

Examining the impact of work flexibility and work-related stress on the managerial
aspirations of young professionals

Student no. 24026779

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Abstract

The growing shifts in work patterns and changing career values are defining how young professionals perceive career progression. Many prioritise flexibility and personal well-being over traditional hierarchical advancement, resulting in declining managerial aspirations. Despite the strategic importance of developing managerial talent and a leadership pipeline for organisations, there is limited research on this growing global trend among young professionals in South Africa. Using the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study examines how perceived resource losses associated with managerial roles influence the managerial aspirations of young professionals in South Africa.

The study employed a cross-sectional design and collected data from 196 respondents using a structured quantitative online survey. The multiple regression analysis revealed that perceived resource losses negatively influence managerial aspirations, with the loss of flexibility and work-related stress being statistically significant valued resources amongst young professionals.

These findings highlight the importance of work flexibility and psychological well-being as key resources that young professionals aim to protect while shaping their career development. The study contributes to the literature on talent management, career development, leadership, and managerial aspirations. It provides empirical evidence to guide talent management strategies and enhance organisational succession planning efforts.

Keywords

Managerial aspiration, perceived resource losses, work flexibility, work-related stress, and conservation of resource (COR) theory.

Plagiarism 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.

Name: 24026779

Date: 03 November 2025

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1. Research problem definition

1.1. Introduction

Global trends indicate a significant decline in the inclination of young professionals to pursue managerial roles, influenced by various internal and external factors (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Deloitte, 2024). External factors, including environmental, structural and cultural shifts have significantly impacted work arrangements, further increasing the work options available for young professionals (Groenewald et al., 2024; Vaiman et al., 2021).

This global shift has caused many young professionals to re-evaluate work trade-offs between financial gain and the preservation of emotional health, autonomy, and work-life balance (Wang et al., 2024). Thereby questioning the traditional belief that early-career development amongst employees naturally gravitates towards management (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021; Williams & McCombs, 2023). Overall, there's been an increasing decline in managerial aspiration among young professionals globally (Deloitte, 2024; Robert Walters, 2024).

1.2. Background of the study

Significant changes in the work and labour market continue to challenge talent management strategies. The workforce has undergone significant transformations over the past decades, primarily influenced by rapid technological advancements, the global pandemic, political shifts and climate change (Groenewald et al., 2024; Vaiman et al., 2021). These changes have challenged career development and trajectories, particularly for young professionals who are increasingly leveraging technological advances to manage their careers (Gričnik et al., 2024; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021).

The impacts of COVID-19 have caused many individuals to rethink their life and work interactions, with many prioritising work-life balance, mental well-being, and personal development over conventional career paths that emphasise hierarchical progression into managerial roles (Akkermans et al., 2020; Spurk et al., 2019; Vaiman et al., 2021). Young professionals are redefining career success, prioritising flexibility, autonomy, work-life balance, and job satisfaction over financial compensation (Minzlaff et al., 2024; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020).

The most significant evidence of changing workforce dynamics was observed in the post-pandemic period, known as the Great Resignation, where many employees resigned from their jobs (Formica & Sfodera, 2022; Serenko, 2023). The uncharacteristic resignations and voluntary retirements during the 2021-2022 period were motivated by the need to avoid toxic work environments, ineffective leadership, and lack of flexibility, among other reasons (Alfano et al., 2023; Formica & Sfodera, 2022; Serenko, 2023). This presented a considerable challenge for organisations and a tremendous skills drain.

Furthermore, the rise of the gig economy and platform-based employment has redefined career paths for many young professionals, enabling them to achieve financial stability and career satisfaction without the pressures of traditional management roles (Groenewald et al., 2024; Vaiman et al., 2021). This transition towards non-traditional work models further challenges organisations, particularly in leadership development and succession planning, where a lack of managerial aspiration creates gaps in talent pipelines (Vaiman et al., 2021).

1.3. Research problem

The shifts in work arrangements are particularly evident and significant among young professionals, who prioritise work-life balance, mental well-being, and quality of life over financial incentives in crafting their career development (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Deloitte, 2024; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020). This shift is particularly notable among individuals born between 1983 and 2006, collectively referred to as Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z), who are projected to constitute over 73% of the global workforce by 2030 (Deloitte, 2025).

Recent surveys indicate that over 52% of Gen Z respondents do not wish to pursue management roles, with more than 72% preferring individual or specialised positions to advance and develop their careers rather than following a management-oriented path for progression (Robert Walters, 2024).

Despite the importance of developing managerial talent for organisational sustainability and growth (Groenewald et al., 2024), there is a notable decline in managerial aspirations among young professionals globally (Robert Walters, 2024; Vaiman et al., 2021). Young professionals are seeking jobs that offer satisfaction and enhance their social welfare rather than simply providing a higher salary (Barhate &

Dirani, 2022; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020) and are willing to consider alternative work arrangements instead of pursuing management roles (Robert Walters, 2024; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021, 2022).

Organisations are challenged to manage their labour and talent differently due to the increasing global mobility and technological advancements, where geographic locations no longer restrict individuals from taking on a role (Vaiman et al., 2021). The initiatives organisations employed to deal with and manage COVID-19, enabled by technological advancement, have accelerated the changing work arrangements and amplified remote work, which further challenges their talent management strategies (Alfano et al., 2023; Groenewald et al., 2024; Minzlaff et al., 2024; Vaiman et al., 2021).

The rising platform economy and increased interest in entrepreneurship have provided the youth with a desirable alternative to formal employment and traditional corporate advancement (Akkermans et al., 2020; Groenewald et al., 2024).

Overall, there is a growing antipathy among young professionals towards managerial roles, resulting in low managerial aspirations. Simply put, young professionals are opting out of traditional career pathways characterised by managerial advancement, as evidenced by the lack of managerial aspiration. Increasing work alternatives enabled by technology and global mobility have given young professionals an alternative path to career success, other than managerial attainment. Hence, they do not aspire to become managers. The growing lack of managerial aspiration by young professionals presents a big challenge for organisations and talent management strategies.

1.4. Purpose of the research

The research aims to provide organisational leaders with empirical evidence regarding how the perception of personal and energy resources loss associated with managerial roles influences the managerial aspirations of young professionals in South Africa. This will aid organisations in enhancing and reviewing their talent management strategies, promoting succession planning and work arrangements to encourage the managerial aspirations of young professionals.

The study aims to use the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory to explain how the threat of resource loss deters young professionals' intention and aspirations to management despite the resource gains associated with managerial attainment.

This study aims to ultimately contribute to career development research while offering human resources professionals empirical evidence of the developing trends among young professionals in a South African context.

1.5. Context of the study

Most of the existing research on managerial aspiration and related constructs of career aspiration, leadership aspiration, and achievement motivation is primarily focused on the developed countries (Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021, 2022). Although some studies are reported as global, the samples are primarily from the United States, Western Europe, and parts of East Asia (Gregor et al., 2019; Gregor & O'Brien, 2016; Powell & Butterfield, 2022; Wan et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). There is very little to no representation of Africans or South Africans in these studies' samples. Therefore, the study aims to understand the emerging trends within the South African context.

In addition to providing critical insights to the body of knowledge by researching a population previously underrepresented in earlier studies, the South African socio-economic context offers a unique perspective. Economic stagnation, high youth unemployment, and shifting cultural values are significant unique contexts for South Africa compared to the earlier studies (Statistics South Africa, 2025). Given that the evaluation of key resources for preservation and acquisition differs based on the context (Hobfoll et al., 2018), it is critical to investigate the managerial aspiration of young professionals in South Africa.

1.6. Research implications

1.6.1. Academic contribution

The study will contribute to existing academic literature on career development, managerial and leadership aspiration and talent management from a South African perspective, which is often underrepresented in global studies. Through the theoretical framework of the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, the study

explored the relationship between managerial aspirations and the associated resources losses in young professionals (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021, 2022).

While career development and managerial aspirations have been well-studied in the literature, much of the focus has traditionally been on gender differences (Gregor et al., 2019; Gregor & O'Brien, 2016; Powell & Butterfield, 2022). Given the diminishing influence of gender roles in today's society, studying managerial aspirations among young professionals, regardless of their gender, is necessitated (Powell & Butterfield, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Therefore, this study aimed to address the gap in the literature by directly correlating the threat of resource loss with the management aspirations of both male and female young professionals in South Africa.

Furthermore, the study will contribute to existing literature on career development, leadership and managerial aspiration by incorporating a South African perspective. The South African context is unique to similar international studies, given the socio-economic factors such as high youth unemployment, economic instability, and limited career advancement opportunities significantly influence career choices (Statistics South Africa, 2025). Notably, global phenomena such as COVID-19 and the Great Resignation had significant impacts on South African workers, as they did on workers in other countries, highlighting the interconnectedness of the labour market despite unique country factors (Old mutual, 2021). Therefore, a South African perspective on the growing development of young professionals not aspiring to management is necessary to determine similar or varying trends from global developments.

1.6.2. Business contribution

The study will inform talent management practices for businesses and organisations in light of the evolving labour dynamics. It will provide practical insights for organisational leaders and human resource professionals in enhancing retention and succession planning strategies, as well as understanding the interplay of resources and the perceived resource losses that serve as barriers to managerial aspirations among young professionals. Business leaders can develop work arrangements, structures, and policies that offer young professionals the flexibility and creativity to thrive without jeopardising valuable resources. Given the shift in workplace expectations towards autonomy, flexibility, and mental well-being, organisations might proactively address these issues and potentially cultivate strong leadership and management pipelines while improving talent retention.

1.7. Conclusion

The managerial aspirations of young professionals reflect a global challenge to current talent management practices. As work dynamics evolve, driven by globalisation, technological advancements, and the rise of flexible work models, traditional hierarchical career paths are being questioned and, in many cases, abandoned in favour of more autonomous and flexible career options. The rapid growth of the gig economy and platform-based employment has provided young professionals with viable alternatives to conventional managerial roles, offering control over work hours, the choice of projects, and greater alignment with personal values and well-being. This global shift necessitates empirical research to understand how these changes impact career development and managerial aspirations, informing effective talent management in modern organisations.

The research, therefore, aims to fill a critical gap by providing empirical evidence on how perceived resource losses affect the managerial aspirations of young professionals in South Africa. By understanding the perceived resource loss associated with managerial roles, organisations can better align their work structures and talent management strategies to foster leadership development.

The balance of this report relied on existing literature to structure and substantiate the arguments presented and highlighted in the problem statement, developing research questions and hypotheses. The approach and methodology used for this study is outlined in Chapter 4, highlighting the type and the philosophy the study undertook. Results and analysis of findings are presented in Chapters 5 and 6, while conclusions and recommendations for future studies are presented in Chapter 7.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction

Evolving labour market dynamics have led to changes that consistently impact individuals' career aspirations, influenced by their core values. In particular, young professionals are questioning traditional career development methods, characterised by linear hierarchical advancement, in favour of value and purpose-driven career trajectories (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020). Managerial aspiration amongst young professionals is significantly diminishing in favour of non-traditional career paths influenced by technological advances, globalisation and the greater value placed on work-life balance as amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Therefore, organisations face the complex challenge of retaining talent while developing future leadership.

The purpose of this literature review is to quantify and position the managerial aspiration and perceived resource losses within the literature by analysing recent scholarly studies. This chapter, therefore, critically reviews the impacts of perceptions of resource losses associated with management roles on managerial aspirations among young professionals.

2.2. Managerial aspirations

Managerial aspiration is a critical determinant of managerial attainment within an organisation (Moake et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). It is an individual's motivation, desire, and ambition to attain managerial roles, associated with higher power and influence (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018; Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007; Wang et al., 2024).

Managerial advancement symbolises career development, advancement, and overall success, as well as the attainment of a higher status within the community or society (Wang et al., 2024).. Managerial roles are often associated with increased income, company benefits, greater influence, and legitimate power. This is the reason why retention and talent management often offer individuals increased perks and benefits as a way to motivate and encourage them to take up and aspire to managerial roles (Minzlaff et al., 2024).

Similarly, managerial roles are characterised by an increased workload and the responsibility of setting goals for the team, as well as capacitating and allocating resources for the team to execute the organisational goal (Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007; Wang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2021). The increased responsibility and accountability towards the team requires additional effort and time from individuals in managerial roles than those who are not (Jiang et al., 2023). Hence, young professionals are increasingly viewing managerial roles with the view that it's taking more out of them than they are gaining. As a result, young professionals do not wish to pursue managerial roles and do not aspire to be managers (Powell & Butterfield, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021).

Managerial aspirations often overlap with constructs such as career development and leadership aspirations (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018; Powell & Butterfield, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). These key constructs are often used interchangeably in the literature to refer to the same phenomenon. Therefore, the study has drawn on the career and leadership aspirations literature to develop the managerial aspirations construct.

The definition of managerial aspiration is further broadened to include an individual's action while in a role, such as pursuing managerial or leadership opportunities, seeking promotion, accessing training, acquiring new skills and increasing their responsibilities (Gray & O'Brien, 2007; Gregor et al., 2019; Gregor & O'Brien, 2016). While aspiration may focus on an individual's desire, it manifests through their actions toward managerial attainment (Spurk et al., 2019; Williams & McCombs, 2023). Therefore, organisational and career aspirations are influenced by an individual's internal motivations, desires, and actions toward attainment and achievement aspirations.

2.2.1. Leadership Aspiration (LA)

Leadership Aspiration (LA) is an individual's desire to attain a leadership role in the future, such that they are willing to accept roles with higher responsibility that could prepare them for future management and leadership roles (Nair & Senthil Kumar, 2024). Simplistically, it's an individual's intentions towards leadership. As highlighted in the definition, it represents both a desire to attain leadership roles and a determination to actively pursue opportunities that offer leadership responsibility.

LA is therefore a good measure of an individual's leadership potential and as a predictor for hierarchical advancement. Importantly, LA is shaped by both organizational factors and intrinsic psychological resources (Gregor et al., 2019; Gregor & O'Brien, 2016). An individual's career competencies, as reflected in the quality of work, career control, career networking potential, and career development paths, enable them to perceive themselves as leaders and strive towards leadership attainment (Nair & Senthil Kumar, 2024).

In addition to the competency factors of leadership aspiration, there are individual psychological factors, such as self-efficacy, Individual motivation and work role salience (Gregor & O'Brien, 2016). These factors increase an individual's belief in their abilities and the value they place on leadership advancement, creating the desire to attain leadership (Gregor & O'Brien, 2016; Khampirat, 2020). Therefore, the combination of the competency and the motivation is the foundational framework for leadership aspiration.

2.2.2. Achievement Aspirations (AA)

Achievement Aspiration (AA) defines an individual's desire, behaviours and actions to attain professional excellence, recognition, and overall professional advancement (Gregor & O'Brien, 2016). Supported by McClelland's three needs theory in which the motivation to achieve, succeed, and excel is an important factor in an individual's strive towards career development (McClelland, 1961). By actively seeking roles and tasks that challenge one's capabilities and pursuing opportunities that will test and demonstrate professional competency, ultimately results in recognition and achievement (Gregor et al., 2019)

Individuals demonstrate achievement aspiration by engaging in career planning, seeking feedback and mentorship programmes, and proactively taking on additional work responsibilities (Gregor et al., 2019; Nair & Senthil Kumar, 2024). As a result, Individuals with higher achievement aspirations deliberately engage in career-enhancing actions that prepare them for future leadership positions (Gregor & O'Brien, 2016).

2.2.3. Educational Aspirations (EA)

Educational Aspiration (EA) is an individual's desire and goals towards continued learning, advanced education and skills development to enhance one's long-term career prospects and professional growth (Gregor et al., 2019). It reflects the intentions and actions towards formal and informal learning opportunities, by either enrolling for further education and qualifications, or engaging in other forms of learning opportunities, ongoing professional development initiatives (Gregor et al., 2019). By continuously investing in education and skills development, professionals strengthen the competencies required for managerial attainment. Thus, the combination of educational desire and proactive learning behaviours forms the foundational framework for educational aspiration and a major determinant of managerial aspiration.

There is complex interplay of internal and external factors, such as individual ambitions, social expectations, and organisational structures, that influence an individual's aspirations to management (Gray & O'Brien, 2007; Gregor et al., 2019; Gregor & O'Brien, 2016). Internal characteristics, such as self-efficacy and achievement motivation, influence personal ambition, while external factors, including organisational culture, organisational policies, and support structures, shape the pathways to management (Moake et al., 2023).

Motivation factors such as an individual's proactive behaviours and competencies towards their career goals, highlight their career proactivity which is a great determinant of managerial aspiration (Jiang et al., 2023). Individuals who actively participate in career planning, skill development, feedback gathering, and networking are more likely to pursue and achieve managerial positions (Jiang et al., 2023; Moake et al., 2023). Individuals displaying these behaviours have achieved favourable career outcomes, including promotions and associated salary increases, all of which are great benefits associated with managerial roles (Jiang et al., 2023). For young professionals, the path to management entails not only aspiration but also demonstrating initiative and agency in shaping their career paths (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Karlstedt, 2023).

2.3. Theoretical framework

2.3.1. Career stages and development

An individual's career develops in predictable stages, influenced by their age throughout their life (Super, 1980). The dynamic and evolving nature of career aspirations and career development is evident over an individual's lifespan (Wang et al., 2024). Over the years, the career development studies have evolved; however, age has remained a significant variable that impacts how one's career develops (Wang et al., 2024).

Ages from birth to 14 years are characterised by character building, personal development, and exploration of interests. Ages 15-24 are exploration phases of one's career paths and development (Super, 1980). This is followed by the establishing phase, which occurs between the ages of 25 and 44 years, a significant period during which individuals aim to consolidate their careers, gain experience, and advance to higher positions (Super, 1980).

This establishment phase is especially important because decisions taken here, such as specialisation, managerial pursuit, or lateral transitions, have long-term implications for one's career path (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). It is also characterised by a lot of dynamism, movements, transitions and overall activities that individuals take to ensure they develop and advance professionally (Akkermans et al., 2024). However, the risk of stagnation or "mid-career stuckness" is high at this stage and this might cause stress within individuals (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021, 2022). Equally, unmet advancement possibilities, work-life conflict, and organisational barriers reduces managerial aspirations (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2022). However, proactive development, organisational support and talent management initiatives can mitigate against this risk (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2022).

2.3.2. Conservation of Resource (COR) Theory

The Conservation of Resource (COR) theory provides a theoretical framework for analysing the individual's motivation to attain managerial positions. COR is a motivational theory that states that a person strives to preserve and accumulate valuable resources, and any circumstance that threatens the resources will result in stress (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018). The theory further asserts that

resource loss has a significantly greater impact on an individual than the same magnitude of resource gains (Hobfoll, 2002; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Resources are categorised into four main types: object, condition, personal, and energy resources. Object resources refer to tangible physical assets, while condition resources include statuses or positions that provide stability and security, such as employment status, financial stability, and social support (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Personal resources encompass individual qualities and competencies, including resilience, self-efficacy, and energy resources, which refer to time and money expertise that facilitates the acquisition of other resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Not all resources have the same impact. COR theory identifies “key resources” such as health, job security, and self-belief as foundational elements that support other resources (Hobfoll, 2002; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Their impact depends on how critical these resources are to an individual’s survival and goals, and the environment that either nurtures or restricts such resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Individuals with more substantial/robust resource reserves tend to handle threats and potential resource losses better and use their resource reserves to acquire more resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). In contrast, individuals with fewer and lower resources are more exposed and threatened by potential resource loss and feel more strain when a resource threat exists (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

The value of a resource is determined by the extent to which it is perceived to help an individual achieve their goals; hence, the value of a resource can vary significantly depending on the context (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Resource value can also be determined by an individual’s willingness to utilise already acquired resources to acquire new ones (Halbesleben et al., 2014). During the COVID-19 pandemic, psychological capital resources among employees were deemed a valuable asset, having a positive influence on an organisation’s actions (Mao et al., 2021). Hence, organisations that protected employees’ well-being, encouraged resilience, and offered wellness programmes appealed to employees’ self-efficacy, given the context (Mao et al., 2021).

The resources are not always in harmony and could often conflict, causing stress in an individual (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018; Spurk et al., 2019; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2022). The resources impact decision-making and are influenced

by an individual's personal preferences, as well as the environment in which the resources are attained (Hobfoll, 2002; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Hobfoll et al. (2025) refer to the environment and circumstances that aid or dampen the acquisition or preservation of resources as the resource caravan passageways.

An individual will, therefore, evaluate managerial roles through the lenses of resource acquisition and potential resource loss, with resource losses viewed more significantly than gains (Jia & Li, 2022; Moake et al., 2023; Spurk et al., 2019; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2022). This theory, thus, implies that losing something at work, such as autonomy or flexibility, has a greater negative impact than gaining the same amount would have a positive effect. It also means that acquiring something valuable, like a job or a promotion, is much more meaningful if it occurs after a period of loss, such as being unemployed or enduring long periods without consideration for a promotion.

2.4. Resource losses

2.4.1. Time losses

The added responsibilities associated with managerial roles cause individuals to dedicate more time to work, resulting in a loss of time for social welfare and other family and social activities (Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007; Zhang et al., 2021). Proactive career planning further requires a concerted effort and time to advance one's career. Conflict, therefore, arises when the efforts and time needed to manage one's career start eroding the time available for social non-work activities (Akkermans & Tims, 2017). Putting extra time and effort into career progression and planning often means having less time and energy for personal and family goals (Akkermans & Tims, 2017).

The job demands associated with managerial roles are significantly higher and often reduce the time available for personal activities, leading to increased fatigue and tension between career advancement and personal well-being (Akkermans & Tims, 2017). Given the significantly higher psychological impact associated with losing a resource compared to gaining one, the time-related losses associated with management aspirations often deter young professionals from proactively pursuing and aspiring to managerial roles (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

2.4.2. Autonomy

Job autonomy highlights the freedom an individual has in deciding their work schedule and methods (Bakker et al., 2025). Autonomy, therefore, allows individuals to work at a time that's suitable and conducive to their optimal effectiveness, thereby increasing work efficiency and overall task ownership and self-regulation (Groenewald et al., 2024). For managers though, while the role often comes with increased authority, it also means working within the frames or limits of the team under your management. Therefore, the work isn't only dependent on an individual's output but that of a team, reducing the individual's freedom to tailor their own work schedule (Bakker et al., 2025).

The rise of the platform and gig economy, along with the increasing number of workers operating outside traditional full-time employment, underscores a shift towards autonomy for employees, enabling them to complete work efficiently rather than managing others (Groenewald et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Work autonomy has a positive impact on individuals' levels of engagement, improving their motivation, enhancing their positive outlook towards work tasks, and overall career and job satisfaction (Wang et al., 2024).

Particularly for young professionals, autonomy over work duties, scheduling, and decision-making gives them a greater sense of control and makes them more connected and engaged at work (Groenewald et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Individuals who reported a higher job autonomy are able to balance the demands of work and family, resulting in a balanced work life and reduced strain (Badri & Panatik, 2020). conversely lower job autonomy result in conflict between work and life causing imbalance (Badri & Panatik, 2020). Overall, lower work autonomy results in resource loss, leading to increased strain and work-life conflict.

2.4.3. Flexibility

Moving into managerial roles can potentially restrict individuals' career paths and constrain professional identities (Vaiman et al., 2021). Professionals who value flexibility have benefited from remote and flexible work arrangements, making it easier for them to perform their duties in a manner that meets their performance obligations (Wang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2021). Work schedule flexibility was

linked to a 62% increase in job satisfaction and a 20% reduction in stress (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021).

In contrast, traditional corporate hierarchical career paths offer rigidity. Managerial roles often come with increased oversight, formal responsibilities, more constraints, and less flexibility in how tasks are done (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). Being accountable for the team challenges individual flexibility and autonomy and may add emotional strain that young professionals may wish to avoid. Young professionals are motivated to perform and advance their career goals when they find alignment between organisational and personal values (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). When there is a misalignment of values, stress arises, leading to the loss of resources.

2.4.4. Work-related stress

Work-related stress is the mental and psychological strain that an individual experiences when work pressures and demands associated with a career or professional tasks exceed the individual's resources to manage them (Picker-Roesch & Lang, 2024). It reflects a state of imbalance where high work expectations, increased workload, responsibilities, and the pressure to perform exceed one's ability to deliver and cope effectively (Picker-Roesch & Lang, 2024).

The increased job requirements associated with management, such as long hours, limited financial support to meet job demands, and unclear role specifications, increase stress levels for managers, sometimes leading to burnout (Heffernan & Bosetti, 2020; Wu et al., 2019). This level of strain on managers affects both their physiological and mental health and strains personal relationships (Bowen et al., 2021; Heffernan & Bosetti, 2020). Many professionals have experienced burnout and mental health-related issues due to the increased work responsibilities that come with management roles (Powell & Butterfield, 2022).

Emotional labour is another form of work-related stress that is often experienced with higher managerial and leadership responsibilities. Emotional labour is the practice of displaying different emotions from those actually felt, to maintain organisationally appropriate emotions in a given situation (Heffernan & Bosetti, 2020; Wu et al., 2019). The expected behaviour and professional conduct that are professionally acceptable within an organisation as norms and practices for managers and leaders. When professional behaviours and norms are constantly in conflict with an

individual's personal norms, stress results, leading to emotional labour (Wu et al., 2019). The additional burden on managers, who are expected to display calmness, empathy, and objectivity during heated conflicts, exacerbates this stress.

Work-related stress significantly impedes an individual's ambitions and aspirations to achieve high professional goals. The lower levels of senior manager and leadership aspirations that young medical professionals reported was mainly associated with the high levels of stress (Picker-Roesch & Lang, 2024). Stress is a major resource depletion factor, draining personal energy and reducing enthusiasm and overall will for an individual to pursue any ambitious goals, such as managerial roles (Picker-Roesch & Lang, 2024; Wu et al., 2019). This has caused professionals to avoid leadership and managerial positions in order to protect against mental exhaustion and burnout resulting from the increased work stress (Zhang et al., 2021).

2.4.5. Work-life balance (WLB)

Work-life balance (WLB) describes the extent to which an individual's income-generating work and non-work activities are in harmony with little to no conflict (Bouwmeester et al., 2021; Hamilton, 2025). The concept is premised on the idea that an individual must balance work and non-work activities to reduce stress and attain a meaningful life (Wayne et al., 2021; Wood et al., 2020). With the growing definition of work and work arrangements, such as the gig economy, and the evolving and varied life commitments, defining boundaries between work and life is increasingly complex, and the diverse needs of individuals must be considered (Kelliher et al., 2019).

Overall, the balancing act of work and life is more important to young professionals and is a bigger determinant of where and how an individual works (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020; Vaiman et al., 2021). As a result, balancing work-life resources is a critical factor in how individuals progress and develop their careers (Kelliher et al., 2019; Moake et al., 2023; Powell & Butterfield, 2022).

In gender studies, work-life balance is a significant reason why many women lack managerial aspirations compared to men (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018; Hartman & Barber, 2020; Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007; Powell & Butterfield, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Among young professionals, meaningful work and the alignment of work goals and personal goals/ values are critical while maintaining a healthy work-life balance

and level of flexibility (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Deloitte, 2024; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020).

The lack of work-life balance and the strain that traditional work has placed on employees have deterred young professionals from taking up leadership roles and opting for non-traditional work structures to support their financial and value-driven needs (Kelliher et al., 2019).

2.4.6. Theory and literature integration

The resource losses associated with managerial roles can be explored through three main resource categories of energy, condition and personal resource using the COR theory (Hobfoll, 2002). Time is a key energy resource under threat when considering managerial roles, given the expected increase in working hours, the expectation to be available continuously for subordinates and team members, and increased tasks (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Therefore, it depletes the time available for self-recovery or personal/family commitments.

The condition resource is associated with autonomy and flexibility losses related to managerial roles. While managers acquire strategic authority, they often lose their work autonomy due to increased scrutiny, reporting obligations, and being accountable for the team's work as well. Similarly, flexibility in work schedules, location, and leave is limited for people in leadership positions, placing additional strain on individuals as they try to balance organisational duties with their personal lives (Gričnik et al., 2024; Kelliher et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2020). The loss of autonomy and flexibility threatens the loss of the condition resource (Hobfoll, 2002; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Similarly, work-related stress causes a loss that depletes both energy (emotional and physical effort) and personal resources (self-efficacy, resilience, and motivation), making leadership roles less appealing ((Bowen et al., 2021; Heffernan & Bosetti, 2020). Emotional labour, which requires managers to regulate or repress their emotions to match organisational standards, consumes additional energy resources while depleting personal resources, such as authenticity and psychological well-being (Heffernan & Bosetti, 2020). Together, these losses diminish individuals' ability to maintain the effort required for job progress.

Based on the COR theory, the threat posed by these anticipated losses significantly impacts individuals more than the potential gains from the object resource (Hobfoll,

2002). It will, hence, deter individuals from attaining or aspiring to attain managerial roles. Hence, in an effort to preserve these resources, the object resource gains, such as status and recognition of organisational roles, may not compensate for the perceived loss of time, autonomy, flexibility, and well-being.

Studies have explored mitigating factors that seek to moderate and significantly reduce the impact of the resource losses within organisations. Organisational interventions to soften the negative effects of increased work pressures include work-life balance initiatives (Moake et al., 2023). Organisations have implemented various programmes that can act as moderating mechanisms to protect valuable resources, reduce the strain of managerial roles, and sustain individuals' aspirations for leadership.

2.5. Work-life balance initiative (WLBI)

Work-life balance initiatives (WLBI) are organisational policies, work arrangements, and structures that support work-life balance (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2020; Seman et al., 2022). Such initiatives may include flexible working arrangements, leave of absence, extended leave programs, dependent care facilities, and remote work options (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2020; Seman et al., 2022). The initiatives include policy and physical infrastructure that organisations put in place to aid employees in maintaining a work-life balance.

Work-life balance initiatives have demonstrated a positive impact on employees' psychological well-being, alleviating work-life conflict and ultimately enhancing job satisfaction (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2020; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Individuals who indicated their organisation has implemented initiatives to enhance work-life balance have demonstrated improved motivation and leadership aspirations (Seman et al., 2022; Urme, 2023).

Although WLBI might be available, managing time allocated to work and life can be difficult, particularly in a remote environment where there is no physical distinction between work and family spaces (Adisa et al., 2022). COVID-19 mandatory work restrictions highlighted the negative impacts of remote work, highlighting that it's not merely the presence of remote work (WLBI) that brings about work-life balance but a complex interplay of many factors, from both work (employer) and individual (employee) (Adisa et al., 2022; Alfano et al., 2023; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).

In addition, the organisational support and encouragement from leaders within the organisation foster a culture that values and prioritises employee wellbeing and the use of Work-Life Balance initiatives (Moake et al., 2023). The extent to which supervisors and managers actively support the use of such initiatives and encourage employees to participate in these programs results in the effectiveness of these initiatives (Baral & Bhargava, 2010; Minzlaff et al., 2024; Moake et al., 2023). Organisations that have embedded flexible work practices into leadership roles have significantly reduced work-life conflict among employees, resulting in increased employee engagement and an increased appeal for managerial and leadership roles (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). Organisational culture is an essential element in enhancing these WLBI and achieving the desired results.

Ultimately, young professionals not only view WLBI as an optional benefit but as a fundamental factor that determines where and how they work, because they place a high value on flexible working arrangements, purpose-driven work, and mental health, among other factors (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Minzlaff et al., 2024). The presence of WLBI directly impacts employee engagement, productivity, and aspirations to pursue professional development within an organisation (Minzlaff et al., 2024; Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021)

2.6. Summarised research constructs and variables

The literature and the theory discussed can be summarised in the following table, which outlines the conceptual and operational definitions of the key research variable within the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory framework.

Table 2.6-1: Summarised research constructs and definitions

Construct / Variable	Definition (Conceptual Meaning)	Dimension(s) / Subconstructs	Sources/References
Managerial Aspiration (MA) (Dependent Variable)	The motivation, desire, and proactive intention of an individual to pursue managerial or leadership roles that entail higher levels of responsibility, authority, and influence.	Leadership aspiration, Achievement aspiration, Educational aspiration,	Litzky & Greenhaus (2007); Fritz & van Knippenberg (2018); Powell & Butterfield, (2022); Barhate & Dirani (2022); Gregor & O'Brien (2016); Gregor et al., (2019); Wang et al. (2024); Moake et al. (2023); Nair & Senthil Kumar, (2024);

Perceived Resource Loss (PRL) (Independent Variable)	The perception that managerial roles threaten valuable personal resources such as time, autonomy, flexibility, and psychological well-being.	Energy Resources: Time loss, Work life conflict, Work related Stress Condition Resources: Autonomy loss, Flexibility loss	Hobfoll (2002); Halbesleben et al. (2014); Zhang et al. (2021); Hobfoll et al. (2025); Akkermans & Tims (2017); Minzlaff et al., (2024) ; Bowen et al., (2021); Wu et al., (2019) Gričnik et al., (2024) ; Vaiman et al., (2021) ; Picker-Roesch & Lang, (2024);
Work-Life Balance Initiatives (WLBI) (Moderating Variable)	Organisational policies, programs, and cultural practices that enable employees to balance work and non-work responsibilities effectively.	Structural initiatives (e.g., flexible work, leave, family-friendly services) Organisational culture and support (e.g., manager encouragement, no career penalties for using WLB policies)	Adisa et al., (2022); Alfano et al., (2023) Seman et al. (2022); Baral & Bhargava (2010); Shirmohammadi et al., (2022); Moake et al., (2023); Minzlaff et al.,(2024) ;Urme, (2023) ; Ray & Pana-Cryan, (2021);
Gender (Control Variable)	Biological or self-identified gender differences that influence managerial aspirations and perceptions of work-life balance.	Male, Female, Non-binary (depending on respondent data)	Litzky & Greenhaus (2007); Fritz & van Knippenberg (2018); Hartman & Barber (2020); Powell & Butterfield (2022); Netchaeva et al., (2022)

2.7. Conclusion

The literature highlights the complex nature of talent management, which is influenced by changing workforce demographics. Young professionals continue to craft their career paths shaped not only by monetary compensation but also by how these align with their values, purpose, and work schedules. While managerial aspirations demonstrate a desire for success and the attainment of necessary resources, they are also characterised by the loss of key energy resources associated with the additional responsibilities.

Grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the literature details how the perceived loss of key resources, of time, autonomy, flexibility, and psychological well-being, outweighs any possible advantages in monetary, recognition, or prestige. Young professionals are increasingly viewing managerial roles from a point of resource depletion rather than resource acquisition. Given the psychological significance of a threat to a resource loss, young professionals are therefore deterred from aspiring to managerial roles as a result. Some organisational measures, such as work-life balance initiatives, have the potential to protect key resources and reduce the perceived threat. These initiatives, if ingrained in corporate culture and actively promoted by leadership, have the potential to transform perceptions of managerial roles, making them more acceptable to young professionals who value holistic and sustainable careers and personal well-being.

Understanding this resource trade-off view of managerial aspiration is crucial in the South African context, where economic instability, high youth unemployment, and evolving labour dynamics further influence career development. This study fills a critical gap by empirically investigating how the threat of resource loss affects the managerial aspirations of young professionals and how organisational interventions can reshape these career pathways in South Africa to align with the evolving expectations of the modern workforce.

This study, therefore, introduces a COR theory analysis framework with resource losses as the independent variable, managerial aspiration as the dependent variable, and work-life balance initiatives as the moderating variable. This model controls for the impact of gender on these variables. The study aims to empirically test these relationships and provide evidence-based recommendations for talent management.

3. Research questions and hypotheses

This paper discusses the growing trend of declining managerial aspirations among young professionals, posing a significant challenge to organisations in managing talent/human resources. Given that young professionals are expected to constitute over 73% of the workforce by 2030 (Deloitte, 2025). The literature has highlighted the growing reluctance of young professionals to take on managerial positions, sparking serious concerns about succession planning and the overall sustainability of organisations (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Deloitte, 2024, 2025; Karlstedt, 2023).

To effectively address the shifting composition of the workforce and the changing work models and dynamics, critical questions must be asked to guide research. As a result, the researcher empirically examined the perception of resource losses that deter the career development and managerial aspirations of young professionals. Consequently, informing talent management strategies for establishing a sustainable managerial pipeline within organisations.

Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study argued that threats and perceptions of resource loss are critical factors in young professionals' decision-making and career advancement. Such that the perceived resource losses associated with managerial roles have a far greater impact than the associated resource gain. As a result, the study sought to answer the following research question by developing the following hypotheses.

RQ: How does the perception of resource losses associated with managerial roles influence the managerial aspirations of young professionals and the extent to which work-life balance initiatives mitigate these influences?

H1: There is a negative relationship between perceived resource loss (time, flexibility, autonomy, work-life balance, work-related stress) (PRL) associated with managerial roles and the managerial aspirations (MA) of young professionals.

H2: Work-life balance initiatives (WLBI) moderate the relationship between the perceived resource losses (PRL) associated with managerial roles and the managerial aspirations of young professionals.

Such that individuals with access to work-life balance initiatives, such as flexible work arrangements, extended leave, and training and development within their organisations, will significantly mitigate the threat of resource losses and may be

more inclined to pursue managerial roles (Moake et al., 2023). In addition, there is a gender difference in managerial aspiration, which should be controlled for in the moderation analysis (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018; Hartman & Barber, 2020).

Hypothesised theoretical model

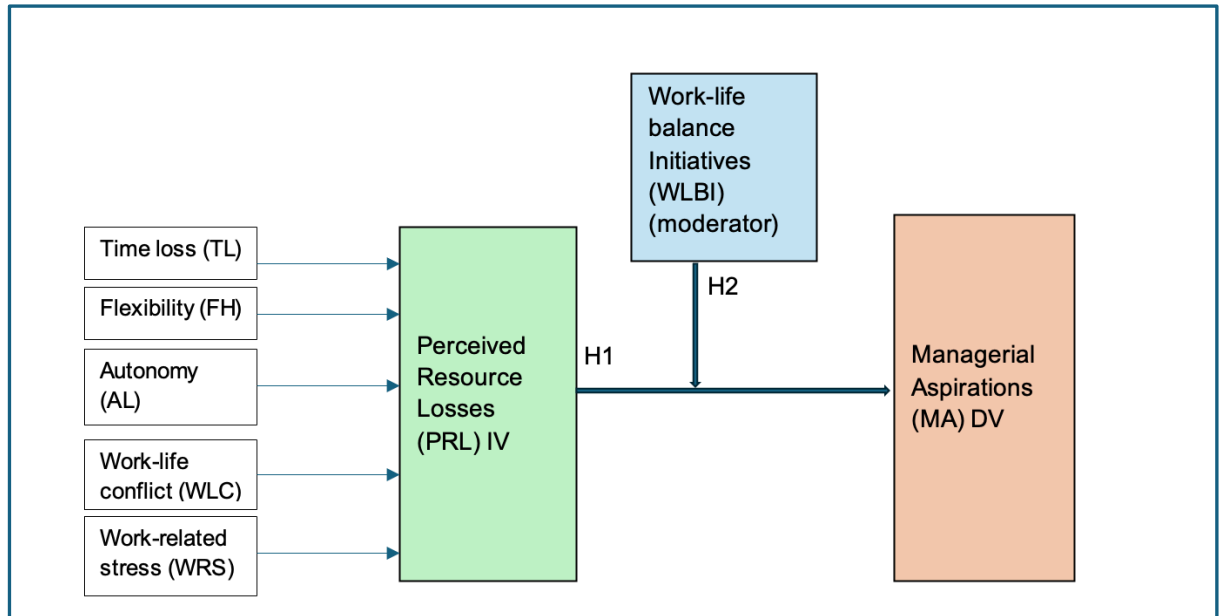


Figure 3.1: Hypothesised theoretical model: Perceived resource loss (IV), Work-life balance initiatives (Moderating variable), Managerial aspiration (DV)

4. Research methodology design

4.1. Research design

4.1.1. Philosophy

This research aimed to determine whether the perception of resource losses associated with managerial roles affects an individual's aspiration to become a manager. Therefore, an explanatory positivist approach was employed in which the potential threat of resource loss was explored to explain aspirations to management (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Taherdoost, 2022). Positivism relies on facts and unambiguous data-driven analysis that is uninfluenced by the researcher's biases or perspectives on the subject under investigation (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Grounded in established theory and highly rated literature, the researcher formulated hypotheses and operationalised the constructs into key variables for analysis (Park et al., 2020).

4.1.2. Approach

The study employed a deductive approach, grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, to explain the lack of managerial aspirations among young professionals and how the perception of a threat to existing resources influences managerial aspirations. Similar studies of managerial aspiration have drawn on a theoretical framework derived from Gottfredson's development theory of career aspiration and social role theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), and COR theory to explain various factors of influence (Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021, 2022; Wang et al., 2024; Williams & McCombs, 2023). This deductive approach, which uses established theory to understand reality, is therefore well argued. The deductive approach enabled testing of hypotheses based on an already established theory (Park et al., 2020).

4.1.3. Methodological choice

A mono-quantitative research method was employed to investigate the impact of perceived resource loss on managerial aspirations (Taherdoost, 2022). This approach is suitable given the exploratory nature of the study; unlike qualitative methods, it is more objective and less prone to biases (Wang et al., 2024). Quantitative methods are preferred for establishing relationships and analysing how potential resource loss correlates with management aspirations (Azmat et al., 2023; Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Park et al., 2020).

Hence, this methodological choice was deemed suitable for this study, which sought to explain a behaviour of one variable systematically using other variables (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Historical studies that used qualitative methods have recommended further research to examine the relationship quantitatively (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020).

4.1.4. Research strategy and time horizon

To gather data, the study used a survey research strategy, distributing a questionnaire to the sampled population (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Taherdoost, 2022). Because the research philosophy is positivist, the researcher structured standardised survey questions, which allowed consistent data collection across the sampled population (Park et al., 2020; Taherdoost, 2022). Additionally, a survey strategy facilitates ease of distribution and timely data collection from the population sample with minimal effort and cost (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The survey's strategy also enabled the collection of uniform data by using similar questions and scales across all respondents, allowing the researcher to determine relationships when the data is collected and analysed quantitatively (Park et al., 2020; Taherdoost, 2022).

To gather immediate insights a cross-sectional time horizon was employed. The study was further constrained by the time availability to collect data; hence, a cross-sectional study was suitable for the analysis (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The significance of this study being cross-sectional lies in its capacity to serve as a dipstick of the managerial aspirations of young professionals in the South African context and to compare these with literature and emerging observations from other countries and offer immediate cause of action (Kelliher et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021).

4.2. Research Methodology

4.2.1. Population

The population for this study was young professionals in South Africa. Similar studies have attributed the lack of managerial aspiration to the generational theory, specifically Generation Z, while also highlighting the challenge of insufficient data to draw conclusions about the employment or aspirations of Generation Z (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). As a result, studies have recommended the inclusion of young Millennials in future research (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Powell & Butterfield, 2022;

Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020). Consequently, the study focused on all young professionals both the Gen Z and the Millennials aged between 21 and 44 and who were currently employed.

Whereas most studies have sampled university or postgraduate students across major universities in Europe and the USA, they have emphasised the need to investigate individuals who are already employed (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018; Hartman & Barber, 2020; Wang et al., 2024). Hence, this study focused on young professionals with post-metric qualifications who were employed during the period of data collection.

4.2.2. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis used for this study is individuals. The research measured and sampled individuals born between 1981 and 2004 (ages 21-44) who are professionals with post-matric qualifications and who were employed at the time of the study. This unit of analysis is suitable because this research studies young professionals within organisations. Hence, this unit of analysis enabled the researcher to conclude, based on the data gathered, that the findings apply to young professionals.

4.2.3. Sampling method and size

The non-probability sampling method was deemed suitable for this study because not everyone could be part of the study population (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). As a result, only candidates who fit the targeted population were sampled. A quota non-probability sampling method was used to specifically target young, employed professionals (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Quota sampling is used when the researcher wants to isolate a population and focus only on the group that matches the study's characteristics (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

In addition to quota sampling, a volunteer sampling method was employed, where the researcher made direct contact with participants or participants were referred by others to participate in the research voluntarily. This technique is often used when the target population is difficult to reach (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The researcher employed a self-selection sampling method, where potential participants were asked to volunteer and identify themselves using selected questions that would qualify them as a sample for the research (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In this study, the researcher

utilised social media platforms to invite individuals to self-identify by responding to qualifying questions. This form of non-probability sampling method was suited to this study, given that it targets a specific group of people who can be easily identified by age, employment status, and the limited time for which data were gathered (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The sample size was initially targeted at 250, when the survey instrument was distributed; however, only 213 responses were received by the cut-off date. Of those, 17 were deemed unusable, leaving 196 responses that could be used as the sample data for this study. For this type of study, a sample size that is too small may lead to unrealistic results, while a sample that is too large may result in contradictions and inconclusive findings (Park et al., 2020; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Similar studies had varied sample sizes, ranging from 259 in a study by Moake et al. (2023) to 402 (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018), 286, 193, and 199, as analysed in the meta-analytic study by Powell and Butterfield (2022).

4.2.4. Measurement instrument

The study used a survey questionnaire to gather data relating to the three key variables or constructs: managerial aspiration, perceived resource loss, and work-life balance initiatives. The questionnaire was organised into four sections: Part 1 consisted of demographics questions, Part 2 consisted of resource loss (PRL) questions, Part 3 consisted of questions relating to work-life balance initiatives (WLBI) and Part 4 consisted of managerial aspiration (MA) questions.

Part 1: This part asked questions to determine whether the respondent was a suitable candidate or part of the sample, based on their answers to qualifying questions and demographics. Questions about the individual's demographics included gender, age, level of qualification, years in employment, and the industry or sector of the economy.

Part 2 asked respondents to answer questions about their perceptions of resource loss (independent variable), specifically time, flexibility, and autonomy, adapted from the job demand-resource (JD-R) questionnaire (Popov, Jelic, et al., 2024). This part also asked questions about the work-related stress that is associated with attaining managerial roles. A 19-item scale was used, categorised into time loss, flexibility,

autonomy, work-life conflict and work-related stress, to assess the perception of resource loss associated with being a manager.

Part 3 consisted of questions related to work-life balance initiatives (Moderator), which was measured using a 7-item, 5-point Likert scale adapted from similar studies (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018; Seman et al., 2022). The instrument measures the extent to which an organisation has developed measures such as flexible working arrangements, extended leave and family care facilities on site.

Part 4 asked questions relating to the managerial aspiration (dependent Variable) construct, which was measured by asking the sampled population to respond to the 17-item 5-point Likert scale using Gregor and O'Brien's (2016) revised career aspiration scale (CAS) and adapted to include updated scales used in recent studies (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018; Gregor et al., 2019).

The respondents were asked to indicate, on a scale of 1 to 5, the extent to which they agreed with statements regarding their perceptions of resource loss, work-life balance initiatives, and managerial aspirations. The 5-point Likert scale, which ranges from 1 to 5 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), was consistently used throughout the questionnaire to gather uniform data for all variables, facilitating practical quantitative analysis (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The full research instrument can be accessed in Appendix 1.

4.2.4.1. Development of the perception of resource loss (PRL) instrument

The key construct of perceived resource loss included all the cited reasons and factors that literature has identified as deterring young professionals from managerial roles. Using this literature, job demand-resources and the conservation of resource theory resource categories were considered. The perceived resource loss variable was operationalised into five subcategories: time, autonomy, flexibility, work-life conflict and work-related stress resource losses.

The study, therefore, developed survey items that align with validated instruments incorporating the same constructs and measuring these resources and their interaction in a job/work setting (Baker, 2014; Bakker et al., 2025). The construct of perceived resource loss, therefore, used established, tested and validated questions

for the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Questionnaire (Bakker, 2014) and the Job Characteristics Questionnaire (JCQ) (Popov et al., 2025). The summarised instrument development variable is detailed in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.2.4.1-1: Perceived resource loss construct (Independent variable)

Construct and variable: Perceived resource loss (Independent Variable)

Subcategory	Survey Questions	Characteristics Supporting Source
1. Time Loss	Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15	These items measure the expectation and perception that becoming a manager require more time investment towards work, leaving less time for personal activities. For instance (Q12) asked respondents if "A managerial role would significantly reduce my personal time" and "I expect a managerial position would demand more hours" (Q13). The questions derived from the JD-R and JCQ's quantitative questionnaires (Baker, 2014; Popov, Jelić, et al., 2024).
2. Autonomy Loss	Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q20	These items measure the perceived loss of autonomy and decision-making freedom linked to managerial positions. Derived from the job control/autonomy subscales of the JD-R and JCQ measure how much control a manager has over how their work is carried out (Baker, 2014; Popov, Jelić, et al., 2024). For example, Q16 asks; "As a manager, I would have less control over how my work is done" and Q18 asks; "Taking on a managerial role would limit my ability to make independent decisions" (Q18).
3. Flexibility / Hassle	Q21, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25	This set of questions seeks to understand the extent to which bureaucratic and structural constraints of managerial positions are

		perceived. Q23 asks; “Managers deal with more administrative hassles than non-managers” and Q25 “In a managerial role, I would encounter more bureaucratic hurdles than I do now” aligns with the hassles portion of the JD-R (Baker, 2014; Popov, Jelić, et al., 2024).
4. Work-Life Conflict	Q26, Q27, Q28, Q29, Q30	These questions assess how managerial responsibilities may spill over into personal life and wellbeing. For example, Q26 asks “A managerial role would interfere with my personal responsibilities outside of work” and Q28 asks; “The stress of a managerial role would spill over into my personal life”. This is derived from the emotional demands and exhaustion dimensions in both the JD-R and JCQ that links to role conflict and wellbeing (Baker, 2014; Popov, Jelić, et al., 2024).
5. Work-Related Stress & Emotional Labour	Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34, Q35, Q36, Q37	These questions captures the emotional and psychological strain associated with managerial roles. Q31 probed the extend to which managers feel emotional after dealing with other parties, “I often feel emotionally exhausted after dealing with staff, clients, or any other stakeholders” and “I am expected to always appear composed and emotionally neutral, even in difficult situations” (Q34). Items reflected on Q31, Q34, Q35 probes the emotional labour associated with managerial roles. While the balance questions asks role specific stress associated with the pressure to perform and deliver often with conflicting and ambiguous role specification.

Overall, the scale reflects the emotional labour and demands that comes with the managerial role. (Baker, 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018; Popov, Jelić, et al., 2024)

4.2.4.2. Development of the work- life balance initiatives (WLBI) instrument

The construct of Work-Life Balance Initiatives (WLBI) was operationalised using a seven-item scale (Q38-Q44), which incorporated both structural policies and organisational culture of support that impacts how employees reconcile work and personal responsibilities (Seman et al., 2022). The instrument was adapted from similar studies. Key factors asked included the extent to which the organisation has flexible work arrangements (Q38), sufficient leave policies (Q39), and offers family-friendly services (Q40), representing structural organisational initiatives. The provisions of such initiatives have resulted in a sufficiently improved work-life balance for employees by decreasing work-life conflict and enhancing employee well-being and organisational commitment (Seman et al., 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).

Organisational culture and management support are as important in ensuring that work-life balance efforts are successful. Items Q41 and Q42 asks if employees are encouraged to use the structural initiatives offered by the company through the work-life balance programs without any stigma and fear. An important factor is the extent to which supervisors and managers actively support the use of such initiatives and encourage employees to participate in these programs (Baral & Bhargava, 2010; Moake et al., 2023; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Items Q43 and Q44 seek to determine how proactive the organisational efforts are by asking questions about training, awareness, and task adjustment aligned to work-life balance. Table 4.2 summarises the items used to operationalise the construct of WLBI into a variable.

Table 4.2.4.2-1: Work-life balance Initiative construct (moderating Variable)

<i>Subcategory</i>	<i>Survey Questions</i>	<i>Characteristics Supporting Source</i>
<i>1. Structural Flexibility</i>	Q38, Q39, Q40	These questions measure the availability of formal structural initiatives or policies such

		as flexible work arrangements, sufficient leave policies, and family-friendly services. Flexible work arrangements and leave programs have been demonstrated to reduce stress and turnover intentions, while dependent-care support helps employees balance dual duties (Seman et al., 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).
2. <i>Organisational Culture & Support</i>	Q41, Q42	These items assess whether employees feel encouraged to use WLBI without fear of penalties and whether supervisors actively support such initiatives. Organisational culture and leadership support are critical for ensuring that work-life balance efforts succeed (Baral & Bhargava, 2010; Moake et al., 2023; Seman et al., 2022).
3. <i>Proactive Organisational Efforts</i>	Q43, Q44	These items measure the proactive steps taken by organisations, such as training employees on managing work-life balance and adjusting workloads to prevent victimisation and negative connotations associated with those using the policies. Training and workload modification are vital to embed WLBI as a sustainable practice (Seman et al., 2022).

4.2.4.3. Development of the Managerial Aspiration (MA) Instrument

The main dependent variable of managerial aspiration represents both the desire and the actions taken towards attaining managerial roles. Through literature, it's been concluded that managerial aspirations are a reliable predictor of managerial attainment (Moake et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). While the managerial aspiration construct often overlaps with related concepts of career and leadership aspirations (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018; Powell & Butterfield, 2022), it reflects both the desire

to manage/lead and the actions taken to achieve such managerial/leadership positions.

The instrument was therefore developed taking into account previous studies and this overlap in constructs tailored to management aspiration. Aligned with validated definitions and literature on managerial aspirations, the instrument included questions about respondents' leadership, achievement, and educational aspirations (Gregor et al., 2019; Gregor & O'Brien, 2016). Similar studies used this instrument to measure managerial aspirations and was validated as a good instrument for measuring this construct (Moake et al., 2023). Table 4.2.2.3-1 summarises the items used to operationalise the Managerial Aspiration construction into a variable.

Table 4.2.4.3-1: Managerial Aspiration construct: Dependent variable

Construct and variable: Managerial Aspiration (Dependent Variable).

<i>Subcategory</i>	<i>Survey Questions</i>	<i>Supporting Source</i>
<i>1. Leadership aspiration</i>	Q45, Q46, Q47, Q48, Q49, Q50, Q51, Q52	These items assess the extent to which individuals hope to occupy managerial positions, and positions with additional responsibility, and influence. For example, Q45 asks 'i hope to become a manager in my career field,' while Q52 asks about responsibility and influence. Gregor & O'brien (2016) and Gregor et al., (2019) highlight that leadership aspiration is a key factor in the CAS-R's, strongly linked with leader identity and motivation to lead.
<i>2. Achievement aspiration</i>	Q53, Q54, Q55, Q56, Q57	These items capture the desire for recognition, additional responsibility, and career advancement. For instance, Q53 directly measures high aspirations for managerial recognition, while Q56 reflects proactive career path planning (Gray & O'Brien, 2007).
<i>3. Educational aspiration</i>	Q58, Q59, Q60, Q61	These items measure the pursuit of further skills and training to remain competitive for managerial promotion. For example, Q58 asks about improving and upskilling, and Q61 asks about

requesting consideration for promotion. Educational aspiration aligns with the CAS-R's emphasis on training, knowledge acquisition, and long-term competitiveness. Gregor & O'Brien (2016) validate education as a crucial career aspiration dimension across both men and women.

4.3. Data gathering process

Data was gathered by distributing an online survey questionnaire to the targeted population. Due to the nature of the study, which aimed to collect uniform data from the sampled population to establish a relationship, a questionnaire consisting of similar questions and measures was distributed online (Park et al., 2020; Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.3.1. Ethical Clearance

Before collecting any data for this study, the researcher sought ethical clearance from the institution through the university's ethical committee. This ensured that the study followed correct governance, academic processes and that data was collected ethically, without offering incentives or monetary compensation in favour of a specific outcome. The ethical clearance also ensured that the research would not in any way harm or endanger the participants. Furthermore, obtaining ethical clearance ensured credibility and reassured participants that the research was sound and ethically conducted, as the researcher was formally affiliated with the university. The ethical clearance approval (Appendix 2) was obtained prior to both pre-testing and data collection using the questionnaire.

4.3.2. Pre-testing of the instrument

The survey instrument was pretested following the approval and granting of the ethical clearance. This process was to ensure that the instrument is well established and able to gather the data required for this study. The pre-testing, in particular, focused on providing clarity, functionality, and applicability of the instrument for this research and on answering the research questions. The pre-test was conducted on nine respondents, comprising fellow MBA students, who assessed the

questionnaire for completion time, clarity of instructions, ease of understanding, any grammatical or spelling errors and the order of the questionnaire sections. This process helped identify unclear/contradictory wording, technical errors, or areas needing refinement. In addition, the research supervisor who is a competent scholar and respected member of the GIBS faculty, reviewed the instrument to ensure it was academically robust and aligned with the study's objectives.

Feedback from both the pilot test and supervisory review informed minor adjustments to the instrument. The segments of the instrument were reorganised to enhance flow, with the question layout modified to show progress completion when answering the questions. This improved the quality and ensured that the instrument was adequately developed to answer the research question.

4.3.3. Data collection

The data for this study were collected using a quantitative survey questionnaire, which was administered via Google Forms as the primary data collection tool. The survey instrument was initially developed in Microsoft Word to ensure clarity and logical flow, and then transferred into Google Forms, where a URL link was generated for execution. The questionnaire comprised four distinct sections, each aligned with the study's constructs, including demographic information, perceived resource losses, work-life balance initiatives, and managerial aspirations.

Data collection was conducted over a seven-week period, from 1 August to 22 September 2025. The google forms survey link was generated and distributed through multiple digital channels, including email, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn. To increase participation, broaden reach, and enhance response rates, a snowball sampling approach was employed, whereby participants were asked to distribute the survey to their networks. The survey specifically targeted young professionals currently employed in South Africa, aged 21–44 years, thereby ensuring alignment with the study's focus on young professionals' managerial aspirations.

The use of Google Forms allowed for efficient, secure, and anonymous data collection, with all responses automatically stored on a password-protected Google Drive. Therefore, ensuring data integrity and safeguarding respondent confidentiality aligned with the ethical principles of data gathering. The online distribution mechanism was suitable given the study population's high engagement with digital communication platforms, such as LinkedIn, which supports accessibility and

convenience. Furthermore, the questionnaire was designed to capture responses on nominal, ordinal, and interval scales, enabling the application of descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate statistical analyses. This alignment between data type and planned analysis ensured that the data collection approach was not only ethical but also methodologically robust in addressing the research objectives and hypotheses.

4.4. Quality Control

Data collection was conducted using a survey questionnaire that consisted of validated, tested, and thoroughly researched measurement instruments for all constructs and variables (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). This ensured the internal validity of the study design and data collection methods (Park et al., 2020; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Although some of the questions were adapted from other validated instruments to cater for the research question and combined into a single research questionnaire, the essence of the questions and measures remained unchanged to retain the integrity and validity of the instruments. Additionally, the survey questionnaire was tested for functionality and applicability with a sample of nine respondents, comprising individuals who are either currently completing an MBA or have already attained an MBA, before distribution.

4.4.1. Validity

Using SPSS, each construct was validated using Pearson's bivariate correlation analysis. This was used to determine whether the individual items of each construct were strongly related to their respective constructs (Hair et al., 2010). A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy greater than 0.70 reflects good convergent validity and indicates that all items are measuring the same construct (Hair et al., 2010). The study, therefore, considered the KMO value greater than 0.7 adequate and a good measure (Kaiser, 1974). Detailed results of the analysis are presented in Chapter 5.2.

4.4.2. Reliability

Reliability testing assesses the degree to which the measurement instrument consistently measures what it is intended to measure, with the widely accepted indicator being Cronbach's alpha (Hair et al., 2010). It is expressed as a coefficient ranging from 0 to 1, with values below 0.7 indicating low reliability and values between 0.7 and 0.95 indicating acceptable reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Detailed results of the analysis are presented in Chapter 5. 3. For this study, instruments were deemed reliable with a Cronbach value above 0.7 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

4.5. Analysis approach

The collected data was checked and cleaned for outliers and missing information to ensure data quality and consistency before analysis. A total of eight respondents over the age of 44 years and 10 who were not employed at the time of the survey were discarded from the data. The nominal data collected for the gender questions were coded so they could be used for analysis (0=male, and 1=female) (Wegner, 2020). The rest of the data used for analysis was interval numerical data, as the instrument used a 1 -5 Likert scale (Wegner, 2020).

The data was analysed using statistical methods, both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics of mean, median, and standard deviation provide a general overview of the data and describe the responses (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019; Wegner, 2020). Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between the constructs and test the hypotheses formulated by simple linear regression, multiple linear regression and moderation analysis to examine the impact of perceived resource loss on managerial aspirations (Wegner, 2020). In essence, the study aimed to predict the behaviour of the dependent variable based on the behaviour of the independent variables and the moderating variable (Park et al., 2020; Wegner, 2020).

The study conducted two predominant statistical procedures to test the estimated relationships based on the two hypotheses (H1 and H2), while controlling for gender. All the statistical tests were assessed at a 95% confidence level, consistent with established norms for statistical significance (Hair et al., 2010; Wegner, 2020).

Hypothesis 1, a simple linear regression analysis was drawn up in SPSS to evaluate the effect of Perceived Resource Loss (PRL) on Managerial Aspirations (MA). PRL was specified as a compound variable comprising of its constituent sub-dimensions: time loss, autonomy loss, flexibility hassle, work-related stress and the work-life conflict. The reliability and factor structure of these dimensions were checked to be congruent with the underlying constructs; hence, they were combined into a single

index. This meant that the composite score reflected the overall perception of resource loss, the independent variable. The regression test examined the direct correlation between PRL and MA, providing insight into whether perceived losses of key personal and energy resources associated with managerial roles increase or decrease the respondents' managerial aspirations. The equation below represents the model tested under this hypothesis.

$$MA = \beta_0 + \beta_1(PRL)$$

Where:

- MA = Managerial Aspirations (Dependent Variable)
- PRL = Perceived Resource Loss (composite score of time loss, autonomy loss, flexibility loss, work-related stress, and work-life conflict) (Independent Variable)
- β_0 = constant/ intercept
- β_1 = Regression coefficients estimating the effect of PRL

Hypothesis 2.

To consider the effects of Work-Life Balance Initiatives (WLBI) on the relationship between PRL and MA, and to determine whether this relationship is affected by gender (A1). Using this model, PRL (IV), MA (DP), WLBI (MV), and gender (Control) were the independent variable, the dependent variable, the moderator and the covariate, respectively.

It was appropriate to use PROCESS as a moderator as it makes estimation and interpretation of conditional effects easy. It presents explicit output regarding the importance of the interaction term (PRL x WLBI) and its impact on managerial aspiration. This procedure can be applied to test theoretical models that propose boundary conditions of the impact of independent variables on dependent outcomes.

$$MA = \beta_0 + \beta_1(PRL) + \beta_2 (WLBI) + \beta_3 (PRL \times WLBI) + \beta_4 (Gender)$$

- **MA** = Managerial Aspiration (Dependent Variable)
- **PRL** = Perceived Resource Loss (Independent Variable)
- **WLBI** = Work-Life Balance Initiatives (Moderator)
- **PRL×WLBI** = Interaction term between PRL and WLBI
- **Gender** = Control Variable (0 = Male, 1 = Female)

Both the simple regression and moderation analyses produced the same results, as analysed in Chapter 5. This consisted of coefficients, level of significance, R^2 and confidence intervals.

In general, the chosen method of analysis was of a high standard and corresponded to the researchers' objectives. This enabled the research to explore directly and conditionally the relationship between perceived resource loss, involvement in work-life balance and managerial ambitions among young professionals.

4.6. Limitations

The biggest limitation of a quantitative study is its attempt to link the causal effect of real-life issues through statistical significance, using a dataset that lacks the properties of real people to explain causality (Meyer et al., 2017). So while interpreting statistical data, it's important to be aware that it cannot fully explain the real issues and that is the inherent limitation (Meyer et al., 2017).

Additionally, limitations may arise from the sampling methods, which could result in biases due to the use of non-probability quota sampling. Hence, the study will not be generalised to represent the population (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Affinity bias will likely arise due to the data-gathering methods through the researcher's networks on LinkedIn and WhatsApp (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Additionally, the study's cross-sectional nature, imposed by time constraints, limits its effectiveness. Longitudinal studies would provide better insights into managerial aspirations over time (Barhate & Dirani, 2022).

5. Findings and Results

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study using both descriptive and inferential statistics. It begins with a description of the sample, outlining the respondents' demographic and biographical characteristics. The reliability and validity of the measurement instruments are then assessed through construct validity tests and factor analysis to confirm internal consistency and dimensionality of the key constructs. The results of descriptive statistics are presented to illustrate the central tendencies and variability of the observable variables. Thereafter, inferential statistical analyses are reported, structured around the hypotheses developed in Chapter 3. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings, which form the basis for the interpretation and discussion in Chapter 6.

5.1. Demographics

The sampled data was cleaned for outliers and incomplete responses, resulting in the valid data sample presented in Table 5.1. below. Since the study was conducted among young professionals aged 21 to 44 years, all of whom have post-matric qualifications and are currently working at different occupational levels, the demographic structure aligns sufficiently with the research aims.

Table 5.1-1: Representation of the sample data of respondents

Criterion for inclusion/exclusion	No. of respondents
<i>Total number of respondents</i>	213
<i>Respondents above the age threshold: <21 >44(Remove)</i>	8
<i>Respondents currently not working: Responded “No” to question 4 (Remove)</i>	9
Total valid sample data	196

The population targeted for this study consisted of young professionals in South Africa, specifically Millennials and Generation Z. Consequently, the study included all young professionals who were currently employed and aged between 21 and 44. The composition of the respondents to the survey was therefore analysed based on the demographic questions asked to ascertain the suitability of the sampled population and the respondents' ability to answer the research question.

5.1.1. Age distribution

The age distribution of the respondents is presented in Figure 5.1. A big part of the sample (37.8%) was between the ages of 29 and 34 years. This was then followed by the 35-40 year age range, accounting for 34.7% of the respondents. The respondents aged between 41 and 44 years accounted for 17.3% and a lower number of respondents were in the 24-28 years group (9.2%) and those between ages 21-23 years less than 1 percent of the total. These findings point out that the sample is mostly comprised of people in their late 20s to early 40s; together, the age group between 29-40 accounted for 72.5% of the sample. This is consistent with the study's purpose of sampling young professionals.

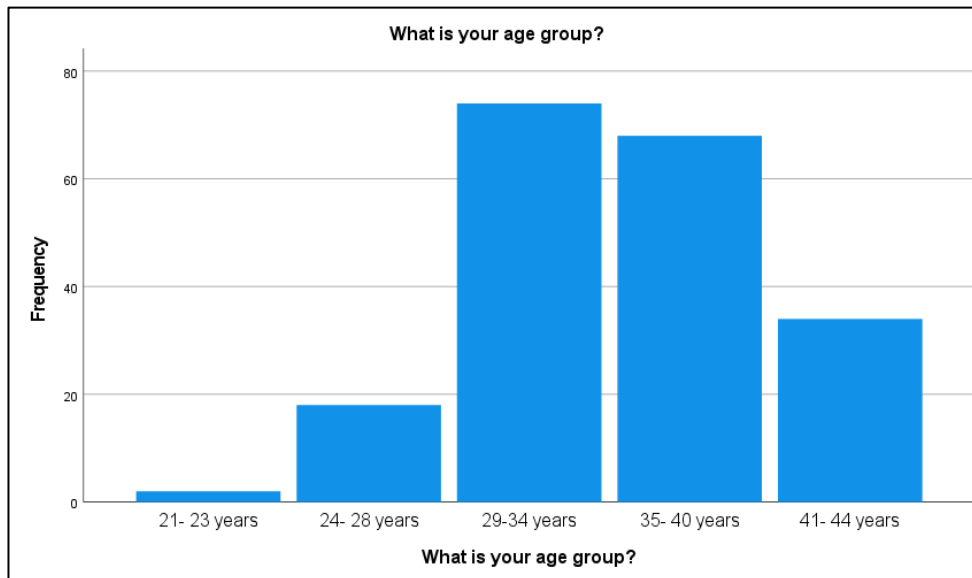


Figure 5.1.1.1: Age distribution of respondents (no. of respondents/frequency)

5.1.2. Gender

The gender distribution of the study participants is that out of the total respondents 196, 94 (48%) were male and 102 (52%) were female. This close representation of genders indicates a relatively equal sample makeup, thereby strengthening the generalizability of the results for both male and female subjects. This distribution is also significant because gender can influence perceptions of resource loss and managerial aspirations (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2020; Powell & Butterfield, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021).

5.1.3. Education level

Distribution of respondents by educational qualification is given in Figure 5.3. The most common level of qualification held was an Honours degree (36.7% of the sample). This was followed by those having a Master's degree at 35.2%, and Bachelor's degree at 21.4%. A smaller group received a Diploma or Certificate (5.1%) and only 1.5% of respondents said they had a Doctorate, which indicates that the majority of respondents were quite educated, with over 94% of respondents having received at least a bachelor's degree. The high proportion of postgraduate degrees reflects the sampling of young professionals with high-level educational profiles, as one would expect from a sample for a study of managerial aspirations.

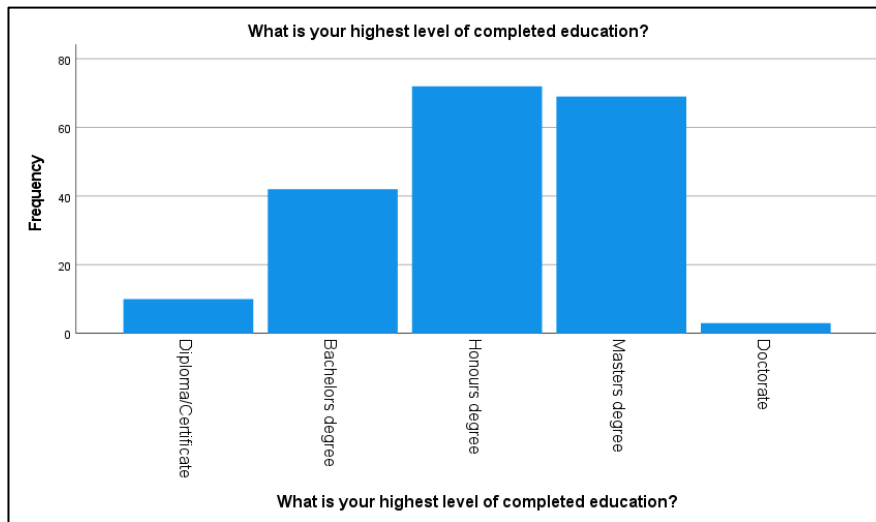


Figure 5.1.3.1: Qualification level of respondents

5.1.4. Employment status and level

The distribution of respondents by length of employment reflects a workforce that is both experienced and relatively stable. As shown in Figure 5.6, only a small percentage of participants (1.5%) reported having been employed for less than one year, while 6.1% indicated between one to three years of experience. A larger proportion, 14.8%, fell within the 4–6 years category, suggesting a group still in the earlier phases of consolidating their careers. The majority of respondents, however, had accumulated substantial work experience: 24.5% reported 7–10 years, 28.6% reported 11–15 years, and 24% reported more than 15 years of employment. Figure 5.1.4.1 represents the distribution, which demonstrates that nearly three-quarters

(77.6%) of the respondents had more than seven years of cumulative work experience.

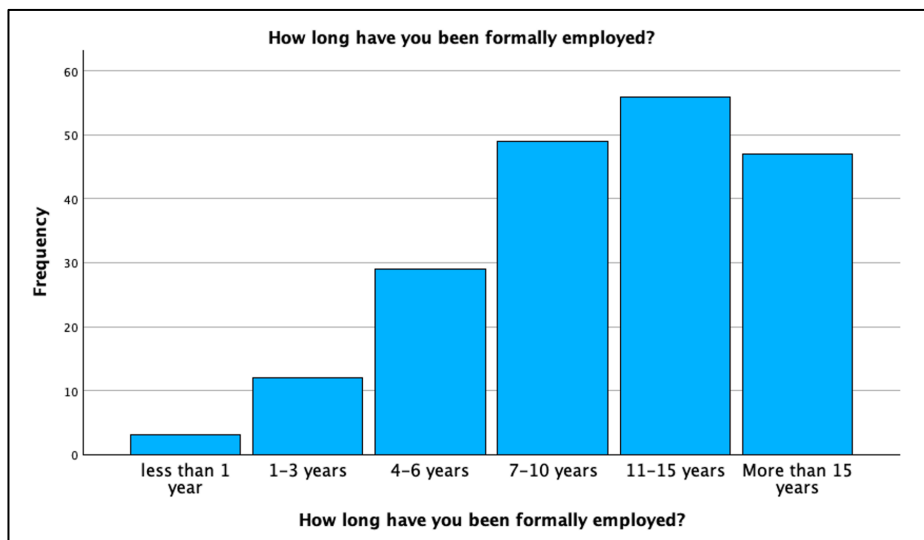


Figure 5.1.4.1: Distribution of respondents by period of employment

In addition to years of employment that demonstrate professionals with sufficient work experience to aspire to management, 62.2% indicated they currently hold managerial roles or have managerial responsibilities. The balance of 37.8% do not occupy managerial positions depicted in Figure 5.1.4.2.

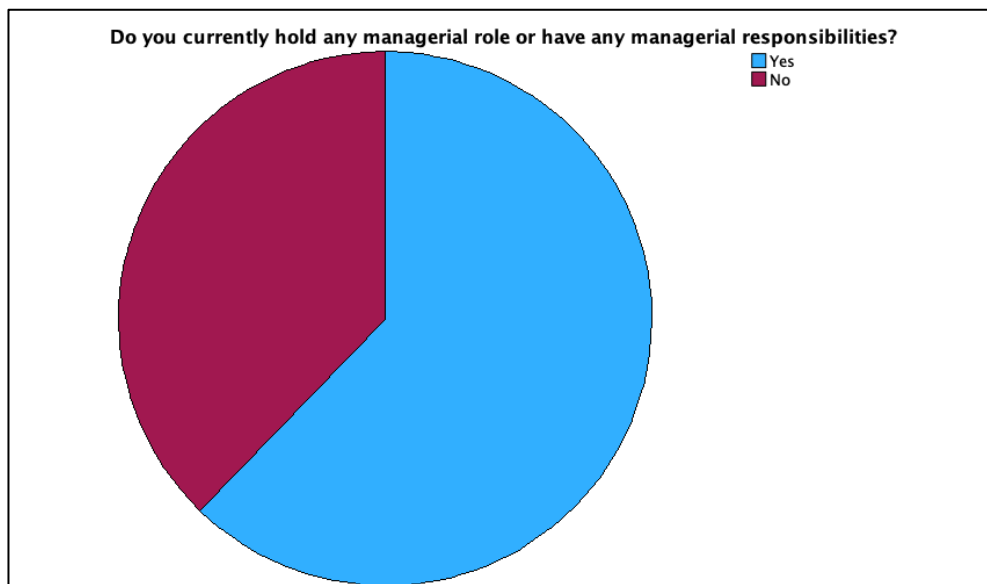


Figure 5.1.4.2: Respondents with managerial roles and responsibilities

A total of 68 respondents indicated that they were promoted to management within the last two years, accounting for 35.71%. The remaining 64.24% have not been appointed to such roles within the same period.

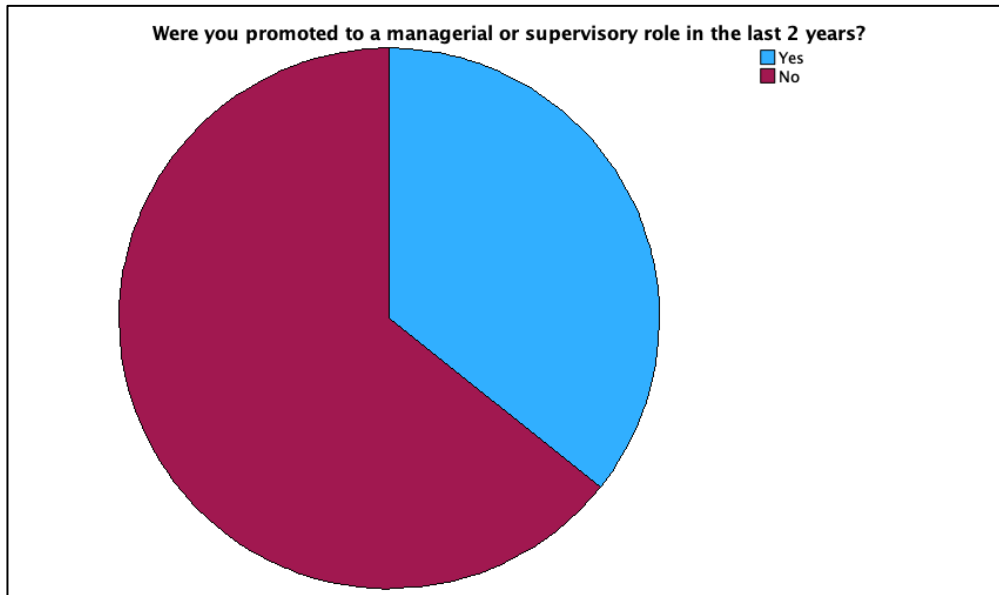


Figure 5.1.4.3: Promotion to managerial or supervisory role in the last two years

The employment level is shown in Figure 5.1.4.4. The majority of respondents described themselves as holding senior management-level positions, accounting for 33.2% of the sample in this category. Respondents with middle management roles accounted for 28.6% of the respondents, followed by junior associate roles, which accounted for 12.8%. Specialists, executives and entry-level associate or graduate roles accounted for 12.8%, 7.7% and 4.1% respectively. A small minority indicated, others on the role level and specified, freelancing at a local level private practice referred to "Locums".

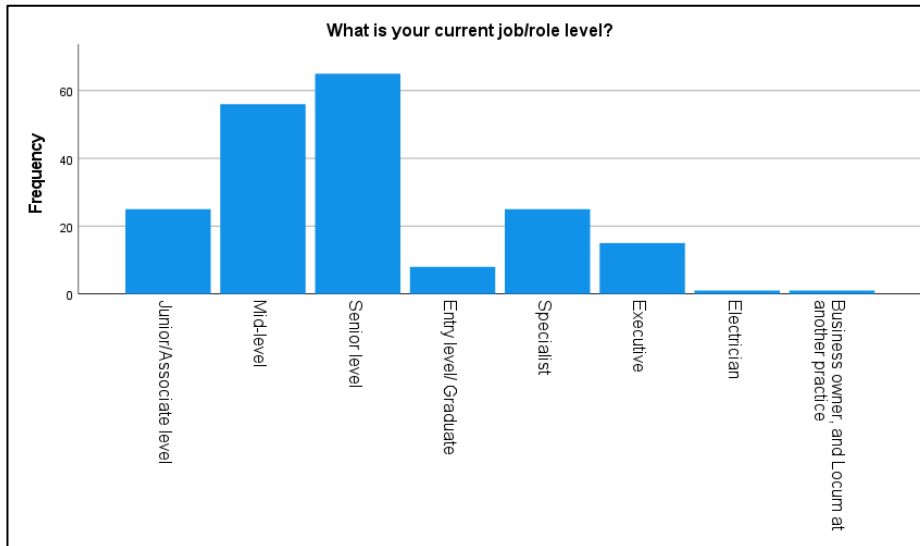


Figure 5.1.4.4: Respondents current job/role level

In addition to job level, respondents were asked to indicate their income level, and figure 5.1.4.5 represents the distribution of the income levels of the respondents. The income distribution of the respondents shows that the workforce constitutes moderate to high earning potential, which was in line with the workforce being a professional, post-matric, and career oriented group. The data show that the highest percentage of the respondents (27%) earned R901 000 to R1 300 000 annually, 16.3% earned between R701 000 and R900 000, 15.3% earned R500 000 or less and R2 001 000 and above. Moreover, 11.7 percent had incomes of between R1 601 000 to R2 000 000, 7.7 percent had incomes of between R501 000 to R700 000 and 6.6 percent had incomes of between R1 301 000 to R1 600 000.

These percentages suggest that most of the participants belong to either upper-middle-income to high-income category and represent a group of professionals who are well-established in their careers and whose economic standing is in managerial or specialty positions. The comparatively low number of the respondents with incomes that are less than R500 000 also implies that relatively low-income employees (entry-level, early-career professionals) comprised the sample minority, and the fact that high earners (more than R1.3 million) are included indicates that older professionals or executives were also included.

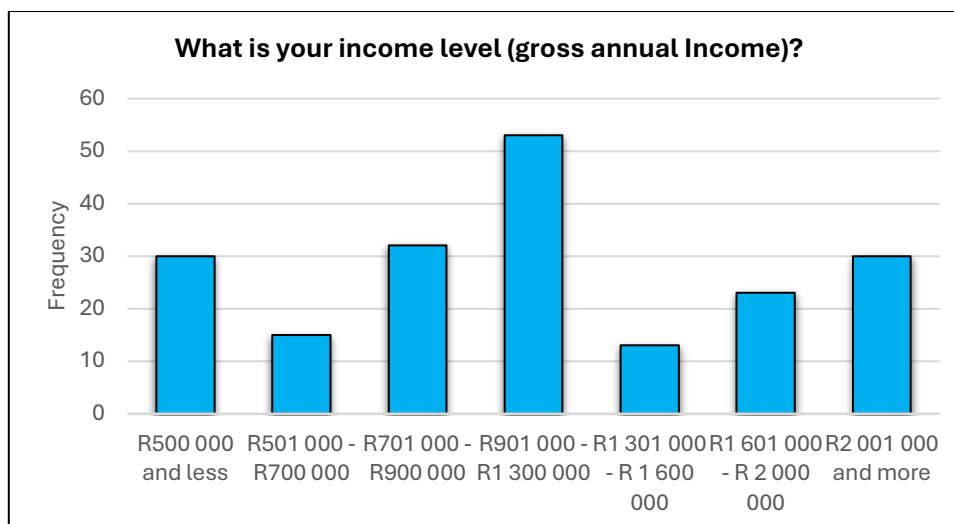


Figure 5.1.4.5: Income distribution of the respondents

5.1.5. Industry of employment

Figure 5.1.5.1 shows the distribution of the respondents by industry. The majority of respondents indicated that they are working in the Mining and Quarrying sector, accounting for 42.1% of the sample. This was closely followed by Health and Social Services (20.1%) and Financial Services and Insurance (11.6%). Another 7.3% indicated they worked in Manufacturing, and 4.3% said they had worked in what is classified as "Other" industries.

Smaller sample shares were spread over other sectors such as Information Technology and Communication (2.4%), Utilities (electricity, gas, water etc.) (2.4%), Public Administration and Municipality (2.4%), Logistics, Transport and Storage (1.8%). In addition, Construction (1.8%) and Education (1.8%) also appeared in the list of respondents. The lowest represented industries were Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (0.6%), Arts, Entertainment, Sport and Culture (0.6%) and Tourism and Hospitality (0.6%).

The mining and quarrying industry had the highest number of participants (34.7%), followed by the health and social services industry (17.3%), and the financial services and insurance industry (15.8%). These overpowering industries alone are over two-thirds of the sample. The balance of the respondents representing smaller percentages comprised manufacturing (7.1%), education (4.1%), and information technology and communication (3.1%). Other represented industries included construction, public administration, logistics, agriculture and utilities contributing

marginally to the total sample. This represented a diversified employment base as in the case of South African economy.

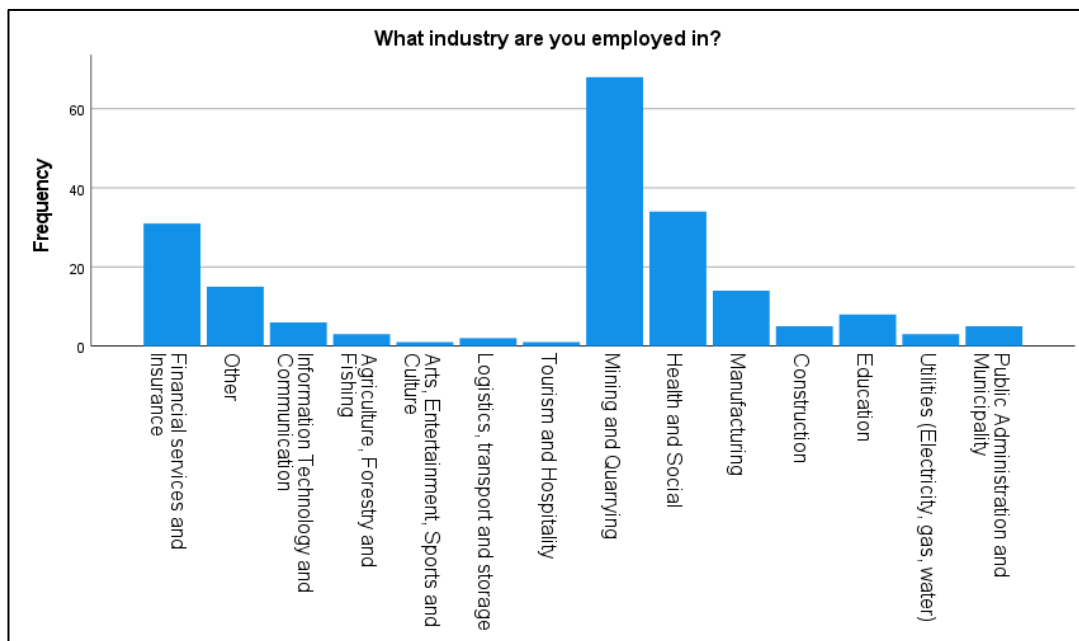


Figure 5.1.5.1: Economic industry distribution of respondents

5.1.6. Concluding paragraph

Collectively, the demographic information represents respondents who are predominantly young, both male and female, possessing post-matric qualifications, and are currently working in various levels of occupation within various economic industries. The sample is predominantly composed of young professionals who hold middle to senior-level positions and have gained some exposure to organisations' managerial roles, having been promoted recently or already in a role with managerial responsibilities. The sample also consists of a diverse group of professionals, at different levels of employment, ranging from entry-level to senior-level roles and specialists. Finally, the sample consists of moderate to high-earning professionals, with over 76% earning an annual gross income of more than R700,000.

5.2. Construct Validity

The constructs were validated using Pearson's bivariate correlation analysis and recording the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The items of each construct (sub-constructs) were tested, validity of these

items was established (Gaskin, 2021). The validation was performed for the Perceived Resource Loss (PRL) construct, which consisted of five sub-constructs.

5.2.1. Perceived Resource Loss (PRL)

5.2.1.1. Time Loss Scale

A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was performed on the items that measure perceived Time Loss related to managerial responsibilities. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.798, which is higher than suggested minimum of 0.70, implying that sufficient sampling adequacy exists for the use of factor analysis (Gaskin, 2021).

Table 5.2.1.1-1: KMO and Bartlett's validity test: Time loss scale

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.798
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	259.502
	df	6
	Sig.	.000

The data yielded a significant ($\chi^2(6) = 259.50$, $p < .001$) Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value, validating that the items in this sub-construct of the time loss scale measure the same construct and hence there exists a correlation (Gaskin, 2021). The four items recorded a KMO measure of between 0.775 and 0.852, reflecting a good convergence and measure of the sub-construct of time loss resource by these items. Appendix 5.1 present the component matrix.

5.2.1.2. Autonomy loss scale

The five-item scale was tested and produced a KMO of .766, which is above .70 (Gaskins, n.d.; Kaiser, 1974). indicating a sample suitable for use in a factor analysis. The data yielded a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value ($\chi^2(10) = 274.48$, $p < .001$), indicating that the correlation between items was adequate for extraction (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 5.2.1.2-1 KMO and Bartlett's validity test: Autonomy loss scale

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.766
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	274.476
	df	10
	Sig.	.000

The PCA results showed that there is one component with factor loadings of .594 to .836. (Appendix 5.2.)The most restrictive factors were "Accepting a managerial position would reduce my discretion in making decisions" (.836) and "I would be less responsible for my work processes in a managerial position" (.814). Products reflect the sense of powerlessness associated with managerial roles and powerlessness in controlling one's own life. Although one item (As a manager, I would have less control over how my work is carried out) had a relatively low loading (.594), this item was retained because it is conceptually consistent with the construct. Strong loadings for the Autonomy Loss items on the overall pattern of loadings supports the one-dimensionality of the scale and validates that the Autonomy Loss items are measuring a homogeneous construct.

5.2.1.3. Flexibility loss scale

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of .737 is above the minimum acceptable value of 0.70, showing that sampling adequacy was achieved (Kaiser, 1974). The data yielded a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity results ($\chi^2(10) = 205.96$, $p < .001$), which means that the correlation matrix was appropriate for extracting factors (Hair et al.,2010).

Table 5.2.1.3-1: KMO and Bartlett's validity test: Flexibility loss scale

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.737
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	205.957
	df	10
	Sig.	.000

In the PCA, the single extracted component had factor loadings ranging from .610 to .785. The items with highest load were "I would lose the flexibility I currently enjoy if I assumed a managerial role" (.785) and "The structure of managerial roles does not allow for flexible work schedules" (.738). These items were highly reflective of loss of flexibility as a perceived consequence of taking on a managerial role. One item ("Managers deal with more administrative hassles than non-managers") had a lower loading (.610), but was kept because it makes sense conceptually as part of the construct and contributes to the overall meaning of reduced flexibility. The one-dimensionality of the factor suggests that the Flexibility Loss scale reliably measures perceptions of lower structural flexibility and rigid structures associated with management (see Appendix 5.3).

5.2.1.4. Work-life balance conflict scale

The construct validation yielded a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of .856, suggesting sampling adequacy (Gaskins, n.d.; Kaiser, 1974). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(10) = 524.22$, $p = .001$), confirming the factorability of the correlation matrix (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 5.2.1.4-1: KMO and Bartlett's validity test: Work-life balance scale

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.856
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	524.222
	df	10
	Sig.	.000

The component matrix reported one component, with factor loadings ranging from 0.811 to 0.895. These high loadings affirm that the scale can indeed be used to measure the sub-construct of work-life conflict as an expected consequence of managerial work (see Appendix 5.4).

5.2.1.5. Work-related stress scale

Work related stress subconstruct scale reported a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.801, which is considered as a measure of good sampling adequacy above the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Gaskins, n.d.; Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett Sphericity Test was significant ($\chi^2(21) = 355.48$, $p < .001$), which shows that the correlation matrix was factorable (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 5.2.1.5-1: KMO and Bartlett's validity test: Work-related stress scale

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.801
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	355.484
	df	21
	Sig.	.000

The principal component analysis (PCA) outcome established that there are two factors which indicate a multidimensional nature of the construct of work-related stress. The first component was defined by items like "Conflicts or ambiguity in my management role is a source of everyday stress" (.778), "I often feel emotionally exhausted after dealing with staff, clients, or other stakeholders" (.751), and "My role requires me to repress frustration/irritation to remain professional" (.707). These items tap into the emotional exhaustion and role conflict component of stress (See Appendix 5.5.).

The second component was represented by items including "I feel less effective and competent in my role when I am emotionally drained" (.498) and "I experience physical symptoms (e.g., fatigue, headaches, sleep problems) because of my management role" (.399 cross-loading). This represents a physical and competence-related strain dimension, which means that stress in managerial positions not only characterises emotional strain, but also manifests itself in physical symptoms and reduced self-efficacy.

5.2.2. Work-life balance initiative scale

Work-Life Balance Initiatives (WLBI) scale reported a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic of .850, indicating good adequacy of sampling considering its greater than the acceptable criterion of .70 (Gaskins, n.d.; Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's test of sphericity showed significance ($\chi^2(21) = 381.63, p < .001$), indicating that the use of a correlation matrix is feasible for this construct (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 5.2.2-1: KMO and Bartlett's validity test: Work-life balance initiatives scale

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.850
Bartlett's Test of Approx. Chi-Square	381.628
Sphericity df	21
Sig.	.000

There were two components extracted from the PCA, which indicated that WLBI was multidimensional in nature detailed in Appendix 5.6. The first factor was represented by items including "I feel encouraged to use work-life balance programs available without career penalties," (.835); "Supervisors and managers encourage employee participation in work-life balance programs," (.806); and "Company provides training sessions and information on how to manage work-life balance," (.753). Part of this reflects management and organisational support for work-life balance.

The second component consisted of items including 'the organization offers child-care support or family friendly services' (.786) and 'I have enough leave policies' (-.467 loading on component 2). These products capture structural and policy-based responses such as leave policies and family-friendly services. Taken together, the two extracted factors indicate that WLBI includes both policy-driven support mechanisms and managerial/organisational culture, both of which are necessary for supporting employee well-being and for shaping managerial aspirations.

5.2.3. Managerial Aspiration Scale

Managerial Aspirations (MA) scale measured reported a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.897, showing a good sampling adequacy (Gaskins, n.d.; Kaiser, 1974). The significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2(136) = 2070.62, p < .001$) results, demonstrate the validity of the items for factor analysis (Hair et al.,2010).

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.897
Bartlett's Test of Approx. Chi-Square	2070.615
Sphericity df	136
Sig.	.000

The component matrix (see Appendix 5.7) analysis yielded three meaningful factors which corresponded quite well with the theoretical factors in the questionnaire: Leadership Aspirations, Achievement Aspirations, and Educational Aspirations.

Leadership Aspirations

The items loaded strongly on this factor include "I would like to get a (higher) managerial position" (.849), "When I am established in my career I would like to manage other employees" (.826), and "I hope to become a manager in my career field" (.803). This dimension measures the long-term desire of participants to hold managerial positions, exercise influence and move up the corporate ladder.

Achievement Aspirations

Items such as: "I have high aspirations with regard to managerial recognition and achievement" (.855), "In the last 4 months, I have asked for feedback on my job performance" (.532), "I have discussed my aspirations with a senior person in the department/organization" (.639) defined this factor. This dimension illustrates proactive behaviours like soliciting feedback, engaging in conversation for mentoring, and planning one's career path as expressions of dedication to career growth.

Educational Aspirations

Items like "In the last four months, I have upgraded my skills to be more competitive for promotion" (.610), "I have volunteered for important assignments with a view to furthering my advancement" (.609), and "I have asked to be considered for promotions to managerial positions" (.635) were grouped together as the third factor. This dimension captures the investment of respondents in skill development, volunteering, and promotion seeking behaviours that support their managerial career aspirations.

5.3. Construct Reliability

5.3.1. Perceived Resource Loss

5.3.1.1. Time loss scale

Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the Time Loss scale (four items). The reliability coefficient calculated by the analysis was a $\alpha = .832$, which is well above the recommended limit of .70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). This means that the items are well-represented and measure the same underlying construct fairly well, highlighting high correlation.

Table 5.3.1.1-1: Reliability statistics table: Time loss scale

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.832	4

The reliability results show that the Time Loss subscale has high internal consistency. So the scale may be seen as a reliable reflection of participants' beliefs concerning the potential buffer effect managerial roles may have on the amount of time available to themselves. This is in line with previous suggestions that an alpha between .80 and .90 indicates a high degree of internal consistency without item redundancy (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

5.3.1.2. Autonomy loss scale

Internal consistency of the Autonomy Loss scale, consisting of five items, was examined with Cronbach's Alpha. The coefficient was $\alpha = .796$, which is a little below the .80 and is still within the acceptable range (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). This suggests that not only are the items fairly correlated, but they are a sufficiently consistent measure of the perceived loss of autonomy associated with managerial positions.

Table 5.3.1.2-1 Reliability statistics table: Autonomy loss scale

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.796	5

In comparison with the Time Loss scale, the Autonomy Loss scale is somewhat lower, but still acceptable for research purposes. Cronbach's Alpha values between .70 and .80 are considered satisfactory in exploratory research, especially when the construct measures complex perceptions (i.e., autonomy) (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The results thus confirm that the Autonomy Loss scale is a reliable instrument for measuring respondents' perceptions of the restrictions of managerial role.

5.3.1.3. Flexibility loss scale

The Flexibility Loss scale was five items long and had a Cronbach's Alpha of .763. This is within the acceptable limits of internal consistency, and higher than the minimum threshold of .70 suggested for exploratory research (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 5.3.1.3-1: Reliability statistics table: Flexibility loss scale

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.763	5

The results indicate that the items have a modest correlation with each other and provide a reliable measure of the extent to which managerial roles are perceived to minimise workplace flexibility. Cronbach's Alpha values between .70 and .80 are deemed acceptable and as such indicate that the scale is appropriate for use in empirical analysis (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

5.3.1.4. Work-life conflict scale

The Work-Life Balance Conflict scale (five items) had a very high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = .906). This value is above the conventional value of 0.70 and in the range of the "excellent" values (Hair et al., 2010; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 5.3.1.4-1: reliability statistics table: Work life conflict scale

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.906	5

The reliability coefficient shows that the items are highly interrelated and consistently measure the construct of anticipated work-life balance conflict in managerial positions. The result, therefore, supports the robustness of the scale to capture perceptions of work-life interference related to management responsibilities.

5.3.1.5. Work related stress scale

In the Work-Related Stress (WRS) scale consisting of seven items, Cronbach's α =.804. This result is better than .70, which indicates adequate internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 5.3.1.5-1Reliability statistics table: Work related stress scale

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items

.804	7
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This coefficient indicates that the items are a good measure of the underlying construct, managerial stress. The items are correlated enough to reflect different dimensions of stress, such as emotional exhaustion, role conflict, and physical strain, but not too correlated so that the same dimension is reflected in multiple different items. This is in agreement with guidelines from the literature, which identify values greater than .70 to indicate high reliability for multidimensional psychological constructs (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Thus, the WRS scale may be considered a reliable indicator of stress levels that are associated with management tasks.

5.3.2. Work-life Balance Initiatives scale

The Work-Life Balance Initiatives (WLBI) scale, consisting of seven items, had a Cronbach's Alpha of $\alpha = .824$. This protein has excellent internal consistency and is greater than the recommended .70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 5.3.2-1: Reliability statistics table: Work-life balance initiatives scale

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.824	7

The reliability coefficient shows that the items have a satisfactory measure of reliability in measuring the degree to which respondents perceive that their organisation has work-life balance initiatives. Cronbach's Alpha values above .80 indicate a satisfactory level of internal reliability of the WLBI scale, which still allows differentiation between items representing formal organisational policies (e.g. flexible working arrangements, childcare support) and managerial support practices (e.g. encouragement to use WLB schemes). Therefore, the WLBI scale can be regarded as a sturdy and dependable instrument for capturing employees' perceptions of work-life-balance efforts the organization is making.

5.3.3. Managerial Aspiration scale

5.3.3.1. Leadership aspiration scale

The reliability analysis on the sub-construct of managerial aspiration yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.901 for the eight items, indicating excellent internal consistency among the measurement items (Hair et al.,2010). According to Tavakol and Dennick, (2011), a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 signifies acceptable reliability, while values above 0.90 demonstrate outstanding reliability suitable for research purposes. Consequently, the scale can be considered a dependable and valid measure of the leadership aspiration sub construct of managerial aspiration.

Table 5.3.3-1: Reliability statistics table: Leadership aspiration scale

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.901	8

5.3.3.2. Achievement aspiration scale

The reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.833 for the five items, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the variables. This suggests that the items reliably measure the same underlying construct. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011), a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient exceeding 0.80 is considered very good, indicating that the scale demonstrates stable and consistent measurement properties. Therefore, the instrument used in this section is deemed reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis, such as factor analysis or regression modelling.

Table 5.3.3-2: Reliability statistical table: Achievement aspiration scale

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.833	5

5.3.3.3. Education aspiration scale

The reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.779 across four items, indicating acceptable internal consistency within the scale. According to

Tavakol and Dennick (2011), a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered satisfactory for research instruments, suggesting that the items are suitably correlated and measure a common underlying construct. While the coefficient is slightly below the “high” reliability threshold of 0.80, it remains within the acceptable range for social science research (Hair et al.,2010). Therefore, the four items demonstrate dependable measurement consistency and are appropriate for inclusion in subsequent analyses.

Table 5.3.3-3: Reliability statistics table: Education aspiration

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.779	4

5.4. Descriptive statistical analysis

The analysis of the descriptive statistics was conducted to summarise the responses for each construct measured in the study. A summary of the results of the five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree - 5 = Strongly Agree) is presented below. Central tendency (mean) and dispersion (standard deviation) are reported as well as observed minimum and maximum. The results offer an insight into the general patterns and variability in perceptions and aspirations among participants.

5.4.1. Managerial Aspiration

5.4.1.1. Leadership Aspiration

The descriptive results show that young professionals have high aspirations for leadership. The most highly rated item on the scale is "When I am established in my career, I would like to train others" (M = 4.55, SD = .720), indicating that the majority of participants strongly agreed with the concept of coaching and capacity building. Overall, the respondents agreed that they had aspirations of moving up the ranks within organisations (M = 4.27, SD = 1.097) and gaining greater responsibility and influence (M = 4.25, SD = 1.110).

Similarly, items such as it's essential for me to attain managerial position was favourably considered, with the respondents in agreement (M = 4.21, SD = 1.192).

However, when asked if they would devote and invest energy to be promoted, a tentative response was gathered; however, still primarily in agreement ($M = 3.90$; $SD = 1.327$), albeit with slightly more variance as represented by the SD of 1.327 compared to 1.192 of earlier item. Interestingly, the item “attaining managerial status in my career is that important to me” was scored the lowest ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.381$), but even here, there was moderate agreement in the sense that respondents were ambivalent.

Table 5.4.1.1-1: Descriptive stats: leadership aspiration sub-construct

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I hope to become a manager in my career field	196	1	5	4.32	1.097
When I am established in my career, I would like to manage other employees	196	1	5	4.24	1.109
I plan on devoting energy, time and effort to getting promoted to a manager in the organisation or business I am working in	196	1	5	3.96	1.268
When I am established in my career, I would like to train others	196	1	5	4.36	1.006
I hope to move up through any organisation or business I work in	196	1	5	4.12	1.209
Attaining managerial status in my career is not that important to me	196	1	5	3.68	1.422
I would like to obtain a (higher) managerial position	196	1	5	4.11	1.210
I would like to be in a position of greater responsibility and influence in my department/organization	196	1	5	4.17	1.145
Valid N (listwise)	196				

5.4.1.2. Achievements aspiration

Achievement aspirations indicate that respondents tended to agree that they aspire for managerial recognition and achievement ($M = 4.04$; $SD = 1.262$). In contrast, behaviours that are active in aiding the career development process (such as asking for feedback ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.368$), talking to experienced colleagues about their career ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.479$), engaging in planning a career ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.507$) and talking to senior staff about aspirations ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.532$) were rated much lower than the actual aspiration items. The action-related achievement items reported a slightly higher variation (average $SD=1.5$) amongst the respondents compared to the items about the aspiration ($SD=1.2$). As a result of this it can be inferred that, although the need for recognition and progression is great, the need for clear developmental practices is not as strong.

Table 5.4.1.2-1: descriptive statis: Achievement aspiration sub-construct

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
My aspirations are very high in regard to managerial recognition and achievement	196	1	5	3.99	1.240
In the last 4 months, I have sought feedback on my job performance	196	1	5	3.47	1.357
In the last 4 months, I have discussed my career prospects with someone with more experience in the department/organization	196	1	5	3.52	1.472
In the last 4 months, I have engaged in career path planning	196	1	5	3.44	1.489
In the last 4 months, I have discussed my aspirations with a senior person in the department/organization	196	1	5	3.48	1.445
Valid N (listwise)	196				

5.4.1.3. Education Aspiration

The analysis of educational aspirations provides valuable insights into respondents' perceptions of their developmental activities aimed at advancing in the managerial ranks. The highest mean score was seen on updating skills to be competitive for promotion ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.403$). This suggests that participants are generally aware of the importance of skills development as an ongoing process for enhancing both individual and managerial skills. By contrast, the lowest mean ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.528$) was associated with requests for consideration for managerial promotions, reflecting a certain hesitation or trepidation about actively seeking opportunities for promotion. Items about additional responsibility towards attaining managerial responsibility received neutral feedback from respondents from the ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.398$) and for essential tasks ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.395$), indicating that the respondents are moderate to ambivalent about these items.

Table 5.4.1.3-1: Descriptive stats summary: Education aspiration sub-construct

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
In the last 4 months, I have updated my skills in order to be more competitive for promotion to management roles	196	1	5	3.06	1.589
In the last 4 months, I have volunteered for activities other than my day-to-day work tasks, which have managerial responsibilities	196	1	5	3.06	1.398
In the last 4 months, I have volunteered for important assignments with the intent of helping to further my advancement to management possibilities	196	1	5	3.10	1.361
In the last 4 months, I have requested to be considered for promotions to managerial roles	196	1	5	2.86	1.528
Valid N (listwise)	196				

Overall, respondents tended to agree strongly with having leadership and managerial aspirations; however, when asked about efforts to be recognised and under the achievement aspiration scale, there was a slight drop in responses. However, still maintaining a positive stance, I agree to having achievement aspirations. Education aspiration remains neutral of all the aspiration scales, with overall respondents being moderate to ambivalent when asked about their education aspiration.

5.4.2. Perceived resource loss

Time loss

The descriptive results show that respondents' perceptions of time loss associated with a large personal commitment indicate that they are more aware of the potential costs of managerial roles. The item with the highest mean score was "Managerial roles require more investment of time" ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .852$), followed by "A managerial role would significantly reduce my personal time" ($M = 4.10$, $SD = .997$). These findings suggest that participants agree that being in a managerial role means significant time pressures and less personal time; detailed results are presented in Appendix 7.1.

Autonomy loss

Descriptive analysis reveals that respondents generally disagreed or remained neutral with statements indicating that managerial roles can reduce autonomy, creativity, and control. The two items that scored highest on the mean—that is, "Managers are expected to follow rigid procedures with little room for personal input" ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.186$) and "As a manager, I would have less control over how my work is carried out" ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.138$)—implies ambivalence of respondents to perception that managerial responsibilities may limit the autonomy or independence in decision-making. Overall, most people do not consider managerial positions too restrictive, with the detailed results in Appendix 7.2.

Flexibility loss

The descriptive results indicate that respondents tend to agree that there are increased levels of organisational and administrative constraints relating to managerial roles, in terms of bureaucracy, distractions and administrative burden. The highest mean score was for the statement, "In a managerial role, I would face

more bureaucratic blockages than I do now" ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.102$). Similarly, "Managers experience more administration than non-managers" and "Managerial work requires frequent interruptions (interdepartmental/team meetings) that make planning difficult" both had means of $M = 3.63$ $SD = 1.252$, $SD = 1.127$, respectively. Respondents tend to therefore agree that flexibility will be hampered with managerial roles, with the itemised means reported on Appendix 7.3.

Work-life conflict

Respondents experienced neither agreed or disagreed that managerial roles would impact their work life balance resulting in conflict. The items "The stress of a managerial role would spill over into my personal life" ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.213$) gained the highest mean score, indicating that participants are mildly conscious of the threats that managerial roles may pose on their work life balance. Similarly, the item "It would be difficult to have a healthy work-life balance as a manager" recorded a mean of 3.27 ($SD = 1.269$), which further suggests neutrality among the respondents. Overall, the respondents showed Moderate discontent to the impact of managerial roles to their work life balance. (see appendix 7.4).

Work-related stress

The descriptive findings show that respondents highly agreed to the high emotional demands of managerial roles, in terms of managing emotions and acting professionally under stress. The highest mean scores were found for the statements "even in difficult situations, I'm expected to always be composed and emotionally neutral" ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.909$) and "My profession requires me to suppress frustration or irritation in order to be professional" ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.882$). The results show respondents expect managerial roles to have high levels of emotional labour and psychological strain. (see detailed results on appendix 7.5).

5.4.3. Work-life balance initiatives

Descriptive results show that, overall, participants perceived moderate organisational support for work-life balance, although there was considerable variability in different support modalities. The item 'I have access to sufficient leave policies (e.g. parental leave, sabbaticals) that support my family and personal needs' had the highest mean ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.169$). Respondents remained neutral in their views of work-life

balance structures at their workplace and the support from supervisors ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.43$). This was consistent throughout the other items on the scale as detailed in Appendix 7.6.

5.5. Inferential statistics

5.5.1. Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1

H1: There is a **negative relationship** between perceived resource loss (time, flexibility, autonomy, work-life balance, work-related stress) (PRL) associated with managerial roles and the managerial aspirations (MA) of young professionals.

The perceived resource loss (PRL) and its impact on managerial aspirations (MA) in young professionals were examined using simple linear regression analysis. The model summary, ANOVA, and coefficient results indicate that there is statistically significant negative relation between the two variables such that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

The model summary presents the correlation coefficient between PRL and MA as $R = 0.453$, indicating the existence of a moderate relationship between the variables (Hair et al., 2010). The R^2 of 0.205, however, suggests that perceived resource loss accounts for about 20.5 per cent of the difference in the managerial aspirations of the respondents. Presenting a weaker model for predicting Managerial aspiration of young professionals by the dependent variable PRL.

Table 5.5.1-1 Model summary table: Hypothesis 1

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.453 ^a	.205	.201	.73812

a. Predictors: (Constant), PRL

This implies that almost a fifth of the difference between the intentions of young professionals to work as managers can be attributed to the perception of resource

loss. The adjusted R² value, 0.201, shows that the model is an acceptable fit with consideration of the sample size (Hair et al.,2010).

Table 5.5.1-2: ANOVA results table: Hypothesis 1

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	27.328	1	27.328	50.161	.000 ^b
	Residual	105.694	194	.545		
	Total	133.022	195			

a. Dependent Variable: MA

b. Predictors: (Constant), PRL

Another way that the ANOVA result supports the conclusion that the regression model is statistically significant is that the F-value of the ANOVA is 50.161 which has a significance value of 0.000, $F(1,194) = 50.161$, $p < .000$. Such that the results of the this model can be used predict and explain the differences in the Managerial aspirations based on the perceived resource loss (Hair et al.,2010).

Table 5.5.1-3: Coefficients table: Hypothesis 1

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	5.557	.267		.000
	PRL	-.570	.080	-.453	.000

a. Dependent Variable: MA

The variable coefficients of the model depict the direction of the relationship between the two variables of Managerial aspiration and resource loss as predicted by the significant model. From the table analysis, the PRL variable has a negative and significant coefficient (p value of 0.000, < 0.05). PRL unstandardized coefficient is $B = -0.570$, with a standard error = 0.080, and a t-value = -7.082, which is significant at $p = .000$. That means that managerial aspirations decline by 0.57 units with a one-unit change in perceived resource loss. The standardised coefficient (= -0.453) indicates that PRL has a moderate negative impact on MA (Hair et al.,2010), that is,

higher perceptions of time loss, lower flexibility, lower autonomy, work-life imbalance, or higher stress levels are linked with lower levels of aspiration to become managers.

The ANOVA and coefficient results are all significant, which implies that there is enough evidence not to reject the null hypothesis, that there is a negative correlation between PRL and MA.

The data was further analysed in a multiple linear regression to unpack the interplay of the different PRL factors and their individual contribution to Managerial aspiration. Breaking down the PRL variables, such as time loss (TL), autonomy loss (AL), flexibility loss (FL), work-life conflict (WLC), and work-related stress (WRS), the impact was investigated on managerial aspirations (MA) in a multiple regression analysis.

Table 5.5.1-4: Model summary stats for multiple linear regression

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.478 ^a	.229	.208	.73490

a. Predictors: (Constant), WRS, AL, TL, FH, WLC

The summary model showed that the R-squared value was 0.229, which means that out of the total variance in managerial aspirations, the five predictors explained 22.9%. The general model was found to be statistically significant, $F(5, 190) = 11.26$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that when the predictors are considered collectively, they are significant in predicting the aspirations of managers. The adjusted R² value of 0.208 ascertains that the model still has a good explanatory power despite the fact that it has adjusted the number of predictors used in it.

Table 5.5.1-5: ANOVA summary stats for multiple linear regression

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	30.406	5	6.081	11.260	.000 ^b
	Residual	102.616	190	.540		
	Total	133.022	195			

a. Dependent Variable: MA

b. Predictors: (Constant), WRS, AL, TL, FH, WLC

Table 5.5.1-6: Coefficient results table for multiple linear regression

Coefficients ^a						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	5.674	.319		17.780	.000
	TL	-.029	.073	-.030	-.392	.695
	AL	-.035	.073	-.036	-.476	.634
	FH	-.227	.084	-.237	-2.714	.007
	WLC	-.060	.073	-.079	-.830	.407
	WRS	-.233	.084	-.218	-2.763	.006

a. Dependent Variable: MA

The coefficients table indicates that all five variables have a negative relation with MA; however, of the five predictors, only the flexibility hassle (FH) and work-related stress (WRS) were found to be statistically significant predictors of the managerial aspirations. Specifically, flexibility hassle ($\beta = -0.237$, $t = -2.714$, $p = 0.007$) and work-related stress ($\beta = -0.218$, $t = -2.763$, $p = 0.006$) both had significant negative effects on managerial aspirations. This implies that workers with increased degrees of flexibility restrictions or work-related stress have lower chances of managerial aspirations.

In addition, the variables, team loss (TL), autonomy loss (AL), and work-life conflict (WLC), did not show statistically significant relationships with managerial aspirations ($p > 0.05$). It is an indication that these factors might contribute to overall job satisfaction or commitment but not to the motivation of amongst young professionals to aspire to leadership positions.

5.5.2. Hypothesis 2

H2: Work-life balance initiatives (WLBI) moderate the relationship between the perceived resource losses (PRL) associated with managerial roles and the managerial aspirations among young professionals.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) sought to determine whether work-life balance initiatives moderate the relationship between perceived role loss and managerial aspirations, while accounting for gender. This hypothesis was tested using Hayes' PROCESS Macro

Model 1, with PRL as the independent variable (X), MA as the dependent variable (Y), WLBI as the moderator (W), and gender as a covariate.

Run MATRIX procedure:

```
***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 *****

      Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D.      www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

*****
Model   : 1
  Y     : MA
  X     : PRL
  W     : WLBI

Covariates:
  A1

Sample
Size: 196

*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  MA

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
,4894    ,2395    ,5296    15,0407    4,0000    191,0000    ,0000

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant    6,0095    ,8214    7,3158    ,0000    4,3893    7,6298
PRL         -,7605    ,2419   -3,1439    ,0019   -1,2376   -,2833
WLBI        -,1448    ,2409   -,6009    ,5486   -,6199    ,3304
Int_1       ,0709    ,0712    ,9960    ,3205   -,0695    ,2114
A1          -,1772    ,1059   -1,6742    ,0957   -,3860    ,0316

Product terms key:
Int_1      :      PRL      x      WLBI

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
      R2-chng      F      df1      df2      p
X*W      ,0039      ,9919      1,0000    191,0000    ,3205

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
  95,0000
```

The model summary showed an R^2 value of 0.2395. This indicates that about 23.95% of the variance in managerial aspirations could be explained by the combined effects of PRL, WLBI, their interaction, and gender. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(4,191) = 15.04$, $p < 0.001$, confirming that the predictors collectively had a meaningful impact on managerial aspirations.

The regression results showed a significant negative relationship between perceived resource loss and managerial aspirations ($\beta = -0.76$, $t = -3.14$, $p = 0.0019$).

Suggesting that managerial aspiration decreases with increasing perception of resource losses such as time, autonomy, flexibility, work-life balance and increased emotional strain, consistent with hypothesis 1 findings.

However, work-life balance initiatives (WLBI) did not produce any significant direct relationship with managerial aspirations ($\beta = -0.14$, $t = -0.60$, $p = 0.5486$). Additionally, the interaction term (PRL $\times$ WLBI) was also not significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $t = 0.99$, $p = 0.3205$). Suggesting that having work-life balance initiatives, such as flexible work arrangements or extended leave arrangements, may not have a mitigating effect on the relationship between the perception of resource loss and managerial aspiration.

When gender was included as a control variable, it showed a marginally insignificant effect ($\beta = -0.18$, $t = -1.67$, $p = 0.0957$). In the managerial aspirations of young professionals, this result suggests that gender may have some influence in the relationship between perceived resource loss, work-life balance initiatives and the managerial aspiration, although not as conclusively. The negative coefficient ($\beta = -0.18$) of the gender variable, suggests that when considering work-life balance initiatives and the perceived resource losses, females have lower managerial aspiration than men (coded male = 0 and female = 1).

Overall, hypothesis 2, which states that work-life balance initiatives (WLBI) moderate the relationship between the perceived resource losses (PRL) associated with managerial roles and the managerial aspirations of young professionals, is rejected considering the insignificant model results.

5.6. Conclusion/ Summary of Results

Chapter 5 presented the empirical results derived from a sample of 196 young professionals across various South African economic sectors. Data was collected using a reliable and valid instrument with Cronbach's alpha coefficients and a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value above 0.7, highlighting good quality data collection tool. Respondents exhibit high levels of managerial aspiration, while also showing increased perception of resource loss, especially in relation to loss of flexibility and work-related stress. Inferential analyses using multiple and moderated linear regression models indicated that perceptions of resource loss negatively impacted

managerial aspiration. The moderation analysis indicated that work-life balance initiatives (WLBI) did not significantly mitigate this adverse relationship.

6. Discussion of Results

6.1. Introduction

The study aimed to provide empirical evidence on how perceptions of resource loss influence the managerial aspirations of young professionals in South Africa. By conducting a quantitative research method, data were gathered using a survey questionnaire, and the results were analysed statistically. This chapter will therefore examine and discuss the study's results in relation to the research question and hypothesis, as well as the theory and existing literature.

The overarching research question for this study is: how does the perception of resource losses associated with managerial roles influence the managerial aspirations of young professionals, and to what extent do work-life balance initiatives mitigate the adverse effects? Therefore, this chapter will unpack the results of Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 in response to this question, integrating them with theory and existing literature, as detailed in Chapter 2.

The study's findings were based on a sample of 196 young working South African professionals across various economic sectors. The majority of respondents hold Honours and Master's degrees, indicating a sample composed of knowledge-based professionals working in industries where managerial promotion is a viable career development path. The sample comprised 63% of young professionals in management roles, highlighting that respondents have sufficient exposure and experience in managerial positions. The sample is balanced, with individuals at various employment levels, from entry-level to junior and senior roles.

6.2. Managerial Aspiration

The findings of the study support the argument that managerial aspiration is not merely the desire to attain management roles but the active engagement in behaviours and actions that demonstrate such desire (Grey and O'Brien, 2007; Gregor et al., 2019; Spurk et al., 2019). The respondents indicated high levels of education, including postgraduate level education (73%), holding management roles

(65%) and having been promoted (36%) in the last two years. This is consistent with the MA construct, indicating the interplay between leadership achievement and educational aspiration in shaping managerial aspiration.

There was high variability in responses to key items (e.g., willingness to invest energy in promotion and lower preference for managerial status), suggesting that many young professionals balance ambition and a concern for resource trade-offs, such as autonomy and work-life balance when considering management roles (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2022). This means that while the intent to lead and manage is strong, it is impacted by the realisation that managerial positions comes with resource losses.

Whilst the intention to engage in career-enhancing behaviours is high, actual engagement is not consistently high, demonstrating the ascription-action gap. This gap highlights the importance of supportive organisational systems, such as mentoring, feedback mechanisms and clear promotion pathways, that encourage employees to translate ambition into actionable steps towards managerial positions (Moake et al., 2023).

Altogether, the descriptive statistics paint a complex picture: young professionals desire to develop their competencies and become leaders but may be reluctant to actively position themselves for managerial roles due to broader contextual challenges and the perceived trade-offs associated with management (Powell & Butterfield, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021).

6.3. Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1

H1: There is a **negative relationship** between perceived resource loss (time, flexibility, autonomy, work-life balance, work-related stress) (PRL) associated with managerial roles and the managerial aspirations (MA) of young professionals.

The study asked respondents to answer questions about management roles and the expected or perceived resource losses. For individuals already in management roles, the researcher investigated their aspirations for a higher managerial role than the one currently occupied. The results showed a significant, negative relationship,

such that managerial aspirations declined in response to increased perception of resource loss. This is consistent with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which posits that individuals weigh the potential losses of resources (Time, autonomy, flexibility, etc) against the potential gains of resources (e.g., money, status, prestige) in their consideration of managerial roles and hence how they then desire or aspire to such roles (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

The strength of this inverse relationship is relatively moderate (standardised B = -0.453), given that managerial aspirations would decline by 0.57 units for every one-unit increase in perceived resource loss. The model's estimated baseline management aspiration of the respondents is represented by the intercept/constant (B = 5.674). Despite being higher than the observed scale range (1–5), this score indicates that respondents had a strong underlying predisposition toward managerial aspiration when there is no perceived resource loss or at the lowest theoretical levels of PRL (PRL=0). Therefore, the threat to existing resources reduces the individual's managerial aspiration.

$$\underline{MA = 5.557 - 0.57 \text{ PRL}}$$

This finding is consistent with earlier literature in that the additional responsibility and burdens associated with managerial roles deter young professionals to aspire to attain such roles (Spurk et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Similarly, Akkermans and Tims (2017) discovered that an individual's motivation to pursue progression is reduced by the anticipated higher job demands and the expectation of more time dedicated to work.

When the PRL's impact is analysed using the various subconstructs of Time loss (TL), autonomy loss (AL), flexibility loss (FH), work-life conflict (WLC), and work-related stress (WRS), on managerial aspirations (MA), it yielded a negative and significant relation for the overall model. Specifically, flexibility loss and work-related stress both had significant adverse effects on managerial aspirations. While time loss (TM), autonomy loss (AL) and work-life conflict showed a negative but not significant impact on managerial aspiration (MA).

$$\underline{MA = 5.674 - 0.227 (FH) - 0.233 (WRS)}$$

Table 6.3-1: Summary of the multiple regression model

Predictor variable	Unstandardized coefficient (b)	Std. Error	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Constant	5.674	0.319	0.000	Higher baseline managerial aspiration when all variables = 0.
Time Loss (TI)	-0.029	0.073	0.695	Not significant
Autonomy Loss (AI)	-0.035	0.073	0.634	Not significant
Flexibility Loss (FH)	-0.227	0.084	0.007	Significant negative effect: reduced flexibility reduces managerial aspiration.
Work-Life Conflict (WLC)	-0.060	0.073	0.407	Not significant
Work-Related Stress (WRS)	-0.233	0.084	0.006	Significant negative effect: increased work-related stress reduces managerial aspiration.

6.3.1. Flexibility Loss (FH)

The study reveals that flexibility is a statistically significant resource that deters managerial aspiration in young professionals in South Africa, given the negative results ($\beta = -0.237$, $p = .007$). Young professionals value flexibility in their jobs (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Such that events that seek to threaten

these valuable resources will cause them to conserve this resource (Hobfoll, 2002). These findings suggest that as young professionals perceive managerial roles as having increased bureaucratic, procedural, or structural constraints, their desire and ambition to pursue such roles decline.

As established in prior studies, work schedule flexibility is linked to a 62% increase in job satisfaction and a 20% reduction in work stress, ultimately leading to increased motivation and employee wellness (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). Young professionals increasingly prioritise career fluidity and flexible work arrangements over traditional hierarchical prestige that comes with attaining managerial status (Groenewald et al., 2024; Vaiman et al., 2021).

Young professionals will consider managerial aspirations negatively, given the potential threat to the flexibility they currently enjoy. This further highlights the earlier findings of changing economic factors, such as the rise in the gig economy, which offers individuals the flexibility they want to conduct work while maximising their earning potential (Vaiman et al., 2021).

6.3.2. Work-related stress (WRS)

There is a statistically significant negative impact of work-related stress on managerial aspirations ($\beta = -0.218$, $p = .006$). Such that young professionals are less inclined to aspire to management, with the perception of an increase in work-related stress. Literature has reported similar results when the study was conducted on young medical professionals, showing lower levels of managerial aspirations due to increased work stress (Picker-Roesch & Lang, 2024).

The respondents tended to agree (mean = 4.2, SD = 0.0634) that, in management, individuals suppress their frustrations and/or irritation to maintain professional appropriateness, thereby increasing emotional labour. Emotional labour was found to be the primary cause of work-related stress in managerial roles (mean = 4.2, SD = 0.065), consistent with earlier studies (Wu et al., 2019).

Aligned to the COR theory framework, where stress is defined as a depletion of energy resources, specifically emotional and psychological stamina (Hobfoll et al., 2002; 2025). Young professionals expect or have experienced managerial roles as overly stressful (Mean 4.2; SD 0.065), as indicated by the respondents' higher mean

score for this subconstruct of PRL. COR theory, which suggests that threats of resource loss are more motivating than possible rewards. Therefore, it is no surprise that the study reveals a reduced managerial aspiration when work-related stress increases, and that this relationship is statistically significant, albeit with a moderate impact, as indicated by the lower beta coefficient ($\beta = -0.218$, $p = .006$). This explains why even ambitious professionals may choose to opt out of managerial careers when stress is viewed as unavoidable (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2021).

6.3.3. Non-significant resource loss factors

The study revealed that Time Loss (TL), Autonomy Loss (AL), and Work-Life Conflict (WLC) were not statistically significant predictors of managerial aspiration among young professionals ($p > 0.05$). While the study reaffirms the negative impact these predictors have on Managerial aspiration, the lack of statistical significance indicates that these factors do not play any decisive role in managerial aspiration within the South African context. It is important to note the context, given the influence of the environment in determining which resources are key and therefore should be protected and avoid loss of these resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

Time loss (TL)

The lack of significance of time loss (TL) on Managerial aspiration contradicts earlier research, which identified loss of time resulting from increased work demands as a key deterrent to managerial aspiration (Akkermans & Tims, 2017; Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007). While time is a key resource classified under the COR theory, its lack of significance in this study could indicate that the majority of the respondents have already experienced or managed the time loss impact of managerial roles. This is due to the composition of the sample, in which over 62% reported already occupying managerial roles, and only 35% reported being promoted in the last 2 years. Meaning, the majority of the sample have been in managerial roles for a time longer than two years and would have mitigated or established coping mechanisms to deal with any adverse time-related losses.

Autonomy loss (AL)

Autonomy loss did not show any significant relationship with managerial aspiration, despite the literature linking autonomy to job satisfaction and overall motivation

(Badri & Panatik, 2020; Bakker et al., 2025). The sample consisted of young professionals in hugely regulated and structured economic sectors (Mining industry (34.7%), Health (17.3%), Financial services (15.8%), that often have limited autonomy even at lower levels. Hence, the threat of autonomy loss does not exist or is not a real threat to any existing resources.

Work-life conflict (WLC)

Similarly, work-life conflict reported to have a non-significant negative impact on managerial aspiration. This contradicts the findings of Fritz and van Knippenberg (2018), Powell and Butterfield (2022), and Litzky and Greenhaus (2007), who identified work-life conflict as a significant barrier to the advancement ambitions of women and young professionals.

These findings are consistent with the COR theory that resources differ in their subjective value and impact, and that resources can sometimes be in conflict (Hobfoll, 2002; Hobfoll et al., 2018). The COR concept, which posits that some resources are more central or "key" than others, is directly supported by this pattern of data (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Work flexibility and psychological well-being (as reflected in work-related stress), therefore, represent valuable resources for young professionals in South Africa. When exposed to potential loss, these resources cause individuals to conserve them. While time loss, autonomy loss and work-life conflict negatively impact managerial aspiration, they are not significant in predicting young professionals' decisions about managerial aspiration.

The findings provide empirical evidence to support Hypothesis 1 (H1), which states that perceived resource loss has a negative and significant influence on managerial aspirations. The result further supports organisational interventions, which include the promotion of flexible work, the reduction of managerial work-related stress, and the alleviation of the perception of resource loss, thereby promoting managerial aspiration in young professionals. The results further provide excellent insights and understanding of the interplay between these resources (Time loss (TL), autonomy loss (AL), flexibility hassle (FH), work-life conflict (WLC), and work-related stress (WRS)) and the context in which they are observed, questioning the generalisability of global studies in South Africa.

6.4. Hypothesis 2

H2: Work-life balance initiatives (WLBI) moderate the relationship between the perceived resource losses (PRL) associated with managerial roles and the managerial aspirations of young professionals.

The moderating model indicated a significant negative relationship between perceived resource loss and managerial aspirations ($\beta = -0.76$, $t = -3.14$, $p = 0.0019$), as represented by this model.

$$MA = 6.0095 - 0.7605 (PRL) - 0.1448 (WLBI) + 0.0709 (PRL \times WLBI) - 0.1772 (gender)$$

Table 6.4-1: Summary of the moderation process results

Variable	Unstandardized coefficient (b)	Std. Error	T	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Constant	6.0095	0.8214	7.3158	0.000	Higher baseline managerial aspiration when all predictors = 0.
Perceived Resource Loss (PRL)	-0.7605	0.2419	-3.1439	0.0019	Significant negative effect: perceived resource loss reduces managerial aspiration.
Work-Life Balance Initiatives (WLBI)	-0.1448	0.2409	-0.6009	0.5486	Not significant — WLBI alone does not predict managerial aspiration.
PRL × WLBI Interaction	0.0709	0.0712	0.9960	0.3205	Not significant moderation — WLBI does not significantly buffer PRL's effect on managerial aspiration.
<i>Gender (Control Variable)</i>	<i>-0.1772</i>	<i>0.1059</i>	<i>-1.6742</i>	<i>0.0957</i>	<i>Marginally significant: females show slightly lower managerial aspiration than males.</i>

Model Summary: $R = 0.4894$, $R^2 = 0.2395$, $F(4,191) = 15.04$, $p < 0.001$

These results are consistent with the literature that anticipated workload, stress, and emotional strain hamper leadership ambition (Spurk et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). In contrast, work-life balance initiatives (WLBI) did not show a significant direct relationship with managerial aspirations ($\beta = -0.14$, $t = -0.60$, $p = 0.5486$). Additionally, the interaction term (PRL $\times$ WLBI) was also not significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $t = 0.99$, $p = 0.3205$), indicating that WLBI does not moderate the relationship between perceived resource loss and managerial aspirations. When gender was included as a control variable, the model showed a marginally insignificant effect ($\beta = -0.18$, $t = -1.67$, $p = 0.0957$). Demonstrating that there is a marginal impact of gender on managerial aspiration when PRL and WLBI is considered.

The findings contrast prior research that has demonstrated organisational support, especially via leadership endorsement and a culture that normalises the utilisation of WLBI, as a mitigant for work-life conflict while improving employee engagement (Baral & Bhargava, 2008; Carlson & Grzywacz, 2010; Moake et al., 2022; Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). Seman et al. (2022) and Moake et al. (2023) reported evidence that organisational support through WLBI can enhance leadership aspiration by reducing work-life conflict; however, these findings do not support such claims.

The lack of moderating effect of WLBI is supported by earlier studies, which suggest that policies can be ineffective when applied in isolation and not aligned with organisational culture (Baral & Bhargava, 2010). Adisa et al. (2022) and Alfano et al. (2023), while noting the importance of flexible work arrangements such as remote work, highlight the complex relationship between job demands, an individual's ability to handle them, and the support provided by their supervisors, which often results in them not being successful in cushioning the negative work impacts.

The respondents indicated that their organisations had little to no work-life balance initiatives (Mean = 2.68, SD = 1.2899), tending to disagree when asked about the support their organisations offer, either through policy or supervisor support related to work-life balance management. Overall, young professionals in South Africa are ambivalent about work-life balance initiatives, and have tended to neither agree nor disagree that such initiatives exist within their organisations.

The results further highlight the impact of gender on the relationship between these variables. Although the gender coefficient is moderately insignificant, it reveals interesting findings of the evolving dynamics of managerial aspiration across gender.

While earlier studies attributed managerial aspiration primarily to gender differences and traditional social roles (Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007; Hartman & Barber, 2020; Powell & Butterfield, 2022), this study highlights the narrowing gap in the gender differences. The findings show that although women are still marginally less likely than men to aspire to be managers when work-life balance initiatives (WLBI) and perceived resource loss (PRL) are taken into account, the gap is closing. These findings are consistent with emerging research, which indicates that managerial aspiration is more than a gender difference and is more closely related to roles and social norms (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018; Wang et al., 2024).

Organisational interventions, such as WLBI, can serve as resource caravan gateways, allowing individuals to safeguard, retain, and replenish essential resources; however, the overall exposure and understanding of these resource caravans are critical for their effective use (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The lack of a substantial moderating impact shows that, while WLBI theoretically provides this function, in practice it is not strong enough to compensate for perceived resource losses, given that respondents were ambivalent (mean = 2.666, SD = 1.2899) in their responses to WLBI. Unless WLBI are well integrated into organisational culture, their ability to buffer against the threat of resource depletion remains limited.

Overall, the results did not support Hypothesis 2, such that H2 is rejected. Young professionals in South Africa do not consider work-life balance initiatives as a mitigant to the perception of resource losses associated with managerial roles. When controlled for gender, the impact is moderately insignificant. The significant negative effect of perceived resource loss persists even after moderation analysis, underscoring its central role in shaping the career ambitions of young professionals.

6.5. Conceptualised model

The revised conceptual model is depicted in figure 6.5.1 developed through the empirical analysis. The model reflects the key significant resources that young professionals endeavour to preserve in consideration of managerial roles. The revised model thus emphasises the direct negative relationship between perceived resource losses associated with work flexibility and work-related stress and how managerial aspirations.

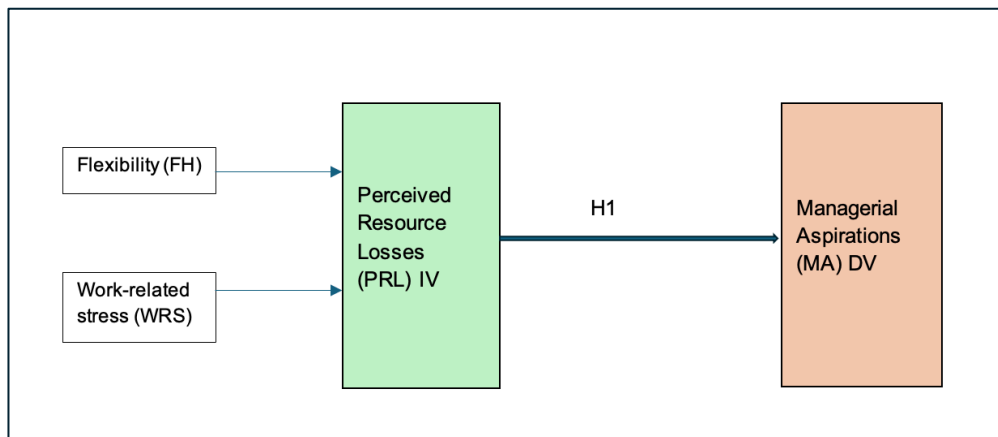


Figure 6.5.1: The COR conceptualized model for managerial aspiration

6.6. Conclusion

Managerial aspiration plays a crucial role in career development and in the advancement of young professionals as they develop. The findings in this study provide strong empirical evidence for the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which posits that individuals strive to protect and conserve key resources.

The study established that, although young professionals have managerial aspirations, the perceived resource losses associated with managerial attainment significantly deter their management aspirations. In particular, the results revealed that perceived losses in work flexibility and increased work-related stress significantly reduce managerial aspiration. In contrast, other factors, such as time loss, autonomy loss, and work-life conflict, were not statistically significant. This outcome confirms COR theory's assertion that resources differ in their subjective value and that some resources are key and central, and individuals will endeavour to preserve those. The study, therefore, highlights the centrality of work flexibility and psychological well-being among young professionals as key resources to be conserved in managerial aspirations. These results support hypothesis 1.

In addition, the study found that Work-Life Balance Initiatives (WLBIs) did not significantly mitigate the negative influence of perceived resource loss and on management aspiration. This finding, while contradicting some studies that found evidence of moderation, reaffirms other studies that consider policy alone does not change the organisational culture. The findings indicate that WLBIs, in their current configuration, do not resonate with the South African employed youth and therefore do not serve as efficient resource caravan passageways. These results did not support hypothesis 2.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1. Introduction

The research aimed to provide empirical evidence that would explain the growing lack of managerial aspiration among many young professionals worldwide in the South African context. This is despite the career benefits that managerial attainment is associated with, such as increased prestige, recognition, status, and income. Grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study employed quantitative research methods. It investigated how the perceived threat of losing key personal and energy resources influences individuals' managerial aspirations and assessed the moderating effects of organisational intervention through work-life balance initiatives. This chapter, therefore, consolidates the empirical findings of the research and integrates with the theoretical and literature insights discussed in the preceding chapters.

7.2. Principal conclusions

7.2.1. Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis one sought to predict the behaviour of managerial aspiration when the perceptions of resource loss in time, autonomy, flexibility, work-life balance and psychological wellbeing are changed. The study confirmed a significant negative relationship between perceived resource loss and managerial aspirations.

In particular, work flexibility loss and increased work-related stress were significant key resources that negatively impact managerial aspiration in young professionals in South Africa. Whereas time loss, autonomy loss and work-life conflict negatively impact managerial aspirations, this impact was not significant. This finding supports H1 and reinforces the core principle of COR theory, that individuals will endeavour to preserve existing key resources against any possible threat of loss, even at the cost of foregoing potential gains.

7.2.2. Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 sought to determine the moderating effect of work-life balance initiatives (WLBIs) on the relationship between perceived resource loss and

managerial aspiration. Such that the negative impact of perceived resource loss on managerial aspiration would be weaker in the presence of organisational support structures through work-life balance initiatives.

The findings of the study did not support this hypothesis, finding no significant effect of WLBI on the relationship between perceived resource loss and managerial aspirations. Respondents tended to disagree that work-life balance initiatives were either present or could be exercised with support within their organisations. Overall, there was an ambivalence amongst respondents to the construct of WLBI, highlighting the complex nature of work-life balance initiatives. While these may exist in organisations, when poorly implemented, they fail to serve their purpose and result in ineffective resource allocation. The study's findings did not support Hypothesis 2, indicating that work-life balance initiatives did not significantly moderate the relationship between perceived resource loss and managerial aspiration.

7.2.3. Integrated principal conclusion

Overall, perceived resource losses vary in their importance and impact on managerial aspiration. Of the five (PRL) resources, only two, work flexibility and work-related stress, had a significant impact on managerial aspirations. Highlighting the COR concept that individuals value resources differently, depending on the context and environment in which they are acquired. Time, autonomy and work-life balance loss did not significantly influence managerial aspiration.

Interestingly, work-life conflict did not have a significant effect on managerial aspiration, indicating that although young professionals value work-life balance and are aware of the potential threat to it, the threat to work flexibility and the increase in psychological strain are significantly considered. This corresponds with the non-significant moderation outcome of Hypothesis 2, suggesting that extensive organisational attempts to address “work-life balance” may be misdirected and not tackle the key resource threats that hinder managerial aspiration.

This is an important insight and finding of the study. Supported by literature, which suggests that work-life balance is far more complex and defining it requires an understanding of underlying factors, rather than broad generalisations (Kelliher et al., 2019; Wayne et al., 2019). Organisations should redefine their organisational

structures to support work flexibility and remove the hassles that often constrain managerial roles, thereby encouraging managerial aspirations in the workplace.

7.3. Implications for theory

7.3.1. Supers' career stage theory

The researcher contextualised the age group under study based on Super's framework on career development, particularly the establishment phase. The findings in this study contributed to this framework by highlighting the shifting patterns within the establishment phase. That is, many young professionals intentionally withdraw managerial aspirations and pursuits due to perceived resource losses. The study demonstrates that career establishment in the 21st century is no longer defined by hierarchical advancement into managerial roles or managerial aspiration but rather by the pursuit of sustainable work arrangements and balanced resource preservation. Young professionals in the establishment stage are redefining career development and success holistically, focusing on flexibility and emotional well-being rather than traditional status-driven managerial attainment.

7.3.2. Conservation of Resources (COR) theory

The findings of the study aligns with the COR theory that individuals seeks to acquire and preserve key resources. Not all resources are equal and that the perception of resource loss is significantly lower for individuals who poses high/more resource. The findings revealed that work flexibility and psychological well-being (operationalised through work-related stress) are regarded as the key resources significantly influencing managerial aspiration.

The study further tested the importance of Resource caravans in mitigating the effects of perceived resource loss. However, WLBI did not significantly moderate the relationship between perceived resource loss and managerial aspiration. This finding implies that while such initiatives may exist structurally, they are not sufficiently aligned with the conservation of a key resources identified by young professionals; namely, flexibility and psychological well-being. Hence, when resource caravans are not aligned to the resources most valued by individuals, their moderating impact is weakened. Theoretically, the findings support the application

of COR theory by illustrating that the effectiveness of resource caravans depends on their relevance to key resources within a given context.

7.4. Implications for Management and Organisations

This study has important implications for talent management, retention, and succession planning within organisations. Ensuring that organisations maintain a competitive pool of young professionals who not only possess the necessary skills and competencies but who have managerial aspirations is critical for sustainability of organisations. Organisations can no longer rely solely on object resources such as salary increases, company vehicles, or housing benefits to attract and retain young professionals. Instead, personal and energy resources, such as work flexibility and psychological well-being, have become central determinants of managerial aspiration among young professionals.

Organisations must therefore re-imagine managerial roles and work environment through the concept of resource acquisition and resource loss. Given the South African context, this includes cultivating a culture that values work flexibility and supports psychological safety and well-being. Stress management and reducing emotional labour are no longer added benefits but the actual benefits when young professionals consider managerial roles. Hence, organisations should prioritise emotional well-being as a strategic goal of any organisation for organisational sustainability.

For individuals already in managerial positions, the extent to which their work can be de-constrained from rigid structures and redesigned to allow greater flexibility is equally necessary. Rigid hierarchies and inflexible reporting structures often amplify perceptions of resource loss, discouraging ambition among emerging leaders. Hence, enabling innovation and empowering young professionals to exercise discretion and flexibility in how the work is conducted is essential.

7.5. Limitations of the study

The sampling method and the sample itself limit the ability to generalise the study to represent the whole population of young employed South Africans. Given the limited time available to collect data, non-probability convenience sampling was used to gather data, which has affinity bias limitations (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Participants

were recruited through personal and professional networks; hence, the sample reflects industries such as Mining, health, and financial sectors, a high education levels (73% postgraduate qualifications) and specific socio-economic groups where the researcher has established networks. Over 63% of the sample indicated earning over R1 Million per annum and with 64% already in management roles.

The cross-sectional nature of the study limits its effectiveness, preventing the establishment of any potential causal relationship between perceived resource loss and managerial aspiration (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Taherdoost, 2022). Although an association was found, causality remains unproven.

A key limitation of the study is the absence of a comparative age group sample. The study focused on young professionals (aged 21-44). The study could not empirically establish whether the observed decline in managerial aspiration is unique to younger professionals or part of a broader shift in work arrangements impacting every employed individual. While the findings are consistent with global studies on young professionals, a Statistical ANOVA analysis could have quantified the differences among young and older professionals improving the strength of the findings of this study.

7.6. Suggestions for future studies

The study could not establish a significant moderating effect of work-life balance initiative on the relationship between perceived resource loss and managerial aspiration. It is recommended for further studies to use a much broader scale or instrument to measure organisational support interventions aimed at improving working conditions to alleviate work-related stress and enhance emotional well-being.

It is further recommended that the study be conducted on a longitudinal time horizon to observe how managerial aspirations evolve over time as individuals move through different life stages and careers progress. The sample could include individuals between the ages of 24 and 28, as they are engaged in early career development (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). This would further enable longitudinal studies to monitor the development of these samples during the critical phases of their careers. Similar studies have considered samples consisting of young graduates in business schools or in college (Powell & Butterfield, 2022; Barhate & Dirani, 2022).

Finally, future studies should employ statistical ANOVA analysis to validate the differences in managerial aspirations among young professionals and older professionals. This will validate the declining managerial aspiration as a unique factor for young professionals. Given that this is the first study of its kind in the South African context, building on these findings to include the various South African contexts that influence labour dynamics, such as industry context, would also add value to understanding this growing phenomenon, where young professionals demonstrate a decline in managerial aspirations.

7.7. Concluding remarks

This study investigated how young professionals' managerial aspirations are influenced by their perception of resource losses associated with managerial roles and how work-life balance initiatives (WLBI) could buffer these impacts. Based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study found that management aspirations were significantly and negatively impacted by perceived resource losses, particularly loss of flexibility and increased work-related stress.

In addition, young professionals have a strong inclination towards managerial aspiration; this inclination, however, decreases when they have high resource-loss expectations. The moderation analysis revealed that WLBI did not significantly buffer the negative effect of perceived resource losses on management aspiration among the young professionals. Although the gender gap is closing, adding it as a control variable showed a marginally significant negative effect, suggesting that women are still somewhat less likely than men to aspire to managerial roles.

Overall, the study highlights a significant shift among young professionals, where success is not defined solely by one's employment status and benefits, but by a holistic value system. Young professionals are highly ambitious and continue to engage in learning and educational development for career advancement. However, the perceived resource losses associated with managerial roles deter them from aspiring to climb up the corporate ladder and become managers. Therefore, organisations must restructure their talent management strategies to align with these evolving work arrangements among young professionals to ensure a sustainable leadership pipeline and effective succession planning.

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9. Appendix

Appendix 1: Consistency matrix

Title:			
HYPOTHESES	LITERATURE REVIEW	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	ANALYSIS
H1: There is a negative relationship between perceived resource loss (time, flexibility, autonomy, work-life balance) and managerial aspirations.	Moake et al. (2023); Hobfoll et al. (2025); Litzky & Greenhaus (2007); Zhang et al. (2021); Spurk et al. (2019); Sullivan & Ariss (2022)	Questionnaire items 26–44 (Resource Loss Indicators)	Multiple regression analysis
H2: Work-life balance initiatives moderate the relationship between perceived resource losses and managerial aspirations.	Fritz & van Knippenberg (2020); Seman et al. (2022); Urme (2023); Barhate & Dirani (2022); Minzlaff et al. (2024)	Questionnaire items 35–47 (Work-life Balance Initiatives)	Moderation analysis (interaction terms in regression)
There is a significant difference in managerial aspirations between genders.	Powell & Butterfield (2022); Zhang et al. (2021); Hartman & Barber (2020); Netchaeva et al. (2022)	Demographic data: Gender (Part 1 of the questionnaire)	Control variable in regression analysis using SPSS
MA = B0 + B1(PRL) + B2(WLB) + B3 (PRL x WLB) + B4(Gender)	Hobfoll et al. (2025); Moake et al. (2023); Powell & Butterfield (2022)	Complete questionnaire dataset	PROCESS moderation regression analysis using SPSS

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

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

I am conducting research on the **factors influencing young professionals' aspirations toward managerial and leadership roles**, with a specific focus on how the perceived loss of personal resources (such as time, autonomy, flexibility, and work-life balance) impacts managerial aspirations. To that end, you are asked to complete this survey. This will help us better understand the managerial ambitions of young professionals and should take less 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. By completing the survey, you indicate that you voluntarily participate in this research.

If you have any concerns, please don't hesitate to contact my supervisor or me.

Researcher Email: 24026779@mygibs.co.za

Research Supervisor Email: wockeA@gibs.co.za and/or Priceg@gibs.co.za

Part A: Qualifying and demographics questions (1-9)

Please answer the following questions by selecting the option that best describes you.

1. What is your gender?
☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary ☐ Prefer not to say
2. What is your age group?
☐ 20 and younger ☐ 21–23 years ☐ 24–28 years ☐ 29–34 years ☐ 35–40 years
☐ 41–44 years
3. What is your highest level of completed education?
☐ Diploma/Certificate ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Honours Degree ☐ Master's Degree ☐ Doctorate ☐ Other: _____
4. Are you currently employed?
☐ Yes ☐ No
5. How long have you been formally employed?
☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1–3 years ☐ 4–6 years ☐ 7–10 years ☐ More than 10 years

6. What industry are you employed in?
7. ☐ Mining & Quarrying ☐ Agriculture ☐ Manufacturing ☐ Finance and Insurance ☐ Self-employed / Freelance ☐ Health and Social services ☐ Information Technology ☐ Other: _____
8. What is your current job/role level?
- ☐ Entry Level / Graduate ☐ Junior Professional ☐ Mid-Level Professional ☐ Senior Professional / Specialist ☐ Management ☐ Executive / Director
9. What is your income level (Gross annual income)
- ☐ R500 000 and less ☐ R501- 000 R700 000 ☐ R701 000- R900 000 years ☐ R901 000- R1 300 000 ☐ R1 301 000- R1 600 000 ☐ R1 601 000- R2 000 000 ☐ R2 000 000 or more
10. Do you currently hold any managerial role or have any managerial responsibilities?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No
11. Were you promoted to a managerial or supervisory role in the last 2 years?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Part B: Perception of Resource Loss Indicators Questions

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about your perception of resource loss associated with taking on managerial roles, using a 5-point scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

Time Loss

12. A managerial role would significantly reduce my personal time.
13. I expect a managerial position would demand more hours
14. As a manager, I would have less time to take breaks and rest during work.
15. Managerial roles require more time investment.

Autonomy Loss

16. As a manager, I would have less control over how my work is carried out
17. Managers are expected to follow rigid procedures with little room for personal input.
18. Taking on a managerial role would limit my ability to make independent decisions.
19. Managerial responsibilities reduce the ability to be creative or innovative.
20. I would feel less ownership of my work processes in a managerial position.

Flexibility / Hassle

21. I would lose the flexibility I currently enjoy if I assumed a managerial role.
22. The structure of managerial roles does not allow for flexible work schedules.
23. Managers deal with more administrative hassles than non-managers.
24. Managerial work involves frequent interruptions (interdepartmental/team meetings) that make planning difficult.
25. In a managerial role, I would encounter more bureaucratic hurdles than I do now.

Work-Life Conflict

- 26. A managerial role would interfere with my personal responsibilities outside of work.
- 27. It would be difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance as a manager.
- 28. The stress of a managerial role would spill over into my personal life.
- 29. As a manager, I would struggle to separate work time from personal time.
- 30. The pressure and expectations of management would negatively impact my wellbeing.

Part C: Work-related stress and emotional labour

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements using a 5-point scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

- 31. I often feel emotionally exhausted after dealing with staff, clients, or any other stakeholders.
- 32. I am often expected to display emotions at work that do not reflect how I truly feel.
- 33. The ambiguity or conflicts in my management role cause me regular stress.
- 34. I am expected to always appear composed and emotionally neutral, even in difficult situations.
- 35. My role often requires me to suppress frustration or irritation to maintain professionalism.
- 36. I experience physical symptoms (e.g., fatigue, headaches, sleep problems) because of my management role.
- 37. I feel less effective and competent in my role when I am emotionally drained.

Part D: Work-life balance Initiatives Questions (53-59)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements using a 5-point scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

- 38. My organisation offers flexible work arrangements (e.g., flexi-time, remote work) that help balance work and personal responsibilities.
- 39. I have access to sufficient leave policies (e.g., parental leave, sabbaticals) that support my family and personal needs.
- 40. The organisation provides child-care support or family-friendly services (e.g., on-site daycare and child assistance programs).
- 41. I am encouraged to utilise available work-life balance programs without fear of career penalties.
- 42. Supervisors and managers support employees' participation in work-life balance programs.
- 43. The company offers training sessions and information on how to manage work-life balance.
- 44. My workload and deadlines are adjusted when I make use of work-life balance policies.

Part E: Managerial Aspiration Questions (45-61)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements using a 5-point scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

Leadership Aspiration

- 45. I hope to become a manager in my career field.
- 46. When I am established in my career, I would like to manage other employees.
- 47. I plan on devoting energy, time and effort to getting promoted to a manager in the organisation or business I am working in.
- 48. When I am established in my career, I would like to train others.
- 49. I hope to move up through any organisation or business I work in.
- 50. Attaining managerial status in my career is not that important to me.
- 51. I would like to obtain a (higher) managerial position.
- 52. I would like to be in a position of greater responsibility and influence in my department/organization.

Achievement Aspirations

- 53. My aspirations are very high in regard to managerial recognition and achievement.
- 54. In the last 4 months, I have sought feedback on my job performance.
- 55. In the last 4 months, I have discussed my career prospects with someone with more experience in the department/organization.
- 56. In the last 4 months, I have engaged in career path planning.
- 57. In the last 4 months, I have discussed my aspirations with a senior person in the department/organization.

Educational Aspirations

- 58. In the last 4 months, I have updated my skills in order to be more competitive for promotion to management roles.
- 59. In the last 4 months, I have volunteered for activities other than my day-to-day work tasks, which have managerial responsibilities.
- 60. In the last 4 months, I have volunteered for important assignments with the intent of helping to further my advancement to management possibilities.
- 61. In the last 4 months, I have requested to be considered for promotions to managerial roles.

Link below to the form.

<https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/Cz2RyPgMAs>

Appendix 3: Ethical Clearance



Ethical Clearance Approved

Dear Itumeleng Kedige,

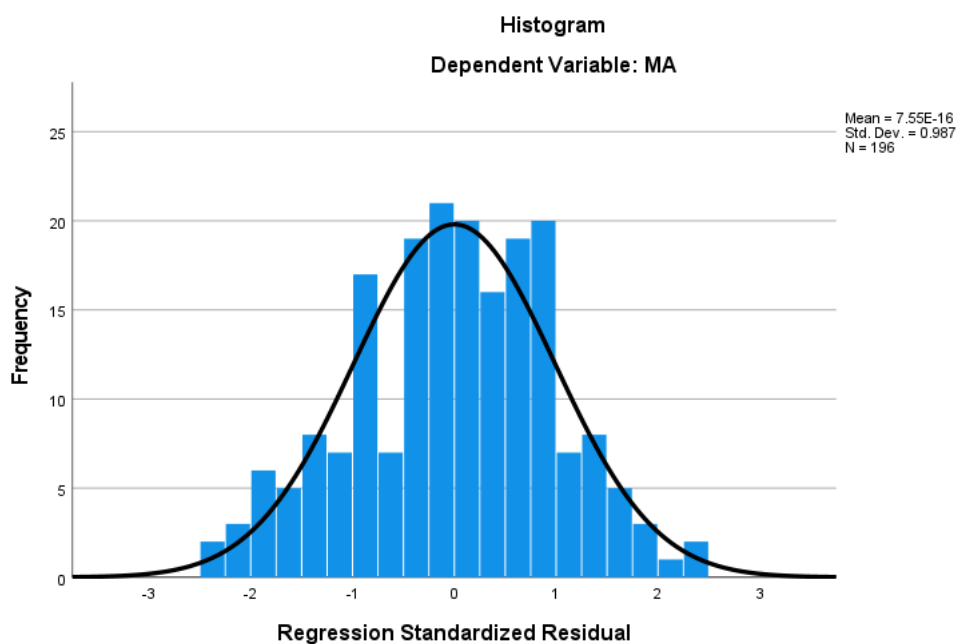
Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

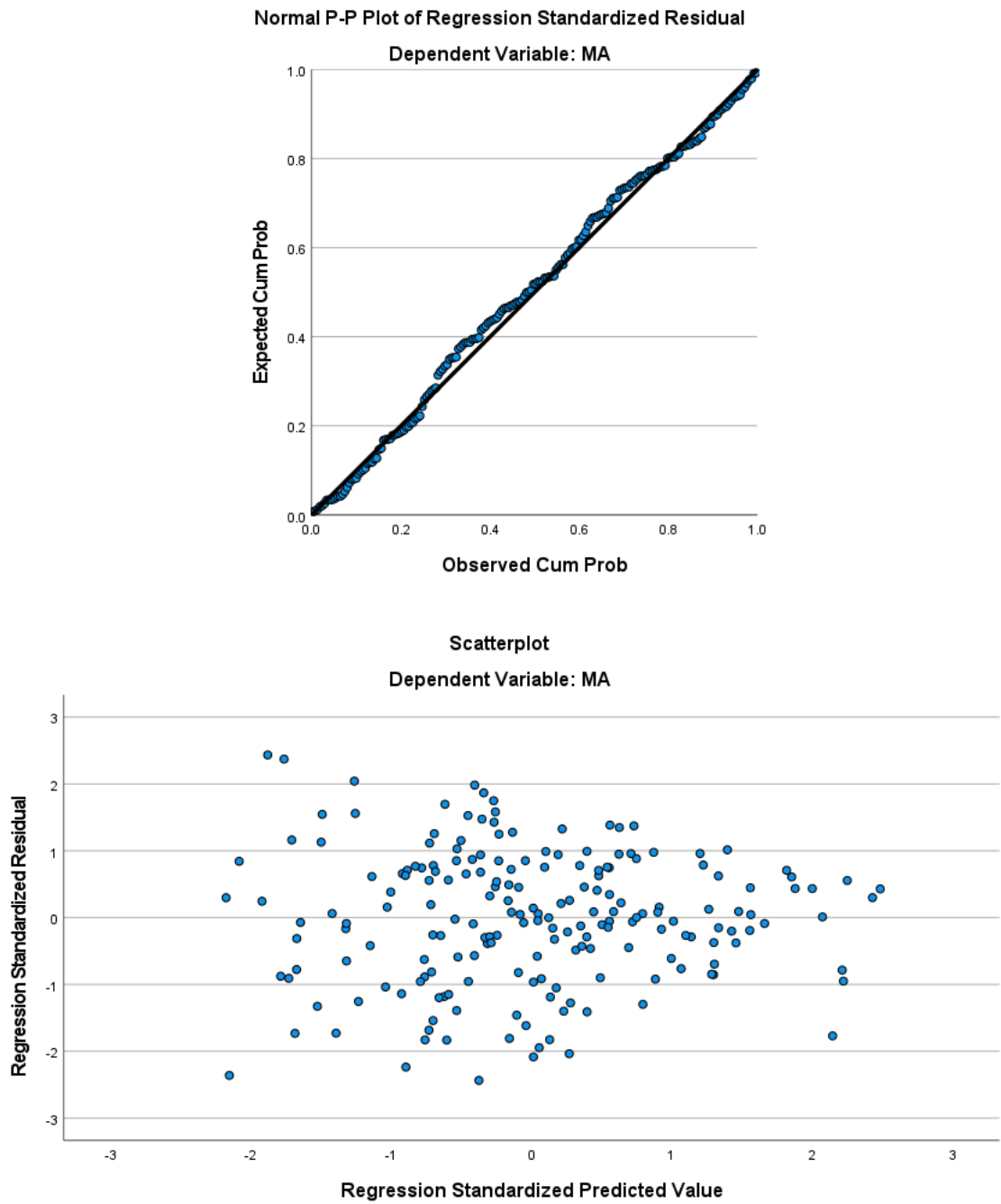
[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS [Research](#) Admin team.

Appendix 4: Analysis of regression assumptions





Appendix 5: Detailed construct Validity tests

5.1. Time loss component matrix

Component Matrix^a

	Component 1
A managerial role would significantly reduce my personal time	.813
I expect a managerial position would demand more hours	.851
As a manager, I would have less time to take breaks and rest during work	.775
Managerial roles require more time investment	.852

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

5.2. Autonomy loss consistency matrix

Component Matrix^a

	Component 1
As a manager, I would have less control over how my work is carried out	.594
Managers are expected to follow rigid procedures with little room for personal input	.676
Taking on a managerial role would limit my ability to make independent decisions	.836
Managerial responsibilities reduce the ability to be creative or innovative	.796
I would feel less ownership of my work processes in a managerial position	.814

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

5.3. Flexibility loss scale consistency matrix

Component Matrix^a

	Component 1
I would lose the flexibility I currently enjoy if I assumed a managerial role	.785
The structure of managerial roles does not allow for flexible work schedules	.738
Managers deal with more administrative hassles than non-managers	.610
Managerial work involves frequent interruptions (interdepartmental/team meetings) that make planning difficult	.734
In a managerial role, I would encounter more bureaucratic hurdles than I do now	.717

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

5.4. Work-life balance conflict scale consistency matrix

Component Matrix^a

	Component 1
A managerial role would interfere with my personal responsibilities outside of work	.855
It would be difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance as a manager	.895
The stress of a managerial role would spill over into my personal life	.854
As a manager, I would struggle to separate work time from personal time	.850
The pressure and expectations of management would negatively impact my wellbeing	.811

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

5.5. Work related stress scale consistency matrix

Component Matrix^a

	Component	
	1	2
I often feel emotionally exhausted after dealing with staff, clients, or any other stakeholders	.751	.230
I am often expected to display emotions at work that do not reflect how I truly feel	.682	-.278
The ambiguity or conflicts in my management role cause me regular stress	.778	.217
I am expected to always appear composed and emotionally neutral, even in difficult situations	.693	-.521
My role often requires me to suppress frustration or irritation to maintain professionalism	.707	-.424
I experience physical symptoms (e.g., fatigue, headaches, sleep problems) because of my management role	.678	.399
I feel less effective and competent in my role when I am emotionally drained	.479	.498

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 2 components extracted.

5.6. Work-life balance initiatives scale consistency matrix

Component Matrix^a

Component	
1	2

My organisation offers flexible work arrangements (e.g., flexi-time, remote work) that help balance work and personal responsibilities	.641	.301
I have access to sufficient leave policies (e.g., parental leave, sabbaticals) that support my family and personal needs	.686	-.467
The organisation provides child-care support or family-friendly services (e.g., on-site daycare and child assistance programs)	.455	.786
I am encouraged to utilise available work-life balance programs without fear of career penalties	.835	-.099
Supervisors and managers support employees' participation in work-life balance programs	.806	-.278
The company offers training sessions and information on how to manage work-life balance	.753	.065
My workload and deadlines are adjusted when I make use of work-life balance policies	.698	.039

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 2 components extracted.

5.7. Managerial Aspiration Scale consistency matrix

Component Matrix^a

	Component		
	1	2	3
I hope to become a manager in my career field	.803	-.384	.026
When I am established in my career, I would like to manage other employees	.826	-.337	.002
I plan on devoting energy, time and effort to getting promoted to a manager in the organisation or business I am working in	.805	-.317	.138
When I am established in my career, I would like to train others	.498	-.092	.204

I hope to move up through any organisation or business I work in	.558	-.215	.128
Attaining managerial status in my career is not that important to me	.787	-.276	.051
I would like to obtain a (higher) managerial position	.849	-.338	.008
I would like to be in a position of greater responsibility and influence in my department/organization	.764	-.221	.082
My aspirations are very high in regard to managerial recognition and achievement	.855	-.305	-.021
In the last 4 months, I have sought feedback on my job performance	.532	.341	.280
In the last 4 months, I have discussed my career prospects with someone with more experience in the department/organization	.577	.651	.312
In the last 4 months, I have engaged in career path planning	.467	.712	.253
In the last 4 months, I have discussed my aspirations with a senior person in the department/organization	.580	.639	.296
In the last 4 months, I have updated my skills in order to be more competitive for promotion to management roles	.610	.180	-.231
In the last 4 months, I have volunteered for activities other than my day-to-day work tasks, which have managerial responsibilities	.525	.321	-.663
In the last 4 months, I have volunteered for important assignments with the intent of helping to further my advancement to management possibilities	.609	.347	-.567

In the last 4 months, I have requested to be considered for promotions to managerial roles	.635	.303	-.288
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Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 3 components extracted.

Appendix 6: Detailed construct reliability tests

6.1. Time loss scale: Item total statistics table

Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
A managerial role would significantly reduce my personal time	11.36	7.381	.603	.416	.819
I expect a managerial position would demand more hours	11.74	6.255	.757	.582	.750
As a manager, I would have less time to take breaks and rest during work	12.01	6.502	.617	.422	.823
Managerial roles require more time investment	11.28	7.495	.735	.556	.776

6.2. Autonomy loss scale: Item total statistics table

Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
As a manager, I would have less control over how my work is carried out	9.22	13.057	.439	.233	.818

Managers are expected to follow rigid procedures with little room for personal input	9.20	11.894	.571	.364	.780
Taking on a managerial role would limit my ability to make independent decisions	9.40	11.493	.735	.549	.730
Managerial responsibilities reduce the ability to be creative or innovative	9.63	12.020	.597	.472	.771
I would feel less ownership of my work processes in a managerial position	9.59	11.782	.654	.515	.754

6.3. Flexibility loss scale: Item total statistics table

Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I would lose the flexibility I currently enjoy if I assumed a managerial role	13.69	11.721	.579	.395	.697
The structure of managerial roles does not allow for flexible work schedules	13.60	12.743	.492	.351	.729
Managers deal with more administrative hassles than non-managers	12.70	13.022	.449	.303	.745
Managerial work involves frequent interruptions (interdepartmental/team meetings) that make planning difficult	12.70	12.681	.584	.365	.698

In a managerial role, I would encounter more bureaucratic hurdles than I do now	12.63	13.076	.546	.304	.711
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6.4. Work-life conflict scale: Item total statistics table

Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
A managerial role would interfere with my personal responsibilities outside of work	12.84	18.759	.773	.666	.877
It would be difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance as a manager	12.74	18.386	.824	.719	.866
The stress of a managerial role would spill over into my personal life	12.61	19.551	.740	.558	.884
As a manager, I would struggle to separate work time from personal time	13.02	18.523	.747	.565	.883
The pressure and expectations of management would negatively impact my wellbeing	12.82	19.727	.702	.500	.892

6.5. Work-related stress scale: Item total statistics table

Item-Total Statistics				
Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted

I often feel emotionally exhausted after dealing with staff, clients, or any other stakeholders	21.95	20.280	.651	.442	.761
I am often expected to display emotions at work that do not reflect how I truly feel	21.81	21.203	.552	.371	.781
The ambiguity or conflicts in my management role cause me regular stress	22.19	20.772	.661	.463	.760
I am expected to always appear composed and emotionally neutral, even in difficult situations	21.06	23.797	.503	.425	.790
My role often requires me to suppress frustration or irritation to maintain professionalism	21.09	23.936	.507	.405	.790
I experience physical symptoms (e.g., fatigue, headaches, sleep problems) because of my management role	22.11	21.044	.539	.322	.784
I feel less effective and competent in my role when I am emotionally drained	21.54	23.378	.409	.240	.805

6.6. Work-life balance initiative scale: Item total statistics table

Item-Total Statistics				
Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted

My organisation offers flexible work arrangements (e.g., flexi-time, remote work) that help balance work and personal responsibilities	18.60	44.888	.656	.444	.884
I have access to sufficient leave policies (e.g., parental leave, sabbaticals) that support my family and personal needs	17.81	51.395	.532	.378	.895
The organisation provides child-care support or family-friendly services (e.g., on-site daycare and child assistance programs)	19.48	45.123	.673	.556	.882
I am encouraged to utilise available work-life balance programs without fear of career penalties	18.63	44.635	.743	.576	.872
Supervisors and managers support employees' participation in work-life balance programs	18.48	46.148	.772	.635	.870
The company offers training sessions and information on how to manage work-life balance	18.74	45.691	.721	.533	.875
My workload and deadlines are adjusted when I make use of work-life balance policies	18.79	44.894	.779	.637	.868

6.7. Managerial aspiration scale: Item total statistics table

Leadership Aspiration Subconstruct

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I hope to become a manager in my career field	28.65	41.891	.727	.885
When I am established in my career, I would like to manage other employees	28.73	41.316	.763	.882
I plan on devoting energy, time and effort to getting promoted to a manager in the organisation or business I am working in	29.01	39.436	.777	.880
When I am established in my career, I would like to train others	28.61	45.542	.505	.903
I hope to move up through any organisation or business I work in	28.85	42.961	.567	.899
Attaining managerial status in my career is not that important to me	29.29	38.062	.760	.882
I would like to obtain a (higher) managerial position	28.86	39.826	.794	.878
I would like to be in a position of greater responsibility and influence in my department/organization	28.80	42.765	.624	.894

Achievement aspiration

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
My aspirations are very high in regard to managerial recognition and achievement	14.01	24.049	.341	.869

In the last 4 months, I have sought feedback on my job performance	14.51	21.266	.556	.820
In the last 4 months, I have discussed my career prospects with someone with more experience in the department/organization	14.54	17.695	.802	.747
In the last 4 months, I have engaged in career path planning	14.59	18.590	.702	.779
In the last 4 months, I have discussed my aspirations with a senior person in the department/organization	14.60	17.728	.777	.755

Education aspiration

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
In the last 4 months, I have updated my skills in order to be more competitive for promotion to management roles	9.02	13.230	.442	.804
In the last 4 months, I have volunteered for activities other than my day-to-day work tasks, which have managerial responsibilities	9.02	12.292	.675	.681
In the last 4 months, I have volunteered for important assignments with the intent of helping to further my advancement to management possibilities	8.98	12.400	.690	.676
In the last 4 months, I have requested to be considered for promotions to managerial roles	9.21	12.467	.562	.738

Appendix 7: Descriptive stats

7.1. Perceived resource loss: Time loss

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
A managerial role would significantly reduce my personal time	196	1	5	4.10	.997
I expect a managerial position would demand more hours	196	1	5	3.72	1.103
As a manager, I would have less time to take breaks and rest during work	196	1	5	3.45	1.187
Managerial roles require more time investment	196	1	5	4.18	.852
Valid N (listwise)	196				

7.2. Perceived resource loss: Autonomy loss

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
As a manager, I would have less control over how my work is carried out	196	1	5	2.54	1.138
Managers are expected to follow rigid procedures with little room for personal input	196	1	5	2.56	1.186
Taking on a managerial role would limit my ability to make independent decisions	196	1	5	2.36	1.069
Managerial responsibilities reduce the ability to be creative or innovative	196	1	5	2.13	1.129
I would feel less ownership of my work processes in a managerial position	196	1	5	2.17	1.105
Valid N (listwise)	196				

7.3. Perceived resource loss: Flexibility loss

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I would lose the flexibility I currently enjoy if I assumed a managerial role	196	1	5	2.64	1.311
The structure of managerial roles does not allow for flexible work schedules	196	1	5	2.73	1.242
Managers deal with more administrative hassles than non-managers	196	1	5	3.63	1.252
Managerial work involves frequent interruptions (interdepartmental/team meetings) that make planning difficult	196	1	5	3.63	1.127
In a managerial role, I would encounter more bureaucratic hurdles than I do now	196	1	5	3.70	1.102
Valid N (listwise)	196				

7.4. Perceived resource loss: work life conflict

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
A managerial role would interfere with my personal responsibilities outside of work	196	1	5	3.17	1.280
It would be difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance as a manager	196	1	5	3.27	1.269
The stress of a managerial role would spill over into my personal life	196	1	5	3.40	1.213
As a manager, I would struggle to separate work time from personal time	196	1	5	2.99	1.344

The pressure and expectations of management would negatively impact my wellbeing	196	1	5	3.19	1.236
Valid N (listwise)	196				

7.5. Perceived resource loss: work related stress

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I often feel emotionally exhausted after dealing with staff, clients, or any other stakeholders	196	1	5	3.34	1.240
I am often expected to display emotions at work that do not reflect how I truly feel	196	1	5	3.48	1.246
The ambiguity or conflicts in my management role cause me regular stress	196	1	5	3.10	1.157
I am expected to always appear composed and emotionally neutral, even in difficult situations	196	1	5	4.23	.909
My role often requires me to suppress frustration or irritation to maintain professionalism	196	1	5	4.20	.882
I experience physical symptoms (e.g., fatigue, headaches, sleep problems) because of my management role	196	1	5	3.18	1.290
I feel less effective and competent in my role when I am emotionally drained	196	1	5	3.76	1.124
Valid N (listwise)	196				

7.6. Work life balance initiatives

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
My organisation offers flexible work arrangements (e.g., flexi-time, remote work) that help balance work and personal responsibilities	196	1	5	3.16	1.614
I have access to sufficient leave policies (e.g., parental leave, sabbaticals) that support my family and personal needs	196	1	5	3.94	1.169
The organisation provides child-care support or family-friendly services (e.g., on-site daycare and child assistance programs)	196	1	5	2.27	1.560
I am encouraged to utilise available work-life balance programs without fear of career penalties	196	1	5	3.13	1.492
Supervisors and managers support employees' participation in work-life balance programs	196	1	5	3.28	1.315
The company offers training sessions and information on how to manage work-life balance	196	1	5	3.02	1.430
My workload and deadlines are adjusted when I make use of work-life balance policies	196	1	5	2.96	1.416
Valid N (listwise)	196				