

Perceptions regarding the impact of Ubuntu and servant leadership on employee engagement in the workplace

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Abstract

South Africa has some of the lowest employee engagement scores in the world. Leadership is a key determinant of employee engagement, but existing leadership theories and practices are often ineffective in more humanistic and collectivistic cultures like South Africa. To this end, Ubuntu and servant leadership is posited to positively influence organisational performance by increasing employee engagement.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate perceptions regarding the impact of Ubuntu and servant leadership on employee engagement in private organisations of the Eastern Cape. A quantitative research design was utilised and yielded 428 usable questionnaires through non-probability convenience sampling.

The empirical results revealed that the spirit of solidarity dimension of Ubuntu leadership influenced employee engagement significantly and positively. Furthermore, it was found that survival and spirit of solidarity had a significant and positive influence on organisational performance as measured through the balanced scorecard (BSC). Servant leadership positively and significantly influenced employee engagement and all dimensions of organisational performance. In addition, it was found that employee engagement mediates the relationship between servant leadership and organisational performance.

Key phrases

Balanced scorecard (BSC); employee engagement; organisational performance; servant leadership and Ubuntu leadership

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is defined as the extent to which employees exhibit the desired cognitive, emotional, and behavioural characteristics in completing work tasks with vigour, dedication and absorption (Macey & Schneider 2008:11; Saks 2006:601; Schaufeli 2013:6). The concept of engagement has emerged as a very important construct in organisational research, based on the positive impact of engaged employee behaviours on organisational performance (Chalofsky & Krishna 2009:190). Growing empirical evidence emphasise the significant link between engaged employees and business success. Harter, Schmidt and Keyes (2003:9), for example, revealed that levels of engagement are positively related to indicators of business-unit performance, such as customer satisfaction and loyalty, profitability, productivity, turnover and safety. Employee engagement is therefore commonly considered to be a powerful and useful tool that assists organisations to achieve competitive advantage (Anitha 2014:309; Gruman & Saks 2011:125).

Leaders play an important role in fostering engagement (Gruman & Saks 2011:131; Joubert & Roodt 2011:96; Wildermuth & Pauken 2008:126). Western individualistic leadership paradigms, however, are considered wholly ineffective in collectivist communitarian cultures, such as South Africa (Guma 2012:1; Lutz 2009:317; Nkomo 2006:3). A new leadership paradigm is therefore considered crucial to engage employees and reverse the negative trend of declining employee engagement, in order to improve South Africa's global competitiveness (Bezuidenhout & Schultz 2013:279; Richardson, Cook & Hofmeyr 2011:47).

It is suggested that African organisations adopt a leadership approach that is consistent with the communal cultures in which they operate. Lutz (2009:317) asserts that scholars need to determine the significance of Ubuntu leadership in relation to the real world of African business. Ubuntu is defined as an African worldview based on the primary values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of family (Broodryk 2006:2). Incorporating

Ubuntu principles in management offers a superior approach to managing organisations, especially in the African context (Mangaliso & Damane 2001:32).

Covey (2006:5) rationalised that servant leadership is appropriate for South Africa, since the model is characterised by moral authority, humility, service and sacrifice that bring about trust and respect. Servant leadership models have been cited as good reference point for contextualising the Ubuntu concept (Brubaker 2013:99). The sheer intensity by which values are exhibited by African people living Ubuntu, however, differentiates Ubuntu from similar leadership styles. The major contribution of this study is the novel approach of utilising the indigenous knowledge-system of Ubuntu, as well as servant leadership, to improve employee engagement and organisational performance. The first part of this article covers the problem statement, objectives, hypothetical model of the study and the hypotheses. Thereafter, a theoretical overview and the research methodology are provided. The last part highlights the main empirical results, conclusions and recommendations, and recommendations for future research.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

A global meta-analysis reports that South Africa has one of the lowest employee engagement scores out of 142 countries studied (Gallup 2013:59). The report further reveals that only 9% of South African employees are actively engaged in their work, whilst 45% are actively disengaged. In a study conducted in the Eastern Cape, Charles and Chucks (2012:1) concluded that employee engagement was negatively impacted by the absence of employee input in the form of improvement suggestion schemes and this led to low organisational growth of automotive component manufacturers.

Banhwa, Chipunza and Chamisa (2014:40) recommended that organisations explore employee engagement strategies to win the hearts of employees and attract talent. It was also found that job stress (related to burnout and disengagement) negatively impacted organisational commitment (Ruzungunde, Murugan & Hlatywayo 2016:219). These studies highlighted the dire need to understand why South African employees become disengaged. The importance of employee engagement is further emphasised due to the prolific impact engagement has on organisational performance (Coetzee, Schreuder & Tladinyane 2014:1). Low organisational performance and more specifically, productivity contributed to the

negative economic trends in South Africa, with the country experiencing the lowest productivity levels in 46 years (Jones 2014:Internet; Klein 2012:5; McCarthy 2005:Internet).

Leaders play a vital role in fostering the engagement of subordinates (Gruman & Saks 2011:131; Wildermuth & Pauken 2008:126). Excellent leadership, however, appears to be a rarity in Africa and many of the continent's problems have been associated with poor leadership (Salawu 2012:17). For South Africa to remain competitive, effective leadership and engagement is required (Bezuidenhout & Schultz 2013:279). However, a number of managerial approaches have been attempted in South Africa, with relatively limited success (Kuada 2010:19; Luthans, Van Wyk & Walumbwa 2004:513). This led researchers to suggest that a new way of leadership thinking and further research is required for South Africa to remain globally competitive and to reverse the trend of declining organisational performance (Joubert & Roodt 2011:101; Luthans *et al.* 2004:513; Muchiri 2011:441). To this end, it is proposed that culturally appropriate leadership behaviours be cultivated by developing an Afro-centric perspective on leadership (Bolden & Kirk 2009:69; Muchiri 2011:443).

Limited empirical and theoretical research has addressed management and leadership in Africa, and empirical research on the concept of Ubuntu is almost non-existent (Shrivastava, Selvarajah, Meyer & Dorasamy 2014:60; Walumbwa, Avolio & Aryee 2011:425). Moreover, Muchiri (2011:443) indicates that limited empirical work has been done on the relationship between Ubuntu leadership and follower engagement. Brubaker (2013:115) further notes that no valid scale exists to measure Ubuntu as a leadership construct. This scarcity in empirical work is particularly evident when evaluating how Ubuntu manifests in the workplace.

Carter and Baghurst (2014:455) similarly found that a research gap exists between servant leadership and employee engagement. Research further suggests that to address specific challenges, existing employee engagement models should be adapted to the South African context (Rothmann & Rothmann Jr 2010:11).

Against the background of the above-mentioned problem statement, the main research question of the study is: Can Ubuntu and servant leadership be used to engage employees, and in doing so, improve organisational performance?

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

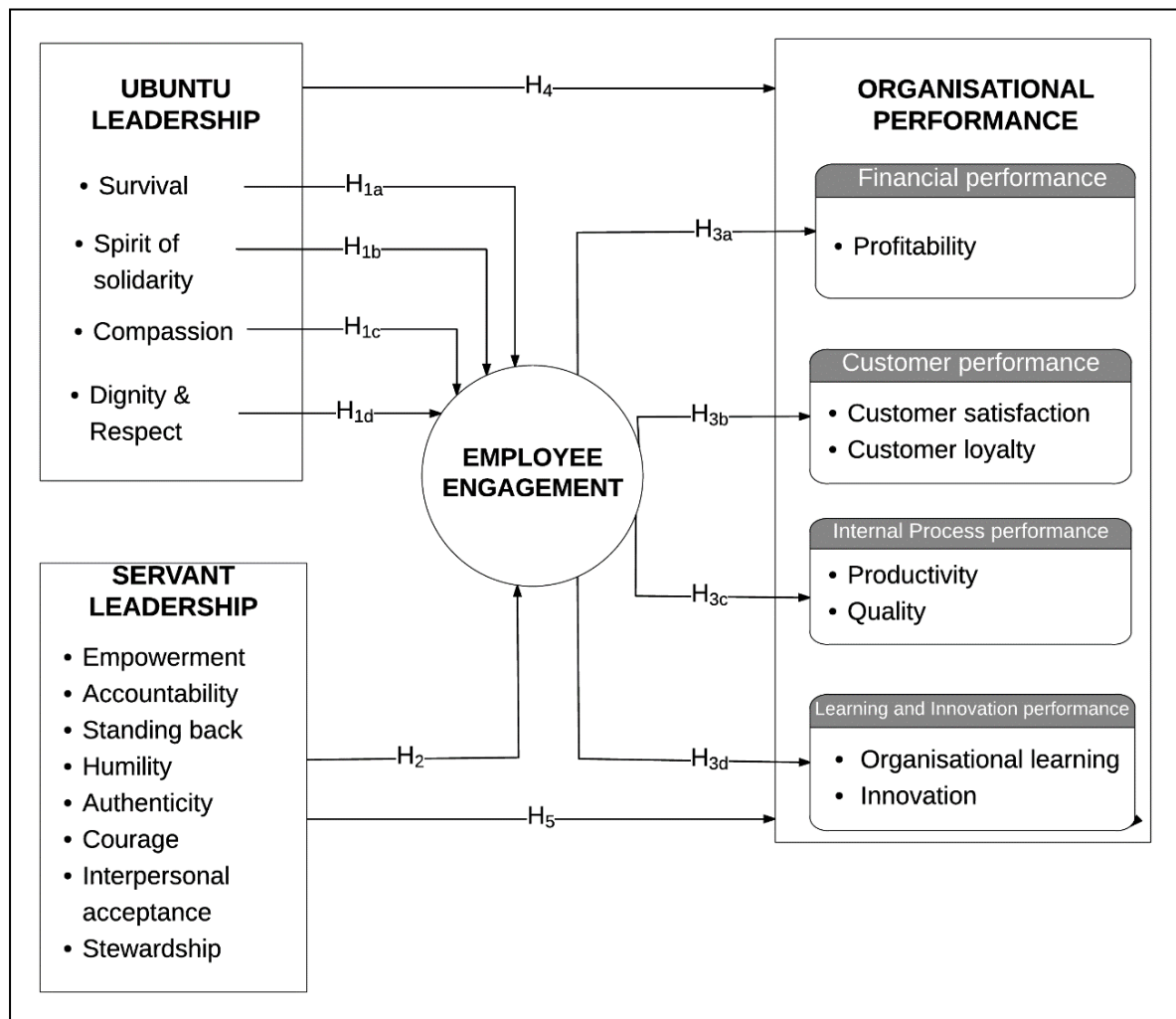
The primary objective of this study is to investigate the impact of certain dimensions (survival, spirit of solidarity, compassion and, dignity and respect) of Ubuntu and servant leadership on employee engagement in the workplace. To achieve the primary objective, the following secondary objectives were pursued:

- To explain the nature of and relationships between Ubuntu leadership, servant leadership, employee engagement and organisational performance.
- To operationalise Ubuntu leadership, servant leadership, employee engagement and organisational performance.
- To empirically assess perceptions regarding the impact of Ubuntu and servant leadership styles on employee engagement and organisational performance.
- To develop a set of guidelines to improve organisational performance by integrating Ubuntu and servant leadership practices with employee engagement initiatives.

4. PROPOSED HYPOTHESISED MODEL OF THE STUDY

The hypothesised model depicted by Figure 1 was based on previous studies and models by Kataria, Rastogi and Garg (2013:60); Poovan, Du Toit and Engelbrecht (2006:21); Russell and Stone (2002:154); Towers-Perrin (2003:Internet); and Vance (2006:7). The hypothesised model will be discussed in paragraph 5.

FIGURE 1: Proposed hypothesised model of the study



Source: Authors' own construction

5. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

The following sections serve to clarify the operationalisation of the study variables and provide a theoretical overview of the constructs.

5.1 Ubuntu leadership

The social values of survival, spirit of solidarity, compassion, dignity and respect were operationalised as the underlying dimensions of Ubuntu leadership in this study. Ubuntu is frequently defined in terms of its etymology of “Ubu-” meaning “being” or “being becoming”

and “ntu” meaning “human”, which translates in English to humanness or humanism (Guma 2012:3; West 2014:48). The meaning of the word is captured in the African aphorism of “muntu, umuntu ngabantu” translated as “I am because we are” or “a person becomes a person through other persons” (Guma 2012:3). For the purpose of this study, Ubuntu was defined as a set of leadership behaviours that embody and exhibit intense humanness towards followers through survival, a spirit of solidarity, compassion, and dignity and respect.

5.1.1 Survival

Survival is defined as the shared will to survive, which stems from groups relying on individual members’ brotherly care to overcome adversity (Bertsch 2012:90). The value of survival may be expressed through open-handedness and concern for the needs and interests of others in the organisation (Broodryk 2006:8; Sigger, Polak & Pennink 2010:48). Poovan *et al.* (2006:23) concluded that the Ubuntu value of survival increase the effective operation of teams and, ultimately, organisational effectiveness. Based on the operationalisation of survival, it is hypothesised that:

H_{1a}: There is a positive relationship between Ubuntu leadership value, survival, and employee engagement.

5.1.2 Spirit of solidarity

The distinctive definition of solidarity in the context of Ubuntu is that an individual finds identity in others in the community and the organisation. Solidarity can therefore, be operationalised as valuing collectively according to a community-based understanding of the self (Brubaker 2013:102). The spirit of solidarity is more clearly expressed through the Zulu words “Simunye” (we are one) and “Shosolozza” (working as one) (Broodryk 2006:27). Engaging leaders encourage collaboration by connecting employees and promoting a high team spirit (Schaufeli 2015:448). Against this background, the following is hypothesised:

H_{1b}: There is a positive relationship between the Ubuntu leadership value, spirit of solidarity and employee engagement.

5.1.3 Compassion

Compassion in the Ubuntu sense extends beyond the western notion of the concept, as individuals go out of their way to help others, and share deeply in the sorrow and joy of

fellow human beings (Broodryk 2010:81). Accordingly, compassion in Ubuntu is evaluated by confirming that a leader is sensitive to employees' problems and share in their suffering (Brubaker 2013:107). Organisational leaders that show compassion towards employees are operationalised as a job resource that engages employees (Rothmann & Welsh 2013:18). Against this background, it is hypothesised that:

H_{1c}: There is a positive relationship between the Ubuntu leadership value, compassion, and employee engagement.

5.1.4 Dignity and respect

Studies of Ubuntu typically combine dignity and respect into a single variable (for example Poovan *et al.* 2006:20; Sigger *et al.* 2010:8). Employees tend to experience a sense of meaningfulness if they are treated with respect, dignity and appreciation for their contributions (Olivier & Rothmann 2007:50). Psychological meaningfulness has been found to be a key determinant of employee engagement (Anitha 2014:311). Against this background, it is hypothesised that:

H_{1d}: There is a positive relationship between the Ubuntu leadership value, dignity and respect, and employee engagement.

5.2 Servant leadership

Organisations are increasingly recognising servant leadership as a legitimate model across different national cultures that can increase engagement, and improve the well-being and performance of employees (De Sousa & Van Dierendonck 2014:893). Servant leaders not only stimulate positive energy levels in employees but also significantly increase engagement through high-quality relationships and social interactions (De Clercq, Bouckenooghe, Raja & Matsyborska 2014:206). For the purpose of this study, servant leadership will be treated as a single dimensional factor. Based on the above discussion, the following is hypothesised:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between servant leadership and employee engagement.

5.3 Employee engagement

Employee engagement is defined differently in academic literature (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes 2002:269; Kahn 1990:692; Saks 2006:601; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma & Bakker 2002:73). Based on this ambiguity and the aforementioned literature, it was defined in this study as the extent to which employees exhibit the desired cognitive, emotional, and physical characteristics in completing work tasks with vigour, dedication and absorption. Employee engagement is conceptualised as consisting of the three dimensions of vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Salanova 2007:144). In addition, employee engagement has also been conceptualised as consisting of three psychological dimensions: cognitive, emotional and physical, based on Kahn's (Kahn 1990:692) definition of personal engagement (Iddagoda, Opatha & Gunawardana 2016:93; May, Gilson & Harter 2004:31). However, South African studies concluded a single factor structure of engagement (Olivier & Rothmann 2007:51; Van Zyl, Deacon & Rothmann 2010:8). For this reason, employee engagement was conceptualised to have a single factor structure in this study.

5.4 Organisational performance

Organisational performance is considered a multi-dimensional concept and most of the results are tangible (Van De Voorde, Paauwe & Van Veldhoven 2012:394). Organisations risk jeopardising future organisational performance by over-emphasising financial performance at the expense of strategic performance (Ireland, Hoskisson & Hitt 2012:357). This concern is addressed by utilising the balanced scorecard (BSC) approach consisting of financial performance, customer performance, internal process performance, and learning and innovation performance. Organisations generally expect employees to be engaged in their work, show initiative and be innovative (Schaufeli & Salanova 2007:137). Furthermore, Gallup (2013:107) reports that highly engaged employees hold managers accountable by embedding organisational performance measures in the managers' BSC. Based on the literature review of organisational performance and employee engagement, the following is hypothesised:

H_{3a}: There is a positive relationship between employee engagement and financial performance.

H_{3b}: There is a positive relationship between employee engagement and customer performance.

H_{3c}: There is a positive relationship between employee engagement and internal process performance.

H_{3d}: There is a positive relationship between employee engagement and learning and innovation performance.

5.5 The relationship between Ubuntu leadership and organisational performance

Researchers propose that organisational leaders harness Ubuntu to improve employee behaviours towards organisational effectiveness (Muchiri 2011:447). Mangaliso and Damane (2001:32) maintain that fostering Ubuntu values in the workplace can lead to sustainable competitive advantage for organisations. Against this background, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₄: There is a positive relationship between an Ubuntu leadership style and organisational performance.

5.6 The relationship between servant leadership and organisational performance

Servant leadership in the workplace was found to improve productivity, increase customer satisfaction, reduce turnover, improve safety, and increase loyalty, in employee engagement (Whorton 2014:134). The improvement of these organisational outcomes drives operational performance and profit. Against this background, the following is hypothesised:

H₅: There is a positive relationship between servant leadership style and organisational performance.

6. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research paradigm and approach

The positivistic paradigm was favoured as the most suitable research paradigm for this study, as a social reality was being researched that is independent of the researcher and the research subjects (Matthews & Ross 2010:27). Conclusions were drawn through logical reasoning which involved building hypotheses from existing literature relating to the variables in the hypothesised model. The existing knowledge was thereafter subjected to empirical scrutiny by collecting quantitative data by means of questionnaires administered to

respondents (Ghuri & Gronhaug 2010:15). Empirical research pertaining to how the value system of Ubuntu manifests itself in the workplace is almost non-existent (Shrivastava *et al.* 2014:60). Investigating the relationship between Ubuntu and servant leadership, employee engagement, and organisational performance can therefore be considered exploratory research.

6.2 Population and sampling

The population of this study consists of all employees of private organisations situated in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. A total of 556 000 people was employed in the Eastern Cape metropolitan areas during the time of the survey at the end of July 2016 (StatsSA 2016:xii). Due to the lack of a sampling frame, non-probability convenience sampling was employed (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin 2009:396). Organisations from online business directories were approached to participate in the study. Employees from these organisations, and others that were known and easily reachable by the researcher and field workers were selected to participate.

6.3 Data collection

Secondary data was collected by means of extensive literature reviews of the study variables, using national and international library databases of peer-reviewed journal articles, reports, books and internet sources. Primary data for this study was collected by means of the survey method using a combination of self-administered paper-based questionnaires and electronic questionnaires administered online through the World Wide Web. A sample size of 400 responses was targeted, as the population size exceeded 5 000 (Leedy & Ormrod 2009:214). A total of 809 questionnaires were distributed and 428 useable questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 53% which was deemed adequate (Babbie & Mouton 2001). A formal declaration confirmed that all ethical aspects were duly considered prior to commencing the study. For this reason, full ethical clearance was waived by the Nelson Mandela University Research Ethics Committee.

6.4 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire used in this study was a combination of self-constructed questions obtained from the literature review, as well as reliable and valid items from the research instruments used in previous studies. Struwig and Stead (2013:98) explain that scaled-

response statements are frequently used to gather data on respondents' perceptions and attitudes. Zikmund *et al.* (2009:350) further recommend the randomisation of questions in a scale to overcome order bias and the anchoring effect prevalent in attitude scales. Randomised, closed-ended questions were therefore used in this study to construct the scales measuring each variable. The questionnaire consisted of statements (items) divided into the following sections:

- Section A: Perceptions regarding Ubuntu leadership (ordinal scale)
- Section B: Perceptions regarding servant leadership (ordinal scale)
- Section C: Perceptions regarding employee engagement (ordinal scale)
- Section D: Perceptions regarding organisational performance (ordinal scale)
- Section E: Biographical information (nominal)

Table 1 provides an outline of the structure of the questionnaire and number of items measuring each variable.

TABLE 1: Layout of the measuring instrument

Variable	Dimensions	No. of items in scale
Ubuntu leadership	Survival (SURV)	5
	Spirit of solidarity (SOLD)	5
	Compassion (COMP)	5
	Dignity and respect (DIGN)	5
Servant leadership (SERV)		11
Employee engagement (ENGA)		15
Organisational performance	Financial performance (FINP)	5
	Customer performance (CUSP)	5
	Internal process performance (INPRO)	5
	Learning & innovation performance (LEARN)	5

Variable	Dimensions	No. of items in scale
Demographics (biographical information)	Age; gender; ethnicity; qualification; position; tenure; employment size; organisation's age; main activity of organisation.	9

Source: Authors' own construction

6.5 Data analysis

After deleting non-random missing data cases, and cases exceeding 50% missing data, valid mean substitution was used to remedy missing data (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson 2014:51). The next step of analysing the data involved determining the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Content validity was ensured by submitting the questionnaire to experts in the fields of leadership and organisational performance. The constructs of the hypothesised model were subjected to factor analysis in order to determine convergent validity. The tests of unidimensionality were performed and enabled the creation of summated scales. Principle component analysis (PCA) was used as the factor extraction method. Unrotated factors were used to assess the construct validity of the measuring instrument (Hair *et al.* 2014:110; Zikmund *et al.* 2009:309).

The retention of factors was determined by applying the Kaiser-Guttman rule which holds that factors having an explained variance (eigenvalue) greater than one are considered significant and may be retained for further interpretation (Hair *et al.* 2014:107; Kaiser 1991:855; Zikmund *et al.* 2009:594). The factors with eigenvalues greater than one is considered to have the same total variance as one variable (Zikmund *et al.* 2009:594). The internal consistency method calculating Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to assess the reliability of the measuring instrument for this study. A scale with a coefficient alpha of 0.70 or greater was considered to have good reliability (Zikmund *et al.* 2009:306).

Based on the factors created in the previous steps, the data analysis continued by calculating the descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions, in order to condense the data. Multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the hypothesised relationships between the study variables. The data was analysed using the MS-Excel and Statistica (version 12) software packages.

7. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

7.1 The demographical data

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the respondents of the study.

TABLE 2: Demographic profile of respondents

Demographic	Range	n	%
Age	20 - 29	189	44
	30 - 39	127	30
	40 - 49	74	17
	50 - 59	35	8
	60 +	3	1
	Total	428	100
Gender	Female	260	61
	Male	168	39
	Total	428	100
Ethnicity	African	132	31
	Coloured	140	33
	Indian	22	5
	White	130	30
	Other	4	1
	Total	428	100
Qualification	Grade 11 or less	18	4
	Grade 12	125	29
	Post matric certificate	60	14
	National diploma	91	21
	Bachelor's degree	67	16
	Post graduate degree	65	15
	Other	2	0
	Total	428	100
Position	Operator/Hourly employee	186	43
	Supervisor/Team leader	84	20
	Middle management	88	21
	Top management	22	5
	Professional	48	11
	Total	428	100
Tenure	1 - 4 years	232	54
	5 - 9 years	104	24

Demographic	Range	n	%
	10 - 19 years	67	16
	20 years +	25	6
	Total	428	100
Employment size	1 - 49	144	34
	50 - 199	116	27
	200 +	168	39
	Total	428	100
Organisation's age	1 - 4 years	36	8
	5 - 9 years	55	13
	10 - 19 years	82	19
	20 years +	255	60
	Total	428	100
Main activity of organisation	Retail	88	21
	Manufacturing	62	14
	Mining	1	0
	Financial/Banking	76	18
	Hospitality	26	6
	Education	3	1
	Health	20	5
	Transport	42	10
	Energy	1	0
	Agriculture	1	0
	Tourism	6	1
	ICT	33	8
	Infrastructure development	13	3
	Other	56	13
	Total	428	100

Source: Calculated from survey results

Table 2 shows that 44% of the respondents were aged between 20 and 29 years, 61% were female and the ethnic classification of the majority of the sample were coloureds at 33%. In terms of educational qualification, 29% of the sample had a grade 12 certificate. Forty-three percent (43%) of the respondents indicated that they are operators or hourly paid employees, and the tenure of 54% of the respondents was 1 - 4 years. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the sample were employed in organisations that employ more than 200 employees, and 34% of the organisations have an employee size of 1 - 49 employees. Sixty percent

(60%) of the sampled organisations have been in existence for more than 20 years, and 21% of the respondents work in a retail environment.

7.2 Validity and reliability

The results of the tests of unidimensionality for validity, and internal consistency for reliability are presented Table 3.

TABLE 3: Validity and reliability results

Variables	Retained items	Min. loadings	Max. loadings	Eigen	% Total variance	Cronbach's Alpha
Survival (SURV)	5	-0.841	-0.905	3.712	74.2	0.912
Spirit of solidarity (SOLD)	5	-0.782	-0.885	3.621	72.4	0.904
Compassion (COMP)	5	-0.844	-0.918	3.912	78.2	0.930
Dignity and respect (DIGN)	5	-0.843	-0.899	3.799	75.9	0.921
Servant leadership (SERV)	11	-0.445	-0.865	9.333	58.3	0.945
Employee engagement (ENGA)	15	-0.602	-0.828	7.728	51.5	0.929
Financial performance (FINP)	5	-0.606	-0.764	2.649	52.9	0.777
Customer performance (CUSP)	5	-0.716	-0.860	3.269	65.3	0.859

Variables	Retained items	Min. loadings	Max. loadings	Eigen	% Total variance	Cronbach's Alpha
Internal process performance (INPRO)	5	-0.808	-0.843	3.411	68.2	0.881
Learning & innovation performance (LEARN)	5	-0.729	-0.840	2.965	59.3	0.824

Source: Calculated from survey results

The factor loadings presented in Table 3 represent the correlation between the original variable and its factor. Hair *et al.* (2014:115) state that factor loadings greater than 0.30 can be considered significant if the sample size is greater than 350. The sample size for this study was 428 and a criterion of 0.40 was used as the cut-off point for valid factor loadings to determine construct validity. Hair *et al.* (2014:115) further state that loadings equal to or greater than 0.50 are considered practically significant and loadings exceeding 0.70 indicate well-defined structure.

Based on the results in Table 3 sufficient evidence of convergent validity for the variables in the hypothesised model was provided, as all the loadings were greater than 0.40. The factor loadings further conform to the criterion of being practically significant, with all loadings being greater than 0.50, except for SERV5 which had a loading of -0.445. The lowest eigenvalue was reported for *Financial performance* at 2.649 and the highest value was *Servant leadership* at 9.333.

These relatively high eigenvalues confirm that all the factors are unidimensional and significant, and were therefore retained for further interpretation. For the items measuring each variable, the percentage of total variance explained was the lowest for *Employee engagement* at 51.5%, and the highest for *Compassion* at 78.2%. The operationalisation of all the variables therefore remained unchanged, as no items were disregarded or deleted from the original variables.

In terms of reliability, Table 3 reveals that all Cronbach's alpha values were well above the cut-off point of 0.7, therefore sufficient proof of reliability exist and the items for the different scales were retained for further analysis. The highest Cronbach's alpha coefficient was

0.945 for *Servant leadership*. *Financial performance* was found to have to lowest coefficient value at 0.777.

7.3 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the central tendency of the data by measuring the mean and dispersion of the data around the mean by calculating the standard variation. The results are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation
SURV	5.29	1.35
SOLD	5.35	1.32
COMP	5.36	1.37
DIGN	5.48	1.29
SERV	5.30	1.18
ENGA	5.61	0.93
FINP	5.53	0.94
CUSP	5.62	1.01
INPRO	5.60	1.05
LEARN	5.61	0.99

Source: Calculated from survey results

The data was collected by anchoring the items of the questionnaire on a seven-point Likert scale. The Likert scale in the questionnaire was given as: 1-strongly disagree; 2-disagree; 3-disagree somewhat; 4-neutral; 5-agree somewhat, 6-agree and 7-strongly agree. The lowest mean score was for *Survival* at 5.29 and *Customer performance* had the highest mean at 5.62. The mean scores indicate that respondents agreed somewhat with all the items measuring the different variables of the study.

7.4 Regression analysis

The following sections discuss the four sets of regression analyses calculated to test the relationships between the variables.

7.4.1 The influence of Ubuntu leadership on employee engagement

Table 5 summarises the regression analyses of the dimensions of Ubuntu leadership: *Survival*, *Spirit of solidarity*, *Compassion*, *Dignity* and *respect* on *Employee engagement*. From Table 5, it can be seen that the independent variables of *Survival*, *Spirit of solidarity*, *Compassion*, *Dignity* and *respect* explain a significant proportion of the variance in the dependent variable *Employee engagement* ($F 52.88$; $p < 0.05$).

The results, therefore, suggest that as *Spirit of solidarity* behaviours increase, the level of *Employee engagement* increases accordingly in the workplace. It is further evident from Table 5 that the independent variables explained 33.33 percent (R^2) of the variance of *Employee engagement*. No significant relationships were found to exist between the independent variables, *Survival* ($b^* = 0.174$; $p > 0.05$), *Compassion* ($b^* = 0.078$; $p > 0.05$) and *Dignity* and *respect* ($b^* = -0.028$; $p > 0.05$).

TABLE 5: Regression analysis of dimensions of Ubuntu on employee engagement

Dependent Variable: employee engagement						
Independent variables	b*	Std.Err.	b	Std.Err.	t(422)	p-value
SURV	0.174	0.137	0.121	0.094	1.276	0.203
SOLD	0.366	0.112	0.259	0.079	3.268	0.001*
COMP	0.078	0.126	0.053	0.086	0.615	0.539
DIGN	-0.028	0.126	-0.020	0.091	-0.221	0.825
R= 0.57737232 R ² = 0.33335879 F (4.423) =52.881 p<0.0000 Std.Error of estimate: 0.76493 N=428 * = p < 0.05						

Source: Calculated from survey results

7.4.2 The influence of servant leadership on employee engagement

Table 6 summarises the results of the regression analysis of the independent variable *Servant leadership* on *Employee engagement*.

TABLE 6: Regression analysis of servant leadership on employee engagement

Dependent Variable: employee engagement						
Independent variables	b*	Std.Err.	b	Std.Err.	t(422)	p-value
SERV	0.590	0.039	0.466	0.031	15.101	0.000*
R= 0.59048340 R ² = 0.34867065 Adjusted R ² = 0.34714171 F(1.426)=228.05 p<0.0000 Std.Error of estimate: 0.75342 N=428; * = p < 0.05						

Source: Calculated from survey results

Table 6 indicates that a significant and positive relationship exists between the independent variable *Servant leadership* and *Employee engagement* ($b^* = 0.590$; $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, it can be seen that *Servant leadership*, in this regression model, explains a significant proportion ($F = 228.05$; $p < 0.05$) of the variance in *Employee engagement*. The R^2 score in Table 6 reveals that 34.86 percent of the variance in *Employee engagement* is explained by the influence of *Servant leadership*. These results suggest that organisational leaders who exhibit servant leader behaviours will increase *Employee engagement* in the workplace.

7.4.3 The influence of employee engagement on organisational performance

Table 7 summarises the regression analysis results for the influence of *Employee engagement* on the organisational performance variables of the balanced scorecard. For *Financial performance*, the R^2 value indicates that 20.6 percent of the variance in *Financial performance* is explained by *Employee engagement*. A significant and positive relationship exists between the mediating variable *Employee engagement* and the dependent variable

Financial performance ($b^* = 0.454$; $p < 0.05$). This result suggest that *Financial performance* is predicted to increase as employees become more engaged in the workplace.

TABLE 7: Regression analysis of employee engagement and organisational performance variables of the balanced scorecard

	Dependent Variables							
	FINP R ² = 0.206		CUSP R ² = 0.219		INPRO R ² = 0.227		LEARN R ² = 0.302	
Mediating variable	b*	p-value	b*	p-value	b*	p-value	b*	p-value
ENGA	0.454	0.000*	0.468	0.000*	0.477	0.000*	0.550	0.000*
N=428; * = p < 0.05								

Source: Calculated from survey results

In Table 7, the R² value of 0.219 further indicates that 21.9 percent of the variance in *Customer performance* is explained by *Employee engagement*. A significant and positive relationship exist between the mediating variable *Employee engagement* and the dependent variable *Customer performance* ($b^* = 0.468$; $p < 0.05$). The results indicate that *Customer performance* is predicted to increase as employees become more engaged in the workplace. For *Internal process performance*, the R² value indicates that 22.7 percent of the variance in *Internal process performance* is explained by *Employee engagement*. A significant and positive relationship exists between the mediating variable *Employee engagement* and the dependent variable *Internal process performance* ($b^* = 0.477$; $p < 0.05$).

The results suggest that *Internal process performance* is predicted to increase as employees become more engaged in the workplace. Table 7 further reveals, based on the R² value of 0.302, that 30.2 percent of the variance in *Learning and innovation performance* is explained by *Employee engagement*. A significant and positive relationship exists between the mediating variable *Employee engagement* and the dependent variable *Learning and innovation performance* ($b^* = 0.550$; $p < 0.05$). The results suggest that *Learning and innovation performance* is predicted to increase as employees become more engaged in the workplace.

7.4.4 The unmediated influence of Ubuntu leadership on organisational performance

Table 8 reports the regression results for the unmediated influence of the dimensions of Ubuntu leadership on the dimensions of organisational performance.

TABLE 8: Regression analysis of Ubuntu leadership on organisational performance

Variable	FINP		CUSP		INPRO		LEARN	
	p-value	b*	p-value	b*	p-value	b*	p-value	b*
SURV	0,002	0,460	0,007	0,397	0,000	0,691	0,000	0,555
SOLD	0,000	0,432	0,000	0,436	0,012	0,291	0,000	0,445
COMP	0,044	-0,280	0,678	-0,056	0,001	-0,441	0,007	-0,342
DIGN	0,122	-0,215	0,018	-0,321	0,804	-0,032	0,419	-0,101
Model statistics	F = 25.748; p < 0.05 R ² = 0.195		F = 32.07; p < 0.05 R ² = 0.232		F = 45.67; p < 0.05 R ² = 0.301		F = 55.34; p < 0.05 R ² = 0.343	

Note: Regressions indicated in bold are significant at p < 0.05

Source: Calculated from survey results

Table 8 indicates that *Survival* and *Spirit of solidarity* consistently show a significant and positive relationship with all four dimensions of organisational performance. The *Compassion* dimension of Ubuntu leadership was found to have a significant negative impact on three of the four dimensions (*Financial performance*, *Internal process performance*, and *Learning and innovation performance*) of organisational performance.

Furthermore, an insignificant and negative relationship was found between *Compassion* and *Customer performance*. *Dignity and respect* was found to have an insignificant negative influence on three of the four dimensions (*Financial performance*, *Internal process performance*, and *Learning and innovation performance*) of organisational performance, with a significant negative influence only on *Customer performance*.

7.4.5 The unmediated influence of servant leadership on organisational performance

Table 9 reports the regression results for the unmediated influence of servant leadership on the dimensions of organisational performance.

TABLE 9: Regression analysis of Ubuntu leadership on organisational performance

Variable	FINP		CUSP		INPRO		LEARN	
	p-value	b*	p-value	b*	p-value	b*	p-value	b*
SERV	0.000	0.427	0.000	0.468	0.000	0.529	0.000	0.582
Model statistics	F = 94.83; p < 0.05 R ² = 0.182		F = 119.63; p < 0.05 R ² = 0.219		F = 165.15; p < 0.05 R ² = 0.279		F = 218.29; p < 0.05 R ² = 0.338	

Note: Regressions indicated in bold are significant at $p < 0.05$

Source: Calculated from survey results

The results of the regression analyses in Table 9 indicate that *Servant leadership* is a significant and positive predictor of all the variables constituting organisational performance. In this study, organisational performance was operationalised based on the balanced scorecard approach. The results, therefore, indicate that *Servant leadership* behaviours will result in improving organisational performance across all four performance dimensions of the balanced scorecard (*financial, customer, internal process, and learning and innovation*).

7.5 Findings of hypothesised relationships

Table 10 indicates the findings of the hypothesised relationships.

TABLE 10: Hypothesis testing for regression

Hypothesis	Outcome	Method used
H _{1a} : There is a positive relationship between the Ubuntu leadership dimension of <i>Survival</i> and <i>Employee engagement</i> .	Rejected	Simple linear regression
H _{1b} : There is a positive relationship between the Ubuntu leadership dimension of <i>Spirit of solidarity</i> and <i>Employee engagement</i> .	Accepted	Simple linear regression

Hypothesis	Outcome	Method used
H _{1c} : There is a positive relationship between the Ubuntu leadership dimension of <i>Compassion</i> and <i>Employee engagement</i> .	Rejected	Simple linear regression
H _{1d} : There is a positive relationship between the Ubuntu leadership dimension of <i>Dignity and respect</i> and <i>Employee engagement</i> .	Rejected	Simple linear regression
H ₂ : There is a positive relationship between <i>Servant leadership</i> and <i>Employee engagement</i> .	Accepted	Simple linear regression
H _{3a} : There is a positive relationship between <i>Employee engagement</i> and <i>Financial performance</i> .	Accepted	Simple linear regression
H _{3b} : There is a positive relationship between <i>Employee engagement</i> and <i>Customer performance</i> .	Accepted	Simple linear regression
H _{3c} : There is a positive relationship between <i>Employee engagement</i> and <i>Internal process performance</i> .	Accepted	Simple linear regression
H _{3d} : There is a positive relationship between <i>Employee engagement</i> and <i>Learning and innovation performance</i> .	Accepted	Simple linear regression
H ₄ : There is a positive relationship between the dimensions of the Ubuntu leadership style and the dimensions of Organisational performance.	Accepted for:	Multiple regression
	Survival; Spirit of solidarity	
	Rejected for:	
	Compassion; Dignity and respect	
H ₅ : There is a positive relationship between the <i>Servant leadership</i> style and the dimensions of Organisational performance.	Accepted	Multiple regression

Source: Authors' own construction

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of Ubuntu leadership, it is recommended that managers draw employees together to accomplish complex tasks and achieve difficult goals collectively, as opposed to individually. It is recommended that quality circles and mission-directed team concepts are explored to improve the effectiveness of problem-solving. Initiatives like “Six sigma” makes extensive use of project teams for problem-solving and is therefore, recommended.

Managers should further help employees understand their role in the context of the collective organisation, and not in terms of the individual physical or psychological contributions they have to offer. The common understanding is that, together, the team can accomplish more than if each member works individually. Organisational leaders should mould a *Spirit of solidarity* by assisting employees to feel part of the organisational community and, therefore, see the organisation as an extension of the employee’s family.

Tasks and projects should be structured to diminish the “I” and augment the “We”, thus creating a greater sense of collective accomplishment. To further enhance a *Spirit of solidarity*, it is recommended that company stationery and notifications display slogans of solidarity, for example, ‘Simunye’ that translates to ‘we are one’. Collective goal accomplishment should be followed by celebrations, collective singing, celebratory rituals and incorporating the individual’s family, where possible.

These ceremonies and celebrations create a pleasant work environment, and cultivate a sense of trust and belonging. Happiness and harmony should be fostered in the *Spirit of solidarity*. Managers and Human Resource practitioners should link reward systems to team performance and, to a lesser extent, to individual performance.

Based on the findings of *Servant leadership*, it is recommended that managers pay more attention to serving employees and satisfying their psychological needs for growth and development. Employees should be empowered through nurturing attitudes of proactivity and self-confidence; through this, a sense of personal power is derived. Employees should be held accountable for performance only on aspects that are within their control, and the leader should ensure that expectations are always clear. HR practitioners should, therefore,

ensure that employees' job descriptions and actual tasks are continuously audited to show good alignment.

In terms of *Employee engagement*, it is suggested that organisations foster an environment whereby employees: find their jobs inspiring; find it difficult to detach themselves from their work; are able to work for sustained periods of time; are not afraid to be themselves and are enthusiastic about their work. It is further recommended that employees should: keep trying to succeed, even in times of difficulty; deal assertively with work-related problems; confidently handle the physical demands of their job; feel brave enough to express their opinions about work-related matters and consider their job activities to be valuable.

9. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Although Ubuntu has been discussed at length in literature, empirical research on the topic is sparse (Sigger *et al.* 2010:1; Shrivastava *et al.* 2014:62). A highly reliable and valid measuring instrument was developed to evaluate the Ubuntu leadership style, as at the time, there were no reliable scales available in South Africa. This study has also validated the effective use of the balanced scorecard as a strategic mechanism for organisations to measure organisational performance. Management theory and practices predominantly originate from euro-centric or western schools of thought. This study presents an afro-centric approach to organisational leadership, based on indigenous African knowledge systems.

10. CONCLUSION

This study set out to answer the question: Can Ubuntu and servant leadership be used to engage employees, and in doing so, improve organisational performance? The extent to which Ubuntu leadership, operationalised as a multidimensional construct, can be utilised to engage employees in the workplace is most pronounced through the *Spirit of solidarity* dimension of Ubuntu. The empirical results revealed that fostering a *Spirit of solidarity* increase *Employee engagement*, as Ubuntu leaders work to increase employees' level of energy, enthusiasm and stamina in the workplace. Leaders who connect employees and promote team spirit allow employees to get strongly involved in their work. Furthermore, these employees experience a sense of meaning, significance, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Lutz (2009:323) concurs with this finding that states that the application of

solidarity to business involves not only perceiving the organisation as a set of contracting relationships among individuals, but viewing the organisation as a community with a purpose. The leadership role of fostering a *Spirit of solidarity* is, therefore, to also foster the common good of the community. Mangaliso and Damane (2001:23) similarly concluded that Ubuntu values of solidarity must be optimised, as sustainable competitive advantage is derived from strong loyalty to group goals.

The results further suggest that organisational leaders who exhibit servant leader behaviours will increase *Employee engagement*. When leaders focus their efforts on helping subordinates grow, their subordinates will experience increased feelings of vigour, dedication, and absorption at work. In return for heightening the fulfilling and positive work-related state of mind experienced by engaged employees, engaged employees will improve organisational performance, as measured through the balanced scorecard. This finding is in line with previous studies that found that higher *Employee engagement* scores were reported for organisations with more servant leaders (Whorton 2014:127). Similarly, Van Dierendonck, Stam, Boersma, De Windt & Alkema (2014:544) and van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011:261) concluded that *Servant leadership* is a strong predictor of *Employee engagement*, as servant leaders act to satisfy employee needs. Highly engaged employees are characterised by their vigour, dedication, and absorption in the workplace.

From this study it is evident that engaged employees drive *Financial performance*, are productive and have a high concern for quality and satisfying the needs of customers. These employees are an irreplaceable source of much needed innovation to sustain competitive advantage. This study has provided valuable insights into the factors needed to create an enabling environment for *Employee engagement*, towards increased organisational performance. The vital role played by organisational leaders in the engagement process cannot be over-emphasised. As organisations in Africa face several unique challenges, the indiscriminate adoption of western leadership and human resource practices is far from ideal. It is therefore crucial to incorporate culturally oriented indigenous knowledge in the management systems of organisations by fostering and inculcating a spirit of Ubuntu and *Servant leadership* in the workplace.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the abstract nature of Ubuntu, it is suggested that the concept is further explored qualitatively or through a mixed-methods approach, in order to deepen the understanding of the concept. It is the opinion of the researcher that the finer nuances of the dimensions of Ubuntu might be explored more effectively through focus group discussions, narrative research or qualitative case study methods. It is also recommended that the research instrument developed in this study be improved and validated in future studies using samples beyond the Eastern Cape. Furthermore, servant leadership was included in this study to gain a perspective of a contemporary leadership style that appeared to be similar to Ubuntu leadership. While the unidimensionality of the dimensions of Ubuntu leadership and servant leadership was proved, it would be recommended to establish methods of proving the discriminant validity of these two constructs.

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