Associative nature of employee satisfaction within the Market and Social Research Industries in Gauteng Province

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the attributes that affect employee satisfaction in the Market and Social Research Industries in Gauteng Province, South Africa. In order to address the overall objective of this study, the researchers used a two-tiered (mixed) approach in which both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were used to complement and enrich the results. Stratified random sampling and systematic random sampling were used to select a sample of 261 full-time employees for the quantitative phase of the study. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was adapted to collect the data using a face-to-face data collection method.

The study found that a statistically significant association exists between employee satisfaction and leadership style within the Market and Social Research Industries in Gauteng Province. As expected, leadership and management within the Market and Social Research Industries in Gauteng Province should ensure that they are accommodative to their subordinates. More importantly, issues of a good working environment, remuneration, career growth and recognition should be addressed in order to increase employee satisfaction, reduce staff turnover and attempt to optimise labour productivity.

Keyword: Leadership, Employee Satisfaction, Market and Social Research, Gauteng Province, South Africa

Introduction and Background Information

It is generally accepted that the effectiveness of any grouping of people is largely dependent on the quality of its leadership. Nel, Gerber, van Dyk, Haasbroek, Schultz, Sono, & Werner (2004) argue that the quest in today's globalised companies is for visionary and transformational leaders, and for managers with an above average risk profile. Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky (2009) propose that to distribute leadership responsibility more widely, one needs to mobilise everyone to generate solutions, by increasing the information flow that allows people across the organisation to make independent decisions and share the lessons they learn from innovative efforts. In practice, leaders have been seen to experience great difficulty in expressing exactly what they do that makes them leaders.

Castro & Martins (2010) argue that organisations in the 21st century are facing more challenges than ever before. These challenges are not unique to any specific organisation, but affect all organisations, regardless of their structure or size (Castro & Martins, 2010). Organisational climate in particular is constantly challenged by changes impacting organisations (Nair,cited in Castro & Martins, 2010). To survive and outdo their competitors, organisations are constantly seeking to improve their performance (Castro & Martins, 2010). Mintzberg (1990) laments the lack of new efforts inresearch and points out that most research is simply a replication of earlier studies. Storey (2005) observes that most textbooks on the subject of leadership do not clearly distinguish or delineate between leadership at various levels, leadership of organisations and leadership within organisations. The lack of focus in leadership research is attributed to a lack of delineation between levels (Storey, 2005).

The researchers used the ideas contained in the Full Range leadership development theory. The quantitative questionnaire was adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which has been used extensively and remains a very useful tool. The Full Range

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leadership model developed by Bass & Avolio (1997) provides a theoretical framework for the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. For the employee satisfaction questionnaire, the attributes were mainly derived from the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) Questionnaire of Smith, Kendall & Hulin (1969), as well as the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ). This paper focuses on managerial leadership aspects within the Market and Social Research Industries.

Rationale of the Paper

The concepts of leadership and employee satisfaction are not new phenomena in research, but how researchers approach them is often different. Studies on employee satisfaction have identified areas that seem to be important for the satisfaction of employees (Abdullah, 2011). These areas include a well-managed, supportive and prosperous work environment, on-going professional development, career growth potential, challenging and exciting work, teamwork, acknowledgement of work well done, work-life balance and the work culture (Tarasco & Damato, 2006).

Employee Satisfaction

Küskü (2003) advises that employee satisfaction reflects the degree to which an individual's needs and desires are

met and the extent to which this is perceived by the other employees.

Leadership in the South African Context

Undoubtedly, the researcher strongly believes that the leadership literature and what constitutes a leader has been explored in many fields of study. Organisations have been forced to become more competitive in order to retain and protect local markets against international competitors, as well as to ensure that they are able to compete internationally. Many South African organisations have delivered leaders of outstanding quality, who have made a name for themselves and their organisations (Nel et al., 2004). However, South Africa maintains a very low profile in the world competitiveness surveys, and this shows a need to identify and develop more leaders, and to create organisational cultures which encourage and support quality leadership.

Leadership Practices in the Market and Social Research Industries

Leadership within the market and social research industries, like in any other industry, is essential for proper coordination. In order for groups to function successfully within an organisation, there is a need for effective group.

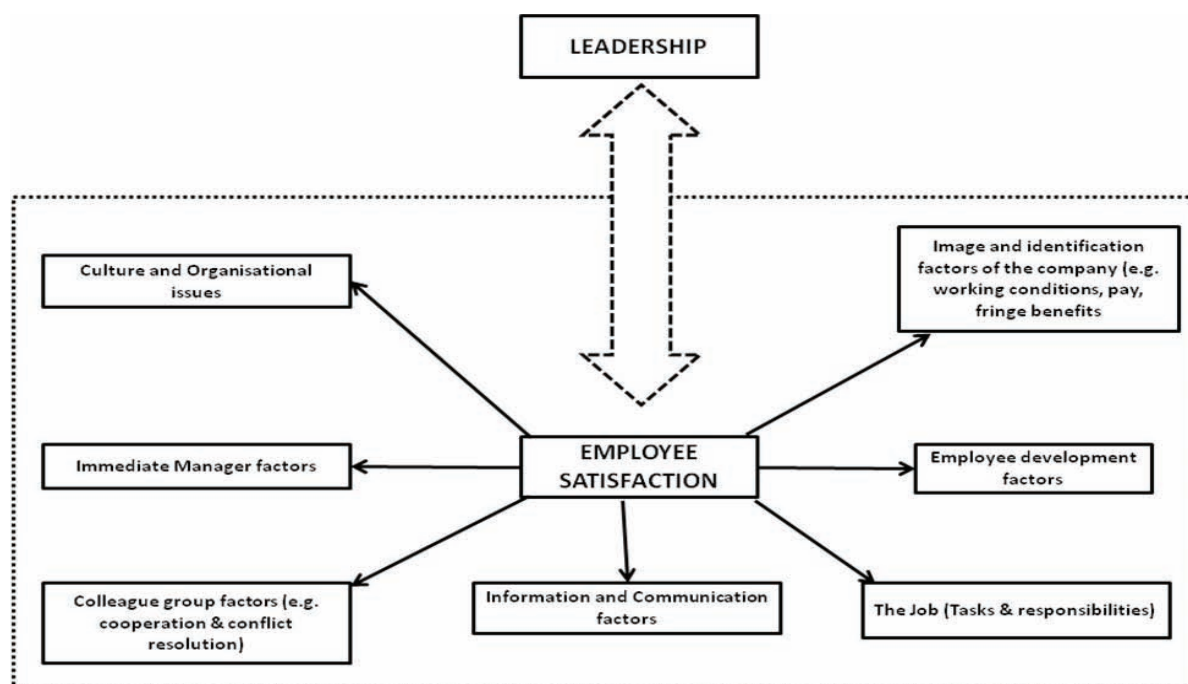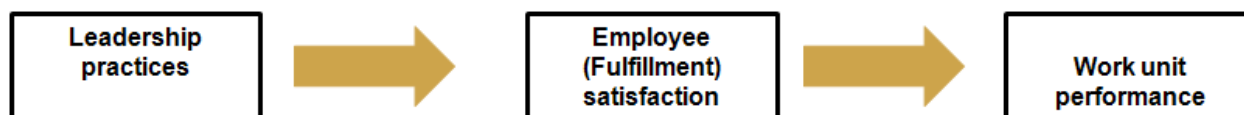**Figure 1:**   **The Organisation's Employee Satisfaction Model**

Figure 2: **Relationship between Leadership Practices and Employee Satisfaction**

Most of the Market and Social research companies within these industries have other offices throughout the country besides their head offices, which are in most cases situated in Gauteng province. Therefore, coordinating with the head office is relatively easy, although at times supervision is always necessary to ensure that the brand of the company remains intact and is not neglected in any way. Nel et al. (2004) identify issues around trust, expectations, cultural difference, work coordination, and group dynamics which need the leader's attention.

The Company's Model for Employee Satisfaction

Figure 1 summarises some of the components that are important in understanding employee satisfaction within an organisation.

Although there are seven dimensions shown in Figure 1 which influence employee satisfaction, each dimension has its own attributes. In general, organisations aiming to create a work environment that enhances job satisfaction need to consider issues like (i) competitive salary, (ii) opportunities for promotion, (iii) training and other professional growth opportunities, (iv) a stable and secure working environment, (v) an environment in which employees are supported by an accessible supervisor who provides timely feedback, (vi) opportunities to use an employee's talent and be creative and innovative, (vii) flexible working hours (viii) use of up-to-date technology, (ix) seeing the employee as a valuable asset, and (x) being an ethical company. It is important to point that employee satisfaction is not synonymous with job satisfaction.

Nel et al. (2004) state that the following techniques are very useful for stimulating creative thinking, while at the same time preventing domination by individuals.

- **Brainstorming**: This process is frequently used to provide the maximum number of ideas in a short period of time.
- **Nominal group technique**: This technique is excellent for ensuring full participation without indi-

vidual domination. Individuals meet as a group and silently generate ideas in writing.

- **Delphi technique**: This technique is used with group members who are geographically dispersed. Participants never meet face-to-face.

One important aspect that is always emphasised in the market and social research industries is the importance of effective communication and management of conflicts that arise. Effective communication ensures that there is cohesion of events within groups, while conflict negates the commonness of group members. In the market and social research industries, cross-functional and self-managed work teams are common. Teamwork is increasingly being introduced as part of the structures of South African organisations, in order to increase performance levels and employee and customer satisfaction (Nel et al., 2004).

Role of leadership in employee satisfaction

Amabile et al. (2010) argue that managers have a powerful influence over events that facilitate or undermine the progress of employees. Furthermore, managers and leaders have a major impact on the fulfilment (satisfaction) of employees and, consequently, on how well they perform. Voon et al. (2011) argue that by adopting the appropriate leadership style, leaders can have an effect on employee or job satisfaction, commitment and productivity. Figure 2 summarises how leadership influences the work performance of each individual.

Factors that were Controlled In the Study

In any research, there are causal factors that can affect the research process and which,therefore, need to be given sufficient attention before the commencement of the study. Meindl, Ehrlich & Dukerich (cited in Nyabadza, 2008) explain the leadership research complexities that arise from numerous causal factors and highly intricate networks in a constant state of flux, which make up

Table 1: **Calibration of the Satisfaction Scale**

Extremely dissatisfied		Dissatisfied		Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied		Satisfied		Completely satisfied	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

systems that a researcher could be studying. In this study, the following variables were controlled (i) industry effects, (ii) organisational size and geographical location, (iii) natural cultural effects, (iv) corporate governance and reputation-related effects, (v) demographic effects of respondents.

Research Design

In any study, the design for how the research will be conducted is very important, as it clearly indicates how the research can be implemented. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) define a research design as a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research. The quantitative research methodology was used to gain a deeper understanding of what affects employee satisfaction in the market and social research industries of South Africa. There were two groups, namely the Social Research and Market Research groups.Within each firm that was selected, a 1 in k systematic random sampling was used and the value of k was determined based on the number of employees in company.

Questionnaire Design

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) has been used extensively in leadership and employee satisfaction studies and remains a very useful tool. In this study, the MLQ and employee satisfaction questionnaires were slightly modified, taking into account how the questions addressed the objectives of the study and, more importantly, linking employee satisfaction to leadership. Only one questionnaire was used, taking all the leadership and employee-related questions into account for the quantitative study.The questionnaire used in this study was mostly administered to respondentsin a face-to-face manner, in order to control the process effectively.

Measurement Scale Used

The survey questions that were used in the quantitative phase of the study were aimedat answering the critical questions being investigated. A number of dimensions were measured using a 10-point scale, where 1 represented extremely dissatisfied and 10 representedcompletely satisfied. The scale was calibrated in a two-tiered scale, as shown in Table 1.

Some of the employee satisfaction dimensions in the study are (i) working conditions-related attributes, (ii) co-workers' (teamwork) attributes, (iii) supervision-related attributes, (iv) pay-related attributes, (v) promotion-related attributes, (vi) communication-related attributes, and (vii) leadership style-related attributes.

Data Collection and Analysis

After piloting the questionnaire, the questionnaires were administered to respondents face-to-face. The researcher used well-trained interviewers for the collection of the data. The quantitative questionnaire took 20-30 minutes to administer. All the different stages of data collection were closely monitored and the data was verified before data analysis was done. The completed questionnaires were captured using EpiData. Quality control checks weredone in order to ensure that the data was entered correctly. Data analysis was done usingStatistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Firstly, basic frequencies were run to uncover employee satisfaction and leadership attribute patterns at the surface level. Furthermore, basic descriptives and cross-tabulations were also tabulated to explore the basic make-up and features of the data.

Reliability, Validity and Ethical Considerations for the Study

Reliability is the consistency of measurement, or the degree to which an instrument measures the same way each time it is used under the same conditions with the same subjects. Gibson (2007: 271) refers to reliability as 'measurement consistent'. The Cronbach's alphawas used to measure the reliability of the attributes. For this study, the overall Cronbach was 0.982 indicating that the questionnaire and the scale were reliable. In terms of validity, the questionnaire had been designed on the basis

of related studies and therefore had high reliability and validity. Validity is the strength of conclusions, inferences or propositions made from the data collected and thus refers to the accuracy or truthfulness of a measurement or study done. Gibson (2007) argues that validity is much more difficult to assess than reliability.

It was also important to emphasise to the respondent that information that was collected would be treated with strictest confidentiality and anonymity, and would only be used for research purposes (academic purposes). It was emphasised to the respondents that the data collected was only going to be used for academic research purposes only. The researcher also ensured that no physical or non-physical harm was done to respondents and that their privacy and dignity were observed at all times.

Achieved Sample Size

A total of 261 respondents from the Market and Social research industries participated in the study. The response rate at the company level was therefore 68% which was good enough for the purpose of this research, and valid and reliable results. A sample of 261 respondents yielded an overall error rate of 4.9% at the 95% confidence interval which was acceptable statistically. For example, Voon et al. (2011) investigated the influence of leadership styles on employees' job satisfaction in public sector organisation in Malaysia and used a sample of 200 respondents. Ponnu & Tennakoon (2009) used a sample size of 174 respondents for a study on "The Association between Ethical Leadership and Employee Outcomes." Furthermore, Ponnu & Tennakoon (2009) argue that reliability estimates of Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) indicated that ELS had demonstrated excellent internal consistency and were stable over studies with respective sample sizes of n=127, n=184 and n=87. In all the 3 studies the reliability estimates were above 0.90. Mintzberg's (1990) total sample comprised 5 chief executives, 56 US foremen; and 160 British middle and top managers. Therefore a sample of 261 achieved in this study was large enough to make any statistical analysis that the researchers would do.

Summary of Demographic and Background Information of the Sample

Table 2 summarises the demographic information:

Table 2: **Summary of demographic information frequency and percentage distributions**

Demographic item		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	126	48%
	Female	135	52%
Total		261	100%
Race	Black	152	58%
	Coloured	18	7%
	Indian/Asian	18	7%
	White	73	28%
Total		261	100%
Age	18 - 24 years	22	8%
	25-34 years	125	48%
	35- 44 years	88	34%
	45-54 years	23	9%
	55 years or more	3	1%
Total		261	100%
Annual income	Less than R60 000	15	6%
	R60 000-R120 000	57	22%
	R121 000-R180 000	47	18%
	R181 000-R240 000	44	17%
	R241 000-R300 000	33	13%
	R301 000-R350 000	37	14%
	More than R350 000	28	11%
Total		261	100%

The sample was almost equally split in terms of gender and the majority were black. The majority (82%) of the people interviewed were adults between 25-44 years with only 1% of the sample being 55 years or older. Of all the respondents interviewed, only 6% of the sample had an annual income of less than R60 000 while 11% of the sample earned more than R350 000 per annum, which was considered to be a high income in this study.

Table 3 shows that slightly more than half of the sample wanted to change their job in the near future. The main reason why the respondents wanted to change their jobs was mainly for career advancement (42%) or looking for better remuneration (31%).

From Table 4, it is clear that most of the respondents were of the view that they were hard working employees (57%) or team players (26%). Most of the respondents were motivated by career growth (62%) to be in their current positions while slightly less than 1 in 4 had no choice as they wanted the job. More than 9 in 10 of the sample had never attended any disciplinary hearings since they joined the company they work for. Every 6 in 10 of the respondents interviewed answered that their

Table 3: **Summary of Respondents' Department and Position and Intention to Change Their Job and Reasons Thereof**

Background item		Frequency	Percentage
Division in which respondent worked in	Research	151	58%
	Data Processing	41	16%
	Field	52	20%
	Administration	17	7%
Total		261	100%
Levelof the position of the respondent in the Research company	Top management	14	5%
	Middle management	134	51%
	Junior level	113	43%
Total		261	100%
Background item		Frequency	Percentage
Intention to change job in the near future	Yes	137	52%
	No	124	48%
Total		261	100%
Main reason for wanting to change job in the near future	Career advancement (better position)	57	42%
	Looking for better remuneration	43	31%
	My manager/supervisor is always on my neck	3	2%
	I do not enjoy working for this company any more	8	6%
	There is no room for growth in this company	15	11%
	This company is badly run	9	7%
	There is favouritism in this company	2	1%
Total (base: Those who want to change a job)		137	100%

Table 4: **Further basic Understanding of Respondents**

Item		Frequency	Percentage
How best would you describe yourself as an employee of this company?	Hard working employee	148	57%
	Team player	67	26%
	Under-utilised employee	17	7%
	Goal getter	26	10%
	None of the above	3	1%
Total		261	100%
What motivated you to be in this position?	Career growth	162	62%
	Remuneration	38	15%
	I had no choice, I wanted the job	61	23%
Total		261	100%
Have you ever attended a disciplinary hearing since you joined this company?	Yes	18	7%
	No	243	93%
In your own opinion, do you think the leadership of this company is meeting your expectations?	Yes	105	40%
	No	156	60%
The company represents the interests of every employee. Do you agree with this statement?	Yes, I agree with that	97	37%
	No, I do not agree with that	164	63%
Do you think that your company has a good reputation as compared to your main competitors in the industry?	Yes	204	78%
	No	57	22%
Total		261	100%

Figure 3:   Decision Tree by Race and Gender of Respondents
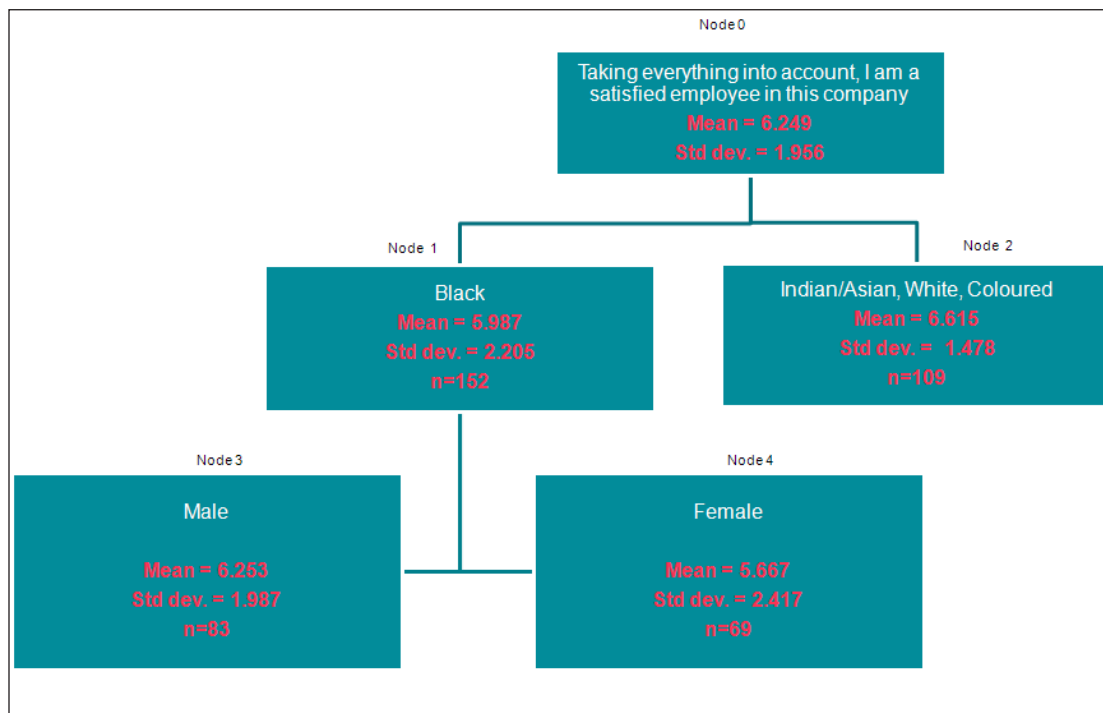
leadership was not meeting their expectations while 63% of the respondents also mentioned that their company did not represent their interests. The majority of the respondents (78%) felt the company they work for had a good reputation in comparison to their competitors within the industries.

Demographic Attributes Influencing Overall Employee Satisfaction

In order to understand which demographics influenced overall employee satisfaction, a classification (decision) tree was used to explore the most influential demographics. Figure 3 shows the results of the decision tree of overall employee satisfaction by gender and race of the respondents.

The decision tree shows that black respondents had a slightly less overall employee satisfaction mean of 5.987 with a standard deviation of 2.205 while Indian/Asian, white and coloured respondents were classified into another node with a mean of 6.615 and standard deviation of 1.478. From this classification, it seems that black respondents were slightly less satisfied as compared to the other respondents.Black respondents were further classified by gender into another node. Male

black respondents had a mean of 6.253 and a standard deviation of 1.987, while black female respondents had a mean of 5.667 and a standard deviation of 2.417. Thus black female respondents were seemingly less satisfied in comparison to their blackmale counterparts.

Employees' Views

Employees were asked directly what the key drivers of employee satisfaction were in order to let their voices be heard. The study found that slightly more than 1 in 2 (54%) of the respondents were of the idea that working environment, followed by remuneration at 49%, were the key drivers of employee satisfaction. The other important drivers of employee satisfaction were mentioned as career growth (27%) and recognition (26%).

When asked about how leadership in their organisations affected them (employees) in their day-to-day operations, 1 in 3 of the respondents responded by saying that their leadership was very supportive and therefore making the working conditions much easier. Some respondents said that their leadership did not communicate (12%) or were oppressed (12%). There were some respondents who mentioned that they were not affected (10%) by their leadership styles in their day-to-day operations.

One example of how one respondent in this research explained how leadership affects their day-to-day operation as follows:

"The leadership has a tendency of addressing symptoms on organisational problems (matters) than addressing the underlying issues. An example would be why you have spent a lot of time on a project when they know that the project is complex, difficult and under-resourced."

Though the percentages were relatively not high, it was evident that there were negative aspects that leadership do that negates the progress of the employees.

Some of the other common comments that were given by the respondents on how leadership practices within their companies affected their overall employee satisfaction as employees were as follows:

- Working environment must be conducive;
- There must be room for career growth;
- The remuneration must be good and comparable to other people within the industries;
- Management and leadership must be transparent and fair;
- There must be job security within the company;
- Professionalism must be exercised at all times;
- Employees must be trained in order for them to be competent; and
- There must be ethical considerations when dealing with employees.

According to Stallard & Pankau (2008), there are six psychological needs in the workplace, namely respect, recognition, belonging, autonomy, personal growth, and meaning.

The following comment made by one respondent shows how important leadership is:

"The company is managed like a personal business since the two directors are a husband and wife team seconded from the office in Europe. Human Resources (HR) issues (disciplinary hearings) that are supposed to be adjudicated on by people with no direct interest are difficult to handle."

Association between Leadership, and Employee Satisfaction Variable and Demographic Variables

The following section presents the results that measured the level of association between demographic information, leadership related and employee (job) related attributes. Literature suggests that Chi-square test is only recommended with moderate sample sizes, that is, more than 30 respondents (Matzler et al., 2006:185). The sample size of 261 was more than enough to carry out Chi-Square tests of association. The hypotheses were tested by using the Chi-Square test and the rejection criterion for the null hypothesis was:

Reject the null hypothesis if the calculated Chi-Square is greater than the critical Chi-Square at the specified degree of freedom (d.f.) at 5% level of significance (Wegner, 2007: p345).

To do the Chi-Square test of association, the expected frequencies must be greater or equal to 5. For all the expected frequencies that were less than 5, the categories were combined to have the minimum expected frequency of 5.

Demographic Profiles association with Overall leadership style

Association between overall employee satisfaction and overall leadership style of the manager results are shown below.

Null hypothesis: No association with overall leadership style

Alternative hypothesis: There is association with overall leadership style

The hypotheses were tested using Pearson's Chi-Square test statistic. Table 5 summarises the results of association between overall leadership style cross-tabulation and overall employee satisfaction as well as the other demographic variables.

Table 5: **Summary of Measures of Associations of Overall Leadership and Different Attributes**

Attribute associated with overall leadership	Calculated Chi-Square Test statistic	Chi-Square Critical value at 5% significance level	Decision
Employee satisfaction	83.85	3.84146	null hypothesis is rejected
Gender	2.28	3.84146	null hypothesis is not rejected
Race	6.70	7.81473	null hypothesis is not rejected
Age group	1.400663	7.81473	null hypothesis is not rejected
Income group	21.90805	12.59159	null hypothesis is rejected
Position	15.49	5.99146	null hypothesis is rejected
Department within the company	4.96	7.81473	null hypothesis is not rejected

The results show that there is some form of association between overall employee satisfaction and overall leadership style of the respondent's manager. Therefore, this study aimed to further understand the nature of relationship between overall employee satisfaction and leadership practices. It was important to understand these associations in order to know what influenced each demographic information had on the attributes measured. The overall employee satisfaction is not gender, race and age based.

The data also showed that employee satisfaction was closely associated with leadership style or practices.

Discussion of the Results

The results showed that there exists an important relationship between employee satisfaction and job related attributes as well as leadership (or manager) related attributes. The results of the study were reliable as witnessed by the high Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.982 showing that there was consistency within the attributes and that the instrument used in the study was reliable.

Tsui (2006) argues that the best companies have certain common traits and they don't treat people casually since they put a very high premium on valuing the employees. Yang & Chen (2010) mention that satisfied employees tend to show a higher level of loyalty and commitment to their companies and are unlikely to leave their jobs. Employee recognition takes various forms which can be formal or informal.

One interesting comment by one of the quantitative research respondent was that leaders should not have a tendency of addressing symptoms on organisational problems (matters) than addressing the underlying issues.

The results of the study support the previous studies that were done in the field of employee satisfaction.

As expected, overall employee satisfaction was associated with the level of position that one has within the company. However, overall employee satisfaction was not associated with the division the respondent was deployed in. It was also interesting to note that in this industry, overall employee satisfaction was not gender, race and age based. However employee satisfaction was associated with the income earned by the respondent. This further confirms that remuneration related attributes could key drivers of overall employee satisfaction. Nel et al. (2004: 283) note that whatever the future holds in store for the way people are remunerated in an organisation, one thing which appears certain is that effective, well-motivated and appropriately rewarded employees are pivotal to a successful business.

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