shows the strong negative relationship between Aggression and Engagement at all levels of the moderator.

**Multivariate regression: Leader workplace aggression and its sub scales, Timing as a moderator.**

***Model 1: Leader workplace aggression and vigour***

Dependent Variable: Vigour

Independent Variable: Leader workplace aggression

Moderator (W) q5.3: Timing

**Table 5.20**

*Model Summary - Leader workplace aggression and Vigour*

Model Summary						
R	R-sq.	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5260	.2767	.3305	14.0252	3.0000	110.0000	.0000

The R-squared value of 0.526 in the model summary indicates that the model explains 52.6% of the variance in the dependent variable (vigour). This means that the model can explain the influence of the independent variable with a moderate degree of accuracy.

**Table 5.21**

*Leader workplace aggression Composite variable p value*

Vigour	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.6600	.0702	52.1254	.0000	3.5208	3.7991
Leader_a	-.0958	.0321	-2.9889	** .0035	-.1593	-.0323
Q5.3_Dur	-.0858	.0544	-1.5777	.1175	-.1936	.0220
Int_1	-.0064	.0180	-.3576	.7214	-.0420	.0292

\*\*Significant to 5% level

The leader workplace aggression composite variable has a p-value that is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that leader workplace aggression is a significant predictor of vigour, business reporting times as a moderator. This means that for every one-unit decrease ( $\beta = -0.0958$ ) in leader workplace aggression, vigour is expected to decrease by 9%, vice-versa.

**Table 5.22**

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interactions

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):					
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0008	.1279	1.0000	110.0000	.7214

The R2-change value of 0.008 in the table indicates that the addition of the interaction term X\*W to the model increased the R-squared value by 0.8%. The interaction is not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), which means that no significant moderation takes place in the association between leader workplace aggression and employee engagement, when business reporting times are factored in.

***Model 2: Leader workplace aggression and dedication***

Dependent Variable: Dedication  
 Independent Variable: Leader workplace aggression  
 Moderator (W) q5.3: During business reporting times

**Table 5.23***Model 2: Leader workplace aggression and dedication*

<b>Model summary</b>						
R	R-sq.	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.4432	.1964	.4393	8.9631	3.0000	110.0000	.0000

The R-squared value of 0.4432 in the model summary indicates that the model explains 44.3% of the variance in the dependent variable (employee dedication). This means that the model can predict the dependent variable with a moderate degree of accuracy.

**Table 5.24***Dedication -Leader workplace aggression Composite variable p value*

Dedication	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.8898	.0810	48.0498	.0000	3.7294	4.0502
Leader_a	-.0993	.0370	-2.6880	.0083	-.1726	-.0261
Q5.3_Dur	-.0663	.0627	-1.0569	.2929	-.1906	.0580
Int_1	.0027	.0207	.1284	.8980	-.0384	.0437

The leader workplace aggression composite variable and business reporting times as a moderator have p-values that is not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). This indicates that the leader workplace aggression is a NOT a significant predictor of employee dedication in this sample.

**Table 5.25***Test(s) of highest order unconditional interactions - b*

<b>Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s)</b>					
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0001	.0165	1.0000	110.0000	.8980

The R2-change value of 0.001 in the table indicates that the addition of the interaction term X\*W to the model increased the R-squared value by 0.1%. The interaction is not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), which means that no business reporting times moderation takes place in the association between leader workplace aggression and employee dedication as an independent variable.

**Model 3:**

**Leader workplace aggression and absorption**

Dependent Variable: Absorption

Independent Variable: Leader workplace aggression

Moderator (W) q5.3: During business reporting times

**Table 5.26**

*Absorption - Model:3 leader workplace aggression and absorption*

Model summary						
R	R-sq.	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5091	.2592	.3098	12.8267	3.0000	110.0000	.0000

The R-squared value of 0.510 in the model summary and the p-value that is less than 5% indicates that the model explains 52.6% of the variance in the dependent variable (absorption). This means that the model can predict the dependent variable with a moderate degree of accuracy.

**Table 5.27**

*Absorption -Leader workplace aggression p values*

Absorption	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.7080	.0680	54.5410	.0000	3.5733	3.8428
Leader_a	-.1169	.0310	-3.7678	** .0003	-.1784	-.0554
Q5.3_Dur	-.0415	.0527	-.7875	.4327	-.1459	.0629
Int_1	.0150	.0174	.8610	.3911	-.0195	.0494

In this table, leader workplace aggression composite variable has a p-value that is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that the Leader workplace aggression is a significant predictor of employee absorption, business reporting times as a moderator. This means that as aggression decreases absorption increases ( $\beta = -0.0958$ ).

**Table 5.28**

*Test(s) of highest order unconditional interactions: Absorption*

<b>Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):</b>					
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
<b>X*W</b>	.0050	.7412	1.0000	110.0000	.3911

The R2-change value of 0.05 in the table indicates that the addition of the interaction term X\*W to the model increased the R-squared value by 0.3%. The interaction is not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), which means that no business reporting times moderation takes place in the association between leader workplace aggression and employee absorption as the independent variable.

**Multivariate regression: Leader workplace aggression and its sub scales, in times of crisis a moderator.**

***Model 4: Leader workplace aggression and vigour***

Dependent Variable: Vigour

Independent Variable: Leader workplace aggression

Moderator (W) q5.4: in times of crisis

**Table 5.29**

*Model 4: Leader workplace aggression and vigour*

<b>Model</b>	<b>Summary</b>					
<b>R</b>	R-sq.	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
<b>.5062</b>	.2562	.3335	12.9758	3.0000	113.0000	.0000

The R-squared value of 0.510 in the model summary and the p-value that is less than 5% indicates that the model explains 51% of the variance in the dependent variable (vigour). This means that the model can predict the dependent variable with a moderate degree of accuracy.

**Table 5.30***Vigour - Leader workplace aggression p values*

<b>Vigour</b>	<b>coeff</b>	<b>se</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>LLCI</b>	<b>ULCI</b>
constant	3.6166	.0765	47.2794	.0000	3.4651	3.7682
Leader_a	-.1455	.0382	-3.8054	**0.0002	-.2213	-.0698
Q5.4_Int	.0188	.0576	.3262	.7449	-.0953	.1329
Int_1	.0102	.0182	.5596	.5768	-.0259	.0463

In this table, leader workplace aggression composite variable has a p-value that is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that the Leader workplace aggression is a significant predictor of employee vigour, in times of crisis as a moderator. This suggests that as leader workplace aggression decreases, employee vigour increases ( $\beta = -0.146$ ).

*Table 5.31**Test(s) of highest order unconditional interactions: Vigour*

<b>Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):</b>					
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
<b>X*W</b>	.0021	.3132	1.0000	113.0000	.5768

The R2-change value of 0.002 in the table indicates that the addition of the interaction term X\*W to the model increased the R-squared value by 0.2%. The interaction is not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), which means that no times of crisis moderation takes place in the association between leader workplace aggression and employee dedication as the independent variable.

**Model 4: Leader workplace aggression and employee dedication**

Dependent Variable: Dedication

Independent Variable: Leader workplace aggression

Moderator (W) q5.4: in times of crisis

**Table 5.32***Model 4: Leader workplace aggression and employee dedication*

<b>Model Summary</b>						
<b>R</b>	R-sq.	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
<b>.4386</b>	.1924	.4333	8.9738	3.0000	113.0000	.0000



The R-squared value of 0.439 in the model summary and the p-value that is less than 5% indicates that the model explains 44% of the variance in the dependent variable (vigour). This means that the model can predict this dependent variable with a moderate degree of accuracy.

**Table 5.33**

*Dedication - Leader workplace aggression p values*

	<b>coeff</b>	<b>se</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>LLCI</b>	<b>ULCI</b>
<b>constant</b>	3.8528	.0872	44.1832	.0000	3.6800	4.0256
<b>Leader_a</b>	-.1139	.0436	-2.6118	** .0102	-.2002	-.0275
<b>Q5.4_Int</b>	-.0347	.0657	-.5279	.5986	-.1648	.0954
<b>Int_1</b>	.0120	.0208	.5779	.5645	-.0292	.0532

In this table, leader workplace aggression composite variable has a p-value that is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that the Leader workplace aggression is a significant predictor of employee dedication, in times of crisis as a moderator. This means that as aggression decreases, dedication increases ( $\beta = -0.0958$ ).

**Table 5.34**

*Test(s) of highest order unconditional interactions: Dedication*

<b>Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):</b>					
	<b>R2-chng</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df1</b>	<b>df2</b>	<b>p</b>
X*W	.0024	.3339	1.0000	113.0000	.5645

The R2-change value of 0.002 in the table indicates that the addition of the interaction term X\*W to the model increased the R-squared value by 0.2%. The interaction is not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), which means that no times of crisis moderation takes place in the association between leader workplace aggression and employee dedication as the independent variable.

***Model 6: Leader workplace aggression and absorption***

Dependent Variable: Absorption

Independent Variable: Leader workplace aggression

Moderator (W) q5.4: in times of crisis

**Table 5.35***Model 6: Leader workplace aggression and absorption*

Model	Summary					
R	R-sq.	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.4880	.2381	.3152	11.7743	3.0000	113.0000	.0000

The R-squared value of 0.489 in the model summary and the p-value that is less than 5% indicates that the model explains 48.9% of the variance in the dependent variable (absorption). This means that the model can predict absorption with a moderate degree of accuracy.

**Table 5.36***Absorption - leader workplace aggression p values*

Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.7087	.0744	49.8671	.0000	3.5614	3.8561
Leader_a	-.1082	.0372	-2.9092	** .0044	-.1818	-.0345
Q5.4_Int	-.0422	.0560	-.7529	.4530	-.1531	.0688
Int_1	.0145	.0177	.8149	.4168	-.0207	.0496

In this table, leader workplace aggression composite variable has a p-value that is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that the Leader workplace aggression is a significant predictor of employee absorption, in times of crisis as a moderator. This means that as aggression decreases, absorption increases ( $\beta = -0.108$ ).

**Table 5.37***Test(s) of highest order unconditional interactions: Absorption*

Test(s)	of	highest	order	unconditional	interaction(s):
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0045	.6641	1.0000	113.0000	.4168

The R2-change value of 0.005 in the table indicates that the addition of the interaction term X\*W to the model increased the R-squared value by 0.5%. The interaction is not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), which means that no times of crisis moderation takes place in the association between leader workplace aggression and employee absorption as the independent variable.

## 5.9 Hypothesis testing

- Hypothesis 1 was read as follows:

**H<sub>1</sub>: Leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement.**

This hypothesis was tested using a Pearson correlation. This is a bivariate analysis that measures the strength of the association between two variables and the direction of the relationship (Mu et al., 2018). Regarding the strength of the relationship, the value of the correlation coefficient varies between +1 and -1. A value of  $\pm 1$  indicates a perfect degree of association between the two variables; as the correlation coefficient value goes towards 0, the relationship between the two variables will be weaker (Mu et al., 2018). The sign of the coefficient indicates the direction of the relationship; a + sign indicates a positive relationship, and a - sign indicates a negative relationship. Table 5.38 displays the correlations between the total scores and the subscales of the variables of interest.

**Table 5.38**

*Correlations*

Correlations								
	Supervisor behaviour	Incivility	Bullying	Leader aggression	Vigour	Dedication	Absorption	Employee engagement
Supervisor behaviour	--							
Incivility	.885**	--						
Bullying	.787**	.799**	--					
Leader aggression	.952**	.949**	.926**	--				
Vigour	-.467**	-.475**	-.469**	-.508**	--			
Dedication	-.392**	-.411**	-.386**	-.438**	.713**	--		
Absorption	-.446**	-.455**	-.458**	-.481**	.683**	.684**	--	
Employee engagement	-.500**	-.500**	-.481**	-.532**	.891**	.909**	.877**	--

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Concerning the total scores on employee engagement and leadership aggression, a negative correlation of  $r = -0.532$  ( $p < 0.001$ ) was found. This is a medium-sized correlation regarding Cohen's guidelines for the practical significance of correlations (Lakens & Caldwell, 2021). The hypothesis is thus confirmed regarding the total scores on the two questionnaires. Looking at the subscales, the same pattern is found, namely negative correlations between the subscales of Leader workplace aggression and Employee engagement. Supervisor behaviour shows significant negative correlations of a medium effect size with Vigour ( $r = -0.467$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Dedication ( $r = -0.392$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Absorption ( $r = -0.446$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, incivility shows moderate significant correlations with Vigour ( $r = -0.475$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ),

Dedication ( $r = -0.411$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Absorption ( $r = -0.455$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Lastly, bullying correlates significantly with Vigour ( $r = -0.469$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Dedication ( $r = -0.386$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Absorption ( $r = -0.458$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hypothesis 1 is thus supported, both about the total scores and the subscale scores.

- **Hypothesis 2 read as follows:**

**H<sub>2</sub>** The timing factor has a moderating effect on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

To test this hypothesis, a moderated regression analysis was performed with Leader workplace aggression as an independent variable, work engagement as the dependent variable, and the Time factor as the moderator.

Results are reported in Table 5.39

**Table 5.39**

*Moderated regression results*

Model	Coefficient	SE	t	p	95% LCI	95%UCL
Constant	3.779	0.071	53.380	0.000	3.639	3.919
Leader aggression	-0.080	0.038	-2.111	0.037	-0.155	-0.005
Timefactor	-0.130	0.082	-1.584	0.116	-0.292	0.032
Interaction term	-0.005	0.024	-0.223	0.824	-0.052	0.042
<b>R sq</b>	0.299					
<b>F</b>	16.324	p	0.000			
<b>ΔR sq</b>	0.000					
<b>ΔF</b>	0.050	p	0.824			

Results show that Leader workplace aggression is a significant negative predictor of Employee engagement ( $B = -0.080$ ,  $p = 0.037$ ). The time factor is, however, not a significant predictor of Employee engagement ( $B = -0.130$ ,  $p = 0.116$ ). The interaction term is similarly not important ( $B = -0.005$ ,  $p = 0.824$ ). While the overall model is significant  $F(3, 115) = 16.324$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , the interaction term does not add any significant variance to the model  $\Delta F(1, 115) = 0.050$ ,  $p = 0.824$ . It can thus be inferred that the time factor does not significantly moderate the relationship between Leader workplace aggression and Employee engagement.

## **5.9 Summary of results: influence of leader workplace aggression on employee engagement**

### **H<sub>1</sub> – Leader workplace aggression negatively influences Work Engagement.**

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that Leader workplace aggression significantly influences work engagement. A decrease in Leader workplace aggression is associated with an increase in work engagement.

### **H<sub>2</sub>: Timing is not a moderator between leader workplace aggression and employee engagement.**

- a. The results show that leader workplace aggression is a significant predictor of work engagement, with a decrease in aggression corresponding to an increase in work engagement.
- b. However, Timing and the interaction with leader workplace aggression was not found to be a significant predictor of work engagement. This suggests that Timing does not moderate the relationship between leader workplace aggression and employee engagement in this model.

### **The moderating effect of Timing**

#### *Leader workplace aggression and vigour, business reporting times a moderator*

Leader workplace aggression was found to be a strong predictor of vigour and absorption, but not employee dedication. Business reporting times do not moderate the relationship between leader workplace aggression and employee engagement, dedication, or absorption. In other words, when there are business reporting times at work, the association between leader workplace aggression and employee engagement, dedication, and absorption remains consistent, with no additional effect. The p-values for the moderator variable (business reporting times) in all three models were not significant, indicating that business reporting times do not alter the relationship between leader workplace aggression and employee outcomes.

#### *Leader workplace aggression and dedication, business reporting times a moderator*

Results suggest that leader workplace aggression is not a significant predictor of employee dedication in this sample. Additionally, the p-value for the moderator variable (business reporting times) is not significant, indicating that business reporting times do not moderate the association between leader workplace aggression and employee dedication.

*Leader workplace aggression and absorption, business reporting times a moderator*

Leader workplace aggression is a significant predictor of employee absorption. Specifically, as aggression decreases, absorption is expected to increase ( $\beta=-0.0958$ ). However, the p-value for the moderator variable (business reporting times) is not significant, indicating that business reporting times do not moderate the association between leader workplace aggression and employee absorption.

**Leader workplace aggression and employee sub scales, times of crisis as a moderator**

*Leader workplace aggression and vigour, times of crisis as a moderator*

The results suggest that leader workplace aggression is a significant predictor of employee absorption. Specifically, as aggression decreases, absorption is expected to increase. However, the p-value for the moderator variable (business reporting times) is not significant, indicating that business reporting times do not moderate the association between leader workplace aggression and employee absorption.

*Leader workplace aggression and employee dedication, times of crisis as a moderator*

The results indicate that leader workplace aggression is a significant predictor of employee dedication in times of crisis, suggesting that as aggression decreases, dedication increases. However, the analysis does not show any moderation effect of times of crisis on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and employee dedication. Therefore, the association between leader workplace aggression and employee dedication remains consistent regardless of whether there are times of crisis or not.

*Leader workplace aggression and absorption, times of crisis as a moderator*

The results of the analysis indicate that leader workplace aggression is a significant predictor of employee absorption. This suggests that as aggression decreases, absorption increases ( $\beta=-0.108$ ). However, the analysis does not show any moderation effect of times of crisis on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and employee absorption. Therefore, the association between leader workplace aggression and employee absorption remains consistent regardless of whether there are times of crisis or not.

**5.10 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the results of the survey. A detailed discussion of the survey, the literature and the findings are presented in Chapter Six.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this study, it was established that job demands cause strain and burnout which is positively related to leader workplace aggression and negatively related to work engagement (Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, the introduction of additional strain at certain times moderates the relationship between the ongoing interaction of job demands and the occurrence of leader workplace aggression (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

This chapter focuses on the influence of leader workplace aggression on work engagement, specifically exploring how this influence is moderated by the Timing of leader workplace aggression. The findings of the research study and their implications are summarised, and areas for future research are suggested. The findings suggest that supervisor behaviour, incivility, bullying and the timing factor do not significantly impact employee performance. These results have implications for policymaking and organisational practices. The following sections summarise the findings.

### **6.2 Supervisor behaviour**

The coefficient for supervisor behaviour (-0.078) indicates that there is a negative but non-significant relationship between supervisor behaviour and work engagement. It implies that improving supervisor behaviour alone may not lead to significant improvements in work engagement. This finding aligns with previous research by Tepper (2000) who argues that supervisor behaviour is just one aspect of a complex work environment and its impact on performance may be indirect or mediated by other factors.

Contrary to some literature, the findings of this study indicate that most employees do not experience disrespectful behaviour or invasion of privacy from their supervisors. Previous research has highlighted the prevalence of workplace incivility and disrespect; for example, Grandey et al. (2013) found that 62% of employees reported experiencing incivility from their supervisors. This suggests that the current study's finding of a lower incidence of disrespectful behaviour contrasts with previous research. Additionally, Handoyo et al. (2018) conducted a study on workplace incivility in Indonesia and found that a significant number of employees reported experiencing privacy violations, particularly concerning the monitoring of their electronic communications. This again contrasts with the current study's finding that most employees did not report an invasion of privacy.

However, this study's focus on recognition and feedback aligns with findings from previous research. Several studies have highlighted the importance of recognition and feedback in promoting employee satisfaction and performance; these studies emphasise how positive feedback and acknowledgement of employees' efforts are crucial for a supportive work environment (Chakrabarty et al., 2008). These findings further suggest that most respondents had positive perceptions of their supervisors' behaviours, with very few reporting negative experiences such as invasion of privacy, belittlement or rudeness.

This generally aligns with the literature that emphasises the importance of supportive and positive supervisor behaviours in fostering employee satisfaction, engagement and well-being (Podsakoff et al., 2014). Positive supervisor behaviours, such as respect for privacy, providing constructive feedback and displaying fairness and professionalism, have been linked to enhanced work attitudes, job performance and employee well-being (Chakrabarty et al., 2008; Luu, 2020)

In conclusion, while the findings of this study are contrary to some literature regarding workplace incivility and invasion of privacy, they align with previous research emphasising the significance of recognition and feedback. Organisations need to address the identified areas for improvement, such as providing more credit for employees' hard work and refraining from negative comments. By doing so, organisations can foster a respectful and supportive work environment, leading to enhanced work engagement, well-being and overall performance (Tepper et al., 2017)

### **Supervisor behavior in other contexts**

In other contexts, the finding that improving supervisor behaviour alone may not lead to significant improvements in work engagement resonates with previous research conducted in various countries. Here are some examples that support this perspective:

- A study by Liden and Maslyn (1998) conducted in the United States explored the relationship between supervisor behaviour and employee performance; the findings indicated that while supportive leadership behaviours were positively associated with employee performance, the relationship was partially mediated by job satisfaction, specifically, the positive effect of supervisor support on performance was stronger in individualistic cultures compared to collectivistic cultures.
- A meta-analysis by Judge and Piccolo (as cited in Hoch et al., 2018) examined the relationship between supervisor behaviours and employee performance across 87 independent samples from the United States, Canada, Hong Kong and Europe. It



revealed that supervisor behaviours had a modest but significant positive effect on employee performance, however, the authors noted that this relationship was contingent upon factors such as subordinate characteristics and organisational context.

These global examples demonstrate that while supervisor behaviour can have a positive impact on employee performance, its effect may be influenced by various factors such as cultural values, job satisfaction and contextual factors. Therefore, the non-significant relationship found in this analysis aligns with previous research, highlighting that supervisor behaviour alone may not have a direct and significant effect on work engagement and performance in a global context.

Considering these findings, policymakers and organisations globally should consider a multifaceted approach to enhance work engagement and performance. This may involve not only improving supervisor behaviour but also addressing other organisational factors such as job design, fair compensation, career development opportunities and creating a positive and supportive work environment (Handoyo et al., 2018). By considering the complex interactions between supervisor behaviour and other organisational factors, policymakers can more effectively design policies and strategies that promote work engagement and optimal performance.

### **South African context**

In the South African context, the findings suggesting a non-significant relationship between supervisor behaviour and employee performance have important policy implications. While it is crucial to acknowledge that these results may vary across different sectors and organisations within South Africa, the following potential examples that highlight the importance of considering multiple factors in improving work engagement should be discussed:

- For instance, in a study conducted by Paltu and Brouwers (2020) in the South African manufacturing sector to investigate the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intention moderated by culture, it was found that although supervisor behaviour was positively correlated with employee job satisfaction, it did not significantly predict overall employee performance. This suggests that while supervisors' behaviour may influence employee satisfaction, other factors such as organisational culture, job design or supportive work environments might play a more substantial role in fostering better performance.

- Another example is a study by de Beer, Pienaar and Rothman (2015) that focused on the South African banking sector. These researchers found that the quality of supervisor-subordinate relationships, which encompasses aspects of supervisor behaviour, was significantly associated with employee work engagement, job satisfaction and commitment. However, the impact on performance was not assessed in the study, suggesting that supervisor behaviour may be more critical in fostering work engagement or commitment rather than directly impacting performance outcomes.

In these examples, it is evident that supervisor behaviour alone may not be the sole determinant of employee performance in the South African context. Other factors such as organisational culture, job design and supportive work environments, need to be considered when formulating policies aimed at improving work engagement and performance. Therefore, policymakers should take a holistic approach, considering the broader work environment, organisational practices and employee support systems when implementing strategies to enhance employee performance in South Africa.

### **6.3 Incivility: employees disagreed with statements related to supervisors intervening in their personal affairs.**

Contrary to Handoyo et al., (2018), the results of this study indicate that most employees disagreed with statements related to supervisors intervening in their personal affairs, using inappropriate tones, raising their voices, responding unfriendly, talking about them behind their backs or secretly monitoring their activities. Most literature on incivility highlights the prevalence of negative behaviours in the workplace.

For instance, Abubakar et al. (2017) found that many employees reported experiencing bullying and abusive behaviour from their supervisors; this suggests that the current study's findings of a lower incidence of negative supervisor behaviours contradict previous research. These findings are like those of de Beer et al. (2015), who also found that abusive supervision is highly prevalent, particularly among supervisors. This contradicts the current study's finding that most employees disagreed with the statement that their supervisors talked about them behind their backs.

The study findings align with other existing literature on workplace incivility which suggests that supervisors play a crucial role in promoting a civil and respectful work environment (Handoyo et al., 2018; Lata & Chaudhary, 2022; Miner et al., 2012). This suggests that organisations can mitigate incivility by fostering a culture of civility at the supervisory level.

Supervisors should be trained and encouraged to cultivate respectful and considerate behaviour towards their employees, promoting a positive and civil work environment.

Thus, it is crucial to note that the present study's results contradict the existing literature, indicating a lower prevalence of negative supervisor behaviours. This could be due to various factors such as differences in sample characteristics or the specific context of the study (South Africa). However, it is important to acknowledge that research encompassing diverse industries and organisations has consistently shown a significant prevalence of negative supervisor behaviours.

Although the present study suggests a lower incidence of negative supervisor behaviours, organisations need to remain vigilant and take the initiative in addressing any instances of incivility, disrespect or gossip. Creating policies and training programmes to promote respectful behaviour and effective communication can help organisations mitigate the risk of such behaviours and cultivate a positive work culture; by doing so, organisations can foster a culture of trust, open communication and professionalism (Lata & Chaudhary, 2022).

#### **6.4 Bullying**

Most employees felt that their supervisors were unlikely to engage in bullying behaviours.

Contrary to other literature (Braithwaite et al., 2008; Escartín et al., 2011), the results of the study indicate that many employees felt that their supervisors were unlikely to engage in bullying behaviours – insulting or being offensive, intimidating through finger-pointing or shouting, threatening with dismissal or disciplinary action, bullying or ridiculing in connection with work, removing key responsibilities, ignoring or excluding employees, ordering work below their competence level and compelling them to change their approach or decisions.

Several studies have highlighted the prevalence of workplace bullying and the negative impact it has on employees' well-being and organisational outcomes (Balducci et al., 2012; Braithwaite et al., 2008; Escartín et al., 2011). Braithwaite, Ahmed and Braithwaite (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on workplace bullying and found that around 10% to 15% of employees experience bullying behaviours; these behaviours can significantly affect employees' mental health, job satisfaction and overall performance. Additionally, research by Skakon et al. (2010) examined the consequences of workplace bullying and found that it is associated with increased burnout, stress and turnover intentions among employees; this further emphasises the negative impact of bullying behaviours in the workplace.

On the other hand, the findings align with existing literature on workplace bullying, which suggests that bullying behaviours are relatively rare in organisations. Research by Einarsen et al. (2011, as cited by Ng et al., 2020) emphasises that workplace bullying is characterised by repetitive negative behaviours that involve a power imbalance. Their study highlights the importance of a respectful and supportive work environment in preventing bullying behaviours.

Furthermore, a study by Ferris et al. (2007, as cited by Zhang et al., 2019) highlights the impact of Timing on workplace bullying. The study found that bullying incidents were more likely to occur during periods of higher stress, such as the end of the work week or nearing payday. In contrast, their study also noted that bullying behaviours were less likely to occur at the beginning of the work week.

In conclusion, although the findings of this study contradict much of the existing literature on bullying behaviours, organisations need to continue prioritising the prevention and intervention of workplace bullying.

Contrary to some existing literature, the results of this study suggest that most employees perceive a low likelihood of experiencing bullying behaviours from their supervisors, even during specific periods such as the end of the work week or nearing payday. These findings seem to align with research that emphasises the importance of fostering a respectful and supportive work environment to prevent workplace bullying.

According to the JD-R model proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), work engagement is characterised by high levels of energy, enthusiasm and dedication to work tasks, emphasising the role of meaningful work in fostering job satisfaction and overall well-being. This literature suggests that positive work experiences and attitudes are important for an individual's overall satisfaction and job commitment.

However, it is important to note that the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying can vary across studies and contexts. One study that contradicts the current findings is a meta-analysis conducted by Keashly and Harvey (2006, as cited in Escartín et al., 2011), which indicates that workplace bullying is a pervasive issue affecting many employees. Their study highlights how bullying behaviours can lead to adverse consequences such as decreased job satisfaction, increased psychological distress and higher turnover intentions.

Additionally, Wu et al. (2016) investigated the conditions under which workplace ostracism undermines organisational citizenship behaviours and found that this was associated with increased tension and potential for bullying behaviours. The study suggested that high workload demands and time pressure might exacerbate the occurrence of bullying incidents.

Although the findings of the present study contradict some aspects of the literature, it is important to consider that workplace dynamics can differ across organisations, industries and cultural contexts. Factors such as organisational policies, leadership styles and workplace culture can influence the prevalence and perception of bullying behaviours.

To address this contradiction, future research should examine the contextual factors that may contribute to variations in the occurrence and perception of workplace bullying. Additionally, organisations should remain proactive in creating and maintaining a respectful and supportive work environment to prevent bullying behaviours. By promoting open communication, providing training on conflict resolution and interpersonal skills and implementing clear policies against workplace bullying, organisations can work towards cultivating a positive workplace culture.

In conclusion, while the findings of this study contradict some aspects of the existing literature on workplace bullying, it is important to acknowledge the complexity and contextual nature of this issue.

#### **6.6 Work engagement: positive attitudes and high levels of agreement among employees regarding various aspects of their job**

In line with the literature, the study findings reveal positive attitudes and high levels of agreement among employees regarding various aspects of their jobs. One possible explanation for this discrepancy could be the specific context or sample of the study. Different industries, organisations or geographic locations may have varying factors that influence employee attitudes and perceptions. This study has focused on the financial services sector which is characterised by a professionalism, autonomy and cordiality that has a positive work culture and supportive environment, leading to positive findings (Adler & Liyanarachchi, 2020). The sector is also regulated and subject to professional body ethical standards or code of conduct.

However, it is worth noting that there is a wide range of literature on employee attitudes and job satisfaction and different studies have found varied results. Some studies support the findings of the current study, suggesting positive attitudes and high levels of job satisfaction among employees (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). These studies emphasise the role of factors such as engagement, pride and meaningfulness in fostering positive employee attitudes.

On the other hand, some studies highlight negative aspects of employee attitudes and job satisfaction. For example, some research has identified factors such as job stress, job insecurity and lack of recognition as contributing to lower job satisfaction (Pan & Lin, 2018; L.

Wang et al., 2018). These studies highlight the importance of addressing these negative factors to improve overall employee satisfaction and motivation.

These findings align with research highlighting the importance of meaningful work and challenging tasks for work engagement and motivation (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Meaningful work is associated with higher job satisfaction, commitment and well-being, while challenges promote growth, development and a sense of accomplishment (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Additionally, the study findings showed that a significant proportion of employees feel enthusiastic about their jobs (71.4%) and inspired (70.6%). Research has demonstrated that enthusiasm is related to higher job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour and performance; feeling inspired at work has been linked to increased creativity, motivation and commitment (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001)

Overall, the survey results highlight the importance of positive work experiences, such as engagement, meaningfulness and motivation, in promoting employee well-being and job satisfaction. These findings are consistent with previous research and emphasise the need for organisations to prioritise factors that contribute to positive work experiences to enhance employee happiness and productivity.

In conclusion, while the study's findings contradict some literature on employee attitudes and job satisfaction, it is important to consider the specific context and sample of the study. Different industries, organisations and geographic locations may yield different results. Future research should continue to explore the factors that influence employee attitudes and job satisfaction to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

### **6.7 Hypothesis Testing: Leader workplace aggression has a positive correlation with reduced work engagement.**

The two hypotheses adopted in this study were as follows:

**H<sub>1</sub>** Leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement.

**H<sub>2</sub>** The timing factor has a moderating effect on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

Several studies support this hypothesis. For example, a study by Yu et al. (2018) found that aggressive behaviour by leaders led to decreased employee job satisfaction and increased turnover intention. This suggests that when leaders display aggression, it negatively affects employee attitudes and can ultimately impact performance.

Employees who experience aggression from their leaders may feel anxious or threatened, which can interfere with their ability to think creatively and perform at their best. Furthermore, a meta-analysis conducted by Hershcovis and Barling (2010) found that workplace aggression, which includes aggression from leaders, negatively affects job performance. They further found a negative relationship between aggression and performance, suggesting that when leader workplace aggression occurs, it can hinder employee productivity and effectiveness. However, the results of this study were contrary to the literature cited above, as low aggression was noted in the sample that was studied.

Very little aggression was identified in the sample – a result contrary to other literature. The descriptive findings suggest that a significant majority of employees have positive experiences with their supervisors, reporting low levels of supervisor incivility and bullying behaviours (Tepper et al., 2017). This aligns with the literature highlighting the importance of fostering respectful and supportive relationships between supervisors and employees in creating a positive work environment (Tepper, 2000).

Furthermore, the study results indicate that many employees experience positive emotions and attitudes towards their work, such as feeling proud, immersed, resilient and challenged. This aligns with the literature on work engagement, which emphasises the positive cognitive, emotional and behavioural state of being fully absorbed and involved in one's work. The notion that meaningful and challenging work contributes to employee satisfaction and motivation is also supported (Schaufeli, 2017). Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of fostering positive relationships between supervisors and employees, promoting a respectful and supportive work environment and providing meaningful and challenging work experiences to enhance work engagement and satisfaction.

In summary, the results of this study showed that there was little leader workplace aggression in this sample and that it is the context of the research setting that matters here. Research has shown that the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement can vary depending on organisational and cultural factors; in this case, the results may not be generalised as the context is South African and the study was conducted in the professional services sector where leader workplace aggression may not be highly prevalent due to the empowerment that comes with being a knowledge worker (Miner et al., 2012).

It should be noted that different measures of leader workplace aggression and engagement can yield different results and self-report measures may not always accurately capture the true extent of these behaviours (Tepper et al., 2017). While leader workplace aggression and abusive supervision can certainly have a negative impact on engagement, other factors may

be more influential. It is therefore important to consider that work engagement is a multifaceted construct influenced by various factors, including organisational culture, job characteristics and individual motivation factors not included in this study (Balducci et al., 2010).

While the results of this analysis suggest that supervisor behaviour, incivility, bullying and the timing factor did not have a significant effect on work engagement, it is important to interpret these findings within context. The existing literature highlights the potential negative impact of leader workplace aggression on work engagement and further research is needed to explore the specific factors and contextual variables that may influence this relationship.

### 6.8 Relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement

The results of the regression analysis indicate that supervisor behaviour, incivility, bullying and the timing factor do not have a significant effect on employee performance. The coefficients for supervisor behaviour (-.078), incivility (-.058), bullying (-.016) and the timing factor (-.046) were all negative, suggesting that these were less likely to affect work engagement in this study. None of these coefficients are statistically significant, as indicated by the p-values (sig.) which were greater than .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected and it is concluded that employees feel that there is little leader workplace aggression and abusive supervision and that work engagement is positive.

The research conclusions are depicted in Table 6.1 below:

**Table 6.1**

#### *Research Conclusions*

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Finding</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
H <sub>1</sub> : Leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement.	Hypothesis is supported.	Leader workplace aggression has a negative effect on work engagement.  An increase in leader workplace aggression results in a decrease in work engagement  Conversely, a decrease in leader workplace aggression



		results in an increase in work engagement
H <sub>2</sub> The timing factor has a moderating effect on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.	Hypothesis is not supported	Timing does not have a significant impact on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

## 6.10 Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to determine the influence of leader workplace aggression on work engagement, moderated by the Timing of leader workplace aggression in the workplace context. Supervisor behaviour, incivility and bullying did not significantly affect work engagement. While leader workplace aggression and Timing, as well as timing and work engagement have a strong correlation, it was not a moderator of the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement. This can be explained by the low leader workplace aggression prevalence in this study.

The regression analysis results support the descriptive findings: *supervisor behaviour, incivility, bullying and the timing factor do not significantly affect work engagement*. This finding may seem contrary to the existing literature, highlighting the negative impact of factors such as leader workplace aggression and abusive supervision on work engagement. Previous studies have consistently shown that leader workplace aggression, including behaviours such as incivility and bullying, can have detrimental effects on work engagement. These behaviours create a hostile work environment, erode trust and decrease motivation and commitment among employees (Aryee et al., 2008; Miner et al., 2012; Tepper et al., 2017). Similarly, abusive supervision, characterised by demeaning and controlling behaviours, has been linked to lower levels of engagement and job satisfaction (Aryee et al., 2008; Tepper, 2000).

## 6.10 Policy Implications

The results of this analysis have important policy implications for organisations. The policy implications provided are based on the interpretation of the analysis results and should be implemented in alignment with the overall goals, values and context of the specific sector in which the study took place. While the findings suggest that supervisor behaviour, incivility,

bullying and the timing factor did not have a significant effect on work engagement in this specific study, organisations must remain vigilant and proactive in promoting positive work environments and preventing negative behaviours.

First, organisations should prioritise the development of respectful and supportive relationships between supervisors and employees. This can be achieved through training programmes and workshops that focus on promoting effective communication, empathy and conflict-resolution skills among supervisors. By fostering positive relationships, organisations can create a work environment that enhances work engagement and satisfaction.

Second, organisations should have clear policies and procedures in place to address issues of incivility and bullying. These policies should emphasise zero tolerance for such behaviours and provide mechanisms for employees to report and address any instances of uncivil or bullying behaviour. Additionally, organisations should ensure that supervisors receive training on recognising and preventing such behaviours as well as provide resources for employees to seek support and resolution.

Lastly, organisations should continue to explore and identify factors related to work engagement beyond the scope of this study. Work engagement is a complex construct influenced by various organisational, cultural and individual factors. Organisations need to conduct regular assessments and surveys to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive work engagement within their specific context.

By acknowledging these policy implications, organisations can create a positive work environment that promotes work engagement, satisfaction and overall well-being. This, in turn, can lead to higher productivity, improved job performance and reduced turnover rates. It is important for organisations to prioritise work engagement as a critical component of their overall success and to continuously work towards creating a supportive and engaging work environment.

Overall, while the specific factors analysed in this study may not have shown a significant effect on work engagement, organisations should recognise the importance of ongoing efforts to foster positive relationships and prevent negative behaviours. The results of this study should serve as a starting point for further exploration and understanding of the factors that contribute to work engagement, enabling organisations to implement targeted strategies to enhance engagement and create a thriving work environment.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In the concluding chapter of the report, a conclusion and recommendations for practice and future research direction are provided. The chapter commences with an exploration of the principal theoretical conclusions and presents recommendations.

### 7.1 Principal theoretical conclusions

The hypotheses provided in Chapter 1 are as follows:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement.

**H<sub>2</sub>** The timing factor has a moderating effect on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

These hypotheses are now individually considered to reach a conclusion.

**H<sub>1</sub>: Leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement.**

The principal theoretical conclusions made by this research are aligned with the literature and previous studies in the following ways:

- A literature review revealed that leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement (Tepper et al., 2017). In the research conducted, the prevalence of leader workplace aggression was low and, as such, did not appear to influence work engagement. Thus, it can be argued that where the prevalence of leader workplace aggression is low, there is minimal to no influence on work engagement.
- Like performance, which is negatively related to leader workplace aggression, a negligible effect was found in this study as the prevalence of leader workplace aggression was deemed too low to have any significant impact.

**H<sub>2</sub>** The timing factor has a moderating effect on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.

Contrary to the literature, the study found a strong correlation between Timing and work engagement; however, Timing does not have a significant impact on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement, as such is not a moderator.

The study could not conclusively find that managers are more likely to project leader workplace aggression at certain times, such as during business reporting times and towards the end of

the week, as proposed by the study. The results may differ in a different sector or with organisational focus instead of in a cross-sectional study. The literature is coherent in that leader workplace aggression is dynamic, and much more still needs to be done to understand its triggers, causes and impacts and the measures required to respond to it (Sharma, 2018).

Context matters. In general, employees in the professional services sector are educated, have room for autonomy and, being specialists, command some degree of respect from their superiors. In a sector such as retail or manufacturing, where there is a greater socio-economic dependency on the organisation and the supervisor, the results could have been different due to the dynamics and absence of bargaining power (Balabanova, 2022).

## **7.2 Research contribution**

The contribution made by this research is in the following areas of leadership development:

- This research was in response to Sharma's (2018) invitation, wherein he highlighted the need to explore the role of organisational context in enabling leader workplace aggression in the workplace and provided several organisational factors that may serve as the antecedents of leader workplace aggression. The organisational factors that may unwittingly be fostering a conducive environment for infesting toxic and aggressive behaviours could include:
  - How work is structured.
  - The demands that are made on employees by their managers.
  - Poor resourcing of the structure, thus creating a burden for employees.
  - Creating and promoting unhealthy competition among employees and managers.
  - Approaches to dealing with or responding to times of crisis.
- The effectiveness of leaders with the insurmountable task of leading others and coordinating organisational activities and resources to deliver outcomes must be developed. Suppose managers are aware of how job demands potentially lead to leader workplace aggression, which in turn adversely impacts work engagement. In that case, they may adapt their behaviour to create an environment that is conducive to team development and performance (Wang et al., 2020).
- In the sub-field of personal mastery, the research contributes to a limited extent to enhancing self-awareness and the role that a manager plays in creating positive experiences for employees. At times, managers disregard the subjective perceptions and experiences of employees and insist on employees either changing or leaving. Over time, this approach breeds an unhealthy culture and may lead to disengagement

and employee turnover, which is contrary to organisational outcomes (Maamari & Saheb, 2018).

- Indirectly, employees can also benefit from self-awareness and how their conduct and subjective views may lead to the attribution or an encounter with a supervisor as abusive supervision. Employees have work to do, and that often entails the delivery of specific objectives at the direction of the supervisor, who is also the determiner of the standard to be achieved in completing the task. Supervisors are hired to act in the stead of the employer, safeguarding the employer's interest and, at times, having difficult conversations with employees, which does not necessarily result in the sustained aggression suggested by Tepper (as cited in Johnson et al., 2018). The awareness can thus lead to improved introspection and reflection on the nature and quality of relations between the employee and his or her supervisor.
- This study has developed a composite scale for the measurement of leader workplace aggression using the constructs of Supervisor Behavior, Incivility and Bullying; the significance of this approach is that the scale captures broader supervisor conduct that leads to employee dissatisfaction without limiting to one construct or interpretation. The scale presented with a reliability of 0.941, which is deemed to be within the acceptable threshold (Greco et al., 2018).

### **7.3 Recommendations**

The field of talent and leadership development concerns the optimisation of HR to meet the organisation's strategic imperatives. Employees who feel valued and respected by their employers are engaged employees who commit themselves to the purpose and vision of the organisation.

Leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement and, consequently, organisational outcomes (Mackey et al., 2017). This negative relationship has countless effects and these can manifest themselves in several ways, including the following:

- A toxic culture is symbolised by fear and withholding of effort and information by employees.
- Poor performance at individual, team and organisational levels and failure to deliver on strategic objectives.
- High staff turnover creates a vicious cycle of missed deadlines and targets and teams that never reach their full potential.
- Employees who are clock watchers limit their contribution to what is contained in their job descriptions.

- Over a period, the leader's aggression may lead to retaliation by victims which may further escalate the aggression and worsen the toxicity of the culture (Zhang et al., 2019).

The net effect of these symptoms is that the organisation will not be in an optimal position to achieve its targets and its people may prove to be more of a costly burden than strategic human capital. In this paper, several recommendations are made for management and stakeholders based on the findings and insights drawn from this study. The recommendations are directed at the following stakeholders:

- Management
- HR professionals.

### **7.3.1 Recommendations for management**

Management should take particular care to define and foster a culture that is consistent with a productive and motivating workplace. This can be achieved by being deliberate about what the organisation stands for, its values, its code of ethics and its intolerance of any form of aggression or abuse. Broader awareness and buy-in from all stakeholders must be sought and a collaborative framework adopted to foster a healthy workplace (Berson, Oreg, & Dvir, 2008).

The process of fostering a healthy workplace begins with hiring the right people. Managers are the ones who hire and particular attention should be placed on who is brought into the organisation, especially at the management level, by direct recruitment from external candidates or promotion from within (Buckley, 1998). There must be an appreciation for the role of managers in leading, motivating, allocating work and resources and empowering employees to build a climate of engagement, performance and productivity. The use of properly calibrated psychometric instruments should be encouraged as part of broad-based decision-making.

Management will do well to develop policies that eloquently discourage abusive conduct of any form. A policy statement from the organisation's governing body, such as the board of directors, stipulating conduct that is unacceptable as well as the ramifications of such conduct will go a long way towards discouraging would-be abusers. Policies must then be appropriately workshopped with employees to ensure comprehensive understanding (Johnson et al., 2018).

Often policies are beautifully crafted and placed on the intranet and at certain strategic places in the organisation, such as the canteen and close to the cloakrooms. This is often done with

little consideration for the implementation plan and how measures to counter leader workplace aggression will be sustained over a period. One recommendation to ensure the effective operationalisation of policies to counter leader workplace aggression is to incorporate bullying, abusive supervision and other forms of leader workplace aggression into the organisation's wellness, transformation and organisational development agenda. The incorporation will ensure an initiative-taking approach to dealing with leader workplace aggression and the implementation of measures to counter its emergence at any stage. Furthermore, employees will also get a sense that this is a matter that the organisation takes seriously and in which it is willing to invest (Breevaart, Wisse, & Schyns, 2022).

Managers must be trained in the organisation's way of leadership and the cultivation of productive and healthy behaviours. There is often an assumption that managers know what to do, however, this assumption misses the understanding of the dynamic nature of human beings (Maamari & Saheb, 2018). A workforce from the 1980s is different to that of the 1990s and the 2000s; age groups may differ and, at times, without adequate support mechanisms, be a source of perceived leader workplace aggression and this is where the transformation agenda finds relevance (Zhang et al., 2019).

Leader workplace aggression manifests itself in several ways and some of the subtle ways include overloading an otherwise competent employee with work to a point where they just cannot cope, failing to implement salary adjustments or offering less than what the employee deserves and making the employee feel isolated and unappreciated (Li et al., 2019).

Managers must take care not just to assign work and vanish but also to stay close to the employee and conduct an ongoing assessment of how the employee copes with the workload. Just because an employee, who has since left the position or organisation, could manage the workload and never complained, it does not mean that all employees will deal with it in that manner. There are individual and family differences to be factored in. Checking in now and then will also assist the manager to establish whether the organisational outcomes are being adversely impacted in any way and intervene timeously.

Lastly, policies must be implemented for them to be effective. There must be zero tolerance for abusive supervision and other toxic cultures. The message must always be that everyone – including the poor performers and employees that managers may not particularly like for whatever reason – matters and deserves to be treated with respect and dignity (Kelemen et al., 2020).

### **7.3.2 Recommendations for Human Resource Professionals**

HR is often in an optimal position to detect instances of abusive supervision and implement measures to address these before they become problems. When employees are in perilous conditions threatening the relationship between themselves and their managers, they look to HR to intervene or raise the alarm. HR professionals must be sensitive to and aware of the manifestations of leader workplace aggression in the workplace and how different people may be affected by it (Martinko et al., 2011). People are different and have diverse backgrounds and personalities; as such, one employee's complaint may be all that is required for HR to intervene instead of suggesting that there is no problem because no one else is complaining.

HR professionals should be well-trained and keep up to date with developments in employee wellness and strategies to support managers and employees. There must be ongoing and regular interactions between HR and employees and, at times, without the manager present. These are often crafted as 'stay interviews' or 'temperature checking'. Not all employees may have the courage to approach HR or their line manager out of fear that they may worsen their conditions (Ng et al., 2020). This is where HR, representing the organisation, may also get a sense of the distribution and equitable access to organisational resources.

Organisations often run periodical climate surveys which are conducted on a three-to-five-year cycle. The reasoning is that the climate survey provides a snapshot at a point in time and the organisation requires time to address shortcomings revealed by the climate survey. Climate surveys do not explicitly deal with leader workplace aggression even though it is prevalent in the workplace. A lot happens in five years to an organisation internally and externally; as such, HR professionals may consider conducting snap surveys in between climate surveys to detect any significant movement that may require urgent intervention. New supervisors and employees joining the organisation, even with an annual turnover rate of 10%, may mean that in five years, 40% to 50% of the workforce would have exited and new people onboarded, which has the effect of shifting the culture of the organisation (Lundberg, 2007).

When designing jobs, HR professionals must ensure that the job does not create excessive demands for the employee or incumbent. This may be the case where a highly influential role is, for instance, developed without the necessary authority or access to resources, leading a large team or where the job entails extensive and long-term travel (Sharma, 2018). Established work design and work-study mechanisms should be employed to understand the effort required to do the job successfully; this will also assist with ensuring that the correct candidate is placed.



In non-unionised environments, employees should be encouraged to establish work forums which may monitor leader workplace aggression trends, raise the alarm and represent employees as necessary. In this way, employees do not become lonely, isolated victims who must suffer in silence.

Finally, HR professionals can play a more active role in matching line managers and potential employees. This will entail the evolution of the team's strengths and social composition to make an informed guess at the odds of the employee integrating well into his or her new workplace (Qinet al., 2018)

With improved awareness, management, HR practitioners and policymakers may be empowered to develop internal and broad-based mechanisms that have sensors for identifying and eliminating aggression and toxic cultures to ensure overall employee wellness. At times, managers chase targets and results at all costs, even at the expense of people. Over time, this conduct becomes costly and counterproductive; talented people leave the organisation, word spreads around about the culture and it becomes costly for the organisation to attract and retain talented people (Moin et al., 2022).

#### **7.4 Limitations of the research**

The research has several limitations. The study was conducted online and was cross-sectional and, as such, needed more depth of what happens in a particular organisation or group of companies.

Conducting a study online presents several access complications in the South African context. Access to the internet and maintaining an active LinkedIn profile are limiting factors. It is acknowledged that some eligible professionals may not have indicated their job titles or the industries in which they work in their LinkedIn profiles. Moreover, engaging with conference participants meant that only the few who were in attendance were approached.

The study did not factor in the demographic differences which may be essential for the South African context where women, people with disabilities and some black people still report unfavourable experiences at work.

The study further relied on the subjective views of participants, some of whom may have supervisory responsibilities but sought to get their views purely as employees. It may be insightful to explore the differences in responses from employees at different job levels including the difference between those with supervisory responsibilities and individual contributors.

The study used a closed list of Timing, namely, during times of crisis, reporting periods, before and after weekends and towards month-end. The list was narrow and potentially missed a few more perspectives who could have been revealed by a different study using qualitative methods for instance where the input of subordinates was sought to determine the 'when' and use quantitative methods for validation.

In conclusion, it is accepted that studies focusing on Timing are still in exploratory stages and with additional focus on this area, the literature and approaches will develop to cover all dimensions in future.

## **7.5 Suggestions for future research**

Future research should focus on the demographic differences reflecting the experience and perceptions of leader workplace aggression. Generational gaps may elicit different responses; baby boomers have better tolerance for authority as opposed to millennials, for instance, who expect accountability, human rights and a degree of autonomy in the workplace.

At this exploratory stage of the relevance of Timing in the causation of leader workplace aggression, it may be prudent to conduct qualitative studies so that the prevalence of common indicators of time can be compiled into a basket that can be presented to participants for validation. In this study, a basket of typical organisational timings that may cause increased pressure was sought; however, these may need an organic compilation process.

Barnes et al. (2015) suggest that the variations may be related to a specific supervisor and even that supervisor may not be aggressive to everyone, all the time. A more in-depth study focusing on individuals as opposed to a cross-sectional type may be of interest to determine the variations within the individual and what drives those from an organisational context perspective. The study can then be linked to the relevance of Timing and whether it influences the supervisor's propensity to act aggressively.

Furthermore, a study on employees and their attribution process and the extent to which it may be influenced by Timing will be of value. For instance, an employee who has had a tough weekend or is experiencing a stressful Monday' may be sensitive to the supervisor's reprimand and attribute it as aggressive; similarly, an employee who is not coping with the workload or assigned task may experience burnout which may in turn lead to the attribution of the supervisor's conduct as aggressive (Huh & Lee, 2022).

A view of whether supervisors consider the organisational response to leader workplace aggression before engaging in such behaviour or whether the organisational stance such as

policies and how similar cases were managed in the past serve as an enabler or deterrent for would-be abusers would be interesting (Zhang & Liu, 2018).

What could be of relevance to the South African context is the investigation of which sectors of society experience leader workplace aggression more than others and whether this has any influence at all on the degree of work engagement for the various groups; in other words, is there a correlation between the prevalence of supervisor aggression and work engagement for each of the racial groups (Webster & Francis, 2019).

This list of suggestions is not meant to be conclusive. However, it demonstrates that still more needs to be done to develop the literature, gain a better, in-depth understanding of this phenomenon and empower stakeholders to develop appropriate and effective responses.

Finally, the composite scale developed still requires to be tested in different contexts and countries to establish validity and reliability.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A: CONSISTENCY MATRIX

HYPOTHESES	LITERATURE REVIEW	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	DATA ANALYSIS
<p><b>H<sub>1</sub>:</b> Leader workplace aggression is negatively related to work engagement.</p>	<p>(Bakker &amp; Albrecht, 2018; Balducci et al., 2012; Tepper, 2000; Xiong et al., 2021)</p>	<p>Questionnaire Parts 1, 2, 3 &amp; 5</p>	<p>Descriptive statistics  Correlational Analysis</p>
<p><b>H<sub>2</sub></b> The timing factor has a moderating effect on the relationship between leader workplace aggression and work engagement.</p>	<p>(Barnes et al., 2015; Liang et al., 2018; Tepper, 2000; C. C. Wang et al., 2020; Bakker &amp; Demerouti, 2017)</p>	<p>Questionnaire Parts 1 - 5</p>	<p>Multivariate regression analysis  Reliability</p>

**APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE AND INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

**The influence of leader workplace aggression on employee engagement, moderated by timing.**

Student Number: 19258713

## INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

I am conducting research on *the influence of leader workplace aggression on employee engagement, moderated by timing*.

To that end, you are asked to complete a survey relating to my topic. The survey should take no more than 20 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. Your participation is anonymous and only aggregated data will be reported. By completing the survey, you indicate that you voluntarily participate in this research. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the statements below in relation to your current supervisor.

1. Supervisor behaviour		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	<i>My supervisor...</i>					
1.1	Ridicules me					
1.2	Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid					
1.3	Gives me the silent treatment					
1.4	Puts me down in front of others					
1.5	Invades my privacy					
1.6	Reminds me of my past mistakes and/ or failures					
1.7	Does not give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort					
1.8	Makes negative comments about me to others					
1.9	Is rude to me					
1.10	Unfairly assigns more work to me than to others					

**2.  
Bullying**

*Note: Adapted from Taftaf, S. (2018). Examining the dark side of leadership: The role of gender on the perception of abusive supervision (Master's Thesis, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey), p.*

*Please indicate the degree of likelihood for you to experience each of the statements listed below in relation to your current workplace, position, and supervisor/ line manager.*

<b>No.</b>	<i>“The likelihood of me being...”</i>	<b>Very unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Very Likely</b>
<b>2.1</b>	Being bullied or ridiculed in connection with your work					
<b>2.2</b>	Being ordered to do work below your level of competence					
<b>2.3</b>	Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks					
<b>2.4</b>	Spreading of gossip or rumours about you					
<b>2.5</b>	Being ignored or excluded					
<b>2.6</b>	Having insulted or offensive remarks made about my person					
<b>2.7</b>	Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger					

	<b>2.8</b>	Constantly being threatened with dismissal and/ or disciplinary action					
	<b>2.9</b>	Intimidating behaviour such as finger pointing					
	<b>2.10</b>	Being compelled to change your approach or decision					

*Note:* Reprinted from Gupta, R., Bakhshi, A., & Einarsen, S. (2017). Investigating workplace bullying in India: Psychometric properties, validity, and cutoff scores of negative acts questionnaire–revised. *Sage Open*, 7(2), 2158244017715674, p.6

<b>Incivility</b>	Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the statements below in relation to your current workplace, position, and supervisor/ line manager.						
	<i>My Supervisor/ Leader/ Manager...</i>		<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
	<b>3.1</b>	Talked about me behind my back					
	<b>3.2</b>	Secretly tries to know what I am are doing					
	<b>3.3</b>	Ignored opinions I offered in a meeting					
	<b>3.4</b>	Responded to my question in short and unfriendly manner					
	<b>3.5</b>	Raised their voice while speaking to me					

	<b>3.6</b>	Used inappropriate tone when speaking to me					
	<b>3.7</b>	Intervened in my personal affairs					
	<b>3.8</b>	Took items from my desk without asking for permission					
	<b>3.9</b>	Gave me orders which are unrelated to my job					
	<b>3.10</b>	Showed anger by way of ignoring me					

*Note: Adapted from Handoyo, S., Samian, Syarifah, D., & Suhariadi, F. (2018). The measurement of workplace incivility in Indonesia: evidence and construct validity. Psychology Research and Behavior Management, p.222*

<b>4. Time Factor</b>	<b>No.</b>	Please indicate the likelihood of when the behaviour indicated above is likely to be experienced from your Leader/ Supervisor/ Manager					
	<b>Items</b>	<b>Very Unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Very Likely</b>	
	4.1	Immediately before the weekend (end of the work week)					
	4.2	At the commencement of the work week					
	4.3	During busy periods, such as financial year end					



	4.4	In times of crisis					
	4.5	In the afternoon					
	4.6	In the morning					
	4.7	Towards payday					
	4.8	At business reporting times					
<b>5.</b>	<b>No.</b>	Please indicate the frequency (how often) are the below statements applicable to how you feel about your work					
<b>Work Engagement</b>							
<b>Subscales</b>		<b>Items</b>	<b>Almost never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
<b>Vigour</b>	<b>5.1</b>	At my work, I feel bursting with energy					
	<b>5.2</b>	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous					
	<b>5.3</b>	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work					
	<b>5.4</b>	I can continue working for very long periods at a time					
	<b>5.5</b>	At my job, I am very resilient, mentally					
	<b>5.6</b>	I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose					

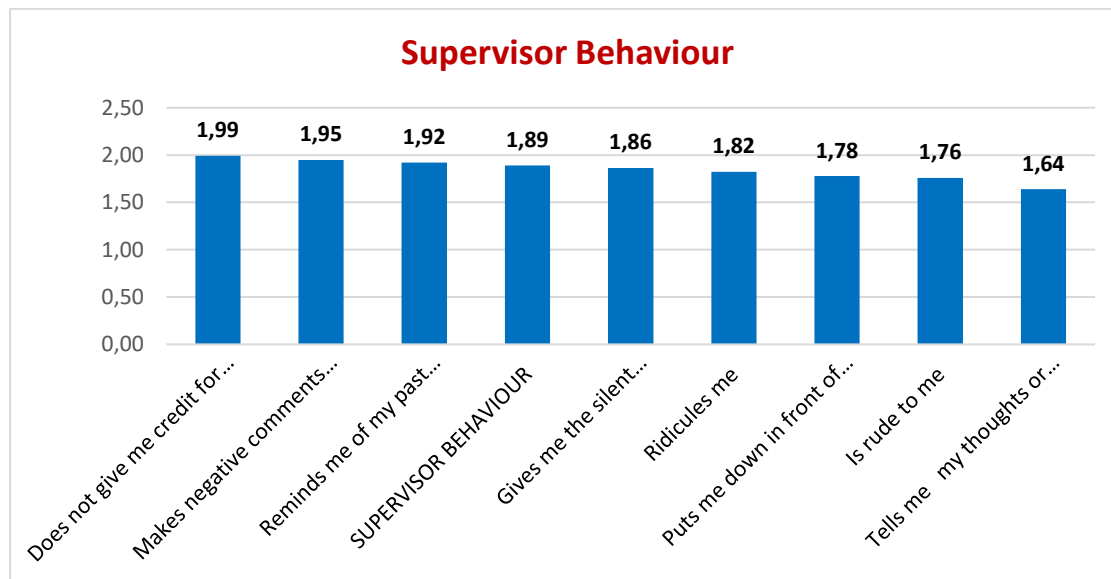
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>5.7</b>	I am enthusiastic about my job					
	<b>5.8</b>	My job inspires me					
	<b>5.9</b>	I am proud on the work that I do					
	<b>5.10</b>	To me, my job is challenging					
<b>Absorption</b>	<b>5.11</b>	Time flies when I'm working					
	<b>5.12</b>	When I am working, I forget everything else around me					
	<b>5.13</b>	I feel happy when I am working intensely					
	<b>5.14</b>	I am immersed in my work					
	<b>5.15</b>	I get carried away when I'm working					

*Note: Adapted from Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2003). Utrecht work engagement scale-9. Educational and Psychological Measurement.*

## APPENDIX C: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The following sub-sections provide the descriptive statistics for each of the factors, by construct. The mean scores, depicting the direction of agreement or disagreement, with the standard deviation that measures how far the respondents deviated from the norm, are also presented.

### Supervisor behaviour



1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree

Figure C1

#### Descriptive statistics for supervisor behaviour

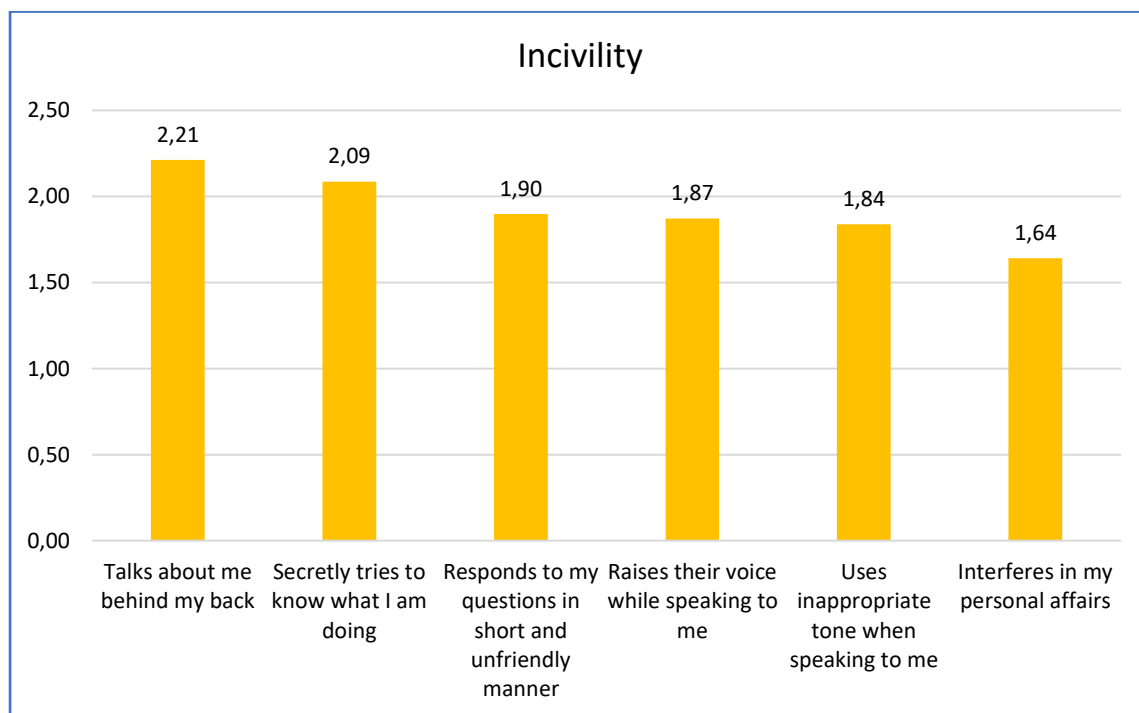
The results of the study reveal that the three aspects that employees most strongly disagreed with were related to disrespectful behaviour and invasion of privacy (Figure C1). First, a significant majority of employees disagreed that their supervisors were rude to them, indicating that they did not experience disrespectful treatment in terms of tone or language. Second, employees disagreed that their supervisors told them their thoughts or feelings were stupid, showing that they did not feel belittled or invalidated in their emotional experiences. Lastly, employees disagreed that their supervisors invaded their privacy, indicating a sense of respect for personal boundaries.

On the other hand, the three aspects that employees least disagreed with were related to negative behaviour and lack of recognition. Employees did not strongly disagree that their supervisors did not give them credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort, implying a potential lack of acknowledgement and appreciation for their hard work. Similarly, employees reported that

their supervisors made negative comments about them to others, indicating the existence of potential gossip or negative talk behind their backs. Additionally, employees reported that their supervisors reminded them of their past mistakes and failures, suggesting a potential focus on past errors rather than growth and improvement.

These findings highlight the importance of respectful behaviour, recognition and constructive feedback in fostering a positive and supportive work environment. They also suggest areas where supervisor behaviour could be improved to promote a more positive and inclusive workplace atmosphere. Supervisors must provide constructive feedback, recognise employees' efforts and refrain from negative comments or dwelling on past mistakes. This can contribute to a more motivated and engaged workforce, ultimately benefiting both the employees and the organisation.

### 5.5.2 Incivility



1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree

Figure C2

#### Descriptive statistics for incivility

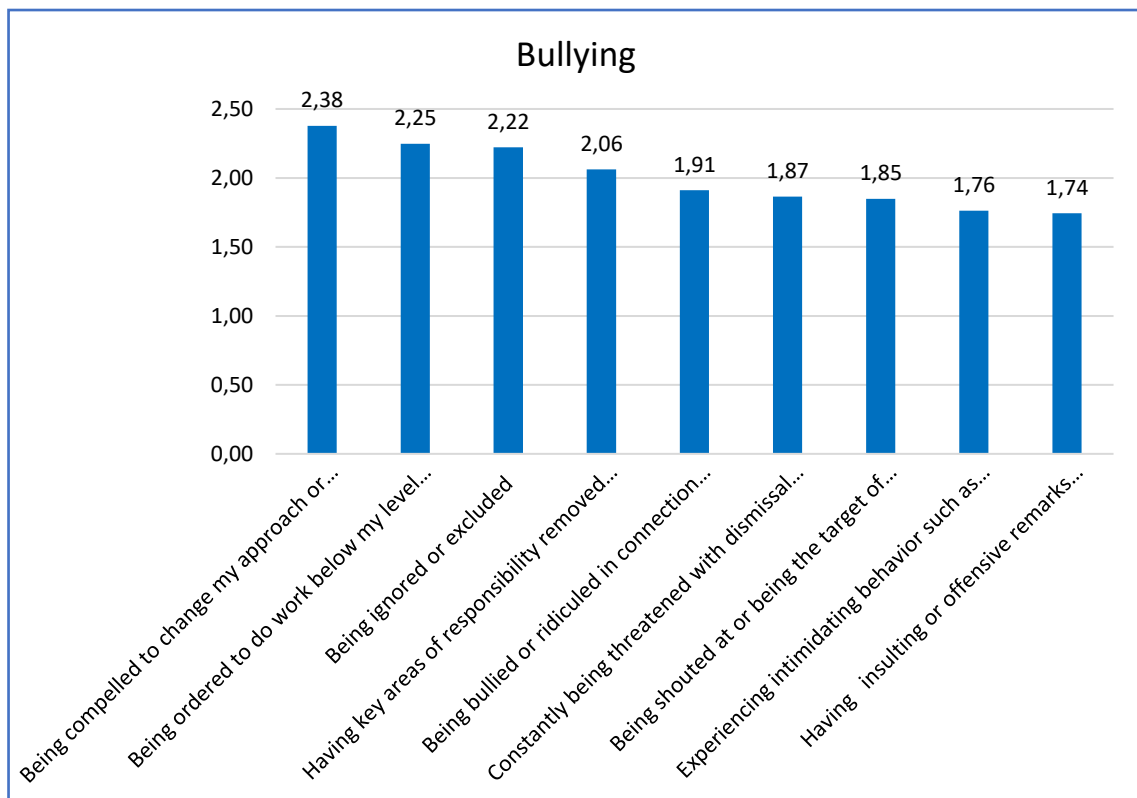
The study revealed that the aspect that employees most strongly disagreed with was their supervisors interfering in their personal affairs. This indicates that employees did not appreciate their supervisors getting involved in their personal lives and preferred them to maintain a healthy boundary between work and personal matters.

On the other hand, the aspects that employees least disagreed with were related to supervisors talking about them behind their backs and secretly trying to know what they were doing. This suggests that there may be instances where employees feel that their supervisors engage in gossip or inappropriate monitoring of their activities.

These findings highlight the importance of maintaining trust and confidentiality in the supervisor-employee relationship. Employees value their privacy and expect their supervisors to respect boundaries and not engage in negative discussions about them behind their backs. Additionally, employees prefer a work environment where supervisors focus on their work-related responsibilities rather than prying into their personal lives.

To foster a more positive work culture, supervisors should be mindful of their actions and maintain professionalism by avoiding gossip and intrusive behaviour. Respecting employee privacy and maintaining open and honest communication can cultivate a sense of trust and create a more harmonious work environment.

### 5.5.3 Bullying



1 = Very unlikely, 2 = Unlikely, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Likely, 5 = Very likely

Figure C3

*Descriptive statistics for bullying*

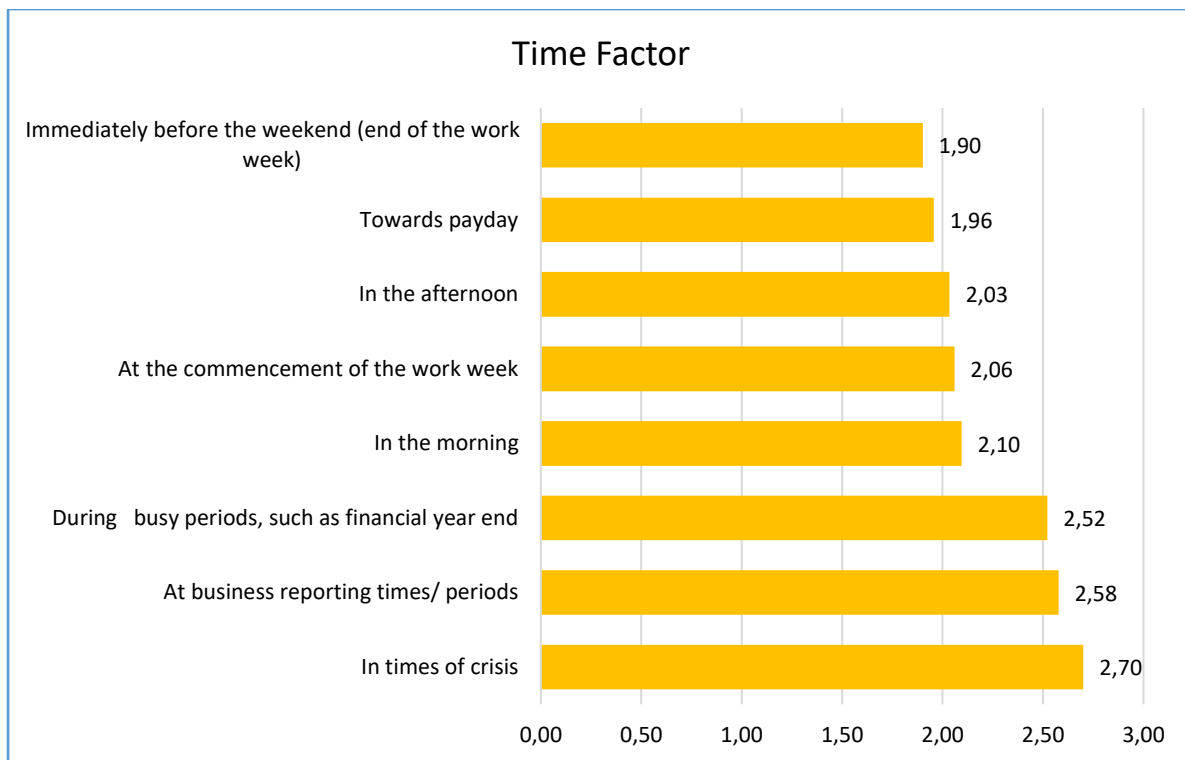
The study revealed that the aspect that employees most strongly disagreed with was experiencing intimidating behaviour, such as finger pointing. This suggests that employees did not feel comfortable or supported when faced with intimidating actions from their supervisors. Additionally, employees strongly disagreed with having insulting or offensive remarks made about their person, indicating a desire for respectful and professional communication.

On the other hand, the aspects that employees least disagreed with or had the most agreement on, were being compelled to change their approach or decision, being ordered to do work below their level of competence and being ignored or excluded. This suggests that there may be instances where employees feel their autonomy, expertise and contributions are not valued or respected by their supervisors.

These findings emphasise the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive work environment. Supervisors should strive to provide constructive feedback, empower employees to make decisions and assign tasks that align with their expertise. Additionally, supervisors should ensure that all employees are valued and included, avoiding behaviours that can lead to feelings of exclusion or indifference.

By addressing these areas of concern organisations can promote a culture that values employee input, fosters collaboration and respects individual skills and contributions. This can lead to increased employee engagement, satisfaction and overall organisational success.

#### **5.5.4 Timing factor**



1 = Very unlikely, 2 = Unlikely, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Likely, 5 = Very likely

Figure C4

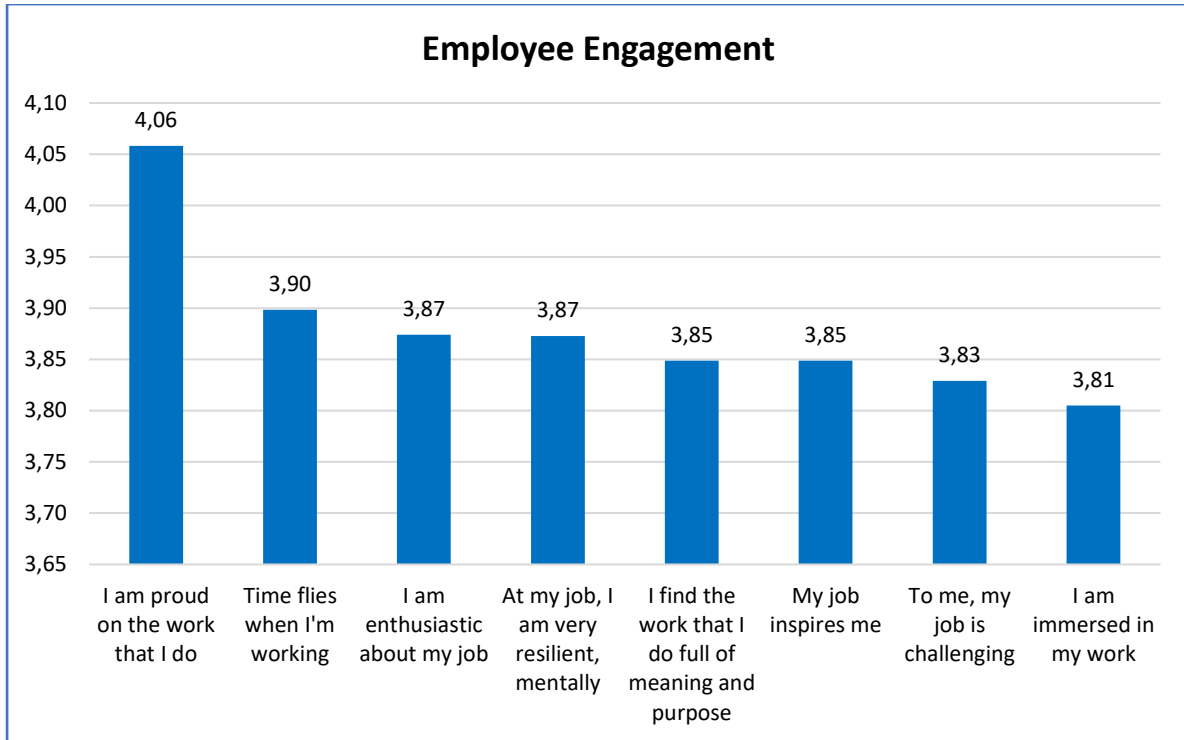
#### *Descriptive statistics for time factor*

The study findings suggest that employees most strongly disagreed with aspects related to payday and immediately before the weekend, indicating potential dissatisfaction or issues during these times. This could imply that employees may experience financial stress or a desire to have their workweek end smoothly and without added pressure.

However, employees least disagreed with aspects related to timings of crises, business reporting timings or periods and busy periods such as the financial year-end. This suggests that employees may feel more engaged and focused during these times, potentially due to the urgency and importance of tasks that need to be completed.

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of considering the timing and context in which employees may experience disagreement or agreement. By understanding these patterns, organisations can proactively address any issues during challenging periods, while also capitalising on employees' engagement and satisfaction during critical business reporting or busy periods. This approach can contribute to a more positive work environment and improved employee performance.

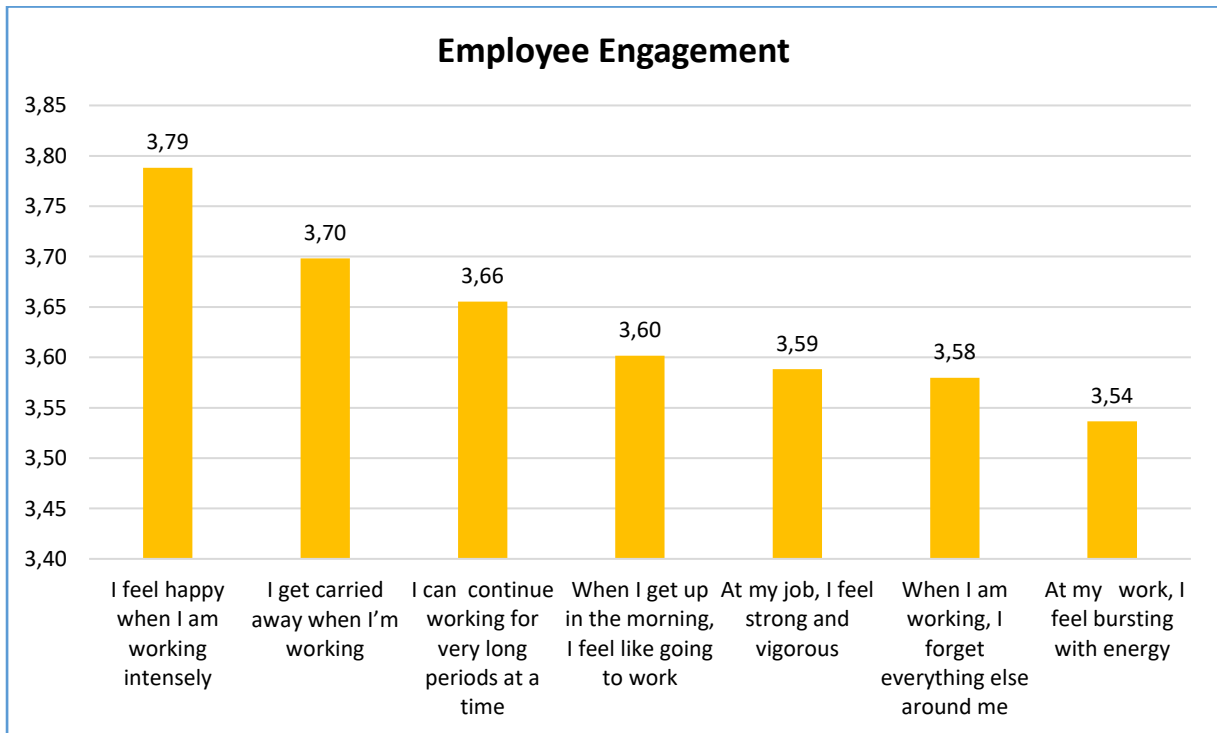
#### **Employee engagement**



1 = Almost never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Very often

Figure C5

#### Descriptive statistics for employee engagement



1 = Almost never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Very often

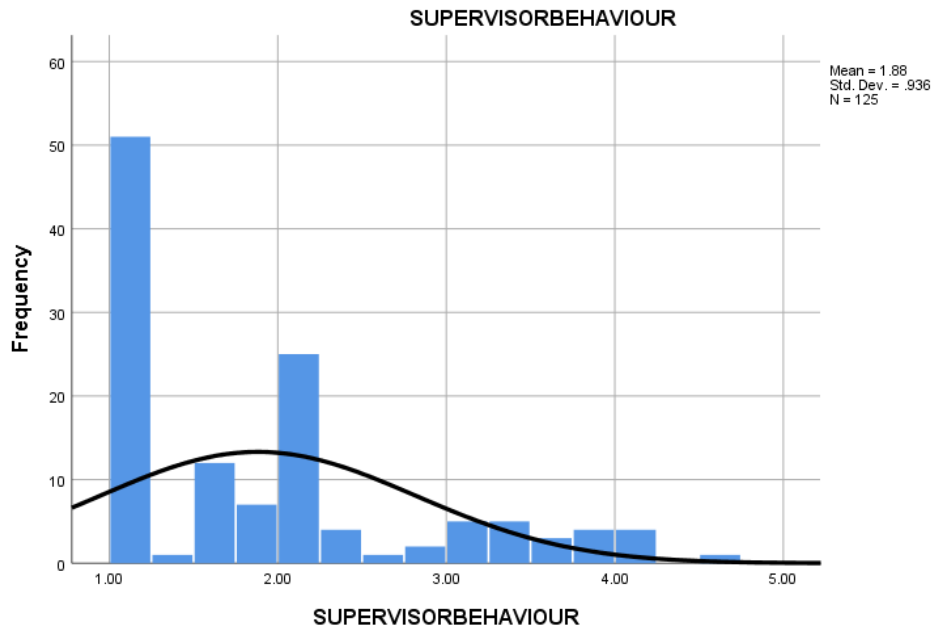
Figure C6



*Descriptive statistics for employee engagement (cont.)*

**Sub-scales: testing normality**

To compute the sub-scales, the scores for all the items (factors) in the scale are summed up and divided by the total.



*Figure C7*

*Distribution test results for supervisor behaviour*

The data for the supervisor behaviour (Figure C7) is not normally distributed, as it is skewed to the left, towards disagreement.

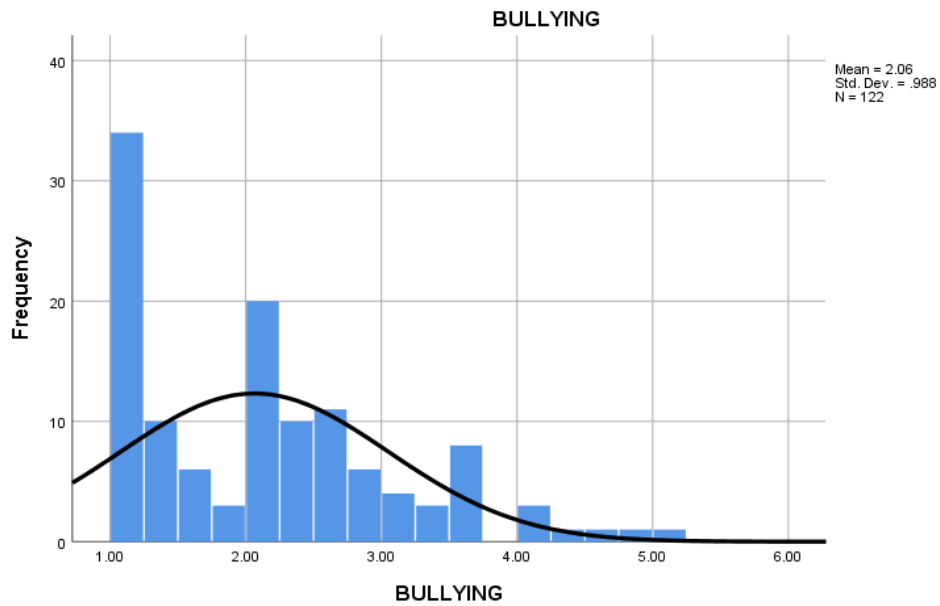


Figure C8

*Distribution test results for bullying*

The data for the bullying (Figure C8) is not normally distributed, as it is skewed to the left, negatively skewed, towards disagreement of bullying behaviour.

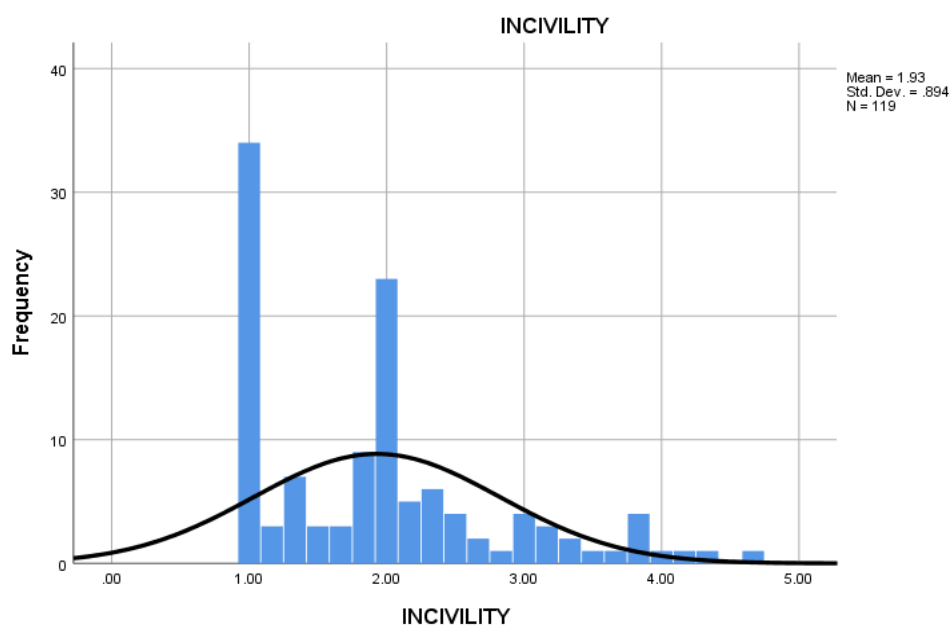


Figure C9

*Distribution test results for incivility*

Data for incivility behaviour (Figure C9) does not part much from normality, although it is negatively skewed, towards disagreement about incivility behaviour.

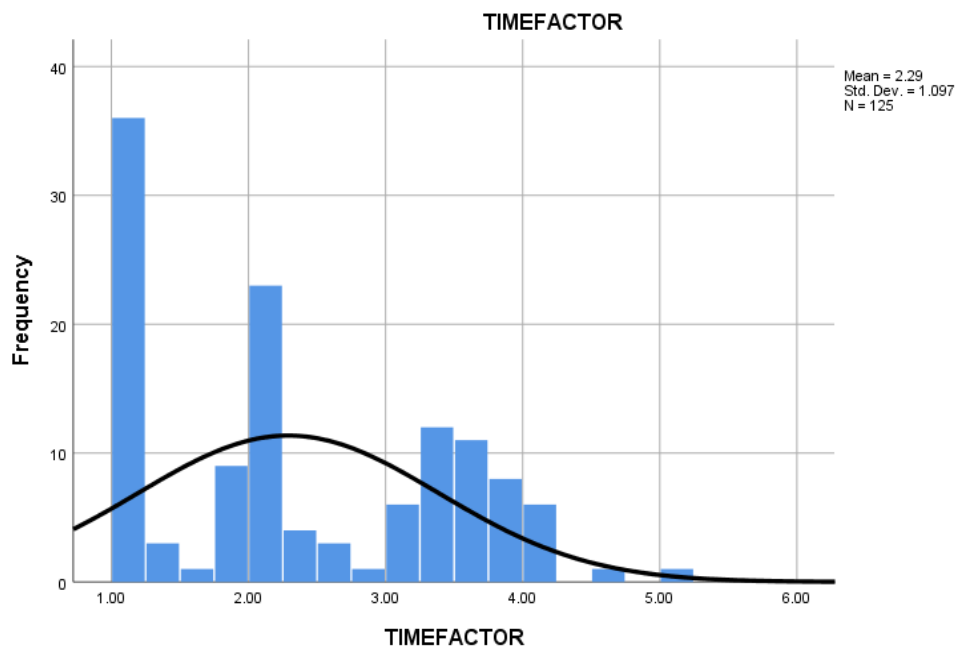


Figure C10

*Distribution test results for time factor*

The data for the time factor (Figure C10) is not normally distributed, as it is skewed to the left, negatively skewed, towards disagreement about the negative effects of timing factors on employees.

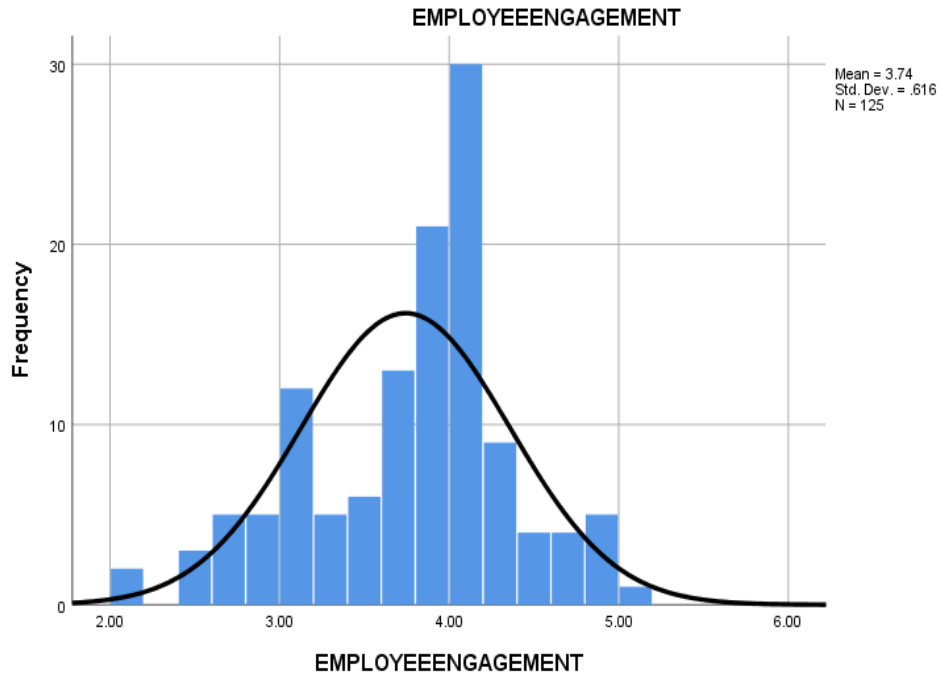


Figure C11

*Distribution test results for work engagement*

Data for work engagement (Figure C11) does not part much from normality; it follows a bell shape, and the mean is 3.76, suggesting agreement that there was work engagement in this sample.

**Leader workplace aggression composite scale**

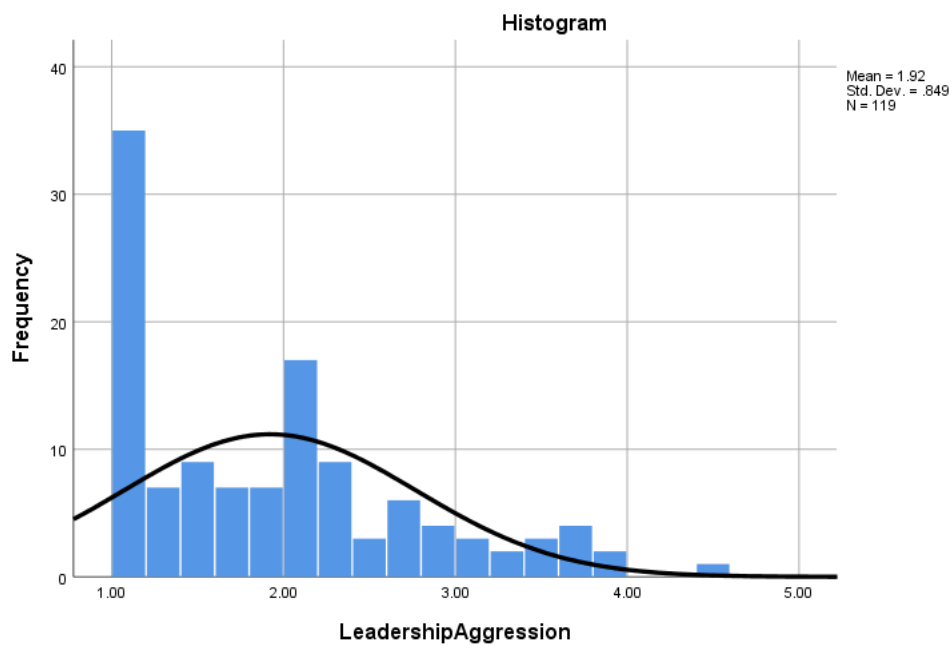


Figure C12

### *Leader workplace aggression Composite Scale*

*1 = Almost never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Very often*

The mean value for Leader workplace aggression is 1.9206. This indicates that, on average, the respondents demonstrate a low level of aggression in their leadership behaviours. The standard deviation of 0.84926 shows little variability or dispersion of the data points around the mean (general perception). The skewness value of 0.800 indicates a moderately positive skewness. This means that the data distribution is slightly skewed to the right, with a longer tail on the positive side.