# Leader-follower relationships as a driver of Employee commitment in South African Small and Medium Enterprises

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# Abstract

The South African economy is experiencing a difficult economic period, characterised by low growth rates and high unemployment. The importance of Small and Medium Enterprises in unlocking economic growth and in creating the much-needed employment opportunities is widely advocated. Business practitioners and economist, however, note that the Small and Medium Enterprises in South Africa have been failing at high rates. This high rate of failure formed the motivation of this research with the aim of adding to our understanding of what can be done to ensure the success of the Small and Medium Enterprises. This research aimed to examine the extent to which followers' commitment is influenced by how they perceive their relationships with their leaders. Understanding of follower commitment was considered an important area of study due to the link between commitment and organisational success.

Leadership scholars are aligned in their thinking that one of the most important drivers of organisational success is employees who are committed to both their work tasks and the organisation. Furthermore, leadership research suggests that leader-follower relationships are a driver of follower commitment. Using the Leader-Member Exchange theory as the basis for the study, the aim of this research was to understand the influence of leader-follower relationships on follower commitment. To this end, the research unbundled leader-follower relationships into three latent constructs: perceived leader support, perceived relationship quality and perceived leadership characteristics. Follower commitment was unbundled into task engagement and organisational commitment.

A quantitative study was conducted using the two study variables, which are leader-follower relationships and follower commitment. An online questionnaire was distributed to the target population which was made up of leader-followers who work in South African Small and Medium Enterprises. Leader-followers were defined as professionally qualified individuals, middle and senior managers. Responses received from 155 participants were used to test the hypotheses that were developed to test the relationship between leader-follower relationships and follower commitment.

The analysis found a statistically significant and positive relationship between leader-follower relationships and follower commitment. The findings of the study empirically

support existing literature which suggests that a positive relationship exists between leader-follower relationships and follower commitment in small and medium enterprises. This study found that relationship quality has the most significant impact on follower commitment and leader characteristics have a higher influence on commitment compared to leader support. The findings of this study add to current literature and also offer opportunities for future studies to expand our current understanding of leadership and followership.

# 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 Business Administration 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 carry out this research.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Problem

## 1.1 Research problem and objectives

The fourth industrial revolution is fundamentally changing the world of business at a rapid pace, radically altering the world of work and how business is done (Hirschi, 2018). For business organisations to succeed and remain sustainable amidst this rapid change, they need to be able to adapt to this change. Business leaders need to be able to effectively map out strategies and lead employees to adapt to the change. In driving this adaptation, business leaders are demanding more from their followers (Xie et al., 2018) and this requires the followers to be committed to the change efforts to adapt to the changing environment (Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017).

Lee and Puranam (2016) suggest that business success is considerably dependent on the successful implementation of the organisational strategy and how the implementation is carried out by employees. It is undeniable that leaders of organisations that succeed are praised and likewise leaders are criticised and found liable when their organisations fail (Newark, 2018). Inyang, Agnihotri and Munoz (2018) suggest that one of the barriers to organisational success is low levels of employee commitment. This means that a fundamental role of leaders is to rally their followers to be committed to the effective implementation of organisational strategy. It is suggested that business success in a rapidly changing environment is dependent on:

(i)     how leaders adapt and lead the change; and
(ii)    how committed employees are, to following their leaders in implementing the change.

Leadership has been defined as a relationship of interactive influence amongst leaders and followers, within a given context, to achieve collective goals (Linde, 2010; Silva, 2016). Inherent to this definition is the fact that leadership goes beyond the position of leaders, but it has more to do with the relationship and influence between two interacting parties. This brings an understanding that leadership is not just about positionality, but it is about one's ability to influence others to follow a desired course of action (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). This understanding puts the destiny of an organisation in the hands of the leader in that the success of the organisation is strongly reliant on the ability of leaders to influence employee

commitment in following the leader. It is, therefore, crucial for leaders to create a work environment through which they can influence followers into high levels of commitment. It is a widely held view in leadership theory that employee commitment is influenced to a high degree by the relationship between leader and follower. Therefore, understanding of how relationships between leaders and followers influence followers' commitment is vitally important in a continually changing environment.

The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory as discussed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) has been instrumental in building our understanding of relationships between leaders and their followers.  The LMX theory is a relationship-based view on leadership which posits that in the interactions between leaders and followers, dyadic relationships are formed. The relationships are dyadic because they are formed between two individuals, the leader and the follower, based on their interactions within the organisational setting. The theory suggests that the quality of these dyadic relationships has a direct influence on organisational and employee outcomes. This suggests that for leaders to effectively motivate positive work and task attitudes that result in commitment from their followers, they must create high-quality relationships with their followers.

The LMX theory suggests that in the dyadic relationships between leaders and followers, unique exchange relationships are formed (C. Liao, Wayne, Liden, & Meuser, 2017). The relationships are considered unique on the basic principle that leaders form interpersonal relationships with each of their followers and how they relate will differ based on the nature of their interactions. The relationship with each follower will differ in quality, which leads to different levels of exchange occurs (Qu, Janssen, & Shi, 2017). The exchange occurs in the form of each party reciprocating the other party's investment in the relationship. That is, the leader invests in the relationship by setting the work context, and the follower reciprocates by investing effort into work task performance (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & Van Den Heuvel, 2015).

The perceived quality of the exchange relationship is believed to affect the follower's cognition, their attitudes and commitment towards work tasks (Breevaart et al., 2015). Data from several suggests that high-quality relationships are built on reciprocated trust, shared respect and a shared obligation, whereas low-quality relationships are centred on a formal employment agreement (Martin, Guillaume,

Thomas, Lee, & Epitropaki, 2016; Qu et al., 2017). The higher the quality of the exchange relationship, the more mature the interpersonal relationship between leader and follower becomes. LMX theory is based on the principle that effective leadership transpires when leaders and followers create mature relationships. This explains the importance of relationships in the leadership process, suggesting that leaders should strive to foster high-quality relationships with their followers in order to influence employee commitment.

Employee commitment is an area of research that has been of interest to researchers due to its purported link to positive organisational outcomes (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015; Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017). Employee commitment is defined as an authentic expression of an individual's cognitive, physical and emotional self (Bailey et al., 2017) that results in a positive and fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, absorption and dedication (Albrecht et al., 2015). This definition suggests that commitment is a state of mind and a perceptual issue, implying that by understanding follower perceptions and state of mind, a leader can influence the commitment of employees to follow.

Many of the leadership studies appear to have been primarily leader-centric with little focus on followership and how it affects the leadership process (Kong, Xu, Zhou, & Yuan, 2019; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Existing literature has put much emphasis on leadership style and its effects on follower outcomes. The focus of the studies has mainly been on transformational and transactional leadership styles (Xie et al., 2018). A review of leadership literature conducted by M. H. Anderson and Sun (2017) revealed the myriad adjectives used in the literature to describe leadership styles. Surprisingly, few studies have investigated the relational aspect of leadership and how the relationship between leader and follower impacts the leadership outcomes. The studies that investigated the relational aspects of leadership have focused on public service employees in well-developed economies with low rates of unemployment (Breevaart et al., 2015; Gooty & Yammarino, 2016; Gutermann, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Boer, Born, & Voelpel, 2017). There are currently very few similar studies that have been conducted in developing economies. Consequently, very little is currently known about the influence of relationships with the leader on follower commitment in developing economies.

This research assesses the interpersonal aspect of the leadership process from the perspective of the leader-follower in their role as a follower. In this study, a leader-

follower is defined as an organisational actor who simultaneously takes up the role of being a leader and a follower (Bradberry, 2017). In the context of this study, the leader-follower relationship relates to the interpersonal relationship that exists between a leader and a follower (Niemeyer & Cavazotte, 2016). The assessment of the LMX relationship quality was carried out on the level of this leader-follower relationship. In contrast to other studies that have been done in well-developed economies, this study was conducted in a low-growth economy facing high levels of unemployment.

It is suggested that additional pressures are being added to leader-follower relationships as a result of the changing world of work driven by the fourth industrial revolution. The fourth industrial revolution is expected to not only impact businesses but to also impact individual career experiences (Hirschi, 2018). The 2016 World Economic Forum (WEF) report on future jobs in South Africa, forecasts a decline of jobs in four of the six main industries that the report considered (WEF, 2016). In addition to this, a Gallup (2014) study reports that the world is facing an employee engagement crisis, reporting that worldwide, only 13% of employees are engaged in their work (Mann & Harter, 2016). South African employee engagement is reported to be only 9%, with 46% not engaged and 45% actively disengaged (Gallup, 2014). A major challenge for leaders in this environment is the need to position and enable their followers to adapt and remain committed amid the rapid changes in the world of work (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). The importance of influencing higher levels of follower commitment in a context plagued by such low levels of commitment is indisputable.

The role of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa has become increasingly important in job creation and the economic recovery of the country. This places the responsibility to create and manage sustainable business models on the leaders of SMEs. To improve the likelihood of business sustainability in a highly competitive and evolving business environment, organisational leaders must ensure high follower commitment to adapt to the changing business environment.

South African SMEs are said to have one of the highest failure rates in the world, with 70% to 80% failing within the first three years of existence (Bruwer & Siwangaza, 2016). SMEs play a pivotal role as drivers of inclusive economic growth in South Africa and the rest of the world. Estimates are that in South Africa SMEs account for roughly 34% of GDP, 91% of formal businesses and employ about 60% of the labour

force (The Banking Association South Africa, 2019). Given this argument, it is inferred that organisations need to be able to adapt to a rapidly changing environment to remain sustainable. Leaders of South African SMEs must, therefore, drive up the levels of commitment from their followers to enable adaptation and remain relevant in an ever-changing environment.

Research by Albrecht et al. (2015) has shown a positive association between employee commitment and organisational outcomes. Employee commitment is positively linked to positive outcomes, which include innovative work behaviour (Bailey et al., 2017), employee productivity and organisational citizenship behaviour (Shamim, Cang, & Yu, 2017). Such research findings show the importance of employee commitment to organisational success. Bailey et al. (2017) state that employees choose whether to wholly and truly invest themselves in work tasks based on their experiences and perceptions of the contextual work environment. This employee commitment is regarded as a cognitive, physical and emotional process through which employees approach work tasks.

This research aims to add to the understanding of the influence of follower perceptions in the leadership-follower model by exploring the perspective of Leader-followers in the contemporary world of work. As suggested by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014), leadership cannot be fully understood without considering the follower perspective and how followership influences leadership outcomes. Jacobsen and Andersen (2015), in their study, found that follower commitment is only affected by leadership when they notice it. This suggests that the outcomes of the relationship between a leader and follower are only positive when the followers perceive the relationship as positive. To that end, this study adds to our understanding of the impact of followership and follower perceptions in the leadership process.

The understanding of the perception of followers has become necessary in leadership theory and practical business application. It is essential to explore the perception of followers and to understand whether the leader-follower perspective is dependent on inherent variables such as generational transition. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of the role that leader-follower relationships play in influencing work commitment from followers. Understanding this relationship will assist leaders of organisations in adopting the appropriate leadership attitudes to influence high levels of work commitment and display the right behaviours in the leader-follower relationship to increase the probability of business success.

Considering the posited arguments, the objective of this study was to understand how followers' perceptions of the nature of their relationship with their leaders affect the followers' work commitment. This objective was achieved through the answering of the research question. This research argues that answering the research question will add valuable knowledge to the leadership fraternity that will aid in improving the success of South African SMEs. The study was carried out in South Africa, which is an economic context characterised by low growth and high unemployment (Statistics South Africa, 2019b). The economic context of the country necessitated this study as it is expected that answering of the research question will add to our understanding of how leader interactions with followers, impact on organisational success in a tough business and economic environment.

To foster organisational success and sustainability, the challenge for leaders is how to effectively manage a team of individuals that are committed to organisational success (Newman, Tse, Schwarz, & Nielsen, 2018). This challenge is exacerbated in a business context like that of South Africa, where unemployment is high, and businesses are failing. Employee commitment means that employees are willing to take risks and demonstrate extra-role performance (L. Lu, Lu, Gursoy, & Neale, 2016). This risk-taking and extra-role performance are among the primary factors that facilitate organisational success, however, in tough economic conditions, employees might not be willing to take risks but instead will try to stay safe and stick to the rules (Xie et al., 2018). It is, therefore, of high importance that leaders understand how they can interact with their followers to influence higher levels of commitment in a constrained economic context.

To this end, the research question that this study seeks to answer is "*To what extent does the follower's perception of the nature of the leader-follower relationship affect the follower's commitment to work tasks and the organisation*?". Given the research problem presented, the general aim of this study is to determine which characteristics and behaviours of leaders as perceived by followers have the most significant impact on creating positive follower commitment.

A quantitative study was undertaken to address the research question. The study was conducted among leader-followers at senior, middle and professionally qualified levels in SMEs in South Africa. In South Africa, SMEs are defined by the National Small Business Amendment Act (No. 26 of 2003), on a number of criteria, which include "industrial sector and subsector classification, total full-time paid employees,

turnover and asset value – excluding fixed property" (The Banking Association South Africa, 2019). For the purposes of this research, SMEs were defined as organisations with between 50 and 200 full-time employees.

The specific research questions that arise from these aims and objectives are:

1. What are the perceptions of leader-followers of their leaders in selected South African SME workplaces?
2. Does a positive perception of the relationship between leaders and followers positively relate to follower commitment?
3. Does perceived leader support positively relate to relationship quality?
4. Are relationship perceptions moderated by demographic variables?

By answering these questions, the research aimed to advise practitioners and leaders of businesses that are seeking growth in fast-changing environments and tough economic environments. This study also has relevance for prospective leaders who wish to improve their understanding of how they can successfully navigate team dynamics and lead a team of highly committed individuals.

## 1.2 Scope of the research

The participants for this study were selected from SMEs within South Africa. The South African economy is on a slowdown and unemployment is on the rise, and SMEs are believed to be a key driver of economic growth and employment creation. This formed the motivation for focusing this study on SMEs. In addition, the decision to use SMEs was based on the belief that SMEs were more accessible, and this helped to facilitate the data collection process. Although the focus of the research was on South African SMEs, the findings of the study are useful and applicable to other sectors within South Africa as well as organisations that are outside of South Africa. The research findings are particularly useful to leaders who seek to influence higher levels of employee commitment to facilitate organisational success.

## 1.3 Structure of the research

To enable the answering of the research question, this study is structured into seven chapters. Chapter one serves as an introduction to the research problem, and the rest of the paper is set out as follows:

- Chapter two: uses existing academic literature to put forward an argument that demonstrates the need for the study.
- Chapter three: summarises the research hypotheses that were constructed based on the review of existing literature.
- Chapter four: describes the methodology that was utilized for this research
- Chapter five: illustrates the data collected, analysis techniques employed, and presents the results to facilitate the answering of the research question
- Chapter six: discusses the results of the study as presented in chapter five
- Chapter seven: presents the main findings of this study, highlights the implications of the findings and offers suggestions for future research

The following chapter provides a review of existing literature in the areas of leadership, followership, employee commitment, leader-follower relationship from the lens of LMX. The literature review will shed more light on the work that has already been done in the areas that this research paper is focused on. The gaps identified in the literature are further expanded in the literature review.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

Follower commitment has been linked to positive organisational outcomes, making the management of follower commitment an important task for organisational leaders (Albrecht et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2017). Scholars such as Breevaart et al. (2015) and Martin et al. (2016) have studied the influences of leadership on follower commitment and concluded that the interactions between leaders and followers have a direct influence on the levels of employee commitment.

This chapter provides an analysis of existing literature into leader-follower theory and employee commitment. Understanding of the leadership process was broken down into its different components, which are the leader, the follower and the interpersonal relationship between leader and follower (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This breakdown acknowledges the social interactions, in the form of a relationship, between a leader and a follower. It is also acknowledged in this study that the outcomes of the leadership process, in influencing followers, are a direct function of how these three components interact.

A review of the literature on employee commitment was undertaken to provide an understanding of the drivers and impact of employee commitment. Arguments were then constructed to highlight the importance of understanding the impact of the relational aspect of the leadership process. The argument goes further to highlight how the relationship is affected by perceptual judgments and that it is vital to understand the perceptions of the followers in managing follower commitment.

## 2.2 Introduction to Leader-Follower theory

As the external business environment changes, businesses need to continually adapt internally to respond appropriately to opportunities and threats in order to ensure organisational sustainability (Hambrick & Lovelace, 2018). Scholars have noted that responding to the changing context is the responsibility of all organisational actors in their respective capacities as leaders and followers (Lee & Puranam, 2016; Lynch & Mors, 2019). It is widely acknowledged in literature that it is the responsibility of organisational leaders to set the course of the organisation by

developing a strategy that will lead to business success. While it is the responsibility of the followers to execute the strategy that is developed by the leaders (Greer, Lusch, & Hitt, 2017; Winn, 2017). Several studies have been carried out to understand the effects of employee commitment on the successful execution of organisational strategy. The findings have primarily shown that a positive relationship exists between the levels of employee commitment and organisational outcomes (Albrecht et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2017; Ng, 2015). The findings of such studies suggest that committed employees hold a vital key to the success of the organisation and it is, therefore, an important task for organisational leaders to influence high levels of commitment from their followers.

The need for business to continually adapt is even more pronounced in a business context where the environment is rapidly changing, and the economy is weak. In such an operating environment, businesses need to continually adapt to remain sustainable (Lynch & Mors, 2019). Several studies have postulated that the leader's role in such a context is to direct business adaptability through sense-giving (Hambrick & Lovelace, 2018), and facilitating adjustments to strategies (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014). Sense-giving is the process through which a leader influences meaning construction and sensemaking in individuals towards an acceptable organisational outcome (Hambrick & Lovelace, 2018). It can, therefore, be concluded that, in its nature, sense-giving recognises that leadership is grounded in a relationship of influence between a leader and followers (Silva, 2016). This influence stems from the leader's behaviours, the follower's judgement of the leader as well as the background under which the leader-follower relationship occurs (Niemeyer & Cavazotte, 2016). The follower plays an equally important role in organisational adaptability. According to Zhu, Avolio and Walumbwa (2016) the follower plays the role of an independent thinker who is willing to take risks and work hard for the attainment of the organisational objectives. If this assertion is accurate it can be argued that followers become the brand builders who deliver the brand promise to customers (Auh, Menguc, Spyropoulou, & Wang, 2016).

Leadership research has largely been leader-centric and has neglected the role played by the follower in the leader-follower process. Owens and Hekman (2016) and Snaebjornsson and Vaiciukynaite (2016) suggest that although there are many different views about leadership, there is consensus that leadership is a process which requires more than one party. This brings the understanding that leadership

process can be viewed as involving two parties, the leader and the follower, whose interactions are mediated by the existence of a relationship. Scholars who view leadership from a relational perspective are in agreement that the quality of the relationship between the leader and the follower will have a direct impact on organisational outcomes (Breevaart et al., 2015; Caillier, 2017; Liang et al., 2016; Owens & Hekman, 2016).

This study focuses on the leader-follower, who is defined as an organisational actor that simultaneously take up the roles of leader and follower in their day to day activities. Ahearne et al. (2014) have suggested that leader-followers have both upward and downward influence in the achievement of organisational goals through leveraging both formal and informal structures of the organisation. Furthermore, the authors suggest that compared to senior executives, leader-followers are closer to operational activities, yet they are far enough from frontline work to still see the bigger picture. Consequently, being close to the operational activities means leader-followers are better positioned to sense environmental changes and suggest strategies to adapt to the changing environment based on the organisational goals. This puts leader-followers in a position where they can facilitate adaptation to the changing environment by giving and receiving direction to advance organisational goals (Xie et al., 2018).

The following section discusses the role played by the leader in the leadership process.


## 2.3 The role of the leader in the leadership process

Section 2.1 notes that this paper breaks down the leadership process into three components and that the first component is the leader. Having introduced the leader-follower theory in the previous section, this section discusses the role of the leader in the leadership process.

According to Hambrick and Quigley (2014), leaders vary in their effectiveness, and this has a direct impact on organisational success. However, despite the differences in effectiveness, leaders all play a similar role in organisations. Silva (2016) sums up the role of a leader as that of influencing followers to adopt a desired course of action through shaping organisational structure and motivation. This view is captured in the definition of leadership by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) who define leadership as a process

of influence that is co-created in relational and social interactions between two individuals. This perspective recognises that leadership can only exist when there are followers that are willing to be influenced. It is believed that through their influence on followers, leaders, directly and indirectly, have an impact on organisational outcomes.

Researchers have attempted to evaluate the impact of the leader's influence using the social contagion theory and have found it to be positively correlated to team performance. In a study involving 161 teams, Owens and Hekman (2016) asked the question of how a leader's behaviour influences team performance. The findings of their study show that the leader's behaviour can create an emergent state that will ultimately affect team performance. These findings bring to light the need for leaders to understand the specific types of behaviours that will positively influence team performance.

It is a widely held view that the role of the leader extends to setting the work atmosphere and the team's working culture (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2015). Xie et al. (2018) add to this view by suggesting that leaders set the culture by being the moral model and provide vision incentive for followers. Moral model refers to the interpretation of the significance of work tasks and providing values that instil a sense of pride in followers. Vision incentive is how leaders make followers aware of their expectations through the distribution of meaningful and challenging tasks. This view on leadership suggests that the role of the leader in an organisational setting is to meet the reasonable needs of followers and to motivate them by offering both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives (Deinert, Homan, Boer, Voelpel, & Gutermann, 2015; Xie et al., 2018).

Much of leadership literature has a strong focus on two types of leadership styles, transformational leadership and transactional leadership (Deinert et al., 2015; Inyang et al., 2018; Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Transformational leadership has been purported to be the ideal style of leadership to maximise follower output. This is achieved through influencing followers to transcend their self-interest through a meaningful exchange that is guided by a shared vision between leaders and followers (Lehmann-Willenbrock, Meinecke, Rowold, & Kauffeld, 2015). By having a shared vision with followers, it is believed that transformational leaders are more likely to promote obedience and deference in followers (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2015). However, in their study

Jaiswal & Dhar (2015), also show that the positive effects of transformational leadership are more apparent in collectivist cultures.

Studies by Hughes et al. (2018); Inyang et al. (2018); Lehmann-Willenbrock, Meinecke, Rowlod and Kauffeld (2015) and Xie et al. (2018), suggest that although transactional leadership has received less research attention than transformational leadership, it has nonetheless captured the attention of scholars. Sometimes, pitted as the opposite of transformational leadership, the transactional leadership style is concerned with motivating followers by offering timely and appropriate material incentives (Xie et al., 2018). Transactional leadership is viewed as a weaker form of leadership as it is based on material exchange rather than a vision that inspires action. However, transactional leadership has been found to be an effective form of leadership in cases where an organisation is in pursuit of efficiency (Donate & Sánchez de Pablo, 2015). This suggests that the role of leaders extends to having the contextual intelligence of knowing when to apply which style of leadership to help them achieve their leadership objectives.

Leadership has been argued to be one of the most important contextual factors that shape the team's performance (Owens & Hekman, 2016). The basis for this argument is that the leadership's behaviour is what shapes the dominant culture and values in an organisation, thus providing an enabling structure for follower performance (Martin et al., 2016; Owens & Hekman, 2016). Watts, Steele and Mumford (2019), hold a similar view and suggest that the leader's role involves crafting and articulating a desired vision that guides followers in their work tasks. This view relegates the role of the follower to that of a receiver of the leader's influence instead of being an active participant in the relationship. Clarke and Mahadi (2014) argue that followers are autonomous agents, suggesting that followers have the discretion to choose whether they want to be influenced. It is therefore essential to understand the role that the follower plays in the leader-follower relationship to start to get to an understanding of the right mix of relational factors to promote the desired organisational and employee outcomes. Consequently, the following section discusses the role of the follower in the leadership process.

## 2.4 The role of followers in the leadership process

The second component of the leadership process, as discussed in section 2.1, is the follower. This section offers a discussion of the role played by the follower in the leadership process towards the achievement of the leadership objectives.

In assessing the role of followers in leader-follower relationships, researchers have investigated different perspectives on the follower's contribution to the leadership process. Snaebjornsson and Vaiciukynaite (2016) suggest that the different perspectives on the role of the follower can be categorised into four viewpoints, which are:

  i.    Leadership can only exist if followers acknowledge the leader
  ii.   Followers as receivers of the leader's influence
  iii.  Followers as moderators of the leader's impact
  iv.   Leadership viewed as a shared process in which followers are also leaders

A common aspect of these four views is that they all recognise that the process of leadership is based on an underlying foundation of a relationship between the leaders and their followers. This is a view that is supported by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) who argue that leadership can only exist if there are relational interactions between leaders and followers in which followers allow themselves to be influenced.

A possible lens that can be used to assess the role of the follower in the leader-follower relationship is the personal identification perspective as suggested by Ashfoth, Schinoff and Rogers (2016). The authors argue that identification with the leader can result in varying outcomes. On the one hand, identification with the leader can be a source of satisfaction and thereby drive individual motivation to perform job-related tasks. On the other hand, identification with the leader could also be detrimental to performance when it leads to over-dependence on the leader (Ashfoth et al., 2016). Personal identification can also be linked to the concept of shared realities, as suggested by Gooty and Yammarino (2016). Through their research, the authors found that shared realities between a leader and followers are likely to impact positively on organisational performance.

Leroy, Anseel, Gardner and Sels (2015) examined the role of authenticity in the leader-follower relationship in a study with 30 leaders and 225 followers. The findings of their study showed a positive relationship between an authentic leader-follower relationship and follower motivation which leads to work-role performance. These findings put the responsibility for a high-quality relationship in the hands of both

leaders and their followers, suggesting that the achievement of organisational goals is equally dependent on the active participation of followers as it is on leaders in the leadership process. These findings, therefore, necessitate the understanding of the drivers and influences of follower commitment.

## 2.5 Relationship as a mediator of the leadership process

The third and final component of the leadership process, as discussed in section 2.1, is the interpersonal relationship between the leader and the follower. This section discusses the role that the relationship plays in the leadership process.

In a study by Qu, Janssen, and Shi (2015), the authors studied the follower's relationship with their leader as a mediator through which the leader can exert influence to perform on followers. The results of the study showed that the relationship between a leader and follower is facilitated by relational identification. Also, the research findings show that the followers' perceptions of the leader's expectations are a strong moderating factor for performance. These findings by Qu et al. (2015)  are critical to our understanding of the importance of clearly specified leader expectations in the relational process and how they impact performance. If these findings are accurate, it can be concluded that when leaders clearly communicate their expectations, followers develop a sense of relational identification which in turn facilitates the interpersonal interactions between the leader and the follower.

The person-person fit model is a model that has been used to investigate the role of relationships in the leadership literature. The model postulates that the fit of personal ideals between follower and leader is essential in a leader-follower relationship (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014). In their research, which sought to understand whether mutual recognition was associated with performance, Clarke and Mahadi (2014) found that shared respect between leader and follower was a predictor of job performance. Niemeyer and Cavazotte (2016) support this view and add that a high-quality leader-follower relationship is linked to positive outcomes that include low voluntary turnover, higher job performance and greater organisational commitment.

It is believed that one of the threats to the attainment of organisational goals is employee deviance. Employee deviance has been defined as intentional non-conformity and behaviour that violates the agreed on organisational norms (Van Gils,

Van Quaquebeke, Van Knippenberg, Van Dijke, & De Cremer, 2015). The behavioural attributes of the leader have been reported to be either a driver or an inhibitor of deviance. Van Gils et al. (2015)argue that through social learning and exchange, leaders influence their followers, further arguing that the behaviour exhibited by leaders will trickle down to followers. The arguments posited by the research findings suggest that leaders need to be cognisant of how followers perceive their behaviours and actions and strive to foster relationships that reduce deviance.

In a more recent study by Tsai, Dionne, Wang, Spain, Yammarino and Cheng (2017), the authors posit that the follower's experience and perception of the leader-follower relationship is more strongly linked to performance. Their argument was based on the proposition that power asymmetry in the leader-follower relationship leaves the follower with fewer options for improving the relationship quality. The view on power asymmetry is also shared by Gutermann et al. (2017) in a leader-follower relationship, the leader is more likely to influence the follower than vice-versa. Breevaart et al. (2015) and Qu et al. (2017) also warn against using leader-rated relationships as a predictor of employee outcomes. To that end, this study focuses on the followers' ratings of their leader-follower relationships.

## 2.6 Leader-Member exchange as a measure of Leader-Follower relationships

The body of knowledge related to the he leader-member exchange theory (LMX) has been growing since the work of Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). LMX is a relationship-based approach to leadership developed from early Vertical Dyad Linkage studies and is useful in assessing the quality of the leader-follower relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This approach posits that leaders and followers develop exchange relationships and the quality of these relationships is related to a range of directly correlated outcomes (Breevaart et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2016). The exchange relationship occurs in the form of leaders creating an enabling environment under which work tasks are performed (Breevaart et al., 2015). There is evidence to suggest that followers reciprocate through job and organisational commitment by investing effort which they perceive to match the leader's investment in the relationship (Breevaart et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2016).

S. hsien Liao, Chen, & Hu (2018) argue that high-quality LMX relationships encourage followers to take risks and be innovative, attitudes that are highly correlated to a range of positive outcomes for the organisation. Each party perceptually evaluates the quality of the relationship based on behavioural interactions with the other party. Research suggests that high-quality relationships are characterised by positive interactions based on mutual trust and obligations (S. hsien Liao et al., 2018). On the other hand, it is believed that low-quality relationships are toxic interactions which pose emotional and psychological strain (Caillier, 2017). Due to the supposed link between high-quality LMX and positive outcomes (Martin et al., 2016), scholars have studied the topic widely to understand the proper mix of relational characteristics required to promote the existence of high-quality relationships. Much of the research on LMX has been largely focused on organisations in well developed countries (Breevaart et al., 2015; Gooty & Yammarino, 2016; C. Liao et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2016), and there is insufficient research on LMX that has been conducted in developing countries.

Leadership is based on relational interactions and influence between two or more people. In this process, leaders promote and influence organisational values through their interactions with followers (Caillier, 2017) and the quality of the interactive relationships has an impact on both employee and organisational outcomes (Liang et al., 2016; Lyu, Zhu, Zhong, & Hu, 2016; Martin et al., 2016). LMX theory provides a lens through which an examination of the relationship quality between leader and follower can be conducted. Research has found LMX to be positively correlated with positive outcomes that include individual effectiveness (C. Liao et al., 2017), organisational citizenship behaviour and task engagement (Martin et al., 2016). The theory behind LMX is based on the tenet that in the dyadic relationship that exists between leader and follower unique exchange relationships are developed (Breevaart et al., 2015) and the quality of the relationship directly impacts followers' work attitudes. The ideal scenario for positive organisational outcomes would be to have high-quality LMX relationships between leaders and followers.

This study adopts the LMX theory as the theoretical lens to assess leader-follower relationship quality in the research methodology. The assessment of the leader-follower relationship in this study is done from the perspective of the follower. It is, therefore, necessary to discuss the elements of the follower perceptions that are used in evaluating the leader-follower relationship. The following section is a

discussion of constructs that a follower uses to assess their relationship with their leader.

## 2.7 Elements of Leader-Follower relationships

The perceptions of followers are based on several factors identified in studies such as that of Auh et al. (2016), Owens and Hekman (2016) and Martin et al. (2016). These perceptions are what form the base from which followers assess their relationships with their leaders. The leader-follower relationship is based on the social interactions between a leader and a follower. As discussed in section 2.6 Leader-Member exchange, the quality of the leader-follower relationship is positively related to follower outcomes. The aim of this study was to understand the influence of leader-follower relationships on follower commitment. To assist in understanding leader-follower relationships, the construct was thus broken down into three underlying variables;

- Perceived Leadership Characteristics
- Perceived Relationship Quality
- Perceived Leader Support

2.7.1 Perceived leader characteristics

Owens and Hekman (2016) suggest that leader humility affects the interaction patterns between leader and follower, which facilitates an emergent state that leads to enhanced performance. The authors' definition of leader humility is "how a leader understands him/herself in relation to the world". Leader humility encompasses a leader knowing their strengths and weaknesses, acknowledgement of follower strengths, follower inclusion and empowerment of followers (Owens & Hekman, 2016). This is in contrast to leader narcissism which was defined by Owens, Wallace and Waldman (2015) as "complex of personality traits and processes that involve[s] a grandiose yet fragile sense of self as well as a preoccupation with success". The definitions of humility and narcissism suggest that both are personality traits which will have an impact of how one handles their relationships.

While the study by Owens and Hekman (2016) suggests that leaders need more humility and less hubris in their quest to manage adaptability in a changing world, Owens et al. (2015) suggest that it is the narcissistic leaders who are able to shape the bold vision necessary for adaptability. The study by Owens and Hekman (2016)

concluded that when a leader behaves with humility, followers are more likely to believe in the leader and can be easily influenced to follow a desirable course of action. This conclusion is supported by Owens et al. (2015) who conclude that leader narcissism will have positive effects of followers when it is tempered by humility. These conclusions suggest that a perception of leader humility by the followers is more likely to stimulate positive work attitudes from the followers.

It has been observed that when followers perceive their leaders to be displaying hostile behaviours, verbally or non-verbally, the quality of the LMX relationship is consequently poor (Liang et al., 2016; Lyu et al., 2016). Some researchers have carried out studies to understand the cause of the hostile behaviour.  Liang et al. (2016) suggest that abusive behaviour from a leader is as a result of the leader's failure to exercise self-control but can also be caused by a follower's poor performance. It is a shared view found in literature that leaders need to exercise restraint and desist from displaying abusive behaviours, as a perception of abusive behaviour is directly related to poor quality relationships. Poor LMX relationships are directly related to poor performance (Liang et al., 2016) employee deviance (Lyu et al., 2016) and counterproductive behaviours that cause harm or detract from organisational goals (Martin et al., 2016).

In studying the behaviour of leaders, Gutermann et al. (2017) carried out a study to understand whether leaders who were highly engaged in their work had healthier relationships with their followers. The research findings showed that leader work engagement was positively correlated to the LMX relationship quality. The basis for this research finding is that engaged leaders tend to have a long-term focus for the organisation. This long-term focus leads the leader to want to form high-quality relationships with followers based on mutual trust and obligations.  Lu, Lu, Gursoy, and Neale (2016) add to this argument by stating that engaged leaders are more likely to invest effort into follower development, which leads to more engaged followers.

Relationships based on mutual trust and obligations are bound to transcend immediate reciprocal exchange benefits (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014) as they are hinged on deeply held beliefs that are shared. When followers perceive that they have shared beliefs with their leaders, they are more likely to view the leader's behaviour as a salient role model through which they model their work attitude and behaviours (Gutermann et al., 2017). Creating shared realities is the fundamental purpose of

interpersonal relationships, and when shared realities do not exist, it hampers mutual reciprocity leading to a breakdown of the relationship (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016).

It is a widely held view that leaders are responsible for mapping the strategic direction of the organisation (Greer et al., 2017), making resource allocation decisions (Martin et al., 2016) and creating an enabling environment that promotes employee commitment (S. hsien Liao et al., 2018). Organisational success is achieved through human capital (Greer et al., 2017), and this makes the responsibility of influencing follower work attitudes a crucial responsibility for leaders. In influencing work attitudes leaders should recognise that followers are not only acting as part of a system but as purposive elements practising their will (Teece, 2018). It can be concluded that how followers perceive their leader is of as much importance as the role played by the leader in achieving organisational success. It is, of course, too early to conclude but it can be inferred that leaders need to be thoughtful of how they portray themselves and how they are perceived by their followers in their quest to influence higher levels of commitment.

## 2.7.2 Perceived Leader support

In the contemporary knowledge-intensive world of work, it is crucial to have a workforce that is highly committed to being both creative and high performers in their work tasks (Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta, & Kramer, 2004; C. Liao et al., 2017). High employee commitment in the contemporary world of work involves taking risks due to the uncertainties in the changing environment (Wu & Parker, 2017). The leader's role is to create a supportive environment in which followers are willing and able to take risks associated with high levels of commitment without fear of negative repercussions (Breevaart et al., 2015; Gutermann et al., 2017; Wu & Parker, 2017). Leader support, defined by Wu and Parker (2017) as "showing general support for the efforts of followers, encouraging their autonomy and empowering them to take on more responsibility", is a fundamental element in the creation of a supportive environment.

Due to their position, leaders have control over critical resources and have the power to incentivise and reward followers (Qu et al., 2017). The distribution of rewards and incentives is linked to the leader's performance expectations (Qu et al., 2017), putting leaders in a position in which they can support followers to meet the expectations

(Breevaart et al., 2015). Studies such as that of Wu and Parker (2017) found a positive relationship between followers' perception of leader support and the levels of employee commitment. The findings of the study suggest that when followers perceive that they are given autonomy, decision-making latitude and feel empowered in their jobs, they will be more committed and will to go the proverbial extra mile in their work tasks.

### 2.7.3 Perceived Relationship Quality

Studies by scholars such as Caillier (2017); Gooty and Yammarino (2016) and Liang et al. (2016) suggest that followers are more productive when they perceive they have a high-quality relationship with their leader. Likewise, a perception of low-quality relationships is linked to poor performance, which has a negative impact on organisational outcomes. Caillier (2017) distinguishes between high-quality and low-quality relationships. The author defines high-quality relationships as positive interactions that positively support social impact and reduce strain and exhaustion. Low-quality relationships, on the other hand, are toxic interactions that place emotive and psychological stress on followers.

Breevaart et al. (2015) suggest that followers in high-quality relationships with their leaders develop considerable confidence and trust in their leaders. Confidence and trust in the leader make the achievement of the leadership goal of influencing followers easier. According to Breevaart et al. (2015) and Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), when followers are confident in their leader's competencies and capabilities, they are willing and ready to justify and defend their leader's decisions. This assertion implies that when followers have confidence in in their leader, they are more likely to believe the leader's vision and therefore, it will be easier for followers to give their buy-in to the leader's vision.

A perception of a high-quality relationship extends interpersonal interactions between a leader and follower beyond contractual and economic exchanges (Breevaart et al., 2015). Going beyond economic exchanges means that a high-quality relationship is based on social exchange where there is open and honest feedback (Jacobsen & Andersen, 2015; Martin et al., 2016) and individual opinions are valued (Neves & Eisenberger, 2014). Qu et al. (2017) warn against attribution bias on the part of the leader in the social interaction as this will negatively impact

the perceived relationship. Attribution bias occurs as a result of leaders attributing poor performance of followers to internal factors while attributing high performance to external factors. Liang et al. (2016) suggest that leaders should strive to be impartial and exercise self-control in their interactions with followers to reduce the occurrence and impact of attribution bias. The occurrence and impact of attribution bias is also reduced when followers are aware of their leaders' expectations regarding their work tasks (Qu et al., 2017). It can, therefore, be concluded that when followers are aware of their leaders' expectations and they receive open and honest feedback on their performance against the expectations, they are more inclined to perceive high-quality relationships with their leaders.

In conclusion, this section discussed that leader-follower relationships have an impact on follower outcomes. Studies that are found in literature widely agree that that both leaders and followers affect how their they relate in their interactions. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that how followers perceive their relationships with their leaders will affect the followers' cognitions and follower outcomes. The next section offers a discussion on one such follower outcome that is believed to be influenced by leader-follower relationships, which is follower commitment.

## 2.8 Follower commitment

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, follower commitment is one of the follower outcomes that are influenced by leader-follower relationships. This chapter discusses the concept of follower commitment in more detail. The chapter starts by offering a definition of the term, follower commitment, before discussing the components of follower commitment. In this study, the terms follower commitment and employee commitment are used interchangeably.

It has been argued that employee commitment can be a source of competitive advantage (Breevaart et al., 2015). A review of existing literature shows that several definitions of follower commitment have been proposed. Breevaart et al. (2015) define commitment as a state of high energy, eagerness, inspiration to accomplish more and pride in one's work and organisation. Gutermann et al. (2017) define commitment as the willingness to go the extra mile and identification with one's work. Lyu et al. (2016) define commitment as discretionary behaviour towards that which

is not part of the formal contract or clearly acknowledged by the reward system. In this study, the terms, employee commitment and follower commitment are used interchangeably.

Despite these widely varying definitions of follower commitment, the definitions by Breevaart et al. (2015); Gutermann et al. (2017) and Lyu et al. (2016), all acknowledge that commitment is an internally driven desire to go above the call of duty to accomplish work tasks and achieve organisational goals. The question that arises is, "if follower commitment is internally driven, how do leaders influence commitment"? A possible answer to this question was noted earlier in this paper. It has been noted that there is a growing body of literature which suggests that leaders encourage high levels of commitment from their followers through interpersonal influence. LMX theory posits that in high-quality relationships followers feel obligated to pay back the leader's investment in the relationship by investing discretionary effort (Breevaart et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2016). This can be interpreted to imply that followers are continually assessing the level of the leader's investment in the relationship and will moderate the levels of their reciprocal investment to match the investment by the leader. A study by Ng (2015), captures this view by suggesting that commitment is a result of followers investing more into their work tasks in response to the positive investments they receive from their leaders.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on follower commitment. These studies have focused on different concepts that are related to followers' cognition towards their tasks and organisations. Scholars such as Bailey et al. (2017); Gupta and Sharma (2016); Gutermann et al. (2017) and Owens et al. (2015) have focused on follower commitment from the perspective of attachment to the task. Other researchers such as Caillier (2017); Devece, Palacios-Marqués, and Pilar Alguacil (2016) and Ng (2015) have studies the concept of follower commitment from the perspective of attachment to the organisation. Both viewpoints have their merits and add to our understanding of how follower cognition can impact follower and organisational outcomes. To that end, for this study, follower commitment is viewed as a combination of two components;

- Task engagement
- Organisational commitment

2.8.1 Task engagement

Task engagement has received considerable attention from scholars due to its association with employee performance (Knight, Patterson, & Dawson, 2017). The connection between employee engagement and performance makes understanding the levels and drivers of employee engagement a paramount concern for organisations. Employee task engagement can be defined as an affective state of high energy levels (Albrecht et al., 2015) that involves emotional and cognitive attachment to one's work tasks (L. Lu et al., 2016). Newton, LePine, Kim, Wellman, and Bush (2019) add to the understanding of engagement by defining the concept as, ''the level to which individuals apply physical, cognitive and emotional energies to their work tasks''. Despite the varying definitions of work engagement found in literature, there is agreement in the various definitions that engagement is a function of three constructs: vigour, absorption and dedication (Bailey et al., 2017; Gutermann et al., 2017; Knight et al., 2017; Lyu et al., 2016).

*Vigour*: refers to the mental strength and high energy while engaged in work tasks.

*Absorption*:  refers to focus and positive engrossment in work tasks.

*Dedication*: the intensity of interest in work tasks complemented by a sense of significance and passion.

There is evidence in research to suggest that significant differences exist in the levels of work engagement for employees in high-performing organisations compared to those in low-performing organisations (Albrecht et al., 2015). High levels of engagement in employees are associated with extra-role performance, which leads to better organisational performance in respect to market value, profitability and return on assets. On the individual employee level, high engagement has been found to be associated with creativity, job satisfaction and wellbeing (Albrecht et al., 2015).

Engagement is predominantly a cognitive construct that is driven by the individual's perception of the availability of personal and job resources. Personal resources relate to an individual's resilience, self-efficacy and their sense of their ability to impact and control the environment (Knight et al., 2017). Job resources are any aspects of the job that help employees to complete their work tasks and achieve work goals by reducing job demands (Caillier, 2017; Knight et al., 2017).

Bailey et al. (2017) suggest that although engagement can be viewed as a behavioural construct that is driven by an individual's sense of responsibility towards

work and self-assessment, engagement is a management practice which can be driven by management practices. This is supported by research findings showing a link between more positive leadership forms, such as transformational leadership and high levels of engagement (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2015). As such, this argument places the responsibility of influencing employee engagement on the shoulders of organisational leaders. Leaders can achieve this by creating an organisational context in which followers have access to the right job resources (Knight et al., 2017).

### 2.8.1.1 Job demands and resources

It has been reported that engagement levels may fluctuate as a function of contextual factors (Newton et al., 2019) and the context is to a large extent shaped by the availability of job resources (Knight et al., 2017). This view is based on the underlying job demands-resources (JD-R) theory, which encompasses both the physical and social aspects of the job and aims to explain the differing levels of engagement in employees (Bakker, 2015). According to the JD-R theory, job demands are aspects of the job that place emotional and cognitive stress on the employee. These include work pressure, task complexity and role ambiguity (Bakker, 2015; Conway, Fu, Monks, Alfes, & Bailey, 2016). Job demands require cognitive and physical effort from employees, thereby imposing physiological and psychological costs on the individual.

Job resources are the physical, organisational and social aspects of the job that facilitate the accomplishment of work tasks and promote personal growth, learning and career growth (Bakker, 2015; van Woerkom, Bakker, & Nishii, 2016; Wingerden, Bakker, & Derks, 2016). Social aspects of the job, such as support from the leader and performance feedback, are associated with the follower's levels of engagement (Wingerden et al., 2016). These aspects of the job are motivational and stimulate motivation that will lead to higher levels of engagement (Conway et al., 2016).

According to Wingerden et al. (2016), job demands and job resources are simultaneously present in the work context and their interaction directly impact the levels of engagement. The interplay between job demands and job resources is what leads to engagement. Job resources reduce and counteract the undesirable aspects of job demands, and the desirable demands enhance the impact of job resources (Wingerden et al., 2016). Due to their nature, job demands impose a cost on individuals. Job resources will buffer the undesirable and negative impact of job

demands (Bakker, 2015). The effect of job demands is not always negative, in cases such as job challenges, the complexity of the job may strengthen the positive impact of job resources as individuals are motivated to conquer the challenge (Bakker, 2015; Wingerden et al., 2016).

### 2.8.2 Organisational commitment

The second component of follower commitment is organisational commitment, which is a form of psychological and emotional attachment to the organisation that results in the display of discretionary behaviour that promotes the effective functioning of the organisation (Newman, Schwarz, Cooper, & Sendjaya, 2017). Such attachment to the organisation is widely believed to result in one identifying with and being highly involved in their work and organisation (Devece et al., 2016). Hudson, González-Gómez, and Claasen (2019) define commitment as a psychological construct that influences an individual's beliefs about whether they should be loyal to their organisation and remain in the organisation.

Researchers agree that high levels of organisational commitment lead to positive outcomes for both the individual and the organisation. Organisational commitment has been linked to a proactive personality in which individuals set out to identify opportunities for organisational improvement in their daily task activities (Newman et al., 2017). In addition to seeking improvement opportunities, engaged individuals will also seek to manipulate the environment in order to act on identified opportunities. Takeuchi, Bolino, and Lin (2015) argue along similar lines, suggesting that when an individual is committed to their organisation, they have a desire to be fully involved in the organisation. This desire results in individuals displaying extra-role performance that is geared towards the success of the organisation through elevated task performance.

Ng (2015) has suggested that organisational commitment leads employees to identify with the organisation, through which a sense of oneness with the organisation is developed. When individuals develop this sense of oneness with the organisation, they are likely to experience a sense of pride being a member of the organisation. This state of emotional attachment to the organisation has been defined as affective commitment (Hudson et al., 2019; Ng, 2015). This state of affective attachment is achieved when employees feel that there is no conflict between their interests and

the interests of the organisation (Devece et al., 2016). Such a state of goal and value congruency will lead to employees investing their best efforts in the organisation.

Commitment can also be viewed as the perceived cost associated with leaving the organisation. This kind of commitment is known as continuance commitment (Devece et al., 2016; Hudson et al., 2019; Ng, 2015). Continuance commitment is reliant on factors outside of the organisation, and when employees assign a high cost to leaving the organisation, they are bound to remain committed. Devece et al. (2016) suggest that although organisational commitment is positively related to task performance, the relationship is strongly reliant on the underlying reasons driving the commitment. In their study, Devece et al. (2016) found that levels of organisational commitment tend to be high in an environment of high unemployment. This can be ascribed to the fact that in high unemployment environments, the costs associated with leaving an organisation are high as it might not be easy to find another job.

Similar to task engagement, organisational commitment is a positive attitude towards the organisation that results in higher job satisfaction and more productive employees (Ng, 2015; van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Organisational commitment is nonetheless more related to extrinsic conditions that influence an employee to have positive work attitudes and attachment to the organisation. In contrast, task engagement is driven more by intrinsic motivations that influence work and task behaviours (van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017).

## 2.9 Influence of macroeconomic conditions on follower commitment

Due to its link to performance and organisational success, follower commitment is an area of research that has generated interest from scholars such as Hudson et al. (2019); Knight et al. (2017); Popli and Rizvi (2016); Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018). Their work has added to our understanding of follower commitment and its influences and drivers. Authors such as Cahill, McNamara, Pitt-Catsouphes, and Valcour (2015) were interested in the influence of macroeconomic conditions on follower commitment. The findings of the study by Cahill et al. (2015) gave valuable insight into the impact of macroeconomic factors on employee commitment, suggesting that the levels of employee engagement levels are significantly low when the country's economy is weak and unemployment is high. Additionally, the study found a significant link between a strong economy and high job satisfaction. These findings

suggest that in a country where the economy is weak and unemployment is high, the levels of employee commitment are expected to be significantly low. On the contrary, findings from a study by Devece et al. (2016) suggest that weak macroeconomic conditions result in significantly higher levels of follower commitment. Although the findings of the studies by Cahill et al. (2015) and Devece et al. (2016) seem to contradict, it can be concluded that macroeconomic conditions have a significant influence on the levels of follower commitment.

## 2.10 LMX impact on Follower commitment

Follower commitment is a result of high-quality exchange relationships in which followers respond to the favourable treatment they receive through positive affect towards the organisation (Ng, 2015). Social exchange theory supports this view by suggesting that employees will seek to balance their exchange relationship with the organisation. This balance is achieved by employees moderating their levels of task engagement and commitment towards the organisation (Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Followers view their leaders as the personification of the organisation (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014; Martin et al., 2016). Therefore, it can be argued that the follower's perception of the treatment that they receive from the organisation is a direct product of the quality of the LMX relationship. This paper argues that when followers perceive that the relationship with their leader is of high quality, they also perceive that they are being treated fairly by the organisation.

Follower commitment is higher in cases where followers feel that they are included in the making of decision that directly impact their work and their wellbeing in the organisation (Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Clarke and Mahadi (2014) found that inclusion in decision making is perceived as a form of respect and this directly impacts the quality of the LMX relationship. Respect is a predictor of follower commitment and task performance (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014), and it is the leader's responsibility to include followers in the making and implementation of decisions that directly impact the followers' wellbeing.

Followers with high levels of commitment are more likely to place a higher bet on the future of the organisation based on the belief that the future will be positive (Ng, 2015). Placing a bet on the future involves taking a risk that the organisation might not follow through on the employee's expectations of the future. Despite this risk,

committed employees will continue to invest discretionary effort into both their tasks and the organisation with the hope and expectation of a positive future. S. hsien Liao et al. (2018) argue that the role of a leader is to promote the confidence of their employees, in both self and the organisation, and this, in turn, encourages them to take risks that improve their performance. The authors further argue that such levels of confidence are only realised in high-quality LMX relationships based on trust. Based on this, this paper argues that when followers perceive a high-quality relationship with their leader, they will inherently have a higher level of trust in their leader. This higher level of trust is expected to result in higher levels of commitment.

The quality of the LMX relationship is based on social exchanges between leaders and followers (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016). This presents a challenge for leaders as they need to lead a group of followers effectively while allowing varying degrees of interpersonal relationships (C. Liao et al., 2017). The varying relationships give rise to the concept of LMX differentiation. A leader must carefully manage their relationships in these circumstances as differentiated LMX quality may be perceived as favouritism which may compromise follower effectiveness (C. Liao et al., 2017). Gooty & Yammarino (2016) in their study, found that when LMX differentiation is high, it has a negative impact on the creation of shared realities which are a core component of high-quality LMX relationships. High LMX differentiation brings into question the fairness and equality norms of the leader from the perspective of their followers. A further argument in this paper is that leaders should strive for fairness in how they relate to their followers as this improves the perception of the relationship quality from the followers' perspective. High-quality LMX relationships blur the lines between in-group and out-group boundaries (C. Liao et al., 2017) and as a result, the leader will be perceived as fair by their followers.

When LMX is considered from the lens of the JD-R theory, it can be argued that leaders play a significant role in mediating the job demands and job resources for their followers. On the one hand, leaders affect job resources as they make decisions and resource allocation and coordination (Breevaart et al., 2015; Gutermann et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2016). On the other hand, leaders impose job demands by setting performance targets and putting pressure on followers through task deadlines. The leader's role in the LMX relationship is to ensure the availability of job resources and minimise the adverse effects of job demands. Gutermann et al. (2017) suggest that probably the most crucial job resource that a leader can provide to followers is

support and feedback. When followers receive feedback on their performance and are aware of where they stand with the leader they are more likely to have a positive perception of the relationship quality with their leader (Breevaart et al., 2015). It can, therefore, be argued that when followers receive leader support and open feedback from their leaders, they are more likely to view the LMX relationship as high quality and will be more committed to their tasks and organisation. This commitment will be the follower's way of reciprocating the leader's investment in facilitating job resources for the follower (Breevaart et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2016).

# Chapter 3: Research Questions

The leader is responsible for integrating followers into the organisation. This integration is achieved through leaders promoting organisational values through their interactions with followers (Caillier, 2017). This is in line with the assertion of Hambrick and Quigley ( 2014) who argued that the leader's role includes shaping the organisational structure and sense giving to influence an acceptable organisational outcome (Hambrick & Lovelace, 2018). To influence behaviour in followers effectively, leaders need to foster high-quality relationships with their followers (Caillier, 2017; Greer et al., 2017; Niemeyer & Cavazotte, 2016). It has been noted that the follower's perception of their identification with the leader also impacts the quality of their relationship (Ashfoth et al., 2016; Snaebjornsson & Vaiciukynaite, 2016). This research argues that a perception of a high-quality relationship from followers will result in higher work and task commitment from them.

> Hypothesis 1a: The degree to which followers perceive the quality of their relationship with the leader is positively correlated to follower commitment.

> Hypothesis 1b: The degree to which followers perceive the quality of their relationship with the leader is negatively correlated to follower commitment.

The leader's behaviour as it is perceived by followers has been found to provide a salient role model through which employees model their own behaviour and potential levels of engagement (Gutermann et al., 2017). In their research Gutermann, et al. (2017) found that leader work engagement was a means of influencing follower commitment as it was positively related to a high-quality leader-follower relationship. A core tenet of the research was the social learning theory, which posits that people learn through observing behaviours and reproducing those behaviours (Gutermann et al., 2017). This research consequently hypothesises that;

> Hypothesis 2a: A perception of positive leader characteristics is positively related follower commitment.

Hypothesis 2b: A perception of positive leader characteristics is not positively related follower commitment.

The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory postulates that leaders and followers develop dyadic relationships that have positive effects on employee outcomes when they are of high quality (Gutermann et al., 2017). The quality of the LMX relationship as perceived by followers is based on the follower's assessment of relational attributes and processes (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016). These relational attributes affect the follower's cognition and attitudes towards work (Breevaart et al., 2015). Followers who perceive that they receive high levels of support and guidance from their leaders are more likely to be more engaged in their work (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016).

Hypothesis 3a: There is a linear relationship between follower's perception of leader support and the follower commitment.

Hypothesis 3b: No linear relationship exists between the follower's perception of leader support and follower commitment.

Figure 1 shows a conceptual diagram of the hypotheses. Testing these hypotheses is expected to add to our knowledge of the nature of the relationship between leader-follower relationships and follower commitment. In the model the independent variables are perceived relationship quality, perceived leader characteristics and leader support. The hypotheses are testing the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable which is follower commitment.

*Figure 1: Hypothesis model*
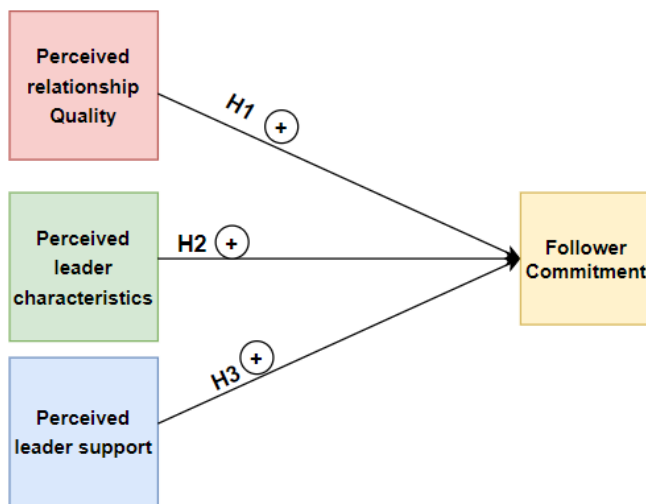
# Chapter 4: Research Methodology

## 4.1 Introduction

A positivist approach was adopted as the research philosophy for this study. The positivist philosophy was considered ideal as the research was trying to determine the structure of the relationship between measurable variables (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Understanding the relationship between the study variables was expected to help explain and predict how leader-follower relationships influence follower commitment. The premise of this research philosophy is that systems can be observed from an objective viewpoint and that issues or functionality can be isolated and recreated, and observations can be repeatable. Positivism, as a research philosophy is based on the premise that reality can be measured objectively, and the world can be explained through cause and effect (Salkind, 2010). This research study explored the nature of the relationship between two variables; the follower's perception of the leader-follower relationship as the independent variable and the follower's work commitment as the dependent variable.

This chapter outlines the design that was adopted to carry out the research to answer the research questions that are posed in chapter three. The methodology, population and sample size, unit of analysis, sampling method, data analysis and the methodological limitations are the core components of this study that are presented in this chapter.

## 4.2 Research Design

This study had two primary aims. Firstly, the research sought to explore the leader-followers' perception of the nature of their relationship with their leaders. Secondly, the research sought to explain how the perception of the relationship relates to the followers' commitment.

The approach used for this research was a deductive approach. A deductive approach in research involves the testing of theoretical propositions through the use of a research strategy designed to specifically collect data for the testing of a hypothesis (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). As this research involved testing of hypotheses derived from existing theory, as discussed in chapter three, a deductive

approach was considered most appropriate. In addition, since a deductive approach involves using strategy designed to empirically test theoretical propositions, it supports the positivist philosophy adopted for this research.

In order to answer the research question, this study aimed to:

i. Establish the followers' perceptions of the leader-follower relationships
ii. Explain how the perceptions of the relationship impact follower work commitment
iii. Evaluate whether the perceptions of the leader-follower relationship differ between demographical variables such as race, gender and generation.

Saunders and Lewis (2018) note three different types of research, explanatory, descriptive and exploratory research. Explanatory research aims to explain how variables relate, while exploratory research aims to ask and answer questions in a new light to get new insights, and descriptive research seeks to provide an "accurate representation of persons, events or situations" (Saunders & Lewis, 2018, p. 118). This study adopted the explanatory approach as its main aim was to answer a research question that was grounded on a relationship between two variables. The independent variable for the study is the follower's perception of leader-follower relationships and the dependent variable is employee commitment. Also, the objective of this study was to uncover the structure of the relationship between the variables and further ascertain the differences and similarities that exist among multiple responses.

Saunders and Lewis (2018) list different forms of research strategies: experiment; survey; case study; action research; grounded theory; and ethnography. Each of these research strategies has its strengths and limitations, and it is crucial that researchers choose the best strategy that will enable them to answer their research questions and objectives, guided by the amount of time and resources that are available (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This study adopted a survey strategy, with a survey questionnaire as the main instrument of enquiry. A standardised online questionnaire was administered to a sample from the target population group. This strategy was considered ideal as it allowed the research to administer a similar set of questions to a large number of respondents (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The standardised nature of the survey questionnaire also allowed for the responses received to be comparable.

The chosen data collection strategy for this this study was the use of an online survey questionnaire, which made it possible to collect a large number of responses in a cost-effective manner (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In addition, Saunders and Lewis (2018) state that an advantage of using survey questionnaires is that it is less time consuming, considering the time constraints present during the study, this advantage made the use of a survey ideal for the research. This research was cross-sectional in nature as it involved collecting data from participants at only one time period (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

## 4.3 Research Methodology

Saunders and Lewis (2018) highlight two main methodological choices for research, which are quantitative and qualitative research. A qualitative study aims to provide a greater understanding of psychosocial issues by answering questions such as "why" and "how" (Marshall, 1996). A quantitative study, however, seeks to test pre-determined hypotheses and generalise the results to the population group (Marshall, 1996; Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

A mono-method quantitative approach (Saunders & Lewis, 2018) was implemented for this research since this research sought to imperially test existing theory through variables that were informed by literature. Leadership theory is a well-developed area of study, with vast amounts of existing literature, and relationships between variables suggested in the literature (Martin et al., 2016). As such, a quantitative methodology was considered appropriate for this research as the basis of this research was to test existing theory.

The study used a self-administered instrument, a questionnaire, and this allowed for the capturing of respondents' responses without the risk of misinterpretation by the researcher (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Confidentiality of the respondents was granted through the research.

## 4.4 Population

Saunders and Lewis (2018) define the population as the complete set from which the sample is drawn. In South Africa, there is no periodic census that tracks the number of SMEs. However, a baseline study by the Small Business Institute estimated the

number of SMEs to be in the region of 86,000 (Small Business Institute, 2018). For this study, SMEs were defined as an organisation/business with a total workforce of between 50 and 200 employees. It is believed that using this definition was enough as it is not all employees who would have knowledge of financial information, such as turnover and asset value, that is used to classify SMEs. The target population for this research was middle and senior managers and professionally qualified individuals who work in such SMEs in South Africa, reporting to a leader in their organisational structure.

The definitions of a middle manager, senior manager and professionally qualified used in this study were drawn from the definition as used in the Employment Equity Act Regulations (Department of Labour, 2019) :

> **Senior Managers**: Employees who "Provide inputs for formulation of the overall organisational strategy, have knowledge of the entire business area, business unit, company or group and operationalise the organisational strategy."
>
> **Middle Managers**: Employees who "have a broad knowledge of products, techniques and processes, receive instructions from senior managers and administer the organisation's policy and operations through subordinates."
>
> **Professionally qualified**: Employees who "have professional knowledge of a sub-discipline or discipline, provide input in the formulation of organisational or functional unit business plans and formulate and implement departmental or team plans that will support the business unit plans."

Middle and senior managers, and professionals are considered relevant to this study as they are considered to be key drivers of organisational success as they play the crucial role of connecting senior executives and frontline employees through receiving and direction (Ahearne et al., 2014). As a result, the target population comprised of employees who are more involved in operational strategy and are in a better position to sense the climate in the operational environment and react faster than top executives would be able to. This makes the engagement of middle and senior managers, and professionals very important and crucial for organisational outcomes (Ahearne et al., 2014). Employees who fit these categories were asked to participate in the study in their capacity as followers of their direct supervisors.

Participation in the study was by means of an electronic survey that was shared with the participants.

Niemeyer and Cavazotte (2016) suggest that leader-follower relationships are affected by the context under which the relationship occurs. As such, controlling the population to the South African context allowed for the generalisability of the findings to South African SMEs.

## 4.5 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was the leader-followers at senior, middle and professionally qualified levels. The study participants were asked to self-identify during the completion of the questionnaire. These individuals worked for organisations in South Africa that are classified as SMEs. For the study, SMEs were classified as organisations with a staff complement of between 50 and 200 employees.

All individuals who met the leader-follower requirements and worked in SMEs were afforded an equal opportunity to participate in the survey.

## 4.6 Sampling method and size

The sample selected for a research study is crucial for answering the research question. Therefore the sample needs to be appropriate (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In most research studies it is not feasible to use the entire population. Thus, it is necessary to use a sub-group of the population and then generalise the results to the population. There are different types of methods that fall under non-probability sampling, but quota sampling was found to be the most suitable for this study. Quota sampling ensures that the selected sample represents specific characteristics that are specified by the researcher (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In this study, the respondents were only considered if they met the definition of leader-follower and worked in a South African SME.

The sample for this research was selected from individuals who worked in SMEs in South Africa, which employ 50 to 200 people, and who fall within the defined leader-follower profile definition. Leader-follower refers to employees who simultaneously assume roles of both being a leader and a follower. They are leaders in that they

have followers that report to them in the organisational structure, and they are followers in that they too have leaders that they report to.

The unavailability of a comprehensive list of SMEs in the country made it unfeasible to collect data from the entire population (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Non-probability sampling was, therefore, employed for this research. Individuals who were considered leader-followers were purposively selected using judgment and based on the researcher's professional network, clients, work associates and social circles. The selection of these individuals was based on the belief that they would be the most appropriate to provide responses to the survey, and ultimately accomplish the research objectives.

A list of the identified individuals, which included their telephone numbers and email addresses was collected. This list was used to distribute the survey link, accompanied by an introductory script to inform the individuals about the purpose of the research and that their participation was voluntary. Participants were also informed of the confidentiality of their responses. The identified individuals were from SMEs from various sectors that ranged from financial advisory services, construction, industrial engineering, professional services to information technology services. It was believed that this broad list would increase the chances of receiving a wide range of responses as a result of the expected different organisational cultures in these sectors.

To increase the number of respondents and achieve a more representative sample, a link to the survey was also shared on a social networking platform. The platform that was deemed ideal for this was LinkedIn. This is because LinkedIn is a professional networking platform and it was believed that this would be a way of reaching employed individuals who fit the leader-follower profile. Although it is not possible to ascertain the number of respondents who were reached via this platform, analytics on the site show that a high number of people viewed the post. In addition, professional and representative organisations that represent SMEs, professionals and managers who fit the profile of the research population were also approached and asked to disseminate the survey link among their members. The organisations approached were The South African Small and Medium Enterprises Federation, The Black Management Forum and the Small Business Institute.

These approaches were considered ideal since there is no complete list of the population intended for this research. A second constraint that informed this decision was that there was limited time in which to complete this research. It was also reasonable to assume that if a big enough sample was achieved for the research, the results could be used to make statistical inferences to the entire population set (Saunders & Lewis, 2018)

As a strategy to increase the number of responses for this research, snowball sampling was implemented as a supplementary sampling technique to complement the quota sampling. Snowball sampling was chosen as an ideal sampling technique since it would have been challenging to identify all members of the population group. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which respondents are asked to share details of other participants who fit the eligibility criteria (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). On completion of the survey, each respondent was asked to share the survey link with other potential participants who might be interested in taking part in the survey. To ensure confidentiality, respondents were not asked for details of other participants. Instead, the respondents were asked to forward the survey to the other participants.

The selected sample for the research must provide data that is representative of the population. Consequently, the determination of the sample size is a common task for researchers (Barlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001). A common approach to determine a sample size is to use estimates based on prior studies (S. F. Anderson, Kelley, & Maxwell, 2017). Research has shown that this approach often results in underpowered studies (S. F. Anderson et al., 2017), a better approach would be to use a participant-to-variable ratio (S. F. Anderson et al., 2017; Barlett et al., 2001). Barlett et al. (2001) recommend a minimum ratio of 10 participants per variable, while Wegner (2016) suggests that a sample of 30 participants per variable would be large enough. Using these guidelines as the basis for sample estimation, the study aimed to collect a minimum of 120 responses.

## 4.7 Measurement instrument

To address the research questions, the measurement instrument for this study was a self-administered questionnaire. This instrument is ideal as it allows for the collection of data in the same order from the participants. Since this research is explanatory in nature and statistical analysis of the data was implemented, a survey questionnaire was ideal as it allowed for the collection of data from a large pool of respondents (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Different methods to measure relationship quality have been proposed including the LMX-MDM (Martin et al., 2016) and the LMX 7 (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).  The survey questionnaire was adapted from the LMX 7 Questionnaire that was designed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). The LMX 7 Questionnaire was adapted for this research with permission from the authors as shown in appendix two. The benefit of using the LMX 7 questionnaire was that it has been used in several studies which allowed for comparison of the findings from this study. Additional questions were also adapted from literature to supplement the LMX 7 Questionnaire and to answer the research questions for this study. The decision to use additional questions was based on the fact that the LMX 7 only measures relationship quality and does not measure other constructs that were studied on this research. Questions to measure the follower commitment construct were developed from studies found in literature such as those that used the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (L. Lu et al., 2016), the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) scale (K. Y. Kim, Eisenberger, & Baik, 2016) and the Allen and Meyer's scale (Devece et al., 2016).

The questionnaire used for the study was divided into three sections. The first part (Section A) was an introduction to the study and gives insight into the purpose and benefits of the research. Details of the researcher and the research supervisor were also included in Section A, in case the respondents had questions or concerns regarding the research. Section B was used to collect demographic information from the participants in the form of nominal and ordinal data (Wegner, 2016). The purpose of the demographic information was to determine whether the collected data would be suitable for answering the research question.

The third part (Section C), collected interval data (Wegner, 2016) on the two main variables of this research, which are leader-follower relationship and employee

commitment, using a five-point Likert scale. The scale allowed the respondents to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements that were constructed to measure their perception of the leader-follower relationship, and the followers' willingness to commit. Collection of interval data was ideal for this research as interval data allows for a comprehensive range of statistical analysis (Wegner, 2016).

The five-point Likert scale used is shown in Table 1 below:

*Table 1: Likert scale*

| 1 | Strongly Disagree |
|---|-------------------|
| 2 | Disagree |
| 3 | Uncertain |
| 4 | Agree |
| 5 | Strongly Agree |

A sample of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix 1: Questionnaire

## 4.7.1 Questionnaire design

A questionnaire was created to collect information from respondents that would assist in answering the research question.  The independent and the dependent variables, perceived leader-follower relationship and employee commitment, were divided into five underlying variables to enable the designing of the questionnaire. The underlying variables for each of the study variables are shown below.

Leader-follower relationship

- Perceived leader support
- Perceived relationship quality
- Perceived leader characteristics

Employee commitment

- Task engagement
- Organisational commitment

The following subsections show how the questionnaire was developed to measure each of the five latent variables.

*4.7.1.1 Perceived leader support*

Leader support is a self-reported measure reflecting the extent to which followers feel supported by their leader. A review of the relevant literature revealed that supportive leadership is more likely to enhance the followers' willingness to become more involved in their work tasks (K. Y. Kim et al., 2016; Neves & Eisenberger, 2014; Qu et al., 2017). Questions to measure this variable were developed mainly from the LMX-7 questionnaire (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) and supplemented by studies by Breevaart et al. (2015); Kim et al. (2016) in addition to studies that were considered to be relevant during the literature review process. These questions assess the extent to which followers feel that their leaders support them in executing their task objectives and in the growth of their careers. Table 2 below shows the questions that were used to measure this variable and the literature that was used to develop the questions.

*Table 2: Leader support questions*

| Question | Literature used |
|---|---|
| My leader clearly understands the challenges of my job | (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; S. hsien Liao et al., 2018) |
| My leader recognises my true potential | (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) |
| My leader would go out of his/her way to help me solve problems in my work | (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) |
| My leader would stand by me if I make an honest mistake | (Caillier, 2017; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; K. Y. Kim et al., 2016) |
| My leader is committed to my development | (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016; Martin et al., 2016) |
| My leader is committed to the development of all direct reports regardless of who they are | (Breevaart et al., 2015; C. Liao et al., 2017) |

*4.7.1.2 Perceived relationship quality*

Jacobsen and Andersen (2015), in their study, found that the follower's perception of their relationship with their leader has a significant impact on their commitment. This necessitated the empirical measuring of the followers' perceptions of their relationship quality. Questions to measure this variable were developed using the work by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), this was complemented with questions that were developed using studies by other scholars. Work by Jacobsen and Andersen (2015); Gooty and Yammarino (2016) and Martin et al. (2016) is among the studies that informed the development of these questions. Table 3 shows the questions that were used to measure the relationship quality variable and the literature that was used to

develop the questions. These questions assess the degree to which followers perceive their relationship with their leaders as being positive.

*Table 3: Relationship quality questions*

| Question | Literature used |
|---|---|
| My relationship with my leader is effective | (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) |
| My leader provides open and honest feedback on my performance | (Jacobsen & Andersen, 2015; Martin et al., 2016) |
| I feel "heard" by my leader | (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014; S. hsien Liao et al., 2018) |
| I have a clear understanding of my leader's vision | (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014) |
| I have confidence in my leader's competencies | (Breevaart et al., 2015; Gutermann et al., 2017) |
| I would defend and justify my leader's decisions if he or she were not present to do so | (Breevaart et al., 2015; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) |
| My leader values my opinions | (Breevaart et al., 2015; Neves & Eisenberger, 2014) |

### 4.7.1.3 Perceived leader characteristics

The third latent variable to measure the perceived leader-follower relationship is the follower's perception of the leader's characteristics. The questions for this variable were designed to measure the degree to which followers perceive positive relationship characteristics in their leaders. Studies by Clarke and Mahadi (2014); Martin et al. (2016); Breevaart et al. (2015) and Gutermann et al. (2017) formed the basis for the development of the questions and were supplemented by other studies identified during the literature review process. Table 4 below shows the questions that were used to measure the variable and the literature that was used to develop the questions.

*Table 4: Leader characteristics questions*

| Question | Literature used |
|---|---|
| My leader communicates clearly | (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) |
| My leader consults with the team before making a decision | (Qu et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2018) |
| My leader is regarded as fair by most | (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014; Martin et al., 2016) |
| My leader is a good manager of diversity | (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014) |
| My leader cares about my personal wellbeing | (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016) |
| I usually know how my leader regards my work | (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) |
| I have confidence that my leader is able to adapt to the requirements of the future | (Breevaart et al., 2015; Gutermann et al., 2017) |

| | |
|---|---|
| My leader has the required competencies to lead the team | (Jacobsen & Andersen, 2015) |
| My leader includes me in strategic planning | (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014) |

*4.7.1.4 Task engagement*

To measure task engagement, questions were developed using studies that were considered during the review of the literature. Work by Bailey et al. (2017); Albrecht et al. (2015) and Newton et al. (2019) was used in developing the questions to measure this variable. Development of questions was further supported by other studies that studied the same construct. This variable is a self-reported measure that measures the extent to which followers are motivated to carry out their tasks and achieve their performance goals. Table 5 shows the questions that were used to measure the variable and the literature that was used to develop the questions.

*Table 5: Task engagement questions*

| Question | Literature used |
|---|---|
| I am motivated to do my job to the best of my ability | (Bailey et al., 2017; Newton et al., 2019) |
| I feel part of the decision making | |
| I am committed to following the lead of my leader | (Albrecht et al., 2015; Bakker, 2015) |
| I am committed to achieving my key performance outputs | (Albrecht et al., 2015) |
| I am excited to get involved in projects for my organisation | (Bailey et al., 2017; L. Lu et al., 2016) |
| I identify with problems of my organisation | (Auh et al., 2016; Newton et al., 2019) |
| I am satisfied with the position I am in | (Knight et al., 2017; Newton et al., 2019) |

*4.7.1.5 Organisational commitment*

Using studies by Bolino, Hsiung, Harvey, and LePine (2015); Kim et al. (2016); Ng, (2015) and Takeuchi et al. (2015), questions to measure the organisational commitment variable were developed. These questions measure the degree to which followers identify with being part of an organisation and believe that their well-being and that of the organisation are intertwined. In addition, by answering these questions, followers revealed the extent of their intention to leave the organisation. Table 6: Organisational commitment questions below, shows the questions that were developed to measure this variable and the literature that was used to develop the questions.

*Table 6: Organisational commitment questions*

| Question | Literature used |
|---|---|
| I believe in the vision of my organisation | (Devece et al., 2016; IMF, 2019) |
| I am proud to work for my organisation | (Devece et al., 2016; Ng, 2015) |
| I find it satisfying to be part of my organisation | (Ng, 2015) |
| I have a strong sense of belonging | (Ng, 2015) |
| I find being a member of my organisation very captivating | (K. Y. Kim et al., 2016) |
| I believe there is career progression for me in this organisation | (Takeuchi et al., 2015) |
| I intend to find another job outside of this organisation in the next 12 months | (Devece et al., 2016; Hudson et al., 2019) |
| One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in my organisation | (Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017) (Saks, 2006) |
| I frequently think of quitting my job | (Bolino et al., 2015) (Saks, 2006) |
| If I have my own way, I will be working for the same organisation one year from now | (Devece et al., 2016) (Saks, 2006) |

## 4.8 Data gathering process

The questionnaire for this study was prepared using an online survey tool. The chosen tool for this study was Google Forms. The data were collected digitally to allow for statistical analysis of the results. The survey was distributed by sending a link to the questionnaire to participants based on the selected sampling method. The advantage of using a survey link is that it is faster and allows for the collection of data from a geographically widespread population. The link for the data collection was active from 22 August 2019 to 4 October 2019.

It was expected that some of the respondents might be time constrained and this data collection method allowed participants to respond to the questionnaire at their own convenience. Wegner (2016) lists several advantages of adopting this method of data collection, which include a higher response rate as well as the data being current therefore more accurate in answering the research question. Snowballing was also implemented for this research and respondents were asked to share the link to the online questionnaire with their peers and work colleagues (Van Gils et al., 2015).

To get the required data for the research, a survey link was shared with known acquaintances and colleagues who were further asked to share the link with their network. The link to the survey was also posted on a professional networking platform, LinkedIn, to widen the reach of the survey.

To evaluate the face value validity of the instrument, pretesting of the questionnaire was undertaken using a select group of respondents. Pretesting was intended to serve the purpose of confirming the validity and reliability of the instrument. For the pretesting, the questionnaire was administered based on a convenience sample of respondents chosen based on their relationship with the researcher. The feedback received from the pretesting indicated that the questionnaire was easy to understand; therefore, no changes were made to the questionnaire.

## 4.9 Analysis approach

To enable the answering of the research questions, data were collected from respondents. Data were collected using the questionnaire using an interval scale to allow for statistical analysis of the relationship between the variables (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The first step in data analysis is to understand the nature and make-up of the data using descriptive statistics (Wegner, 2016). Descriptive analysis of the data will reveal the basic characteristics of the data that include the central location measures, distribution and variability (Wegner, 2016). To that end, descriptive statistical analysis was performed to get an understanding of the nature of the data collected. Data collected were grouped by demographics in order to get a picture of the profile and diversity of the respondents.

When exploring a relationship between two variables, Wegner (2016) suggests plotting a scatter graph to examine the nature of the relationship. Therefore, in order to begin understanding the nature of the impact of the leader-follower relationship on employee commitment, scatter graphs were plotted before running statistical tests. So that the relationships between the variables could be understood, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to uncover and identify the underlying relationship between the variables that were measured. Factor analysis was considered ideal for this research as it summarises data to enable interpretation of relationships and patterns (Gie Yong & Pearce, 2013). The factor analysis was conducted using

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) by means of the correlation matrix.

Since the research sought to identify the impact of the 'leader-follower relationship' variable on the 'employee commitment' variable, simple linear regression was employed as the analysis model. This technique is used to understand straight-line relationships between an independent variable (leader-follower relationship') and a dependent variable (follower work commitment) (Wegner, 2016). The appropriate tools for conducting the data analysis are Microsoft Excel or SPSS. SPSS was chosen as the statistical analysis tool to perform the tests.

A questionnaire is only useful if it collects data that are suitable for the answering of the research question (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). For the questionnaire to be useful, it has to meet criteria for both content and construct validity. Content validity is the extent to which the questionnaire adequately answers the research question (Heale & Twycross, 2015; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Construct validity is the extent to which inferences can be drawn from the data collected by the questionnaire (Heale & Twycross, 2015; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). To ensure content validity, the questions for the questionnaire will be adapted from existing literature, and the questionnaire will be pretested to ensure that the questions are correctly interpreted and understood by respondents (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). To ensure construct validity, confirmatory factor analysis was employed to test how well the constructs are measured by the variables (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006).

In addition to being valid, research also needs to meet requirements for reliability. Reliability represents the accuracy of the instrument used for the research and the extent to which the research will produce similar results if used on other occasions (Heale & Twycross, 2015; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). An attribute of reliability is internal consistency, which is the extent to which the items on the scale measure the same construct. To ensure internal consistency statistical correlation using the Cronbach's alpha tests was be employed for this research (Heale & Twycross, 2015). The Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency that describes the reliability of measurements and ensures that items in the test instrument measure the same construct or concept (Bonett & Wright, 2015a).

To mitigate against the reduction of the validity of the findings of the study, the population was limited to only include professionals, and middle and senior managers. Limiting the population was expected to make the population more homogeneous as the respondents would probably be more like-minded in their approach to work tasks. This also ensured consistency of data collected, making the data collected more reliable and analogous, and any variances more noticeable. Middle and senior managers, and professionals were moreover expected to have closer and more frequent contacts with their leaders, which enables them to form perceptions of their relationships with their leaders.

## 4.10 Limitations

A significant limitation of this research comes from its cross-sectional nature (Qu et al., 2015). Due to the contextual nature of the leader-follower relationship, a longitudinal study would have provided more accurate data on how the changes in the relationship affect the follower's commitment.

A potential limitation of the proposed research methodology lies in the data gathering process. To collect responses, a link to the survey was sent to the respondents, leaving the interpretation of the questionnaire to the respondents. Any misinterpretation of the questionnaire by respondents would have yielded invalid responses to the research questions. To limit the risk of misinterpretation of the questionnaire, pilot testing was done to identify and fix any potential problems in the questionnaire before the actual research was undertaken (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Using only one social networking site was another limitation of this research. Results from a study by Hargittai (2015) revealed that the choice of which networking platform to use is not random. Instead, this choice is affected by variables such as the individual's internet skill, age, gender, socioeconomic status and online experiences. This limits the data collected to a somewhat similar group of respondents, thereby reducing the data variability. This has implications on the types of conclusions that can be drawn from the data collected. The impact of this limitation is expected to have been reduced by data collected from the purposively selected individuals and respondents from the link shared by the professional organisations.

Another potential limitation to the research was that participants might try to respond to the survey multiple times. Doing so would have reduced the diversity in the

research responses, thereby compromising the reliability of the findings. This limitation was minimised by setting the online survey tool to accept only one response from each IP address.

Another potential limitation of this research is based on the independent variables that were investigated in this study. It is possible that there are other influences on the chosen dependent variable that affect the followers' commitment to work tasks and the organisation. In addition, both the perception of relationship quality and willingness to engage are cognitive constructs, and the fact that one is willing to engage does not necessarily mean that they are going to be committed.

Another limitation of this study is related to the definition of SMEs that was adopted for this study. The National Small Business Amendment Act (No. 26 of 2003) from which the definition of SMEs was derived lists other criteria such as turnover and asset value which were not included in the definition adopted for this study. It may be possible that, by excluding these criteria, the definition used would have unintentionally excluded some potential respondents who would have added useful insights to the study.

# Chapter 5: Research Results

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a presentation of the results of the analysis that was performed on data collected from the survey respondents. Also presented in this chapter are the statistical tests that were conducted to facilitate the answering of the research questions through testing the hypothesised relationships between the research variables. The chapter begins by discussing the response rate to the survey that was distributed to gather the data that would assist in answering the research question. This is followed by a presentation of the descriptive statistics to highlight the composition of the respondents. A discussion of the process of measuring construct validity and reliability of the measurement instrument is then followed a discussion of the results from the tests of the relationship between variables.

This chapter will have the following sections:

- Survey response rate
- Descriptive statistics of the characteristics of the respondents
- Descriptive statistics of the answering of the questionnaire
- Reliability and Validity
- Hypothesis testing
- Summary

## 5.2 Survey response rate

The survey link, to collect the data to help in answering the research questions, was active for a six-week period from the 22nd of August 2019. Google forms was employed as the survey tool for the data collection. During the period in which the survey link was active, 155 responses to the survey were recorded. The recorded responses are above the targeted 120 responses, as highlighted in section 4.6 Sampling method and size. However, these responses included nine surveys in which some of the questions were not answered, leaving 144 fully completed surveys. A total of 407 potential respondents were contacted via email, SMS and WhatsApp, with a link to the survey and asked to participate in the study. In addition, a link to the survey was shared on LinkedIn, and this generated a total of 217 views from South Africa. Therefore, the total engagement with the survey link was 624. The 155 responses, therefore, represent a response rate of 24.8%.

Appendix 3: Response rates per question, shows the response rate for each of the questions that were included in the survey questionnaire. From the 155 responses received, 5.8% of the responses were not fully completed. Questions that were not fully completed were not included in the calculation of scores per research construct.

## 5.3: Descriptive statistics of the characteristics of the respondents

This section presents the descriptive statistics of the characteristics of the respondents who participated in this study. The study was targeted at leader-followers in South African SMEs to get an understanding of how they perceive the nature of their relationships with their organisational leaders. Understanding the makeup of the respondents allows for the generalisability of the results to the relevant population.

The first question of the study was a categorical question which is purely descriptive and do not have a numerical order (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The purpose of this question was to check if the respondents were evenly distributed between males and females. The results show that there were more male respondents (56%) than female respondents (44%). To get a better understanding of the composition of the respondents, the second question of the study was designed to collect age information. The highest number of responses came from the 30-39 years age group, while the smallest age group was the over 50 years group which constituted 3% of the responses. Figure 1 and Figure 2 below are representations of the gender and age distribution of the respondents.

*Figure 1: Gender distribution*



52
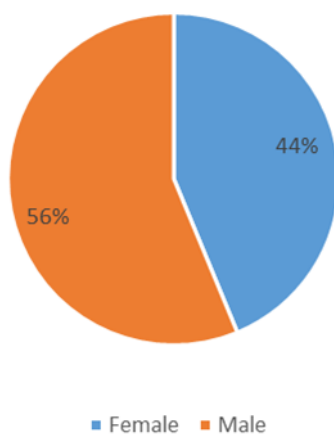
*Figure 2: Age distribution*
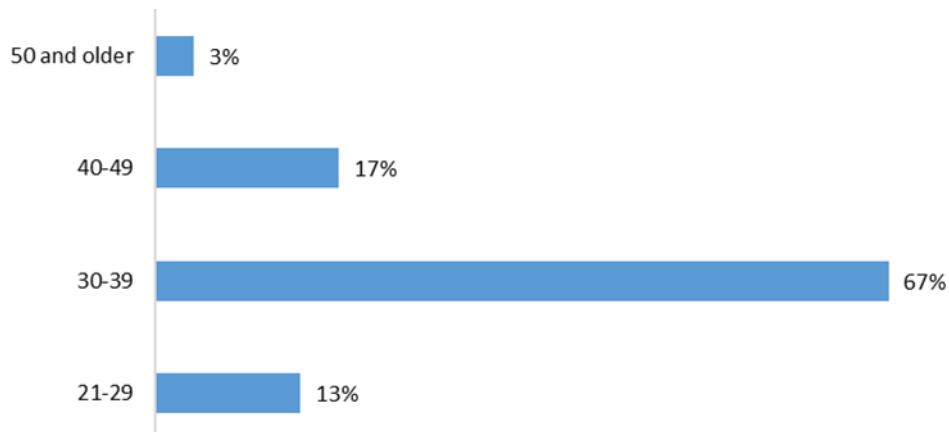
The population of the study was comprised of middle managers, senior managers and professionally qualified individuals in South African SMEs. Responses were only regarded as valid if the participant had specified their job level in their responses. The highest number of responses, 40%, were received from individuals who indicated that they were in middle management positions. It was also noted that there are professionally qualified individuals who are also middle or senior managers and these individuals made up 9% of the recorded responses. Figure 3 provides a graphical presentation of the distribution based on job level.

*Figure 3: Job level distribution*
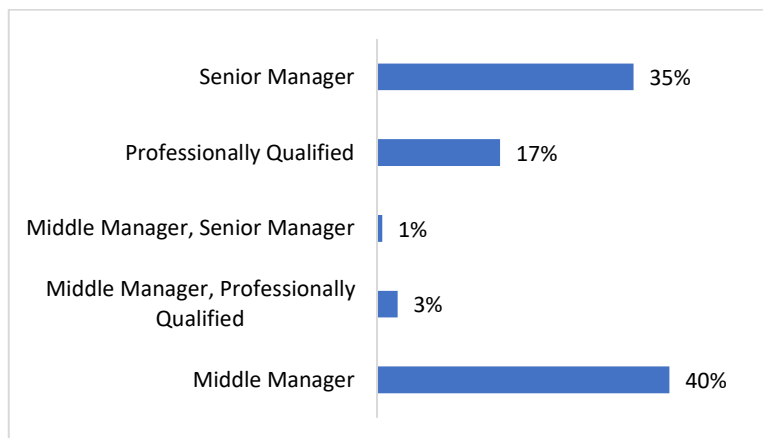


The survey questionnaire was also designed to collect information on the length of service with the organisations. Results show that 48% of the respondents have been with their current organisation for five or more years. The second biggest group of respondents had spent between one and three years with the current organisation. Figure 4 graphically presents the responses by tenure with the organisation.

*Figure 4: Tenure with organisation*
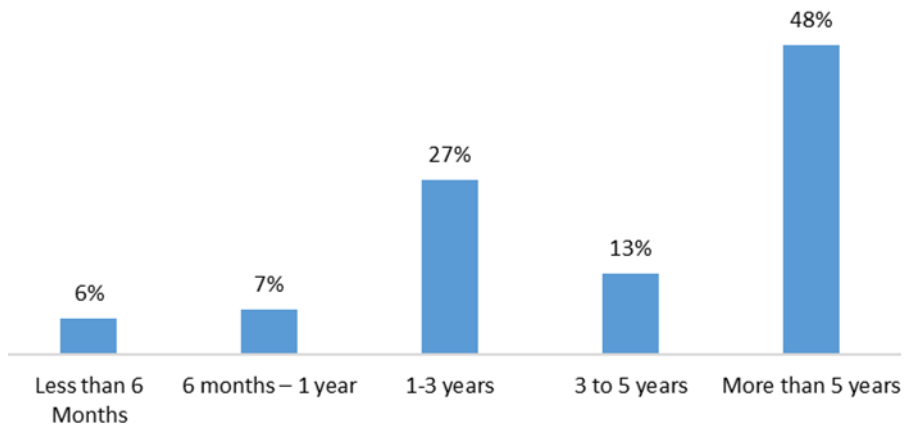


Figure 5 is a graphical representation of the data grouped on the race of the respondents. Most of the respondents (60%) identify as being black, and the smallest race group recorded identified as Asian.

*Figure 5:Distribution by race group*
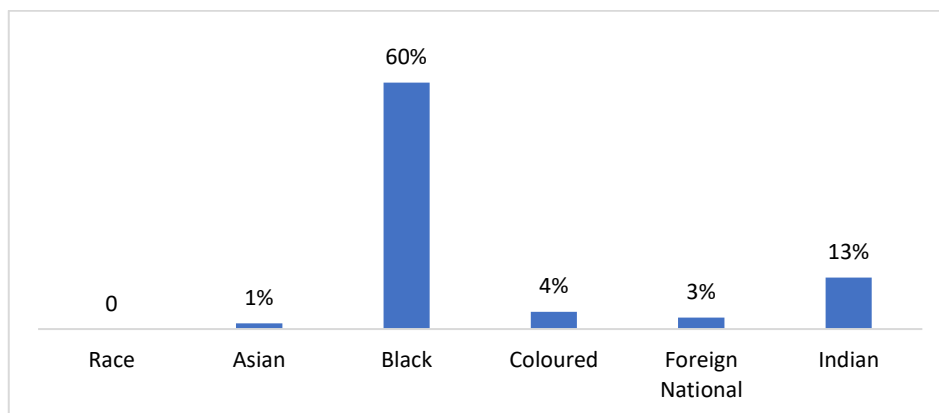


Information on the highest level of education was also collected from the respondents. The recorded responses show that 77% of the respondents hold a post-graduate qualification, while only 1% only have a high school qualification. Figure 6 shows the distribution of the respondents by the highest level of education achieved.

*Figure 6: Distribution based on the highest level of education completed*
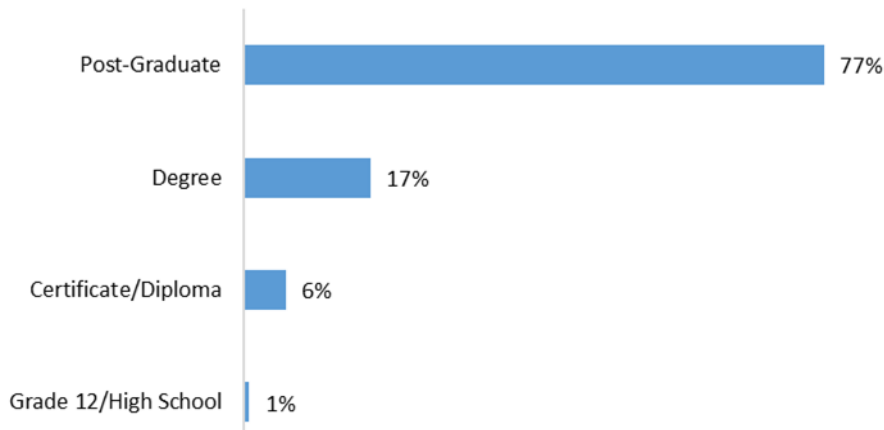


## 5.4: Descriptive statistics of the answering of the questionnaire

This section shows how the respondents answered the questionnaire. It shows the mean, standard deviation and mode of the answers of each statement. This allows for the view of the overall agreement level of each statement.

*Table 7: Perceived leader support statistics*

| Perceived Leader Support | Mean | Std Deviation | Mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| My leader clearly understands the challenges of my job | 3.58 | 1.04 | 4 |
| My leader recognises my true potential | 3.78 | 1.07 | 4 |
| My leader would go out of his/her way to help me solve problems in my work | 3.61 | 1.10 | 4 |
| My leader would stand by me if I make an honest mistake | 3.84 | 0.99 | 4 |
| My leader is committed to my development | 3.58 | 1.27 | 5 |
| My leader is committed to the development of all direct reports regardless of who they are | 3.47 | 1.16 | 4 |

Table 7 shows that respondents on average agreed with all the statements under the factor Perceived leader support with respondents mostly agreeing with the statement "My leader would stand by me if I make an honest mistake". Respondents to the statement "My leader is committed to my development" mostly strongly agreed with the statement because the mode is 5.

Figure 7 shows that only a minority of the respondents felt that their leaders were not supportive. The highest score received was five, meaning that there were about 14 respondents who had a very strong and positive perception of leader support. The majority of the respondents were concentrated closely to the mean.

*Figure 7: Perceived leader support histogram*
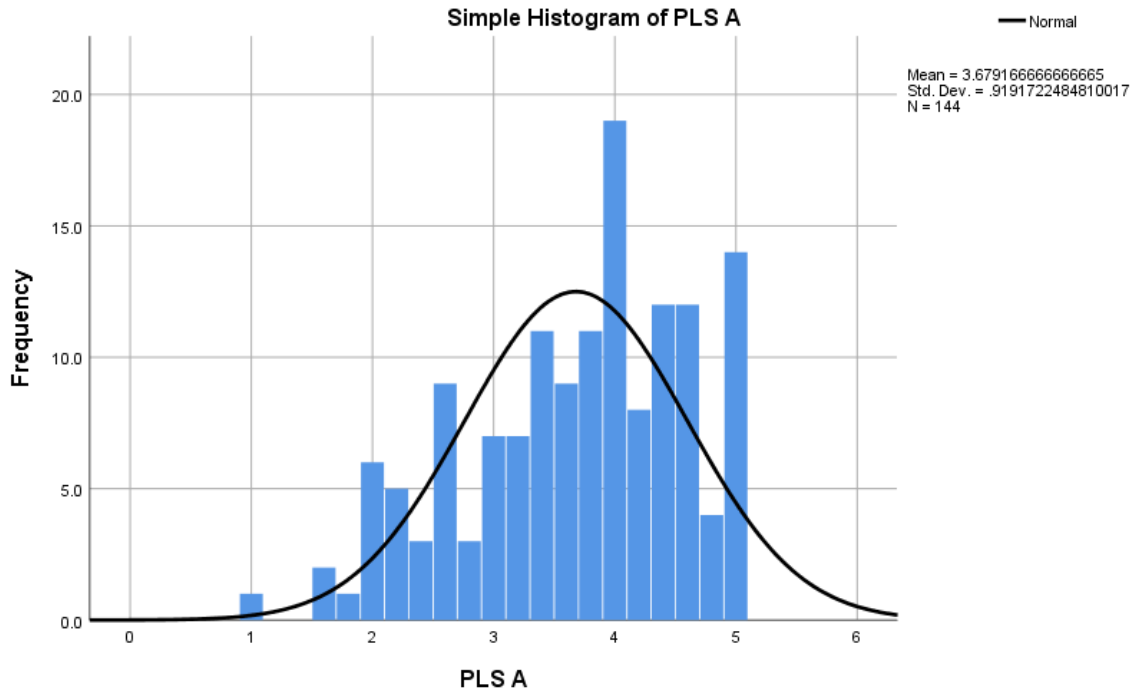


*Table 8: Perceived relationship quality statistics*

| Perceived relationship quality | Mean | Std Deviation | Mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| I have confidence in my leader's competencies | 3.85 | 1.04 | 4 |
| I would defend and justify my leader's decisions if he or she were not present to do so | 3.97 | 0.92 | 4 |
| My relationship with my leader is effective | 3.74 | 1.06 | 4 |
| My leader provides open and honest feedback on my performance | 3.64 | 1.13 | 4 |
| My leader values my opinions | 3.83 | 1.01 | 4 |
| I have a clear understanding of my leader's vision | 3.48 | 1.04 | 3 |
| I feel "heard" by my leader | 3.44 | 1.24 | 4 |

Table 2 shows that under the factor Perceived relationship quality respondents on average agreed with all the statements with respondents mostly agreeing with the statement "I would defend and justify my leader's decisions if he or she were not present to do so". An examination of Figure 8 shows that the majority of the respondents rated their perception of the relationship quality to be above three. The highest score recorded was five with about 11 respondents while about 23 respondents were recorded to have rated relationship quality to be below three.

*Figure 8: Perceived relationship quality histogram*
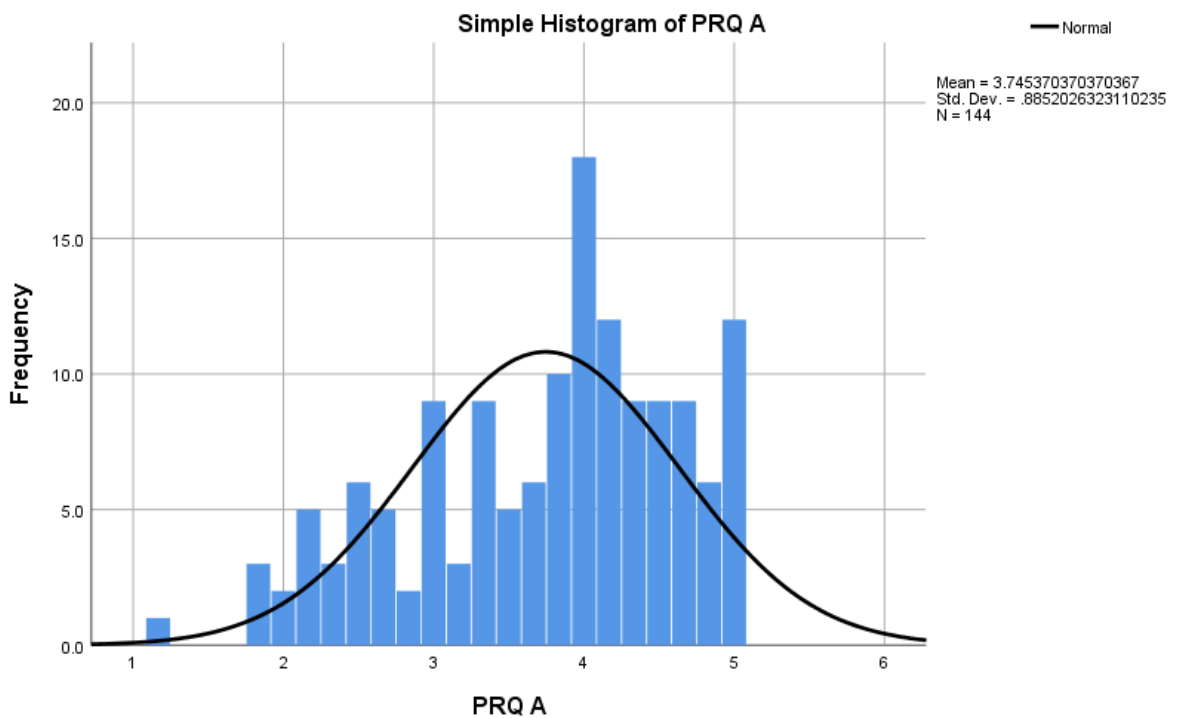


*Table 9: Perceived leader characteristics statistics*

| Perceived Leader Characteristics | Mean | Std Deviation | Mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| My leader includes me in strategic planning | 3.56 | 1.20 | 4 |
| I usually know how my leader regards my work | 3.92 | 0.88 | 4 |
| I have confidence that my leader is able to adapt to the requirements of the future | 3.32 | 1.15 | 4 |
| My leader has the required competencies to lead the team | 3.76 | 1.17 | 4 |
| My leader communicates clearly | 3.44 | 1.20 | 4 |
| My leader consults with the team before making a decision | 3.01 | 1.19 | 2 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| My leader is regarded as fair by most | 3.31 | 1.19 | 4 |
| My leader is a good manager of diversity | 3.19 | 1.28 | 4 |
| My leader cares about my personal well being | 3.48 | 1.28 | 4 |

Table 9 shows that respondents on average agreed with all the statements under the perceived leader characteristics factor except with the statement "My leader consults with the team before making a decision" were respondents were on average neutral and mostly answered disagree because the mode is 2. Figure 9 below shows that while a majority of the responses recorded were above three a sizeable number of respondents showed that they have a negative perception of leader characterises with more than 30 respondents rating leader characteristics to be less than three.

*Figure 9: Perceived leader characteristics histogram*
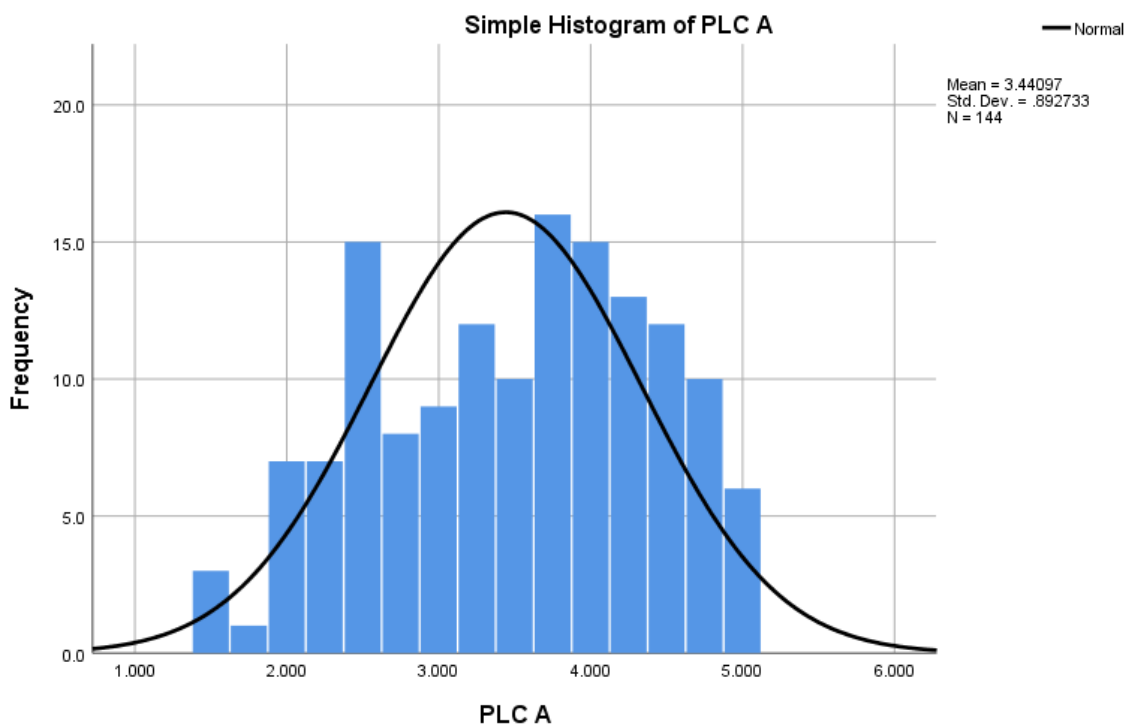
| Task Engagement | Mean | Std Deviation | Mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| I am motivated to do my job to the best of my ability | 4.03 | 1.01 | 4 |
| I am excited to get involved in projects for my organisation | 4.04 | 0.94 | 4 |
| I feel part of the decision making | 3.16 | 1.20 | 4 |
| I am committed to following the lead of my leader | 3.71 | 1.02 | 4 |
| I am committed to achieving my key performance outputs | 4.22 | 0.88 | 5 |
| I am satisfied with the position I am in | 3.01 | 1.16 | 4 |
| I identify with problems of my organisation | 3.64 | 0.81 | 4 |

Table 10 shows that respondents, on average, agreed with all statements except with the statement "I am satisfied with the position I am in" where the mean is 3.01, which is classified as neutral. Respondents mostly and strongly agreed with the statement "I am committed to achieving my key performance outputs" because it has the highest mean and has a mode of 5. As shown in Figure 10 the mean score for task engagement was 3.69 and the majority of the responses were closely clustered around the mean. About four of the responses had an average of five, while another five responses recorded an average of less than two signalling that these individuals are potentially highly disengaged.

*Figure 10: Task Engagement histogram*



Simple Histogram of TE A
Mean = 3.6932870370370385
Std. Dev. = .7774160761248924
N = 144
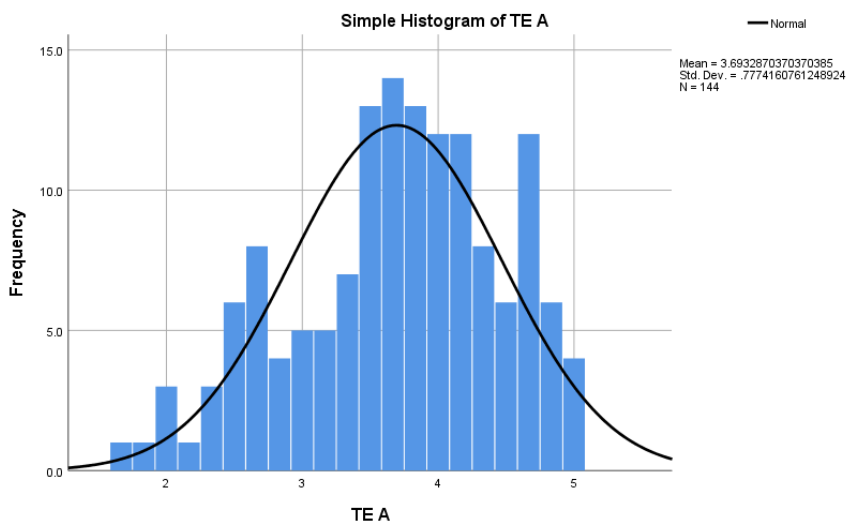
*Table 11: Organisational commitment statistics*

| Organisational Commitment | Mean | Std Deviation | Mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| I believe in the vision of my organisation | 3.87 | 0.99 | 4 |
| I am proud to work for my organisation | 3.85 | 0.96 | 4 |
| I believe there is career progression for me in this organisation | 3.12 | 1.28 | 3 |
| I find it satisfying to be part of my organisation | 3.67 | 1.04 | 4 |
| I have a strong sense of belonging | 3.21 | 1.19 | 4 |
| I intend to find another job outside of this organisation in the next 12 months | 3.58 | 1.45 | 5 |
| One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in my organisation | 3.65 | 0.97 | 4 |
| I find being a member of my organisation very captivating | 3.28 | 0.99 | 4 |
| I frequently think of quitting my job | 2.98 | 1.44 | 4 |
| If I have my own way, I will be working for the same organisation one year from now | 2.94 | 1.41 | 1 |

*Figure 11: Organisational commitment histogram*
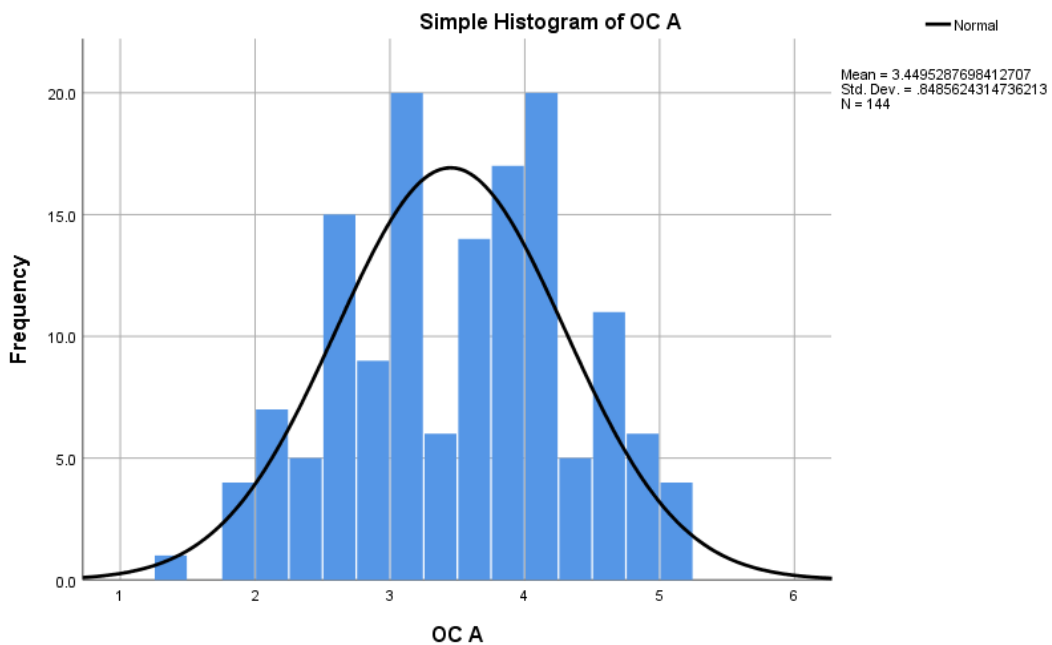
Table 11 shows that respondents disagreed on average with two statements and agreeing with the rest of the statements. Respondents answered mostly strongly disagree on the statement "If I have my own way, I will be working for the same organisation one year from now" because it has a mode of 1. A review of Figure 11 shows that the respondents gave an average score of 3.45 for organisational commitment with about 30 respondents scoring less than three for organisational commitment. Figure 11 also shows that the responses are clustered around the mean.

## 5.5 Construct validity

In any research, it is necessary to check the validity of the constructs upon which the research questions are based (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). To this end, statistical tests were conducted on the collected data to validate the constructs. The validation was done through factor analysis. This was after a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), and Bartlett's tests for sphericity was undertaken to check if an exploratory factor analysis was suitable for the data collected (Çelikler & Aksan, 2016). The results of the KMO and Bartlett's test as shown in sections 5.5.1 and 5.5.2 show that the collected data were suitable for structure detection.

### 5.5.1 KMO and Bartlett's test for sphericity

*Table 12: KMO and Bartlett's test for the independent variables*

| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | | 0.896 |
|---|---|---|
| **Bartlett's Test of Sphericity** | Approx. Chi-Square | 3354.32 |
| | df | 231 |
| | Sig. | 0 |

Table 12 shows the Bartlett's test having a p-value of less than 0.05, which means that factor analysis can be run on the collected data. The table also shows the KMO value to be 0.896, which is higher than the suggested lower limit of 0.5. The KMO result agrees with the result of the Bartlett's test.

| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | | 0.825 |
|---|---|---|
| **Bartlett's Test of Sphericity** | Approx. Chi-Square | 1664.191 |
| | df | 136 |
| | Sig. | 0 |

Table 13 shows the Bartlett's test having a p-value of less than 0.05, which means that factor analysis can be run on the collected data. The KMO value is 0.825, which is high and agrees with the result of the Bartlett's test.

## 5.5.2 Factor analysis

Table 14 and Table 15 show the factor analysis that was carried out for the independent and dependent variables for the study.

Factor analysis for the independent variables was done for three factors, and the majority of the statements were grouped as the pre-assigned factors. Statement PRQ 6, PLS 6, and PLC 9 were not grouped with their pre-assigned statements. Consequently, these statements were excluded from the study.

*Table 14: Rotated Component matrix - independent variables*

| Question | Component | Factors 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My leader includes me in strategic planning | PLC 1 | 0.768 | | |
| My leader consults with the team before making a decision | PLC 6 | 0.732 | | |
| I have confidence that my leader is able to adapt to the requirements of the future | PLC 3 | 0.644 | | 0.398 |
| My leader communicates clearly | PLC 5 | 0.637 | 0.458 | |
| I usually know how my leader regards my work | PLC 2 | 0.613 | | |
| My leader is a good manager of diversity | PLC 8 | 0.594 | 0.43 | 0.342 |
| My leader is regarded as fair by most | PLC 7 | 0.554 | 0.428 | 0.404 |
| I have a clear understanding of my leader's vision | PRQ 6 | 0.549 | | 0.314 |
| My leader has the required competencies to lead the team | PLC 4 | 0.505 | 0.381 | 0.4 |
| My relationship with my leader is effective | PRQ 3 | | 0.78 | 0.41 |
| I would defend and justify my leader's decisions if he or she were not present to do so | PRQ 2 | | 0.751 | |
| My leader includes me in strategic planning | PRQ 1 | | 0.731 | |
| My leader communicates clearly | PRQ 5 | 0.421 | 0.674 | |

| Question | Component | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My leader is committed to the development of all direct reports regardless of who they are | PLS 6 | 0.538 | 0.66 | 0.388 |
| My leader cares about my personal well being | PLC 9 | 0.477 | 0.622 | 0.513 |
| I feel "heard" by my leader | PRQ 7 | 0.483 | 0.603 | 0.519 |
| My leader provides open and honest feedback on my performance | PRQ 4 | 0.341 | 0.584 | 0.344 |
| My leader recognises my true potential | PLS 2 | | 0.324 | 0.769 |
| My leader clearly understands the challenges of my job | PLS 1 | | | 0.749 |
| My leader would go out of his/her way to help me solve problems in my work | PLS 3 | 0.352 | | 0.739 |
| My leader is committed to my development | PLS 5 | 0.425 | 0.432 | 0.672 |
| My leader would stand by me if I make an honest mistake | PLS 4 | 0.398 | | 0.644 |

Factor analysis for the dependent variables was undertaken for two factors. Also, all the statements for the two dependent variables, task engagement and organisational commitment, were allocated or grouped as pre-assigned from the questionnaire except statement TE 7. The conclusion of the factor analysis is that statement TE 7 will be removed from the study

*Table 15: Rotated Component matrix - dependent variables*

| Question | Component | Factors | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 |
| I find it satisfying to be part of my organisation | OC 4 | 0.809 | |
| I find being a member of my organisation very captivating | OC 8 | 0.802 | |
| I have a strong sense of belonging | OC 5 | 0.767 | |
| I am proud to work for my organisation | OC 2 | 0.748 | |
| I frequently think of quitting my job | OC 9 | -0.718 | |
| I believe there is career progression for me in this organisation | OC 3 | 0.71 | |
| I intend to find another job outside of this organisation in the next 12 months | OC 6 | -0.699 | |
| If I have my own way, I will be working for the same organisation one year from now | OC 10 | 0.66 | 0.611 |
| I believe in the vision of my organisation | OC 1 | 0.649 | |
| I identify with problems of my organisation | TE 7 | 0.599 | 0.562 |
| One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in my organisation | OC 7 | 0.583 | |
| I am committed to following the lead of my leader | TE 4 | | 0.787 |
| I feel part of the decision making | TE 3 | | 0.768 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| I am motivated to do my job to the best of my ability | TE 1 | | 0.766 |
| I am committed to achieving my key performance outputs | TE 5 | | 0.758 |
| I am satisfied with the position I am in | TE 6 | | 0.667 |
| I am excited to get involved in projects for my organisation | TE 2 | | 0.635 |

### 5.5.3 Total Variance Explained

Factor analysis was employed for data reduction purposes to make it easier to model the data in the regression models. Each factor accounts for a percentage of the total variance. However, some factors will account for a higher percentage of the total variance (Bruin, 2011).

Table 16 shows that three factors explain 67.741% of the total variance of the data. This means that, out of the 22 original components, using only three factors would significantly reduce the complexity of the dataset with only a 32% loss of information.

*Table 16: Total Variance Explained - Independent Variables*

| Total Variance Explained | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Comp onent | Initial Eigenvalues | | | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings | | | Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings | | |
| | Total | % of Varianc e | Cumul ative % | Total | % of Varian ce | Cumul ative % | Total | % of Varian ce | Cumul ative % |
| 1 | 12.63 | 57.398 | 57.398 | 12.63 | 57.398 | 57.398 | 5.217 | 23.713 | 23.713 |
| 2 | 1.281 | 5.825 | 63.223 | 1.281 | 5.825 | 63.223 | 5.135 | 23.341 | 47.054 |
| 3 | 0.994 | 4.518 | 67.741 | 0.994 | 4.518 | 67.741 | 4.551 | 20.687 | 67.741 |
| 4 | 0.859 | 3.903 | 71.644 | | | | | | |
| 5 | 0.754 | 3.427 | 75.071 | | | | | | |
| 6 | 0.689 | 3.13 | 78.201 | | | | | | |
| 7 | 0.617 | 2.803 | 81.004 | | | | | | |
| 8 | 0.57 | 2.592 | 83.596 | | | | | | |
| 9 | 0.502 | 2.282 | 85.878 | | | | | | |
| 10 | 0.462 | 2.098 | 87.976 | | | | | | |
| 11 | 0.402 | 1.826 | 89.802 | | | | | | |
| 12 | 0.379 | 1.722 | 91.524 | | | | | | |
| 13 | 0.374 | 1.701 | 93.225 | | | | | | |
| 14 | 0.315 | 1.43 | 94.655 | | | | | | |
| 15 | 0.27 | 1.226 | 95.881 | | | | | | |
| 16 | 0.236 | 1.073 | 96.954 | | | | | | |
| 17 | 0.2 | 0.909 | 97.863 | | | | | | |
| 18 | 0.182 | 0.829 | 98.691 | | | | | | |
| 19 | 0.162 | 0.738 | 99.429 | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20 | 0.114 | 0.516 | 99.945 | | | | | | | |
| 21 | 0.007 | 0.032 | 99.977 | | | | | | | |
| 22 | 0.005 | 0.023 | 100 | | | | | | | |

Table 17 shows that three factors can explain 64.627% of the total variance in the depended variables.

*Table 17: Total Variance Explained - Dependent Variables*

| Total Variance Explained | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Compo nent | Initial Eigenvalues | | | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings | | | Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings | | | |
| | Total | % of Varian ce | Cumul ative % | Total | % of Varian ce | Cumul ative % | Total | % of Varianc e | Cumul ative % | |
| 1 | 7.421 | 43.65 | 43.65 | 7.421 | 43.65 | 43.65 | 4.169 | 24.526 | 24.526 | |
| 2 | 2.478 | 14.578 | 58.229 | 2.478 | 14.578 | 58.229 | 3.712 | 21.834 | 46.360 | |
| 3 | 1.088 | 6.398 | 64.627 | 1.088 | 6.398 | 64.627 | 3.105 | 18.267 | 64.627 | |
| 4 | 0.925 | 5.442 | 70.069 | | | | | | | |
| 5 | 0.732 | 4.305 | 74.375 | | | | | | | |
| 6 | 0.72 | 4.237 | 78.612 | | | | | | | |
| 7 | 0.607 | 3.571 | 82.183 | | | | | | | |
| 8 | 0.52 | 3.059 | 85.242 | | | | | | | |
| 9 | 0.451 | 2.651 | 87.893 | | | | | | | |
| 10 | 0.411 | 2.418 | 90.311 | | | | | | | |
| 11 | 0.366 | 2.152 | 92.463 | | | | | | | |
| 12 | 0.316 | 1.856 | 94.319 | | | | | | | |
| 13 | 0.301 | 1.769 | 96.088 | | | | | | | |
| 14 | 0.259 | 1.526 | 97.614 | | | | | | | |
| 15 | 0.22 | 1.297 | 98.911 | | | | | | | |
| 16 | 0.159 | 0.938 | 99.849 | | | | | | | |
| 17 | 0.026 | 0.151 | 100 | | | | | | | |

## 5.6 Reliability results

For the results of a research study to be useful, the research instrument used must be reliable (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Cronbach's alpha tests were conducted for each of the research constructs to test the reliability of the measuring instrument. The results of the tests show that all the constructs had an alpha value that is greater than the generally acceptable coefficient of 0.70 (Bonett & Wright, 2015b; UCLA, 2019). The following sections highlight reliability results for each of the constructs.

### 5.6.1 Cronbach's alpha results: Perceived leader support

The results of the factor analysis shown in Table 14 show that component PLS_6 "My leader is committed to the development of all direct reports regardless of who they are" does not belong with the rest of the questions measuring this construct. To that end, component PLS_6 was deleted. Reliability tests for the perceived leadership support construct are acceptable for the remaining five items with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.893. Table 19 shows that deleting any of the statements to measure this construct would not improve reliability. It can, therefore, be concluded that all statements for the construct are appropriate. To that end, all the statements were used to test the hypothesis relating to perceived leader support.

*Table 18: Perceived leader support overall Cronbach's alpha*

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|---|---|
| 0.893 | 5 |

*Table 19: Perceived leaders support delete Items analysis*

| Statements | Scale Mean if Item Deleted | Scale Variance if Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My leader clearly understands the challenges of my job | 14.81 | 14.671 | 0.673 | 0.884 |
| My leader recognises my true potential | 14.62 | 14.098 | 0.728 | 0.872 |
| My leader would go out of his/her way to help me solve problems in my work | 14.78 | 13.471 | 0.8 | 0.856 |
| My leader would stand by me if I make an honest mistake | 14.56 | 14.864 | 0.687 | 0.881 |
| My leader is committed to my development | 14.81 | 12.293 | 0.814 | 0.853 |

### 5.6.2 Cronbach's alpha results: Perceived relationship quality

Reliability tests for the perceived relationship quality construct were conducted using six questions. This was after the factor analysis tests showed that component PRQ_6 needed to be deleted as shown in Table 14. Table 20 below shows that, with six items, the reliability for the perceived relationship quality construct has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.906. As illustrated in Table 21, deleting any of the items would not have improved the reliability of the construct. In addition, each of the items for this

construct is highly correlated with the overall scale. All the six items were therefore used in the testing of the hypothesis related to the construct.

*Table 20: Perceived relationship quality overall Cronbach's alpha*

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|---|---|
| 0.906 | 6 |

*Table 21: Perceived relationship quality delete Items analysis*

| Statements | Scale Mean if Item Deleted | Scale Variance if Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have confidence in my leader's competencies | 18.62 | 20.895 | 0.652 | 0.902 |
| I would defend and justify my leader's decisions if he or she were not present to do so | 18.5 | 21.301 | 0.711 | 0.894 |
| My relationship with my leader is effective | 18.74 | 19.091 | 0.859 | 0.872 |
| My leader provides open and honest feedback on my performance | 18.83 | 19.888 | 0.703 | 0.895 |
| My leader values my opinions | 18.64 | 20.414 | 0.742 | 0.889 |
| I have a clear understanding of my leader's vision | 19.03 | 18.16 | 0.802 | 0.881 |

## 5.6.3 Cronbach's alpha results: Perceived leader characteristics

The reliability test for the perceived leader characteristics constructs resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.9 using eight items. Table 23 shows that the Cronbach's alpha would not be improved by deleting any of the items. Therefore, the calculated coefficient of 0.9 was accepted, and all the eight items were used in the testing of the hypothesis.

*Table 22: Perceived leader characteristics overall Cronbach's alpha*

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|---|---|
| 0.9 | 8 |

*Table 23: Perceived leader characteristics delete Items analysis*

| Statements | Scale Mean if Item Deleted | Scale Variance if Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My leader includes me in strategic planning | 23.97 | 40.747 | 0.577 | 0.898 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I usually know how my leader regards my work | 23.60 | 43.933 | 0.542 | 0.900 |
| I have confidence that my leader is able to adapt to the requirements of the future | 24.21 | 39.201 | 0.727 | 0.884 |
| My leader has the required competencies to lead the team | 23.76 | 39.412 | 0.696 | 0.887 |
| My leader communicates clearly | 24.08 | 37.853 | 0.789 | 0.878 |
| My leader consults with the team before making a decision | 24.52 | 39.300 | 0.693 | 0.887 |
| My leader is regarded as fair by most | 24.22 | 38.604 | 0.742 | 0.883 |
| My leader is a good manager of diversity | 24.33 | 37.804 | 0.734 | 0.883 |

## 5.6.4 Cronbach's alpha results: Organisational commitment

Using the ten questions that were designed to measure the organisational commitment construct, the reliability test returned a Cronbach's alpha of 0.589 as shown in Table 24: Organisational commitment initial Cronbach's alpha. This coefficient is below the acceptable 0.70, meaning that some questions had a low correlation with the overall scale. Table 25 shows that deleting item OC6 would improve the coefficient to 0.764. After deleting item OC6, Table 27 shows that the reliability for the construct could be further improved by deleting item OC9. Deleting item OC9 improved the coefficient to 0.897, as shown in Table 28, which is above the acceptable coefficient of 0.70. After deleting item OC9, deleting any further items would not have significantly improved the reliability of the construct. Hypothesis testing for the construct was, therefore done using eight items.

*Table 24: Organisational commitment initial Cronbach's alpha*

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|---|---|
| 0.589 | 10 |

*Table 25: Organisational commitment delete Items analysis*

| Code | Statements | Scale Mean if Item Deleted | Scale Variance if Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| OC1 | I believe in the vision of my organisation | 30.30 | 23.184 | 0.616 | 0.488 |
| OC2 | I am proud to work for my organisation | 30.30 | 22.803 | 0.700 | 0.473 |
| OC3 | I believe there is career progression for me in this organisation | 31.03 | 22.611 | 0.485 | 0.503 |
| OC4 | I find it satisfying to be part of my organisation | 30.49 | 21.660 | 0.758 | 0.448 |

| OC5 | I have a strong sense of belonging | 30.96 | 22.449 | 0.545 | 0.489 |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| OC6 | I intend to find another job outside of this organisation in the next 12 months | 30.59 | 37.482 | -0.536 | 0.764 |
| OC7 | One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in my organisation | 30.52 | 24.984 | 0.425 | 0.532 |
| OC8 | I find being a member of my organisation very captivating | 30.89 | 22.396 | 0.716 | 0.465 |
| OC9 | I frequently think of quitting my job | 31.20 | 36.106 | -0.469 | 0.749 |
| OC10 | If I have my own way, I will be working for the same organisation one year from now | 31.22 | 21.006 | 0.543 | 0.476 |

*Table 26: Organisational commitment Cronbach's alpha excluding OC 6*

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| 0.764 | 9 |

*Table 27: Organisational commitment (excluding OC 6) delete Items analysis*

| Statements | Scale Mean if Item Deleted | Scale Variance if Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |
|------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| OC 1 | 26.73 | 29.622 | 0.635 | 0.717 |
| OC 2 | 26.73 | 28.946 | 0.746 | 0.704 |
| OC 3 | 27.46 | 28.011 | 0.586 | 0.718 |
| OC 4 | 26.92 | 27.570 | 0.810 | 0.690 |
| OC 5 | 27.38 | 27.999 | 0.635 | 0.711 |
| OC 7 | 26.94 | 31.518 | 0.459 | 0.742 |
| OC 8 | 27.31 | 28.527 | 0.755 | 0.701 |
| OC 9 | 27.63 | 46.249 | -0.554 | 0.897 |
| OC 10 | 27.65 | 25.947 | 0.659 | 0.702 |

*Table 28: Organisational commitment Cronbach's alpha excluding OC 6 and OC 9*

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| 0.897 | 8 |

## 5.6.5 Cronbach's alpha results: Task engagement

The reliability test for the task engagement construct resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.841. This alpha was calculated using six items after item TE7 was deleted as shown in Table 15. Table 30 shows that deleting any items would not improve the reliability of the construct. Therefore, the six items were used in the testing of the hypothesis related to the task engagement construct.

*Table 29: Task engagement Cronbach's alpha*

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|---|---|
| 0.841 | 6 |

*Table 30: Task engagement delete Items analysis*

| Statements | Scale Mean if Item Deleted | Scale Variance if Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am motivated to do my job to the best of my ability | 18.13 | 15.472 | 0.663 | 0.807 |
| I am excited to get involved in projects for my organisation | 18.12 | 16.790 | 0.532 | 0.831 |
| I feel part of the decision making | 19.00 | 14.168 | 0.677 | 0.804 |
| I am committed to following the lead of my leader | 18.45 | 15.117 | 0.703 | 0.799 |
| I am committed to achieving my key performance outputs | 17.94 | 16.528 | 0.624 | 0.816 |
| I am satisfied with the position I am in | 19.15 | 15.459 | 0.546 | 0.832 |

## 5.7 Hypothesis testing

After the reliability and validity tests were performed in sections 5.6 and 5.5, respectively, statistical tests to test the hypothesis were conducted. To test the hypotheses, a Pearson correlation test and regression model were conducted. The hypotheses testing was completed using a significance level of $p < 0.05$ in the regression analyses.

*Table 31: Pearson Correlation Test*

| Correlation Matrix | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | PLS | PRQ | PLC | TE | OC |
| Correlation | PLS | 1 | | | | |
| | PRQ | 0.784 | 1 | | | |
| | PLC | 0.741 | 0.795 | 1 | | |
| | TE | 0.622 | 0.663 | 0.646 | 1 | |
| | OC | 0.684 | 0.725 | 0.695 | 0.491 | 1 |
| Sig. (1-tailed) | PLS | | | | | |
| | PRQ | 0 | | | | |
| | PLC | 0 | 0 | | | |
| | TE | 0 | 0 | 0 | | |
| | OC | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |

Table 31 shows that there are significant and positive relationships between all the factors involved in this study.

Wegner (2016) suggests plotting a scatter plot to get an idea of the direction of a relationship between variables before running regression analyses. In that regard, scatter plots were plotted to visualise the direction of the relationship between perceived relationship quality and, task engagement and organisational commitment as illustrated in Figure 12 and Figure 13 respectively. The plots show that a strong, direct linear relationship exists between the test variables.

*Figure 12: Scatter plot for Perceived Relationship Quality and Task Engagement*
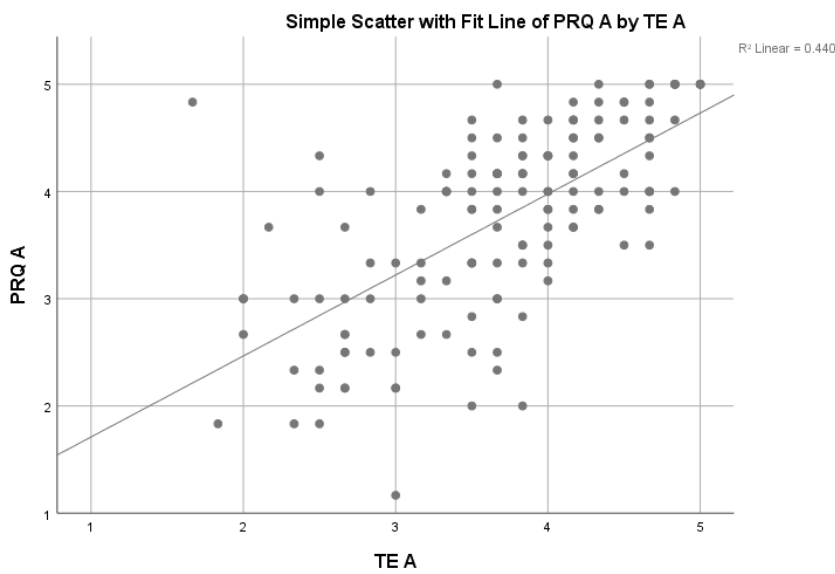


*Figure 13: Scatter plot for Perceived Relationship Quality and Organisational Commitment*
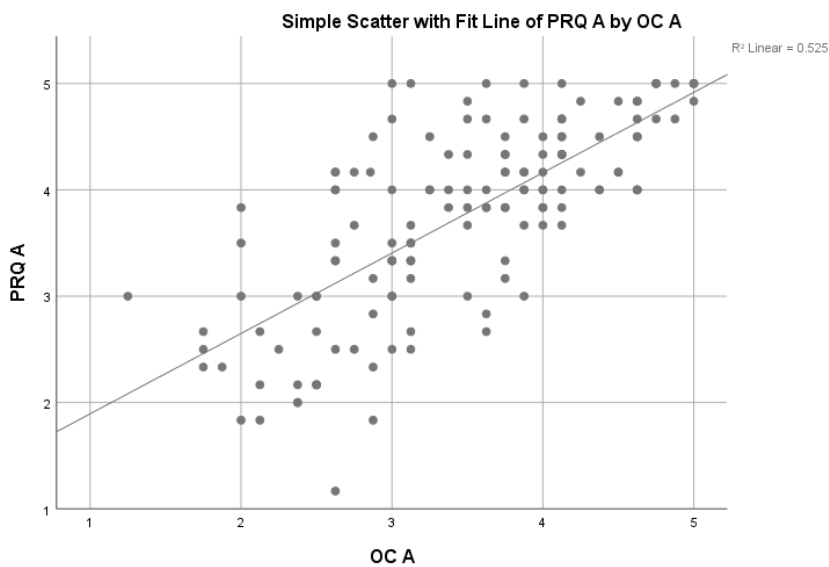
The scatter plots as shown in Figure 12 and Figure 13 above show that a strong relationship between perceived relationship quality and each of the follower commitment constructs. It was therefore necessary to run regression analysis to quantify the relationships between the variables (Wegner, 2016). Table 32 and Table 33 sow the results of the regression analysis that was conducted to quantify the relationship between "perceived relationship quality and task engagement" and "perceived relationship quality and organizational commitment" respectively.

*Table 32:Regression analysis of Perceived Relationship Quality and Task Engagement*

| Model Summary | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | |
| 1 | .663[a] | 0.440 | 0.436 | 0.583775529202515 | |
| | | | | | |
| Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Relationship Quality (PRQ A) | | | | | |
| Dependent Variable: Task Engagement (TE A) | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| ANOVA[a] | | | | | |
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 38.033 | 1 | 38.033 | 111.601 | .000[b] |
| | Residual | 48.393 | 142 | 0.341 | | |
| | Total | 86.426 | 143 | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Coefficients[a] | | | | | | |
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.511 | 0.212 | | 7.122 | 0.000 |
| | PRQ A | 0.583 | 0.055 | 0.663 | 10.564 | 0.000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: TE A | | | | | | |

*Table 33: Regression model of Perceived Relationship Quality and Organizational Commitment*

| Model Summary | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | |
| 1 | .725[a] | 0.525 | 0.522 | 0.586847105766859 | |

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Relationship Quality (PRQ A) | | | | | | |

Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Relationship Quality (PRQ A)

Dependent Variable: Organisational Commitment (OC A)

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 54.065 | 1 | 54.065 | 156.988 | .000<sup>b</sup> |
| | Residual | 48.903 | 142 | 0.344 | | |
| | Total | 102.968 | 143 | | | |

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 0.848 | 0.213 | | 3.975 | 0.000 |
| | PRQ A | 0.695 | 0.055 | 0.725 | 12.529 | 0.000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: OC A | | | | | | |

**Hypothesis 1a**

H0: The degree to which followers perceive the quality of their relationship with the leader is positively correlated to follower commitment.

H1: The degree to which followers perceive the quality of their relationship with the leader is positively correlated to follower commitment.

Table 32 and Table 33 show that there is a significant positive relationship between Task engagement and organisational commitment with perceived relationship quality because their p-values are less than 0.05 and also both their coefficients are positive.

Table 32 shows a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.663 and an Adjusted R square of 0.436 which indicates that 43.6% of the variability of task engagement is explained by perceived relationship quality. Table 32 also shows that task engagement increased by 0.583 with every unit increase in perceived relationship quality.

Table 33 shows that perceived relationship quality is strongly correlated to organisational commitment with a correlation coefficient (R) 0.725. The Adjusted R

square of 0.522 shown in Table 33 indicates that 52.2% of the variability of organisational commitment is explained by perceived relationship quality.

It can therefore be concluded that the quality of their relationship with the leader is positively correlated to work and task commitment. This conclusion is also confirmed by Table 31 which shows that the individual relationship between task engagement and perceived relationship quality, and organisational commitment and perceived relationship quality have high r values which also have a Pearson correlation p-value of less than 0.05.

**Hypothesis 1b**

H0: The degree to which followers perceive the quality of their relationship with the leader is not negatively correlated to follower commitment.

H1: The degree to which followers perceive the quality of their relationship with the leader is negatively correlated to follower commitment.

Table 31 and Table 32 concluded that the degree to which followers perceive the quality of their relationship with the leader is positively correlated to work and task commitment, which means we cannot reject H0 and conclude that the degree to which followers perceive the quality of their relationship with the leader is not negatively correlated to work and task commitment. A review of Figure 12 and Figure 13 shows that strong-direct linear relationships exist between perceived relationship quality and organisational commitment as well as between perceived relationship quality and task engagement.

*Figure 14: Scatter plot for Perceived Leader Characteristics and Organisational Commitment*



*Figure 15: Scatter plot for Perceived Leader Characteristics and Task Engagement*



*Table 34: Regression model of Perceived leader characteristics and organisational commitment*

| Model Summary | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | |
| 1 | .695ᵃ | 0.484 | 0.480 | 0.611934102131121 | |
| | | | | | |
| Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Leader Characteristics (PLC A) | | | | | |
| Dependent Variable: Organisational Commitment (OC A) | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **ANOVAᵃ** | | | | | |

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 49.795 | 1 | 49.795 | 132.976 | .000[b] |
| | Residual | 53.174 | 142 | 0.374 | | |
| | Total | 102.968 | 143 | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| **Coefficients[a]** | | | | | | |
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.175 | 0.204 | | 5.768 | 0.000 |
| | PLC A | 0.661 | 0.057 | 0.695 | 11.532 | 0.000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: OC A | | | | | | |

*Table 35: Regression model of Perceived leader characteristics and task engagement*

| **Model Summary** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | |
| 1 | .646[a] | 0.418 | 0.414 | 0.595314980748097 | |
| | | | | | |
| Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Leader Characteristics (PLC A) | | | | | |
| Dependent Variable: Task Engagement (TE A) | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **ANOVA[a]** | | | | | |
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 36.101 | 1 | 36.101 | 101.865 | .000[b] |
| | Residual | 50.325 | 142 | 0.354 | | |
| | Total | 86.426 | 143 | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| **Coefficients[a]** | | | | | | |
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.757 | 0.198 | | 8.863 | 0.000 |
| | PLC A | 0.563 | 0.056 | 0.646 | 10.093 | 0.000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: TE A | | | | | | |

**Hypothesis 2a**

H0: A perception of positive leader characteristics is not positively related follower commitment.

H1: Hypothesis 2a: A perception of positive leader characteristics is positively related follower commitment.

Table 34 shows that the p-value of organisational commitment is less than 0.05, and the correlation coefficient (R) is 0.695, which means that the relationship between organisational commitment and perceived leader characteristics is positively significant. The table also shows that the variable "perceived leader characteristics" is a strong predictor of organisational commitment as it explains 48% of the variability as shown by the Adjusted R square of 0.480.

Table 35 shows a correlation coefficient of 0.646, which indicates that perceived leader characteristics is strongly correlated to task engagement. The table also shows that task engagement changed by 0.563 with every unit change in perceived leader characteristics.

**Hypothesis 2b**

H0: A perception of positive leader characteristics is positively related follower commitment.

H1: A perception of positive leader characteristics is not positively related follower commitment.

Table 31 and

Table 34 concluded that a positive relationship exists between perceived positive leader characteristics and follower work commitment. This means we cannot reject H0 and conclude that there is no positive relationship between perceived positive leader characteristics and follower work commitment. The scatter plots in Figure 16 and Figure 17 show that a direct linear relationship exists between perceived leader support and both task engagement and organisational commitment.

*Figure 16: Scatter plot for Perceived Leader support and Organisational Commitment*
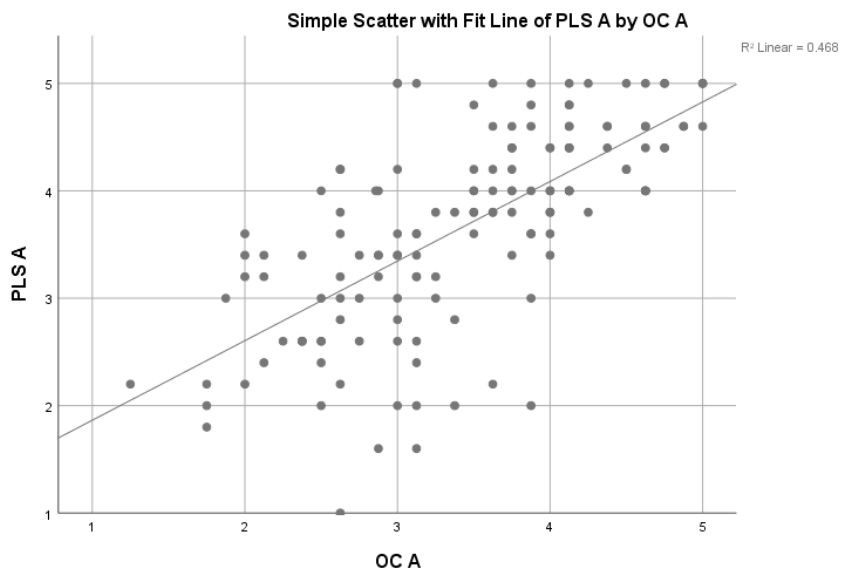


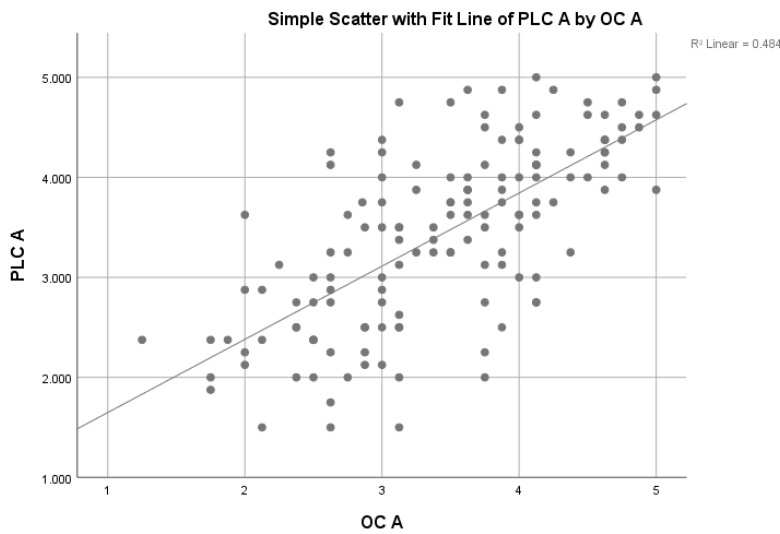*Figure 17: Scatter plot for Perceived Leader support and Task Engagement*



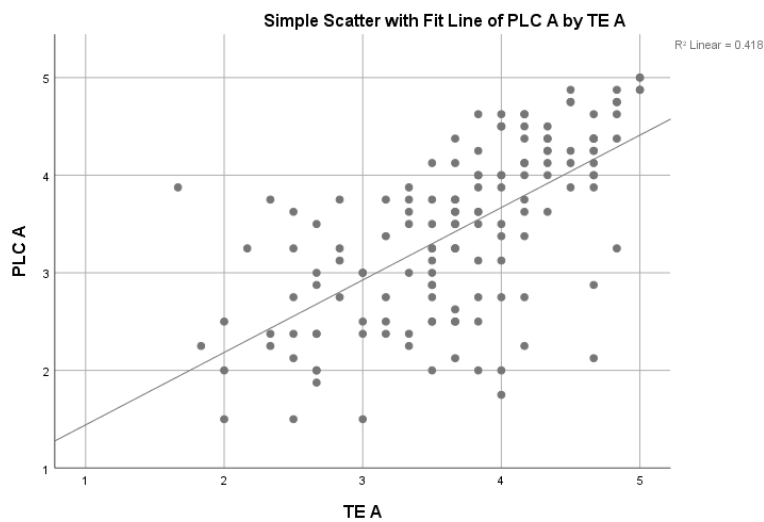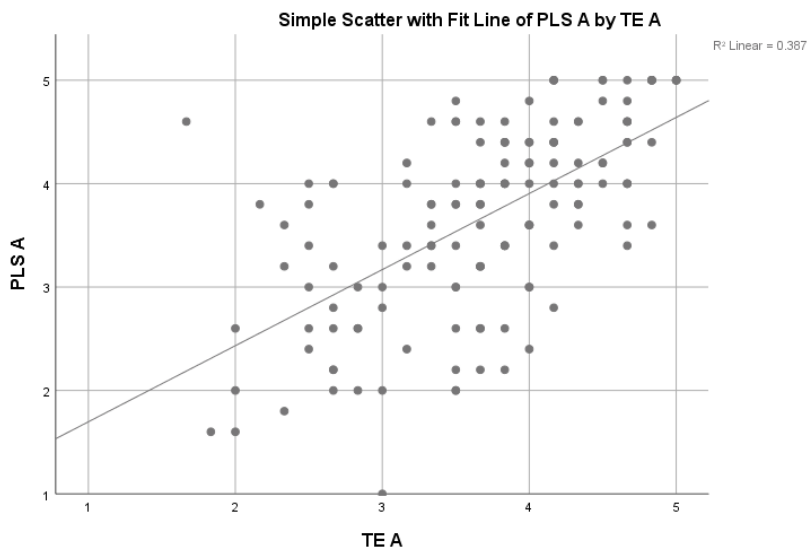*Table 36: Regression model of Perceived leader support and organisational commitment*

| Model Summary | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | |
| 1 | .684ᵃ | 0.468 | 0.464 | 0.62117027652822 9 | |
| | | | | | |
| Predictors: (Constant), Perceived leader support (PLS A) | | | | | |

| Dependent Variable: Organisational Commitment (OC A) | |
|---|---|

**ANOVAᵃ**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 48.177 | 1 | 48.177 | 124.859 | .000ᵇ |
| | Residual | 54.791 | 142 | 0.386 | | |
| | Total | 102.968 | 143 | | | |

**Coefficientsᵃ**

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.126 | 0.214 | | 5.256 | 0.000 |
| | PLS A | 0.631 | 0.057 | 0.684 | 11.174 | 0.000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: OC A | | | | | | |

*Table 37: Regression model of Perceived leader support and task engagement*

**Model Summary**

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .622ᵃ | 0.387 | 0.383 | 0.610641953355576 |

| Predictors: (Constant), Perceived leader support (PLS A) |
|---|
| Dependent Variable: Task Engagement (TE A) |

**ANOVAᵃ**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 33.476 | 1 | 33.476 | 89.777 | .000ᵇ |
| | Residual | 52.949 | 142 | 0.373 | | |
| | Total | 86.426 | 143 | | | |

**Coefficientsᵃ**

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.757 | 0.211 | | 8.340 | 0.000 |
| | PLS A | 0.526 | 0.056 | 0.622 | 9.475 | 0.000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: TE A | | | | | | |

**Hypothesis 3a**

H0: There is no linear relationship between the follower's perception of leader support and the follower's work commitment.

H1: There is a linear relationship between the follower's perception of leader support and the follower's work commitment.

Table 36 shows that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived leader support and organisational commitment because the p-value is less than 0.05 and has a coefficient of 0.684. This means that we reject H0 and conclude that there is a linear relationship between the follower's perception of leader support and the follower's organisational commitment. Furthermore, Table 36 shows that perceived leader support explains 46.4% of the variability in organisational commitment as represented by the Adjusted R square of 0.464.

Table 37 shows a correlation coefficient of 0.622 between perceived leader support and task engagement. Furthermore, the table shows an Adjusted R square of 0.383, which means that 38.3% of the variability of task engagement can be explained by perceived leader support.

**Hypothesis 3b**

H0: There is a linear relationship exists between the follower's perception of leader support and follower commitment.

H1: No linear relationship exists between the follower's perception of leader support and follower commitment.

Hypothesis H3a results lead to not rejecting H0 for hypothesis 3b and conclude like in hypothesis 3a that there is a linear relationship exists between the follower's perception of leader support and the follower's work commitment.

## 5.8 Comparison of mean scores across subgroups

Table 31 shows that there are significant positive relationships between the study variables that the research focused on. This section will test if the differences in the means of the different demographic groups within the study sample are statistically significant. Comparing mean scores was necessary to understand if the responses where different depending on the subgroups.

### 5.8.1 Gender

The test for mean differences across gender groups was conducted using an Independent samples t-test. The test was underpinned by assumptions, which include independence of observations, normal distribution and homogeneity of variances. This test was the ideal test to use as it is used to understand if differences exist between the means of two groups measured on a continuous scale. The finding of the t-test, as shown in Table 38, shows no statistically significant differences between males and females. The significance level used in the test is $p<0.05$ and Table 38 shows that none of the constructs had a p-value less than 0.05.

*Table 38: Independent Samples Test - Gender*

| | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference |
| Perceived Leadership Support | Equal variances assumed | -0.717 | 129 | 0.475 | -0.12600 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | -0.705 | 112.601 | 0.483 | -0.12600 |
| Perceived Relationship Quality | Equal variances assumed | -0.924 | 129 | 0.357 | -0.15312 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | -0.921 | 124.202 | 0.359 | -0.15312 |
| Perceived Leadership Characteristics | Equal variances assumed | -0.852 | 129 | 0.396 | -0.13744 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | -0.848 | 123.754 | 0.398 | -0.13744 |
| Task Engagement | Equal variances assumed | -0.984 | 129 | 0.327 | -0.14079 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | -0.979 | 123.512 | 0.329 | -0.14079 |
| Organisational Commitment | Equal variances assumed | -0.379 | 129 | 0.705 | -0.05907 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | -0.381 | 128.359 | 0.704 | -0.05907 |

### 5.8.2 Age groups

The ANOVA test was suitable for comparing mean scores for each construct across the different age groups in the data set. The ANOVA test was ideal for the mean differences here since it is used to test for differences when comparing more than two groups. No significant differences were found to exist among the age groups as

the p-value was greater than 0.05 for all the constructs. Table 39 shows the ANOVA results for the Age subgroups.

*Table 39: ANOVA - Age*

|  |  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Leadership Support | Between Groups | 5.948 | 3 | 1.983 | 1.993 | 0.118 |
|  | Within Groups | 137.292 | 138 | 0.995 |  |  |
|  | Total | 143.24 | 141 |  |  |  |
| Perceived Relationship Quality | Between Groups | 3.375 | 3 | 1.125 | 1.215 | 0.307 |
|  | Within Groups | 127.748 | 138 | 0.926 |  |  |
|  | Total | 131.124 | 141 |  |  |  |
| Perceived Leadership Characteristics | Between Groups | 1.994 | 3 | 0.665 | 0.773 | 0.511 |
|  | Within Groups | 118.664 | 138 | 0.86 |  |  |
|  | Total | 120.658 | 141 |  |  |  |
| Task Engagement | Between Groups | 2.211 | 3 | 0.737 | 1.114 | 0.346 |
|  | Within Groups | 91.316 | 138 | 0.662 |  |  |
|  | Total | 93.527 | 141 |  |  |  |
| Organisational Commitment | Between Groups | 3.13 | 3 | 1.043 | 1.357 | 0.259 |
|  | Within Groups | 106.084 | 138 | 0.769 |  |  |
|  | Total | 109.214 | 141 |  |  |  |

## 5.8.3 Length of service

The F-test found significant differences for perceived leadership support and task engagement where the p-values were less than 0.05. For perceived leadership support p=0.041 and 0.035 for task engagement. For the remaining constructs, no significant differences were found. Table 40 shows the ANOVA results for the length of service subgroup.

*Table 40: ANOVA - Length of Service with the organisation*

|  |  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Leadership Support | Between Groups | 8.312 | 3 | 2.771 | 2.834 | 0.041 |
|  | Within Groups | 134.928 | 138 | 0.978 |  |  |
|  | Total | 143.24 | 141 |  |  |  |
| Perceived Relationship Quality | Between Groups | 7.063 | 3 | 2.354 | 2.619 | 0.053 |
|  | Within Groups | 124.06 | 138 | 0.899 |  |  |
|  | Total | 131.124 | 141 |  |  |  |

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Leadership Characteristics | Between Groups | 3.366 | 3 | 1.122 | 1.32 | 0.27 |
| | Within Groups | 117.292 | 138 | 0.85 | | |
| | Total | 120.658 | 141 | | | |
| Task Engagement | Between Groups | 5.633 | 3 | 1.878 | 2.948 | 0.035 |
| | Within Groups | 87.893 | 138 | 0.637 | | |
| | Total | 93.527 | 141 | | | |
| Organisational Commitment | Between Groups | 2.606 | 3 | 0.869 | 1.124 | 0.342 |
| | Within Groups | 106.608 | 138 | 0.773 | | |
| | Total | 109.214 | 141 | | | |

## 5.8.4 Job level

Table 41 shows that the p-values for all constructs are greater than 0.05, indicating that no significant differences exist. These results suggest that based on the respondents for this study, job level is not a significant differentiator for any of the constructs.

*Table 41: ANOVA - Job Level*

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Leadership Support | Between Groups | 0.643 | 1 | 0.643 | 0.759 | 0.385 |
| | Within Groups | 109.285 | 129 | 0.847 | | |
| | Total | 109.928 | 130 | | | |
| Perceived Relationship Quality | Between Groups | 1.95 | 1 | 1.95 | 2.203 | 0.14 |
| | Within Groups | 114.208 | 129 | 0.885 | | |
| | Total | 116.159 | 130 | | | |
| Perceived Leadership Characteristics | Between Groups | 0.004 | 1 | 0.004 | 0.005 | 0.942 |
| | Within Groups | 102.318 | 129 | 0.793 | | |
| | Total | 102.322 | 130 | | | |
| Task Engagement | Between Groups | 0.116 | 1 | 0.116 | 0.173 | 0.678 |
| | Within Groups | 86.578 | 129 | 0.671 | | |
| | Total | 86.694 | 130 | | | |
| Organisational Commitment | Between Groups | 1.856 | 1 | 1.856 | 1.862 | 0.175 |
| | Within Groups | 128.583 | 129 | 0.997 | | |
| | Total | 130.44 | 130 | | | |

### 5.8.5 Level of education

ANOVA tests based on the level of education subgroups found no significant differences among the constructs of the study. Table 42 shows the results of the ANOVA test based on the level of education. The results show that none of the constructs had a p-value of less than 0.05.

*Table 42: ANOVA - Highest Level of Education*

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Leadership Support | Between Groups | 1.357 | 1 | 1.357 | 1.396 | 0.239 |
| | Within Groups | 127.335 | 131 | 0.972 | | |
| | Total | 128.692 | 132 | | | |
| Perceived Relationship Quality | Between Groups | 0.607 | 1 | 0.607 | 0.658 | 0.419 |
| | Within Groups | 120.769 | 131 | 0.922 | | |
| | Total | 121.376 | 132 | | | |
| Perceived Leadership Characteristics | Between Groups | 0.053 | 1 | 0.053 | 0.062 | 0.804 |
| | Within Groups | 112.693 | 131 | 0.86 | | |
| | Total | 112.747 | 132 | | | |
| Task Engagement | Between Groups | 0.129 | 1 | 0.129 | 0.204 | 0.652 |
| | Within Groups | 82.525 | 131 | 0.63 | | |
| | Total | 82.653 | 132 | | | |
| Organisational Commitment | Between Groups | 0.111 | 1 | 0.111 | 0.149 | 0.7 |
| | Within Groups | 97.81 | 131 | 0.747 | | |
| | Total | 97.921 | 132 | | | |

## 5.9 Summary

The research received 155 responses of which 144 were fully completed questionnaires.

The overview of the characteristics of the respondents is 56% male, 67% being in the age group between 30 and 39, 75% are either middle or senior managers, 48% have been in the organisation for five or more years, 60% are black and 77% have a postgraduate qualification.

Respondents, on average, mostly agreed with the statements under the factor task management and least agreed with the statement under the factor organisational commitment. Respondents mostly agreed with the statement "I am committed to

achieving my key performance outputs" and least agreed with the statement "If I have my own way, I will be working for the same organisation one year from now".

Overall factor analysis validated the factors that were pre-assigned but removed three statements, PRQ 6, PLS 6 and PLC 9 from the independent factors' statements and just one, TE 7, from the dependent factors.

All the Cronbach's alphas for all the factors classified by the factor analysis were above 0.8, which is classified as good after removing two statements, OC 6 and OC 9, from the dependent factors.

The hypothesis concluded that the degree to which followers perceive the quality of their relationship with the leader is positively correlated to work and task commitment. A positive relationship was found to exist between perceived positive leader characteristics and follower work commitment. There is also a linear relationship between the follower's perception of leader support and the follower's work commitment.

# Chapter 6: Discussion of Research Results

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the research presented in chapter five. The discussion of the results starts with a discussion related to the demographics to further understand the profiles and diversity of the research respondents. The discussion of the results also focused on the results related to each of the research constructs as well as the results of the hypotheses testing. Conclusions were drawn from the results of the statistical tests carried out in chapter five relating to the study constructs and hypotheses.

## 6.2 Demographics

The sample population for this study was made up of 155 individuals who work in South African SMEs. Small and Medium Enterprises were defined as organisations that employ between 50 and 200 full-time staff. The participants were required to be leader-followers who are either middle managers, senior managers or professional. All the participants were asked to indicate their job level to be valid participants in the study. The results showed that 40% of the respondents were middle managers, 35% were senior managers, while a further 9% identified as being professionally qualified individuals who are in middle or senior management positions. A comparison of mean scores based on job level found no significant differences in any of the research constructs.

*Job level*

As mentioned in chapter one and chapter two of this study, professionally qualified individuals, middle managers and senior managers were believed to be crucial to the success of organisations (Ahearne et al., 2014; Newman et al., 2018). Leadership scholars believe that these individuals in their positions as leader-followers are a critical component of the organisation as they play the role of facilitators of strategy execution (Ahearne et al., 2014). This study argued that these leader-followers would have the same performance expectations placed on them by their leaders. This was expected to lead to a somewhat similar approach to work tasks and relationship

perceptions among the study sample. Consistent with the literature, this study found that there are no significant differences across job levels.

*Gender*

Gender statistics were skewed towards males, with males accounting for 56% while females made up the remaining 44% of the respondents. This study found no significant differences in the perception between male and females in their relationship qualities or their commitment to the organisation and work tasks. This finding contradicts findings by Selvarajan, Slattery, and Stringer (2015), which suggest that there are differences in the levels of commitment between genders. A previous study carried out by Visagie and Diedericks (2018) in South Africa concluded that females in the country continue to experience social and psychological barriers to participation in the workplace. As a result, the expectation for this study was to find significant differences between genders regarding how they perceive their relationships with their leaders. A possible explanation for the finding of no significant differences between genders in this study is found in the work of Selvarajan et al.( 2015). The authors found that perceptual differences between genders become insignificant when contextual factors such as position and experience are controlled for. As discussed in section 4.6, this study was controlled for leader-followers, this could offer a possible explanation for why no significant differences were found between genders.

*Age*

 The majority of the respondents, 67%, fell within the 30 to 39 years age group, and this was in line with the expectations of this study. This expectation was informed by the findings of Yang, Johnson and Niven (2018) who found that at the age of 40 is when most individuals start progressing into executive level positions.  The lowest number of respondents fell into the 50 years and older age group. Mean comparisons based on age subgroups found no significant differences in how the participants responded to the survey. A prior study by H. J. Anderson, Baur, Griffith, and Buckley (2017) suggests that significant differences should have been found among the age groups in their relationship perceptions and commitment intentions. It is interesting that no significant difference were found in the 30 to 39 years age group, as studies such as those of  H. J. Anderson et al. (2017) and A. C. C. Lu and Gursoy (2016) have found this age group to have different expectations and attitudes towards work.

In their study, Tuncdogan, Acar, and Stam (2017) concluded that that physiological and psychological differences exist among individuals and this affects individual attribution, perceptions and commitment. This conclusion by Tuncdogan et al. (2017) suggests that age plays a significant role in shaping an individual's physiology and psychology. The finding of this current study is noteworthy in that it is different from the current understanding of the leadership process, its outcomes and influences. The question that arises from the current findings is whether a different population sample would yield a similar result.

*Level of education*

By far the largest percentage, 77%, of the participants indicated that they hold a postgraduate qualification, while 7% indicated that they had only a certificate, diploma or high school certificate as their highest qualification. With the 7% being a small number, the researcher was concerned if these responses would not produce biased results if they were included in the hypothesis testing. A comparison of mean scores, however, found no significant differences in the responses. Thus, the researcher concluded that including the responses would not negatively impact the results of the hypothesis testing.

*Organisational tenure*

Most of participants, 48% had been with their current organisation for more than five years, and 13% had been with the organisation for less than one year. The remaining 39% had been with their current organisation for more than one year but less than five years. A comparison of mean scores across the different subgroups, as shown in Table 40, found significant differences in perceived leadership support and task engagement. For both perceived leadership support and task engagement employees with between three and five years with the organisation seem to have a higher perception of leadership support and task engagement.

The findings of this study replicate findings by Steffens, Shemla, Wegge, and Diestel (2014) up until five years of tenure. In their study, Steffens et al. (2014) found that task engagement was positively related to tenure and that engagement improved the longer an individual stayed with an organisation. Similarly, this study found that individuals with between three and five years of tenure have higher engagement levels than their counterparts with less than three years' tenure. The apparent decline of engagement levels in employees with more than five years of tenure supports the

findings by Ng and Feldman (2013) and T.-Y. Kim, Liu, and Diefendorff (2015). Both studies found that the levels of task engagement begin to decline as job tenure increases. Ng and Feldman (2013) attributed this decline in engagement to individuals getting bored as they reached ceilings of personal and career growth within the organisation. The finding of this study adds to our understanding of follower commitment by suggesting that employee commitment follows an inverted u-curve as job tenure increases.

The following sections offer discussions of the findings for each of the research constructs.


## 6.3 Perceived leader support

Analysis of the data showed that participants of the study perceive just above average support from their leaders. On the Likert scale used, a value of three was neutral in that the respondent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, while four meant the respondent agreed with the statement and therefore it was a positive score. This means that all responses that were recorded as a four or five indicated that the respondent had a positive perception of leader support. All statements under perceived leader support had a median value greater than three, indicating that the participants were leaning towards having a positive perception of leader support, although it was not strongly positive. The statement "My leader would stand by me if I make an honest mistake" recorded the highest mean of 3.58.

The modal values for all statements were also high, suggesting that participants were leaning towards agreeing that they perceived their leaders as being supportive. The statement "My leader is committed to my development" had the highest mode of five, suggesting that participants strongly agreed that their leaders are committed to follower development.

Perceived leader support was one of the three underlying variables that made up the independent variable for this study, which is the perceived leader-follower relationship. The literature review indicated that leadership support is one of the critical antecedents of positive employee and organisational outcomes. Wu and Parker (2017) suggested that leadership support creates an environment in which followers are willing and able to go beyond the call of duty in their work tasks.

Supportive leadership gives followers autonomy and decision-making latitude, which enables them to take task associated risks without fear of reprisals from their leader.

The target population for this study was leader-followers in South African SMEs. It was argued earlier in this study that these individuals are vital to organisational success due to their position within the organisational structure. One of the arguments put forward in chapter one was that leader-followers are better positioned to sense environmental changes faster than senior executives and are therefore able to act quicker by making decisions to respond to the changing operating environment (Ahearne et al., 2014). The literature review on leadership support suggests that when followers do not perceive their leader as supportive, they are unlikely to make decisions in response to the environmental changes.

The findings of this study suggest that leader-followers in South African SMEs generally perceive that they get slightly more than average support from their leaders. Studies by Chiu, Balkundi, and Weinberg (2017) and Jansen, Kostopoulos, Mihalache, and Papalexandris (2016) suggested that through informal networks and interactions leaders engage in supportive behaviours which bring them greater social power. In SMEs, due to their size, leaders are expected to have more frequent engagements with their followers which enables them to create informal networks outside of the formal organisational structure. The findings of this study suggest that organisational leaders in SMEs might not be engaging with followers frequently and actively enough for followers to perceive leader support as very strong.

The analysis of mean differences based on demographics highlighted that a significant difference exists only in the organisational tenure subgroup. The mean differences have been discussed in section 6.2. However, it is essential to note that even though significant differences exist, the perception of leadership support is generally above average. The study thus empirically supports the proposition that the more frequently a leader interacts with their followers, the more positive the perception of leadership support will be. Leaders of South African SMEs are therefore urged to display more supportive behaviours in order to create an environment where followers are willing to take work-related risks to advance organisational goals (Caza, Zhang, Wang, & Bai, 2015; Chiu et al., 2017).

## 6.4 Perceived relationship quality

The mean scores for perceived relationship quality indicated that on average, the participants were leaning towards agreeing that they perceive good quality relationships with their leaders. The highest mean, 3.94, was recorded for the statement "I would defend and justify my leader's decisions if he or she were not present to do so". The statement had a recorded standard deviation of 0.92 and a mode of four, which indicates that the majority of the participants perceive a good quality relationship with their leaders.

LMX theory argues that employee outcomes are a function of the relationship quality between leaders and followers (Breevaart et al., 2015; Gooty & Yammarino, 2016). Guided by the findings of Breevaart et al. (2015) and Gooty and Yammarino (2016) this study sought to determine the relationship between perceived relationship quality and employee commitment. Consequently, this study expected to find a significant and positive relationship between the perceived relationship quality and the underlying variables of follower commitment. The findings of this study are in line with this expectation and show a strong and positive correlation between perceived relationship quality and task engagement 0.663, and perceived relationship quality and organisational commitment 0.725. As shown in chapter five, these findings support prior research findings such as that of Caillier (2017); Devece et al. (2016) and Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018) that "perceived relationship quality" is positively correlated to both "task engagement and organisational commitment".

Qu et al. (2017) have shown that when the relationship quality is perceived to be good, leaders are in a better position to exert influence on their followers to perform. In good quality relationships, followers have a clear understanding of the leader's expectations (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014), this is facilitated by leaders giving open and honest feedback on followers' performance (Martin et al., 2016).

The findings of this study are also consistent with existing literature described in chapter two in that the level of feedback received from leaders and followers' understanding of the leader's vison are within the same range as the overall perception of relationship quality. Followers' understanding of the leader's vision and open feedback channels are key characteristics of high-quality relationships. Leaders are thus called upon to continually provide feedback and articulate their expectations in their interactions with their followers.

Analysis of the data related to "perceived relationship quality" shows that the question with the highest mean is "I would defend and justify my leader's decisions if he or she were not present to do so". This suggests that when followers perceive a good relationship with their leaders, they have higher levels of buy-in into their leader's vision and decisions. It can therefore be inferred that followers in high-quality relationships will have higher levels of trust in their leaders (Caza et al., 2015; Xie et al., 2018). This finding suggests that leaders should strive to foster high-quality relationships with followers as this gives them the ability to influence the actions of their followers.

The comparison of the mean scores found no significant differences across the chosen subgroups for this study. This implies that none of the demographic variables are moderators of how followers perceive the relationship quality with their leaders.


## 6.5 Perceived leader characteristics

In the literature review, it was noted that leaders provide a salient role model through which followers model their own work behaviours (Gutermann et al., 2017). To that end, the questions for the perceived leader characteristics construct were designed to measure the extent to which followers perceive positive characteristics in their leaders. The current understanding in literature holds that when followers assess leadership characteristics they look at the leader's competencies (Breevaart et al., 2015; Gooty & Yammarino, 2016) and psychosocial skills (Clarke & Mahadi, 2014; Gooty & Yammarino, 2016).

Studies such as that of Auh et al. (2016) and Clarke and Mahadi (2014) have posited that leadership traits such as inclusive leadership are critical in building strong relationships with followers. Given these studies, this study set out to find out the degree to which followers perceive their leaders to be good managers of diversity and inclusive in their decision making. Table 9 in chapter five shows that the participants neither agree nor disagree that their leaders consult them before making decisions. The question "My leader consults with the team before making a decision" had a mean score of 3.01 and a mode of two. However, participants also tend to agree that their leaders include them in strategic planning, with a mode of four and a mean of 3.56 for the question "My leader includes me in strategic planning". These almost dissimilar responses suggest that leaders in South African SMEs are not

consistently including their followers in making decisions that affect them in their work tasks.

Perceived leader characteristics results presented in chapter five show that overall, the participants in the study had neutral perceptions of their leaders' characteristics. The mean score for the construct was 3.45, which although it is above average, it not particularly high. Perceived leader characteristics was one of the underlying of the variables for the independent variable of the study, the followers' perception of the leader-follower relationship. Table 31 shows that there is a positive correlation between this variable and both underlying variables of the dependent variable, follower work commitment. Such a low level of positive perception of leader characteristics is thus expected to result in lower levels of employee commitment.

The findings of this study are similar to findings from other studies that found there is a positive relationship between leader characteristics and follower outcomes (C. Liao et al., 2017; Qu et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2018). This finding has important implications for business leaders that seek to influence positive follower outcomes. It is suggested that leaders should display more positive characteristics, such as inclusive leadership and empathy, in order to create more positive relationships that lead to higher levels of follower commitment.

## 6.6 Task engagement

Task engagement was assessed as an underlying variable of the dependent variable, follower commitment. Task engagement was considered necessary for this study due to its positive relationship to organisational outcomes (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2008; L. Lu et al., 2016; Newton et al., 2019). At the beginning of this study, it was discussed that South African SMEs are essential for economic growth and employment creation (The Banking Association South Africa, 2019). It was also noted that SMEs are faced with a high rate of failure (Bruwer Siwangaza, 2016). This study consequently posited that one of the reasons SMEs may be failing could be the low levels of employee engagement in the country, as reported by Mann and Harter (2016). It was against this backdrop that this study set out to measure the levels of task engagement in SME leader-followers.

An analysis of the mean scores, illustrated in Table 10, shows that all the measured items for this construct had a mean greater than three and modal values of four or

five. The average mean for task engagement was recorded as 3.69, suggesting that although the participants might be engaged, they are not highly engaged in their tasks. An interesting finding is that the participants are committed to achieving their performance outputs. A mean of 4.22 (SD=0.88) and a mode of five were recorded for the question "I am committed to achieving my key performance outputs". Two other questions also recorded means scores greater than four. The questions were "I am motivated to do my job to the best of my ability" (Mean = 4.03, SD = 1.01, Mode = 4), and "I am excited to get involved in projects for my organisation" (Mean = 4.04, SD = 0.94, Mode = 4). These statistics suggest that the participants are highly motivated to invest in their work tasks. The results also show that although the participants are highly motivated, they are not satisfied but hold neutral feelings about their current positions. The question with the lowest mean, 3.01 (SD=1.16), was "I am satisfied with the position I am in". The neutral feelings from the participants about their current positions could offer a possible explanation for the slightly above average levels of engagement despite the high levels of motivation.

The literature review highlighted that the current understanding is that LMX quality is positively related to task engagement (Breevaart et al., 2015; Gutermann et al., 2017). Table 31 in chapter five shows that there is a strong statistical correlation between the assessed independent variables and task engagement. The correlation coefficients were 0.622 with perceived leader support, 0.633 with perceived relationship quality and 0.646 with perceived leader characteristics. The findings of this study support findings of Breevaart et al. (2015) and S. hsien Liao et al. (2018) that a positive relationship exists between LMX quality and follower engagement

Comparison of means found that there are significant differences between means of tenure with the organisation. The group with the highest mean score for task engagement was the group with three to five years' tenure with the organisation. Section 6.2 discussed how this finding adds to the existing literature by suggesting that task engagement follows an inverted U-curve.

## 6.7 Organisational Commitment

The data collected for the study revealed a mean score for employee commitment of 3.42, which means the participants are not highly committed to their organisations. The working definition of organisational commitment used for this study can be

summed up as "psychological and emotional attachment to the organisation that influences an individual's beliefs about whether they should be loyal to their organisation and remain in the organisation" (Hudson et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2017). A score of 3.42 implies that the participants are closer to being uncertain about the degree of their psychological attachment to the organisation and, therefore, they are not being fully committed.

The organisational commitment construct was assessed as an underlying variable for the dependent variable, employee commitment. Prior studies have found a positive relationship between organisational commitment and organisational outcomes (Newman et al., 2017; Ng, 2015). It was against the backdrop of the motivation for this study that it was considered necessary to assess organisational commitment. The definition of organisational commitment and previous research in the area of organisational commitment suggest that when individuals have a high sense of organisational commitment, they develop a sense of oneness with the organisation and identify with the organisational problems as their own. It was inferred from the definition and prior studies that if employees of South African SMEs were highly committed, then the success of SMEs would also improve. Prior studies and definitions found in literature were pivotal in establishing the questions used to measure the organisational commitment construct.

A test of correlation between the independent variables and organisational commitment found that organisational commitment is strongly correlated to the perceived leader-follower relationship. This finding supports current literature which suggests that follower organisational commitment is highly influenced by the LMX relationship (Ng, 2015; Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Table 31 shows that organisational commitment is most influenced by the perceived relationship quality, with a correlation coefficient of 0.725. Leaders are, therefore called upon to invest their efforts into building high-quality relationships by displaying positive behaviours such as providing open and honest feedback to their followers.

A study by Devece et al. (2016) found the levels of organisational commitment to be significantly high in environments of high unemployment. The authors attributed this to continuance commitment as they expected it would not be easy for individuals to secure new employment. Considering the high rate of unemployment in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2019a), the researcher expected significantly high levels of commitment from the participants. The mean score of 3.42 is contrary to the findings

of Devece et al. (2016), this is despite the findings suggesting that the participants perceive the cost associated with leaving their current organisations to be high. The question "If I have my own way, I will be working for the same organisation one year from now" had a mean of 2.94 (SD = 1.41) and a mode of one, suggesting that the participants would be willing to leave their current organisation if they found an opportunity elsewhere.

Despite the participants wanting to leave their current organisations, the study found the participants had a sense of moral obligation towards the organisation. The question "I believe in the vision of my organisation" had a mean of 3.87 (SD = 0.99) and a mode of 4. The question "I am proud to work for my organisation" had a mean of 3.85 (SD = 0.96) and mode of four. This finding can be explained to be as a result of normative commitment (Hudson et al., 2019; K. Y. Kim et al., 2016). Normative commitment is a feeling of moral obligation towards the organisation that results from an experience of indebtedness to the organisation. The researcher wondered if a different sample population would yield similar results.

Comparison of means found no significant differences across any of the analysed subgroups. This finding suggests that organisational commitment is not moderated by any of the demographics considered in this study. The findings of this study do, however, offer support to a prior study by Cahill et al. (2015) who suggested there is a direct relationship between macroeconomic performance and employee commitment. Their study found that when a country's economy is weak, the levels of employee commitment are consequently low. This could offer a potential explanation for the low levels of organisational commitment seen in the findings of this study.

The following sections are a discussion of the research findings with respect to the research hypotheses discussed in chapter three.

## 6.8 Perceived relationship quality and follower commitment

The primary objective of this study was to identify the structure of the relationship between the perceived leader-follower relationship and follower commitment.  For this study, follower commitment was subdivided into two latent variables which are task engagement and organisational commitment. Hypothesis one was framed to enable the understanding of the relationship between perceived relationship quality and the two latent variables of follower commitment.

**Hypothesis 1a: The degree to which followers perceive the quality of their relationship with the leader is positively correlated to follower commitment.**

**Hypothesis 1b: The degree to which followers perceive the quality of their relationship with the leader is negatively correlated to follower commitment.**

Leadership scholars are mostly aligned and widely agree that leadership will only exist if there is some form of relationship between a leader and a follower (Silva, 2016; Uhl-Bien  Arena, 2018; Xie et al., 2018). Authors such as Kong et al. (2019) and Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) have argued that research in the realm of leadership has primarily been focused on the leader and leadership traits while side-lining the active role of the follower in the leadership process. Other scholars such as Jacobsen and Andersen (2015) have added to literature by considering the active role of the follower and suggesting that leadership only exists if followers perceive it. Proponents of the relational school of leadership have argued that positive leadership outcomes are as a result of high-quality and mature relationships between leaders and followers. The LMX theory places emphasis on the relational interaction between leader and follower, arguing that a high-quality relationship is positively related to positive employee and organisational outcomes (Breevaart et al., 2015; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; C. Liao et al., 2017).

The regression analysis, as shown in Table 32 and Table 33, shows that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived relationship quality and both task engagement and organisational commitment. This finding is also supported by Table 31, which shows that a positive correlation exists between perceived relationship quality and the follower commitment variables. These findings support the assertions made by Martin et al. (2016) in their meta-analytic examination of the relationship between LMX quality and work performance. In their research, the authors proposed that organisations should remove structural barriers to high-quality relationship development and offer leadership training programmes that focus on techniques to improve relationship quality. These proposals were based on the supposition that high-quality relationships are positively related to high levels of task engagement and organisational commitment.

A study by Breevaart et al. (2015) offers empirical evidence of the assertions made by Martin et al. (2016). In their study, Breevaart et al. (2015) found that individuals who were in high-quality relationships were more engaged and committed. Their

study was, however, carried out within a public service setting in the Dutch economy, which is more advanced and has significantly lower unemployment rates than South Africa.

Responses collected from the survey participants were used to establish whether perceived relationship quality was related to follower commitment in order to test if findings by Breevaart et al. (2015) would be applicable in the South African context and to validate the assertions by Martin et al. (2016). Although the scores in Table 8 were dispersed around the mean, the findings suggest that the participants perceive a relationship quality with their leaders that is not of high quality but slightly above average. Table 31 shows that there is a positive correlation between perceived relationship quality and both task engagement and organisational commitment. The positive correlation is evidenced by the relatively low levels of task engagement and organisational commitment as represented by their means of 3.69 and 3.42 respectively.

The regression models, Table 32 and Table 33, further confirm this trend as they returned Adjusted R-Squared of 0.436 for task engagement and 0.522 for organisational commitment when measured against perceived relationship quality. The findings in Table 31 show that task engagement will increase by 0.663 and organisational commitment will increase by 0.725 for every unit increase in perceived relationship quality. Figure 18 below illustrates the findings in the conceptual model that was hypothesised in chapter three.

*Figure 18: Relationship quality Adjusted R-Squared coefficients results of hypothesis model*
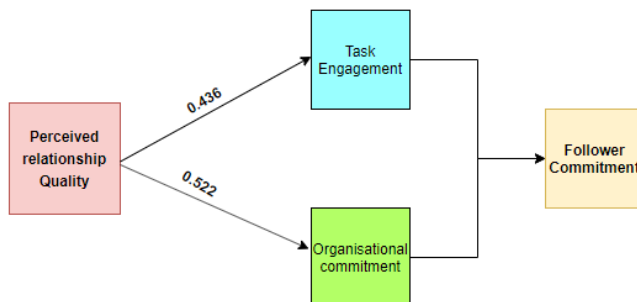


These findings add further empirical evidence in support of the studies by Martin et al. (2016) and Breevaart et al. (2015). Cahill et al. (2015) called for research into possible strategies to improve employee performance in tough macroeconomic conditions. Findings of this study add to the literature of relational leadership by

suggesting that leaders can significantly improve follower outcomes by investing effort into the development of high-quality relationships.

## 6.9 Perceived leader characteristics and organisational commitment

The Pearson correlation test in Table 31 shows that a positive relationship was observed between the contracts of perceived leader characteristics and organisational commitment. In a prior study by K. Y. Kim et al. (2016), the authors concluded that the main drivers of organisational commitment are the individuals' experiences in the workplace. This argument is built on the understanding that when individuals perceive that their organisation cares about their wellbeing, they are bound to have high levels of affective commitment to the organisation. Other scholars such as Clarke and Mahadi (2014) and Martin et al. (2016) have argued that followers perceive their leaders as the embodiment of the organisation and attribute the leader's characteristics and behaviours to the organisation. This perspective implies that when followers perceive that their leader cares about their wellbeing, they will also perceive that the organisation cares about their wellbeing.

**Hypothesis 2a: A perception of positive leader characteristics is positively related follower commitment.**

**Hypothesis 2b: A perception of positive leader characteristics is not positively related follower commitment.**

Results of the regression analysis confirm hypothesis 2a and show that there is a positive relationship between perceived leader characteristics and follower commitment variables. The regression model produced Adjusted R-squared values of 0.414 for task engagement and 0.480 for organisational commitment. These results signify that perceived leader characteristics is a predictor of both task engagement and organisational commitment.

The results offer support for Ng (2015), who suggested that when individuals perceive favourable treatment from the leader, they will respond with positive affective feelings towards the organisation. Multiple studies have found that positive affect is related to positive employee and organisational outcomes. Bolino et al. (2015) found that positive affect leads to individuals going beyond the call of duty and getting involved in activities to advance organisational goals. Takeuchi et al.

(2015) found that positive affect is linked to desires and motives to connect with and help others to achieve performance goals. Newman et al. (2017) concluded that positive affect is linked to discretionary behaviour that promotes the effective functioning of the organisation.

*Figure 19: Leader characteristics results for hypothesis model*
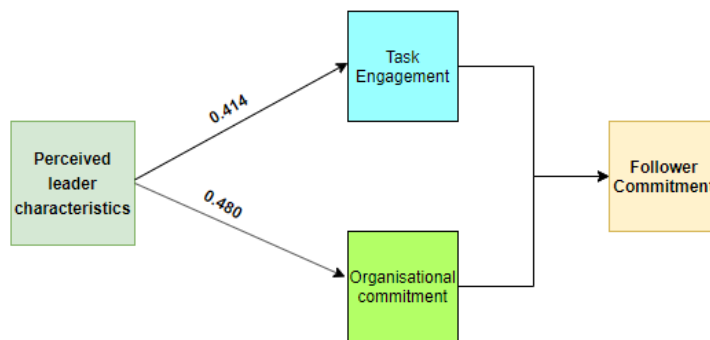


Figure 19 above, illustrates the findings of the regression tests for perceived leader characteristics. The findings show that perceived leader characteristics are a strong predictor of follower commitment. The findings of this study also offer support to a prior study by Gutermann et al. (2017), who found that the leader's work behaviours are positively related to followers' commitment. The argument behind the findings was that the leader's characteristics offer an example that shapes follower commitment. Given the findings of this study and findings from prior studies, such as those of Gutermann et al. (2017); Takeuchi et al. (2015) and Ng (2015), it is proposed that organisational leaders who wish to influence higher levels of affective commitment from followers must display positive characteristics and show a genuine desire to facilitate follower wellbeing.

## 6.10 Perceived leader support and follower commitment

Some scholars in the realm of leadership theory have suggested that each job has a host of associated demands and that it is the leader's responsibility to provide the resources necessary to meet the job demands (Knight et al., 2017; Newton et al., 2019). These arguments are built on the JD-R theory, as discussed in section 2.8.1.1 Job demands and resources. Job demands are ever-present in the work context and how these demands interrelate with job resources has a direct impact on employee performance. Scholars such as Wingerden et al. (2016) and Conway et al. (2016)

have suggested that support from the leader is a crucial job resource that minimises the undesirable effects of job demands. In a study by Qu et al. (2017), the authors concluded that followers are more likely to be engaged in their work tasks when they perceive their leader to be supportive. Using findings from prior studies, the measurement instrument, as discussed in section 4.7, was designed to assess the extent to which the participants perceive their leaders as supportive. The collected data was intended to test whether the assertions by Qu et al. (2017) would hold true in the context of this study.

**Hypothesis 3a: There is a linear relationship between the follower's perception of leader support and the follower commitment.**

**Hypothesis 3b: No linear relationship exists between the follower's perception of leader support and the follower commitment.**

Table 31 shows the results of the correlation test between perceived leader support and both latent variables of follower commitment, as discussed in section 2.8 and section 4.7. Perceived leader support has a correlation coefficient of 0.622 with task engagement and 0.684 with organisational commitment. The trend is further supported by the regression analysis, Table 36 and Table 37, which shows a coefficient of 0.684 for organisational commitment and 0.622 for task engagement. These results mean that organisational commitment will change by 0.684 and task engagement will change by 0.622 with every unit change in perceived leader support. Figure 20 below illustrates the results of the regression in the conceptual model that was hypothesises in chapter three.

*Figure 20: Leader support regression results*
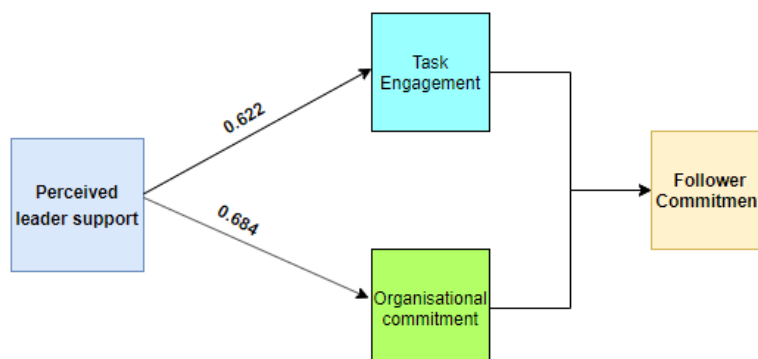


These findings offer empirical evidence in support of the assertions by Qu et al. (2017) and Wingerden et al. (2016) by showing that follower commitment will

increase as followers perceive a more supportive leadership. The findings of this study suggest that leaders who aim to encourage high levels of discretionary effort from their followers should invest efforts in creating a supportive environment that reduces the adverse effects of job demands.

## 6.11 Summary of findings

This research study set out to assess the structure of the relationship between perceived leader-follower relationships and follower commitment. Hypotheses to test this relationship were formulated based on findings from prior studies that form the current understanding of the relational school of leadership. Literature-informed constructs were used to test the hypotheses. The results found the hypotheses to be statistically significant, suggesting that a positive relationship exists between the follower's perception of their relationships with their leaders and the follower's commitment to both work tasks and the organisation. The findings of this study will provide organisational leaders and aspirant leaders with knowledge that they can use when implementing strategies to improve the levels of follower commitment in their organisations.

# Chapter 7: Conclusion

## 7.1 Introduction

The objective of this research was to understand the extent to which followers' commitment is influenced by how they perceive their relationships with their leaders. Understanding of follower commitment was considered an important area of study due to the link between commitment and organisational success. Follower commitment has been linked to positive organisational outcomes based on the argument that it is committed individuals that effectively implement organisational strategies (Lee & Puranam, 2016; Martin et al., 2016). Leadership literature suggested that high-quality leader-follower relationships are an essential antecedent for follower commitment.

The motivation for this study was developed from an appreciation of the changing world of work as well as the high rate of SME failures in South Africa. SMEs play a pivotal role in employment creation and the economic growth of the country (The Banking Association South Africa, 2019), which makes the high rate of SME failures a concern. Furthermore, practitioner reports suggest that the country is plagued by low rates of employee commitment (Mann & Harter, 2016). Given the literature that points to the link between leader-follower relationships and the practitioner reports of low commitment levels in the country, this study inferred that the high rate of SME failures could be attributed to low levels of employee commitment. To this end, this study sought to answer the question "*To what extent does the follower's perception of the nature of the leader-follower relationship affect the follower's commitment to work tasks*?"

The research question above formed the basis for the development of the research hypotheses as discussed in chapter three. Answering of the research question was expected to give valuable insights to leaders who seek to increase the levels of follower commitment within their organisations.

This chapter highlights the main findings of this study. The findings will be used to draw implications of the study and provide recommendations for both academia and business practitioners. The chapter also highlights the limitations of the study and make recommendations for future study.

## 7.2 Summary of main findings

Findings from this study assist in the understanding of the relationship between followers' perceptions of the leader-follower relationships and the follower's commitment. The literature review resulted in a conceptual model that was proposed and tested for this study. Prior studies discussed in chapter two, focused on the different components that formed the basis for this study. Gooty and Yammarino (2016); Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995); Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018) studied leadership from a relationship viewpoint. Studies by Albrecht et al. (2015); Breevaart et al. (2015); Gutermann et al. (2017) and Knight et al. (2017) predominantly focused on task engagement and its impact on task performance, individual effectiveness and positive organisational outcomes. Other scholars have focused their studies on organisational commitment and its influence of individual motivation and positive organisational outcomes (Bolino et al., 2015; Devece et al., 2016; Haque, Fernando, & Caputi, 2019; Takeuchi et al., 2015).

The conceptual model that was formulated from the literature for the purpose of this study is recaptured in Figure 21 below. The model captures the elements of the leader-follower relationship that were expected to influence follower commitment. The results of the model were found to be statistically significant and all path coefficients were positive.

*Figure 21: Conceptual model of factors that influence follower commitment*
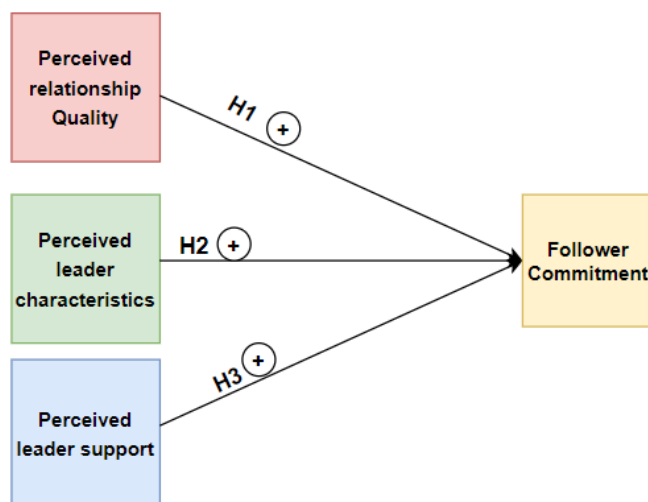


Studies by Breevaart et al. (2015), Martin et al. (2016) and S. hsien Liao et al. (2018) suggested that a positive perception of the leader-follower relationship is positively related to higher levels of follower commitment. Breevaart et al. (2015) conducted a

study within the public service context and found relationship quality to be positively related to employee outcomes. A similar study has not however been conducted within the SME sector in a low growth economy to validate if it would yield similar findings. Findings from a study by Cahill et al. (2015) suggested that in a low economic growth context it might be possible to yield results that are contrary to the current understanding in the existing literature.

The findings from the collected data show relatively low levels of commitment from the participants. The low levels of commitment were accompanied by a perceived relationship that is of just above average quality. Breevaart et al. (2015) and Martin et al. (2016) in their studies concluded that there is a direct relationship between relationship quality and follower commitment. The findings of this study offer empirical evidence in support of the conclusions reached by Breevaart et al. (2015) and Martin et al. (2016). The correlations and regression tests that were conducted found statistical relationships between the independent and dependent variables. This means that the quality of the leader-follower relationship can be used as a predictor for the levels of follower commitment. It can thus be extrapolated that leaders who invest efforts into building high-quality relationships with their followers are likely to see an improvement in the level of follower commitment.

Liang et al. (2016); Lyu et al. (2016) and Van Gils et al. (2015), in their studies made assertions that when followers perceive poor relationships with their leaders their performance will be low, and they will display traits of deviant behaviour. The findings of this study were contrary to the assertions by the authors. This study found that despite the low levels of commitment, the participants in the study have a high sense of pride in their organisations and they are motivated to carry out their work tasks to the best of their abilities and achieve their performance objectives. A possible explanation for this finding could be that the individuals perceive that there is a high cost associated with leaving their current jobs due to the current economic conditions. As a result, the individuals put effort into achieving their performance objectives (Devece et al., 2016) and make themselves non-expendable to their current organisations.

Studies by Selvarajan et al. (2015) and Visagie and Diedericks (2018) provide evidence to suggest that significant differences in the levels of commitment exists between and among different demographic subgroups. To that end, this study also tested if any differences would exist among the demographic subgroups included in

this study. Selvarajan et al. (2015) and Visagie and Diedericks (2018) in their studies, concluded that due to different experiences in the workplace, males and females have different levels of commitment. This study found no significant differences in either commitment or perception of leader-follower relationships from both genders. Similarly, no statistically significant differences were found in neither commitment levels nor relationship perceptions from the age subgroups. This finding is contrary to findings by H. J. Anderson et al. (2017) and Tuncdogan et al. (2017) which suggests age plays a significant role in shaping an individual's psychology that influences the levels of commitment and how they relate and perceive relationships.

A study by Steffens et al. (2014) found that the levels of commitment increased as an individual's tenure with an organisation increased. On the contrary, studies by T.-Y. Kim et al. (2015) and Ng and Feldman (2013) concluded that commitment levels would decline with tenure as individuals reach career and personal growth ceilings within an organisation. The findings of this study suggest that commitment follows an inverted U-curve as job tenure increases. The commitment levels peak at three to five years of tenure and start to decline after five years.

In conclusion, the findings of this research were successful in providing empirical support for literature which suggests that follower commitment is influenced by the follower's perceptions of their leader-follower relationships. When statistical tests were conducted it became apparent that perceptions of the leader-follower relationship are positively related to follower commitment.


## 7.3 Recommendations and implications of the study

In chapter one of this study, it was discussed that the fourth industrial revolution is placing businesses under competitive pressures that require them to continually adapt to remain relevant and sustainable (Hirschi, 2018). Existing literature suggests that for businesses to be able to effectively adapt, they need committed employees who will champion the organisational goals in meeting the adaptation requirements (Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017; Xie et al., 2018). Employee commitment is even more important in the South African context where businesses are operating in a low growth economy with high unemployment (Statistics South Africa, 2019a), and employee commitment levels are low (Mann & Harter, 2016). Given this background, recommendations to leaders on how they can increase the levels of employee

commitment are expected to be beneficial. On the academic front, it was noted that most of the existing literature was leadership focused with little focus on followership (Kong et al., 2019; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). In this regard, this study aimed to contribute to the literature by studying the impact of follower perceptions on the outcomes of the leadership process.

### 7.3.1 Implications for business

Effective execution of the organisational strategy in a fast-changing world requires employees that are committed (Hirschi, 2018; Lee & Puranam, 2016; Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). The challenge for leaders in a fast-changing business environment is influencing and sustaining high levels of follower commitment (Knight et al., 2017). This research set out to understand the possible antecedents of follower commitment based on assertions by authors such as Breevaart et al. (2015) that there is a link between LMX relationship quality and follower commitment.

A study by Knight et al. (2017) found that leadership interventions can effectively influence important follower commitment antecedents such as social support and inclusion in  decision making.   The correlation tests that were conducted for this study show that out of the three relationship constructs that were investigated, perceived relationship quality has the highest correlation with both task engagement and organisational commitment. The regression tests also found that perceived relationship quality is a strong predictor of follower commitment. Considering these findings, leaders of SME organisations should assess how they interact with their followers to ensure that they build high-quality relationships. Breevaart et al. (2015); Clarke and Mahadi (2014); Jacobsen and Andersen (2015) and Martin et al. (2016) all agree that when assessing the quality of the leader-follower relationship, followers place high importance on how the leader provides feedback on performance and how they communicate. Leaders of organisations are thus encouraged to have open lines of communication through which they provide open and honest feedback on follower performance in addition to providing clarity on performance expectations.

Furthermore, this study found the participants perceived relatively low levels of support from their leaders. The JD-R theory suggests that having access to adequate resources can lead to high levels of commitment (Wingerden et al., 2016). This notion is supported by authors such as Wu and Parker (2017) Gutermann et al. (2017) who

suggest that leader support is viewed by followers as a crucial resource in their work activities. Leaders of SME organisations are therefore encouraged to create supportive environments in which their followers can be more committed. This can be achieved by dedicating time and effort towards the development of followers and creating social networks with followers to get to understand the job challenges faced by employees. Understanding the job challenges and demands is one aspect in relationship building, leaders are encouraged to invest efforts and resources into removing the challenges or helping their followers navigate any obstacles in their work tasks (Caza et al., 2015). This study also found perceived leader support to be a strong predictor of employee commitment and this strengthens the case for leaders to invest their efforts into creating a supportive environment.

Since leadership is based on relationships, the personal characteristics of individuals also play a role in determining the quality of the relationship. Literature suggests that the leaders' characteristics form a salient model through which followers shape their own work attitude. Gutermann et al. (2017) suggested that the leader's work engagement plays a role in modelling the followers' commitment. Auh et al. (2016) and Clarke and Mahadi (2014) suggest that among important characteristics that shape the follower perception is empathy from the leader and being included in decision making. This study found perceived leader characteristics to be highly correlated to follower commitment. Leaders are therefore encouraged to portray more positive characteristics, which include empathy, inclusion of followers and high-level engagement in their own work tasks. Leaders can improve how they are perceived by followers by including the followers in making decisions that impact the followers in the execution of their work tasks. Leaders are also implored to reduce the amount of LMX differentiation with their followers and be fair in their exchange relationships with followers. High LMX differentiation does not only negatively impact the perceived leader characteristics but it also hampers the perception of the leader's fairness and equity norms (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016). Leaders should therefore avoid high differentiation as it will ultimately create dysfunctional teams and uncommitted followers.

In conclusion, the findings of this study have important implications for leaders who wish to increase the level of employee commitment in their organisations. The population of this study was drawn from South African SMEs.

### 7.3.2 Implications for academics

The findings of this study add to the expanding body of literature that is associated to leadership and follower outcomes. The study also adds to our understanding of the role of followership in the leadership process as suggested by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014). The goal of leadership is to influence followers to follow and be committed to a desired course of action that leads to the achievement of organisational goals (Linde, 2010; Silva, 2016; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018; Xie et al., 2018). The implication of this research is that it has verified and empirically corroborated previous suggestions and findings in literature which suggest that how followers perceive their leaders is directly related to their levels of commitment.

Follower task engagement is an area of research that has been extensively studied by scholars due to its link to performance and organisational outcomes. The myriad studies on engagement have generated different perspectives on the phenomenon. In their study, Steffens et al. (2014), came to the conclusion that engagement levels increase with organisational tenure. Ng and Feldman (2013) and T.-Y. Kim, Liu and Diefendorff (2015) on the other hand concluded that engagement levels are high in the beginning, but they decline as length of tenure increases. This study adds to the engagement discussion by suggesting that engagement increases with tenure in the first years, reaching its peak at three to five years and begins to decline after five years.

This study also adds to our understanding of leader-follower relationships in low growth or high unemployment economic contexts. In a prior study, Devece et al. (2016) found  levels of commitment are high in environments of high unemployment, while Cahill et al. (2015) suggest that in such a context commitment levels are expected to be significantly low. This study found that the levels of commitment in a high unemployment context are neither significantly high nor significantly low. This study contributes to literature by showing that leader-follower relationships remain a strong predictor of commitment despite the economic situation.

## 7.4 Research limitations

As with any research study, this study has its limitations. This section discusses the limitations that were identified in this study. The limitations expand on the limitations that were identified in section 4.10 Limitations.

Firstly, data was collected only from leader-followers in South African SMEs. This potentially limits the generalisability of the research findings to the sample's business sector and economic context.

Another limitation comes from the data collection method and the measurement instrument that was used. The data collection for this study was conducted using a questionnaire with predetermined and standardised questions and responses. Saunders and Lewis (2018) identify a potential limitation of this data collection method, stating that it does not give the researcher the opportunity to probe the answers. Probing the answers would have highlighted the underlying factors behind the responses which would have improved our understanding of the drivers behind the follower perception of the leader-follower relationship.

As suggested by Zhong, Wayne and Liden (2015) there might be other factors and moderating variables that influence follower commitment. The findings of this study only show the influence of leader-follower relationships on follower commitment but do not indicate its relative impact. Simultaneously testing a wider array of influencing and moderating variables would have provided a clearer picture of how to manage follower commitment.

## 7.5 Recommendations for future research

This study brought to light possible opportunities for future research. Future research could address the limitations of this study and/or add to the understanding of leadership theory and practices and the role of followership and employee commitment. This section discusses the identified opportunities for future research.

The sample population for this study was drawn from leader-followers within the SME sector in South Africa. As identified in section 7.4, the population sample potentially limits the generalisability of the study findings to the SME sector. In view of this limitation, further studies are proposed to include all employee levels within the SME sector. Studies that look at other business sectors are also proposed. The proposed studies will not only address the limitations but will also help us to understand the levels of employee commitment in South Africa and how employee commitment is influenced by LMX relationships.

To address the limitation as a result of the data collection method, a qualitative study is proposed. Future studies could add to our understanding of followership by understanding the underlying drivers of follower perceptions.

This study revealed two almost opposing findings. On the one hand, the study found that the respondents are not highly committed to their current organisations and would be willing to leave if they found opportunities elsewhere. On the other hand, the study found that the respondents are highly motivated to achieve their work tasks and performance targets. Section 6.7 offered a possible explanation for these findings, suggesting that this could be explained as being a result of normative commitment. However, this was stated as a possible explanation in view of the unavailability of data to offer a complete explanation. Further research is therefore proposed to investigate the reasons behind the low levels of organisational commitment and how it is related to the desire and motivation to achieve performance targets. Such research would aid our understanding of how to manage for task performance in the changing world of work and protean and boundaryless career attitudes.

This study was conducted in an economic context characterised by low growth and high unemployment. Prior studies suggested that macroeconomic conditions have a significant influence on the levels of employee commitment. Devece et al. (2016) suggest that in the economic context under which this study was conducted, follower commitment levels are expected to be significantly high. While Cahill et al. (2015) suggest that the commitment levels are expected to be significantly low. This research found follower commitment levels to be neither significantly high nor significantly low. Therefore, a study to investigate the link between macroeconomic conditions and the levels of employee commitment is proposed. Given the link between employee commitment and organisational outcomes, such a study will aid our understanding of how to manage for organisational success in the face of the given macroeconomic conditions.

## 7.6 Concluding remarks

The main goal of leadership is to influence employee commitment towards achieving performance goals and positive organisational outcomes. It was therefore essential to appreciate the role of the perceived relationship between the leader and the

follower in influencing follower commitment. Findings from this study show that there is a positive relationship between the perceived leader-follower relationship and follower commitment. This finding provides crucial information to leaders who wish to inspire higher levels of commitment from their followers. The findings of this study also aided in achieving the research objectives stated in earlier chapters.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Questionnaire

<u>Section A:</u>

Dear Respondent

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research to determine the impact of followers' perceptions of their relationships on their work commitment. The research is conducted on Senior and middle managers and professionally qualified levels in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa.

If you work in an organisation of between 50 and 200 people, you are kindly asked to complete the following survey which should not take more than 15 minutes of your time. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Your participation is anonymous and only aggregated data will be reported. The information collected in this survey will be kept confidential. 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.

Researcher name: Cliff Shonhiwa     Research Supervisor: Dr Annelie Gildenhuys

Email: 18309357@mygiba.co.za     Email: annelie@erguideonline.co.za

Phone: 0730873120     Phone: 0832511326

Section B: Demographics

Please select the option that is most applicable to you:

1. Gender: Male [] Female [] Other []

2. Age: 21-29 [] 30-39 [] 40-49 [] 50 or older

3. Job level: Middle Manager [] Senior Manager [] Professionally qualified []

4. Years of service with the organisation

      Less than 6 Months []

      6 months – 1 year []

      1-3 years []

      3 to 5 years []

      More than 5 years []

5. Race: Black [] White [] Indian [] Coloured [] Foreign National [] Other []

6. Highest level of education:

      Grade 12 []

      Certificate/Diploma []

      Degree []

      Post-Graduate []


Section C: Survey Questions

This section refers to your immediate leader, that is the manager that you report directly to. Please select the most appropriate option based on the scale provided to indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements provided.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I usually know how my leader regards my work | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 2 | My leader clearly understands the challenges of my job | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 3 | My leader recognises my true potential | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | My leader would go out of his/her way to help me solve problems in my work | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 5 | My leader would stand by me if I make an honest mistake | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 6 | I have confidence in my leader's competencies | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 7 | I would defend and justify my leader's decisions if he or she were not present to do so | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 8 | My relationship with my leader is effective | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 9 | My leader is committed to my development | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 10 | My leader is committed to the development of all direct reports regardless of who they are | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 11 | My leader provides open and honest feedback on my performance | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 12 | My leader includes me in strategic planning | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 13 | My leader values my opinions | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 14 | I have a clear understanding of my leader's vision | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 15 | I have confidence that my leader is able to adapt to the requirements of the future | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 16 | My leader has the required competencies to lead the team | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 17 | My leader communicates clearly | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 18 | My leader consults with the team before making a decision | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 19 | My leader is regarded as fair by most | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 20 | My leader is a good manager of diversity | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 21 | My leader cares about my personal well being | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 22 | I feel "heard" by my leader | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |

This section refers to your commitment at work. Please select the most appropriate option based on the scale provided to indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements provided.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I am motivated to do my job to the best of my ability | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 2 | I believe in the vision of my organisation | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 3 | I am proud to work for my organisation | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 4 | I am excited to get involved in projects for my organisation | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 5 | I find it satisfying to be part of my organisation | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 6 | I feel part of the decision making | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 7 | I am committed to following the lead of my leader | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 8 | I am committed to achieving my key performance outputs | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 9 | I believe there is career progression for me in this organisation | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 10 | I am satisfied with the position I am in | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 11 | I identify with problems of my organisation | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 12 | I have a strong sense of belonging | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 13 | I intend to find another job outside of this organisation in the next 12 months | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 14 | One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in my organisation | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 15 | I find being a member of my organisation very captivating | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 16 | I frequently think of quitting my job | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 17 | If I have my own way, I will be working for the same organisation one year from now | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |

**Thank you for your participation and patience in completing this survey**

*In case you know any individuals that would be interested in taking part in this survey can you kindly share the survey link with them.*

## Appendix 2: Permission to Use LMX questionnaire

**Uhl-Bien, Mary**                                    Sat, 20 Jul, 11:28 (9 days ago)  ⭐  ↩  ⋮
to me ▾

Yes you have permission to use it. All best, Mary

---

**From:** Cliff Shonhiwa <18309357@mygibs.co.za>
**Sent:** Thursday, July 18, 2019 12:37:12 PM
**To:** Uhl-Bien, Mary
**Subject:** Permission to use LMX 7 Questionnaire

⚫⚫⚫

Dear Dr Uhl-Bein,

My name is Cliff Shonhiwa, I am a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) student at The University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science. I am currently conducting a study investigating the effect of the Quality of the relationship between leaders and followers on the followers willingness to follow and remain committed.

To assess the relationship quality I would like to use the LMX 7 Questionnaire, attached, and I hereby ask for your permission to use the questionnaire and to change the Scale to range from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" for all question.

I have to apply for Ethical approval at my institution and thus I ask that you reply regarding the permission to use the instrument.

Sincerely,
Cliff Shonhiwa
18309357@mygibs.co.za

# Appendix 3: Response rates per question

| Question | Expected Answers | Answers Received | Skipped | Response Rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| [My leader clearly understands the challenges of my job] | 155 | 154 | 1 | 99.35% |
| [My leader recognises my true potential] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [My leader would go out of his/her way to help me solve problems in my work] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [My leader would stand by me if I make an honest mistake] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [My leader is committed to my development] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [My leader is committed to the development of all direct reports regardless of who they are] | 155 | 153 | 2 | 98.71% |
| [I have confidence in my leader's competencies] | 155 | 154 | 1 | 99.35% |
| [I would defend and justify my leader's decisions if he or she were not present to do so] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [My relationship with my leader is effective] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [My leader provides open and honest feedback on my performance] | 155 | 154 | 1 | 99.35% |
| [My leader values my opinions] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I have a clear understanding of my leader's vision] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I feel "heard" by my leader] | 155 | 154 | 1 | 99.35% |
| [My leader includes me in strategic planning] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I usually know how my leader regards my work] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I have confidence that my leader is able to adapt to the requirements of the future] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| [My leader has the required competencies to lead the team] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [My leader communicates clearly] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [My leader consults with the team before making a decision] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [My leader is regarded as fair by most] | 155 | 152 | 3 | 98.06% |
| [My leader is a good manager of diversity] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [My leader cares about my personal well being] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I am motivated to do my job to the best of my ability] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I am excited to get involved in projects for my organisation] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I feel part of the decision making] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I am committed to following the lead of my leader] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I am committed to achieving my key performance outputs] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I am satisfied with the position I am in] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I identify with problems of my organisation] | 155 | 154 | 1 | 99.35% |
| [I believe in the vision of my organisation] | 155 | 154 | 1 | 99.35% |
| [I am proud to work for my organisation] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I believe there is career progression for me in this organisation] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I find it satisfying to be part of my organisation] | 155 | 154 | 1 | 99.35% |
| [I have a strong sense of belonging] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [I intend to find another job outside of this organisation in the next 12 months] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in my organisation] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| [I find being a member of my organisation very captivating] | 155 | 154 | 1 | 99.35% |
| [I frequently think of quitting my job] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |
| [If I have my own way, I will be working for the same organisation one year from now] | 155 | 155 | 0 | 100.00% |

## Appendix 4: Naming of Survey Questions for Statistical Analysis

| Perceived Leader Support | |
|---|---|
| [My leader clearly understands the challenges of my job] | PLS 1 |
| [My leader recognises my true potential] | PLS 2 |
| [My leader would go out of his/her way to help me solve problems in my work] | PLS 3 |
| [My leader would stand by me if I make an honest mistake] | PLS 4 |
| [My leader is committed to my development] | PLS 5 |
| [My leader is committed to the development of all direct reports regardless of who they are] | PLS 6 |
| | |
| **Perceived Relationship Quality** | |
| [I have confidence in my leader's competencies] | PRQ 1 |
| [I would defend and justify my leader's decisions if he or she were not present to do so] | PRQ 2 |
| [My relationship with my leader is effective] | PRQ 3 |
| [My leader provides open and honest feedback on my performance] | PRQ 4 |
| [My leader values my opinions] | PRQ 5 |
| [I have a clear understanding of my leader's vision] | PRQ 6 |
| [I feel "heard" by my leader] | PRQ 7 |
| | |
| **Perceived Leader Characteristics** | |
| [My leader includes me in strategic planning] | PLC 1 |
| [I usually know how my leader regards my work] | PLC 2 |
| [I have confidence that my leader is able to adapt to the requirements of the future] | PLC 3 |
| [My leader has the required competencies to lead the team] | PLC 4 |
| [My leader communicates clearly] | PLC 5 |
| [My leader consults with the team before making a decision] | PLC 6 |
| [My leader is regarded as fair by most] | PLC 7 |
| [My leader is a good manager of diversity] | PLC 8 |
| [My leader cares about my personal well being] | PLC 9 |
| | |
| **Task Engagement** | |
| [I am motivated to do my job to the best of my ability] | TE 1 |
| [I am excited to get involved in projects for my organisation] | TE 2 |
| [I feel part of the decision making] | TE 3 |
| [I am committed to following the lead of my leader] | TE 4 |
| [I am committed to achieving my key performance outputs] | TE 5 |
| [I am satisfied with the position I am in] | TE 6 |
| [I identify with problems of my organisation] | TE 7 |
| | |
| **Organisational Commitment** | |

| | |
|---|---|
| [I believe in the vision of my organisation] | OC 1 |
| [I am proud to work for my organisation] | OC 2 |
| [I believe there is career progression for me in this organisation] | OC 3 |
| [I find it satisfying to be part of my  organisation] | OC 4 |
| [I have a strong sense of belonging] | OC 5 |
| [I intend to find another job outside of this organisation in the next 12 months] | OC 6 |
| [One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in my organisation] | OC 7 |
| [I find being a member of my organisation very captivating] | OC 8 |
| [I frequently think of quitting my job] | OC 9 |
| [If I have my own way, I will be working for the same organisation one year from now] | OC 10 |

## Appendix 5: Ethical clearance letter

**Gordon Institute of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

22 August 2019

Shonhiwa Cliff

Dear Cliff

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

Please note that approval is granted based on the methodology and research instruments provided in the application. If there is any deviation change or addition to the research method or tools, a supplementary application for approval must be obtained

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Kind Regards

GIBS MBA Research Ethical Clearance Committee