

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**The influence of leadership styles on employee motivation at an
automotive manufacturing company in South Africa**

By

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for the degree of Master of Business Administration**

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

South Africa's automotive manufacturing industry operates within a demanding environment characterised by global competition, technological change, and strict productivity and quality requirements. In such contexts, employee motivation at operational level is critical to sustained organisational performance, yet limited empirical research has examined how specific leadership styles influence motivation within South African automotive manufacturing organisations. This study investigated the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa using a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 107 operational-level employees (from a population of 165) across operational-related functions and analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability testing, and multiple regression analysis. The findings indicate that democratic and transformational leadership styles were most frequently experienced by operational-level employees, while autocratic leadership was reported least often. Overall employee motivation levels were found to be moderate to high. However, when leadership styles were analysed simultaneously and overlapping leadership influences were controlled for, servant/coaching leadership emerged as the only leadership style with a statistically significant unique effect on employee motivation, highlighting its particular relevance within the operational manufacturing context examined. The study contributes empirical evidence from an under-researched South African manufacturing setting and underscores the importance of leadership behaviours that emphasise support, development, and empowerment in sustaining employee motivation and operational effectiveness, while acknowledging the limitations associated with a cross-sectional design and single-organisation focus.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANOVA	-	Analysis of Variance
DTIC	-	Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (South Africa)
ERP	-	Enterprise Resource Planning
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
GLOBE	-	Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness
HSSREC	-	Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
I4.0	-	Industry 4.0
ISO	-	International Organization for Standardization
NAACAM	-	National Association of Automotive Component and Allied Manufacturers
NAAMSA	-	National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa
OECD	-	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OCB	-	Organisational Citizenship Behaviour
SDT	-	Self-Determination Theory
SPSS	-	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UKZN	-	University of KwaZulu-Natal

CHAPTER ONE – RESEARCH OVERVIEW

1.1. Introduction

This chapter places the study within the context of a South African automotive manufacturing organisation and sets out the basis for examining leadership styles and employee motivation. It identifies the research problem and outlines the aim, objectives, and research questions that guide the study. The chapter also explains why the study is relevant from both a practical and academic perspective. Key concepts are clarified, the scope and limitations are described, and the chapter concludes by outlining the structure of the dissertation.

The South African automotive manufacturing industry constitutes a strategically important sector operating within conditions of intense global competition and rapid technological change. The sector makes a substantial contribution to national economic output and employment. In 2021, the automotive sector contributed an estimated 4.3% to South Africa's gross domestic product, of which 2.4% was attributed to manufacturing, as reflected in Figure 1.1 (Naamsa, 2025). Industry reports further indicate that by 2023, the combined contribution of automotive manufacturing and retail activities had risen to approximately 5.3% of GDP (Naamsa, 2025). According to the DTIC's 2035 Master Plan, the manufacturing segment employs approximately 112 000 individuals across vehicle assembly and component production tiers (DTIC, 2018). Subsequent government estimates suggest that the sector currently supports more than 115 000 direct manufacturing jobs and over 500 000 jobs when the broader automotive value chain is considered (Government of South Africa, 2025). Given this economic significance, sustaining high levels of operational efficiency and product quality remains a critical priority for the industry.

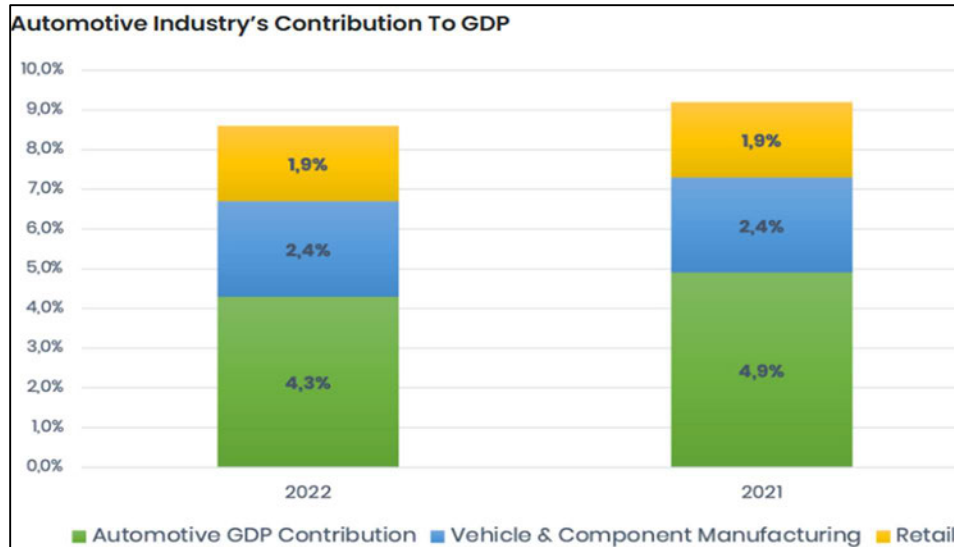


Figure 1. 1: Automotive Industry Contribution to GDP

Source: (Naamsa, 2025).

Within this operating environment, leadership plays a central role in shaping organisational culture and influencing employee behaviour. Leadership practices help establish workplace climate and affect how employees perceive their roles, interact with colleagues, and align with organisational objectives (Mphaluwa, et al., 2025). Prior research suggests that leadership styles such as transformational and democratic leadership are commonly associated with constructive interpersonal relationships, collaboration, and higher levels of employee morale and may contribute to a supportive motivational climate. By contrast, autocratic leadership approaches have been shown to foster organisational climates characterised by compliance and fear, which can suppress employee initiative and engagement (Harms, et al., 2017; Nunes & Palma-Moreira, 2024). Leadership styles are therefore commonly understood as the behavioural approaches leaders adopt to guide, influence, and motivate their workforce (Loang & Ahmad, 2022; Alegre-Quintana & Gutiérrez-Falcón, 2025).

Within manufacturing organisations, employee motivation functions as a central driver of both productive effort and adaptive behaviour. Motivation can be understood as the set of internal psychological mechanisms that influence how much effort employees apply, how long that effort is sustained, and the direction it takes in relation to work tasks (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Wako, 2025). Empirical evidence consistently indicates that higher levels of motivation are associated

with stronger work engagement and more stable performance outcomes, while diminished motivation is linked to declining productivity and increased intentions to leave the organisation (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Gautam, 2020). In automotive manufacturing settings, characterised by demanding production schedules and stringent quality requirements, motivation assumes particular importance in shaping organisational outcomes (Vasileva & Datta, 2021; Hamoumi, et al., 2025). Employees who remain motivated are more likely to respond constructively to operational changes, support continuous improvement initiatives, and uphold quality standards, whereas persistent motivational decline may manifest in absenteeism, operational errors, and the erosion of skilled labour capacity, thereby undermining competitiveness (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Senayah & Biney-Aidoo, 2024). Maintaining employee motivation is therefore not only relevant to individual well-being but also to sustained operational performance in labour-intensive and target-driven manufacturing environments (Syah, et al., 2025; Rakhmat & Sibarani, 2025).

Leadership behaviour is widely recognised as an important enabler of sustained employee motivation. Empirical studies suggest that leadership approaches characterised by support, vision, and individual consideration are more likely to satisfy employees' psychological needs and foster intrinsic motivation (Xuefeng, 2023; Makhwiting & Bruhns, 2025). Transformational leaders, for instance, provide direction and encouragement that may enhance employee commitment and engagement. By contrast, authoritarian or autocratic leadership approaches may generate short-term compliance but often undermine morale and initiative over time. Such styles have been linked to increased stress, fear, and reduced job satisfaction, which may contribute to higher employee turnover (Harms, et al., 2017; Zhang, et al., 2023). Contemporary leadership perspectives therefore emphasise participative, coaching-oriented, and emotionally intelligent leadership behaviours as more effective in sustaining motivation and performance within complex and dynamic work environments. However, as leadership behaviours may coexist within the same organisational setting, it remains important to examine how different leadership styles relate to motivation when considered together.

In response to these organisational conditions, this study investigates how different leadership styles shape employee motivation in a South African automotive manufacturing organisation, with

particular emphasis on how operational-level employees perceive leadership practices and how these perceptions influence motivation and work performance.

1.2. Background of the Study

The background of this research encompasses the context of the case company and the motivations behind the study, as well as its significance and key conceptual foundations.

1.2.1. The Study Organisation

The research was conducted at a single automotive manufacturing company operating within South Africa. To ensure confidentiality, the organisation is not identified by name and is referred to throughout this study as “the case company.” The firm is a medium-sized participant in the automotive supply chain, engaged in the production of vehicle components for both domestic assembly and export markets, consistent with South Africa’s export-oriented automotive manufacturing profile and broader value-chain integration (NAAMSA, 2022; NAACAM, 2023).

The company’s operations are located within one of South Africa’s established automotive hubs in KwaZulu-Natal, a region characterised by developed industrial infrastructure and manufacturing-focused skills ecosystems that support participation in automotive value chains (Nzama, et al., 2024; NAACAM, 2023). Organisationally, the company follows a conventional functional structure comprising departments such as Production, Maintenance, Quality, Logistics, and Administration, as illustrated in Figure 1.2. This structure reflects common patterns of functional specialisation observed in industrial manufacturing enterprises (Kollmann & Dobrovič, 2022).

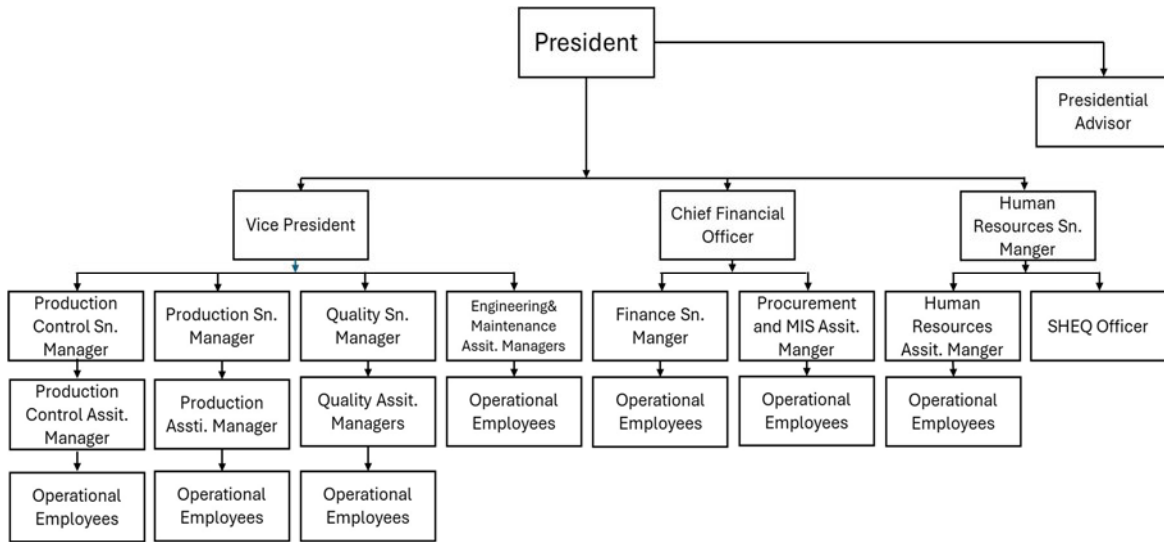


Figure 1. 2: Company General Organisational Structure

Similar to many firms in the automotive sector, the company operates under sustained pressure to meet demanding production schedules, comply with internationally aligned quality standards, and continuously enhance operational performance in order to remain competitive within tightly coordinated automotive supply networks (NAAMSA, 2022; Ziegler & Heidling, 2023). The workforce consists of a combination of line operators, technicians, supervisors, and support personnel, with the majority of employees occupying operational roles typical of manufacturing environments where productivity, process discipline, and quality control are central (Nzama, et al., 2024; Niyaz, et al., 2025).

In recent years, the organisation has faced challenges associated with the adoption of new manufacturing technologies, escalating cost pressures, and ongoing supply chain disruptions, trends that are widely documented within automotive industry research (OECD, 2024). These conditions have intensified the importance of effective leadership and sustained employee motivation, particularly at the operational level where daily execution, adaptation to change, and performance outcomes are realised (Vasileva & Datta, 2021; Niyaz, et al., 2025). Internally, concerns have emerged regarding whether prevailing management practices are optimal for supporting employee morale and engagement. These concerns provided a practical impetus for the study, as management sought clearer insight into how leadership practices influence employee motivation among operational-level employees.

1.2.2. Rationale of the Study

The rationale for this study arises from practical challenges observed within the organisation, together with a recognised gap in the academic literature. Management within the case company has identified indications of strained employee morale, including feedback relating to top-down decision-making and limited initiative among some employees, leading to concerns that prevailing leadership practices may be contributing to these outcomes. These observations are further supported by findings from the organisation's biannual employee morale and culture surveys, conducted by an independent external service provider and coordinated through the Human Resources department, which highlight similar concerns regarding communication, participation in decision-making, and employee engagement. In demanding manufacturing environments such as the automotive sector, ineffective leadership practices have been shown to negatively affect employee motivation, productivity, and quality performance (Ilke, et al., 2018; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021). However, these leadership–motivation dynamics have not previously been examined systematically within the study organisation.

While extensive empirical research has established a relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation, these findings are often context-dependent and shaped by organisational, cultural, and sector-specific conditions. Consequently, their direct applicability to manufacturing organisations in developing contexts remains uncertain, highlighting the need for contextually grounded investigation. Without such evidence, management interventions risk overlooking a critical determinant of operational performance, namely how employees experience leadership in their day-to-day work. Recent empirical studies highlight that leadership style significantly affects employee work motivation across diverse organisational contexts (Zai & Syafril, 2025; Chirwa, 2025). Other contemporary research further confirms that different leadership approaches are significantly related to motivation and performance outcomes in workplace settings (Sharma, 2024). Establishing whether specific leadership styles support or constrain employee motivation is therefore necessary to inform evidence-based leadership development and managerial practice within the organisation.

Beyond the immediate organisational context, the study is further justified by a broader scholarly rationale. Although leadership and work motivation have been widely researched, comparatively few empirical studies have examined their relationship within the South African manufacturing sector. Much of the dominant leadership literature, including research on transformational and transactional leadership and major motivation theories, has been developed and tested primarily within Western or general corporate contexts (Ilke, et al., 2018; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Monga, et al., 2023). As a result, the applicability of these theories within South African industrial environments remains insufficiently explored.

South Africa's automotive manufacturing industry represents a distinctive socio-economic and organisational context, characterised by the integration of global production standards with local labour market conditions, skills constraints, and culturally diverse workforces (Barkhuizen & Gumede, 2021; NAAMSA, 2022). Examining leadership–motivation relationships within this setting provides an opportunity to assess the contextual relevance of established leadership and motivation theories and to determine whether different patterns emerge within operational manufacturing environments.

By focusing on a South African automotive manufacturing case, this study responds to calls for leadership research that extends beyond traditional Western settings and contributes empirical evidence from emerging-market and African contexts, where structural and cultural factors may influence leadership effectiveness and employee motivation in distinct ways (Barkhuizen & Gumede, 2021; Monga, et al., 2023). The study is therefore justified by both an internal organisational need to better understand leadership-related challenges affecting employee motivation and an external academic gap relating to limited empirical evidence from South African industrial contexts. The findings are expected to inform organisational practice while contributing to the broader leadership and motivation literature.

1.2.3. Significance of the Study

The study is relevant to both organisational practice and academic inquiry. Practically, the findings are expected to benefit the participating organisation and potentially other firms within the South

African automotive sector by clarifying how different leadership styles influence employee motivation. Existing empirical research highlights the importance of leadership behaviour in shaping employee motivation and engagement, especially in manufacturing and operational environments where leadership practices directly influence day-to-day work experiences (Vasileva & Datta, 2021; Hamoumi, et al., 2025). By examining the leadership styles associated with stronger motivational outcomes, the study provides evidence that can support management efforts to refine leadership development initiatives and better align leadership behaviour with organisational goals.

Leadership practices that support employee engagement are closely linked to improved performance outcomes, which are critical for achieving production targets, maintaining quality standards, and preserving competitiveness in high-pressure manufacturing environments (Vasileva & Datta, 2021; Hamoumi, et al., 2025). In this regard, the findings of the study can inform organisational responses such as the design of leadership development initiatives, the clarification of leadership role expectations, and the use of targeted coaching interventions that encourage more inclusive and empowering leadership approaches.

Empirical research further suggests that participative and transformational leadership styles are linked to positive motivational outcomes, whereas less supportive leadership approaches are more likely to undermine motivation and contribute to disengagement (Calluso & Devetag, 2024; Hamoumi, et al., 2025). However, leadership behaviours may coexist within the same organisational context, and where specific leadership practices are found to negatively affect motivation, organisations may take corrective action through policy adjustments, leadership training, or performance management mechanisms.

Beyond leadership practice, the study also has implications for broader employee outcomes. Work motivation has been shown to be closely associated with job satisfaction, turnover intention, and employee retention, particularly in labour-intensive environments where motivation plays a key role in reducing attrition and associated organisational costs (Syah, et al., 2025). Empirical findings further indicate that higher levels of employee motivation and job satisfaction are linked to lower

turnover intentions, highlighting the stability and cost-efficiency benefits of effective leadership practices (Syah, et al., 2025; Rakhmat & Sibarani, 2025).

From an academic standpoint, the study extends leadership and motivation literature by generating empirical evidence drawn from a South African manufacturing context that remains comparatively under-represented in existing research. Although leadership and motivation theories have been widely tested in Western and general corporate environments, their relevance within African industrial settings has received far less empirical attention. By analysing these relationships within an automotive manufacturing organisation, the study provides context-sensitive insights and responds to calls for leadership research that accounts for cultural and industrial variation in emerging-market contexts (Calluso & Devetag, 2024; Vasileva & Datta, 2021). In addition, the application of a quantitative research approach supported by validated measurement instruments strengthens the study's methodological robustness and supports the replicability of its findings.

1.2.4. Leadership

Leadership is commonly conceptualised as a social influence process through which leaders shape direction, align collective effort, and facilitate the achievement of shared organisational goals. Contemporary research emphasises that leadership extends beyond task coordination to include the management of relational and psychological conditions that influence employee motivation and performance (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). Through their behaviours and interactions, leaders guide, motivate, and enable employees, thereby shaping attitudes, engagement levels, and team performance outcomes (Bakker , et al., 2023).

Leadership style refers to relatively consistent patterns of leader behaviour and approaches used when directing, supporting, and influencing subordinates. It reflects how leaders exercise authority, make decisions, and either encourage or restrict employee participation in work-related processes (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). Leadership styles typically range along a continuum from more directive and task-focused approaches to more participative and relationship-oriented approaches. For example, some leaders rely on clear instruction and close supervision, while others emphasise

collaboration and shared decision-making. These approaches are not mutually exclusive and may be combined or adapted in response to situational demands (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023).

Leadership theory offers a conceptual basis for differentiating how leaders influence employee behaviour and organisational outcomes. Early work by Lewin and colleagues distinguished between autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership approaches, distinctions that continue to underpin contemporary leadership scholarship (Lewin, et al., 1939). Building on this foundation, later theories introduced more nuanced explanations of leadership influence, most notably through the contrast between transactional and transformational leadership. These perspectives distinguish leadership that relies on structured exchanges and corrective control from leadership that seeks to motivate followers through inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013; Bakker , et al., 2023). Empirical studies repeatedly demonstrate that transformational leadership behaviours are associated with stronger employee engagement and improved performance, frequently mediated by increased personal initiative and the effective mobilisation of individual capabilities (Bakker , et al., 2023).

Beyond traditional leadership frameworks, contemporary research has expanded to include perspectives such as servant leadership, which foregrounds employee growth and well-being, and situational leadership, which emphasises the adjustment of leadership behaviour in response to follower capability and task demands (Greenleaf, 1977; Del Pino-Marchito, et al., 2025). Related streams of research have also highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence and ethical leadership in fostering trust and psychological safety, both of which are closely linked to sustained motivation, learning, and performance (Abuzaid, et al., 2024; Ul Rehman, et al., 2025). In the context of this study, leadership is conceptualised in terms of leadership style and observable behaviours, drawing on established theoretical perspectives while remaining responsive to the operational conditions characteristic of automotive manufacturing.

1.2.5. Motivation

In organisational contexts, workplace motivation reflects the psychological processes that determine how employees channel their effort, how sustained that effort is, and the direction it

takes in relation to work activities (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021). These processes influence not only the level of effort applied to tasks but also employees' ability to remain engaged under pressure and to consistently uphold required performance standards. Motivation does not arise in isolation; rather, it is shaped through the interaction of individual attributes, leadership behaviour, job design, and organisational practices, all of which affect how employees perceive and respond to their work environment (Slemp, et al., 2021).

Motivation theory frequently differentiates between intrinsic motivation, which is linked to enjoyment and interest in the work itself, and extrinsic motivation, which is shaped by external incentives or the avoidance of adverse outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Layek & Koodamara, 2024). In manufacturing environments, both forms of motivation are typically present, as standardised work processes operate alongside performance-based incentives. Research indicates that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are each associated with key work-related outcomes, although their relative effects may differ depending on organisational conditions, job characteristics, and reward systems in place (Aljumah, 2023; Figueiredo, et al., 2025).

Classic motivation theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory offer early insights into how job content and work conditions shape employee motivation (Maslow, 1943; Herzberg, 1959). While these frameworks have been widely critiqued, they continue to influence contemporary thinking on job design and motivational processes. Subsequent motivation research has increasingly been shaped by Self-Determination Theory, which focuses on the fulfilment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key drivers of sustained motivation. Evidence suggests that when these psychological needs are supported within the work environment, employees are more likely to exhibit durable and self-regulated motivation, whereas motivation and overall functioning tend to deteriorate when such needs are frustrated (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021).

In practical terms, employee motivation is reflected in observable behaviours such as persistence, initiative, punctuality, and adherence to quality standards. Conversely, low motivation is commonly associated with withdrawal behaviours and reduced discretionary effort. Empirical research consistently links motivational quality and psychological need satisfaction to work

engagement and everyday work behaviour, underscoring the relevance of motivation for organisational performance (Scharp, et al., 2022; De Vos, et al., 2020).

In this study, motivation is examined specifically among operational-level employees, with attention given to their drive to perform routine production tasks effectively. Although job satisfaction and performance are not measured directly, motivation is closely related to both constructs. By examining employee motivation in relation to different leadership styles, the study seeks to determine whether supportive and empowering leadership behaviours are associated with higher levels of motivation, consistent with established motivational theory and empirical evidence (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Slemp, et al., 2021).

1.3. Problem Statement

Although leadership is widely recognised as a key influence on employee motivation, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how different leadership styles shape motivation within the selected automotive manufacturing organisation. Research conducted within South African manufacturing contexts indicates that leadership style is a significant predictor of employee engagement and discretionary effort, particularly at operational level where day-to-day interaction with supervisors and team leaders is most frequent (Southgate, Aderibigbe, Balogun, & Mahembe, 2023). However, internal observations within the organisation suggest that perceptions of autocratic and bureaucratic leadership practices may exist in certain operational areas, potentially affecting employee morale, engagement, and motivation on the production floor. Employees have reportedly demonstrated reduced initiative and growing dissatisfaction, outcomes that are consistent with studies linking unsupportive or controlling leadership behaviours to disengagement and diminished work motivation (Southgate, et al., 2023; Nunes & Palma-Moreira, 2024). Despite these indications, leadership–motivation dynamics have not been empirically examined within the organisation, and systematic evidence regarding the prevalence of specific leadership styles and their influence on daily motivation among operational employees remains limited.

This lack of insight presents a challenge for management, particularly within an automotive manufacturing environment characterised by demanding production targets, stringent quality

requirements, and continuous improvement imperatives. Automotive production systems are commonly guided by principles associated with the Toyota Way and lean manufacturing, within which leadership behaviour plays a critical role in shaping employee involvement, problem-solving activities, and adherence to standardised work practices (Vanichchinchai, 2023). Furthermore, South African automotive firms operate within a context marked by Industry 4.0 pressures and increasing competition for skilled operational labour, elevating the strategic importance of effective leadership and employee retention (Macpherson, 2024). In the absence of evidence-based understanding of how leadership behaviours influence motivation in this setting, management may struggle to design leadership development initiatives and people-management strategies that are aligned with operational realities.

If certain leadership styles within the organisation are constraining employee motivation, the firm faces risks that are particularly costly in manufacturing environments. Empirical studies indicate that negative leadership climates, including toxic or excessively controlling leadership, are associated with burnout, increased turnover intention, and reduced organisational commitment (Nunes & Palma-Moreira, 2024; Senayah & Biney-Aidoo, 2024). In labour-intensive manufacturing operations, such outcomes may result in higher absenteeism, loss of experienced employees, increased training costs, and erosion of operational knowledge, ultimately weakening competitiveness within the automotive supply chain (Senayah & Biney-Aidoo, 2024; Macpherson, 2024).

This study addresses the need to understand how leadership styles are related to employee motivation within an automotive manufacturing organisation. The focus is placed on operational-level employees, with the study examining the leadership styles they most frequently encounter and how these leadership approaches are associated with key motivational drivers in day-to-day production activities. By exploring these relationships, the study seeks to generate empirically grounded insights that can support management efforts to enhance leadership practices linked to motivation, engagement, and employee retention. Developing a clearer understanding of the leadership–motivation link is expected to inform the cultivation of more effective leadership practices and to support sustained operational performance in the South African automotive manufacturing context.

1.4. Research Aim, Objectives and Questions

1.4.1. Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the effect of leadership styles on employee motivation within an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa, with specific focus on operational-level employees.

1.4.2. Research Objectives

- **Objective one:** To identify the dominant leadership styles experienced by operational-level employees at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa.
- **Objective two:** To assess the level of employee motivation across operational roles at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa.
- **Objective three:** To examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation experienced by operational-level employees at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa.

1.4.3. Research Questions

To fulfil the above objectives, the study will answer the following key research questions:

- **Objective one:** What are the most dominant leadership styles experienced by operational-level employees at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa?
- **Objective two:** How motivated are employees across operational levels under different leadership styles at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa?
- **Objective three:** What is the relationship between specific leadership styles and the level of employee motivation at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa?

1.5. Research Methodology

The study employed a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation in a South African automotive manufacturing organisation. This design was considered appropriate for the study's objectives, as it enabled the structured collection of standardised data within a single organisational setting and supported the use of statistical analysis to assess associations between leadership behaviours and motivational outcomes.

The study population consisted of operational-level employees across production, maintenance, quality, logistics, and related support functions, excluding management positions. A non-probability purposive sampling approach was used, with all eligible operational employees invited to participate. Participation was limited to permanent employees with at least one year of service to ensure adequate exposure to supervisory leadership practice.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising three sections. The first section gathered demographic information to describe the respondent profile, while the second section focused on leadership styles using items adapted from established instruments designed to capture observable leadership behaviours. The third section measured employee motivation using items drawn from recognised work motivation scales. Perceptual responses were recorded on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was administered electronically via an online survey platform, with participation being voluntary and anonymous. In line with ethical requirements, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation.

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistical techniques were applied to summarise demographic characteristics and the main study variables. The internal consistency of the leadership and motivation measures was evaluated through reliability analysis. To examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation, multiple regression analysis was employed, with overall model significance assessed using the ANOVA F-test.

The credibility of the study was supported through the use of established measurement instruments, pilot testing, consistent administration procedures, and appropriate statistical techniques to assess reliability. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC), and participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their involvement, as well as the measures in place to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

1.6. Limitations of the study

When interpreting the findings of this study, several limitations should be taken into account. The cross-sectional research design constrains the ability to draw causal inferences regarding the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation, as the results indicate associations rather than cause-and-effect relationships. In addition, the study was undertaken within a single automotive manufacturing organisation, which may limit the broader applicability of the findings across different organisational contexts or industry sectors. The use of self-administered questionnaire data also presents a potential source of response bias, as participants' responses may be shaped by personal perceptions or tendencies toward socially desirable answering.

Despite these constraints, the study provides empirically grounded insights into how leadership styles are related to employee motivation within an operational manufacturing environment, thereby adding context-specific evidence to the broader leadership literature.

1.7. Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured across six chapters that collectively examine the influence of leadership styles on employee motivation within a South African automotive manufacturing setting.

- **Chapter One: Research Overview**

Chapter One establishes the context of the study by outlining the research background and defining the problem under investigation. It sets out the aim, objectives, and research

questions that guide the inquiry, and provides an overview of the methodological approach adopted. The chapter also discusses the significance of the study and acknowledges key limitations, thereby setting the direction for the research that follows.

- **Chapter Two: Literature review**

Chapter Two examines existing scholarship on leadership and employee motivation by engaging with both classical and contemporary leadership theories, as well as key motivation frameworks. Relevant empirical studies are reviewed to assess how these theories have been applied in prior research, with particular attention given to gaps in the literature relating to manufacturing organisations in the South African context. The chapter concludes by developing a conceptual framework that informs the empirical investigation undertaken in this study.

- **Chapter Three: Research methodology**

Chapter Three describes the methodological framework guiding the study, including the quantitative and cross-sectional design adopted to address the research objectives. It outlines the study population and sampling approach, explains the data collection process, and addresses the ethical considerations governing the research. The chapter further details the statistical methods applied to evaluate measurement reliability and validity, as well as to examine relationships among the key study variables.

- **Chapter Four: Results**

Chapter Four reports the empirical results of the study, beginning with a descriptive profile of the respondent sample. It then presents both descriptive and inferential findings relating to leadership styles, employee motivation, and the relationships between these variables. The results are presented objectively and are supported by relevant tables and figures to facilitate clarity and interpretation.

- **Chapter Five: Discussion**

Chapter Five analyses the study's findings by relating them to the research objectives, the conceptual framework, and relevant literature. The chapter examines the implications of

the results within the organisational and contextual setting of the study, while also reflecting on the study's contributions and the limitations identified.

- **Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations**

Chapter Six draws the study to a close by synthesising the key findings and presenting conclusions grounded in the empirical results. The chapter outlines practical recommendations aimed at strengthening leadership practice and supporting employee motivation, and it highlights areas where further research may extend understanding in this field.

Overall, the dissertation is structured to progress logically from problem formulation and theoretical grounding through empirical analysis to interpretation and practical recommendations, ensuring coherence and clarity throughout the study.

1.8. Chapter Summary

This chapter positioned the study within the South African automotive manufacturing sector and clarified the purpose of the research. It highlighted the significance of leadership in shaping employee motivation and explained why examining the experiences of operational-level employees is important for understanding how leadership styles influence motivation within production-driven environments.

The chapter also established the conceptual and analytical foundations of the study by defining key terms and formally presenting the research problem, together with the study's aim, objectives, and research questions. An overview of the methodological approach was provided, noting the use of a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine employees' perceptions of leadership styles and motivation within the organisational context under investigation.

In addition, the chapter outlined the scope and boundaries of the study and provided a brief overview of the structure of the dissertation to guide the reader. This foundation sets the stage for

the subsequent chapter, which engages with leadership and motivation theories and reviews relevant empirical literature in order to develop the theoretical framework for the study.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Leadership and employee motivation are widely recognised as important determinants of organisational performance, particularly in operational environments where reliability, quality, and continuous improvement are essential. Contemporary leadership research increasingly conceptualises leadership as a relational and behavioural process through which leaders shape work climates, influence employee attitudes, and enable coordinated goal achievement within complex organisational systems (Ilke, et al., 2018; Dirani, et al., 2020; Serang, et al., 2024). In parallel, motivation research emphasises that sustained employee effort is influenced not only by external incentives but also by the extent to which work environments support psychological needs, meaningful work, and internalised commitment to organisational goals (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; McAnally & Hagger, 2024). These relationships are particularly salient in manufacturing and automotive contexts, where organisations face ongoing technological change, productivity pressures, skills transitions, and intensified global competition. In such environments, leadership behaviours that support employee engagement and adaptability are increasingly viewed as central to organisational resilience and performance (WMF, 2023; KPMG, 2023).

Within the South African automotive sector, the adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies and evolving workforce requirements further reinforce the need for leadership approaches that sustain employee motivation, retention, and capability development at operational level (Macpherson, 2024). Motivation is commonly conceptualised as the psychological processes that energise, direct, and sustain work-related behaviour. Empirical evidence consistently supports a multidimensional perspective in which autonomous forms of motivation, associated with internalised values and interest, are more strongly linked to positive work outcomes than controlled forms driven primarily by external pressures (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; McAnally & Hagger, 2024). Large-scale studies further indicate that autonomy and social relatedness are positively associated with work motivation across diverse organisational contexts, highlighting the practical relevance of leadership behaviours that support these conditions (Vo, et al., 2022).

Drawing on this body of theory and empirical evidence, Figure 2.1 illustrates a conceptual model that brings together leadership styles, employee motivation, and employee outcomes. The model integrates established leadership and motivation perspectives to provide a coherent framework for the empirical analysis that follows, rather than proposing a new theoretical approach.

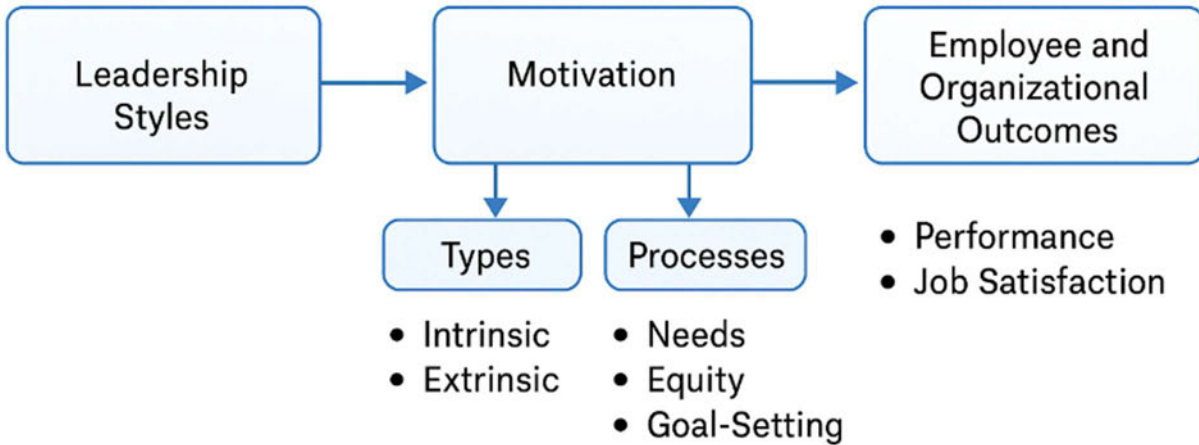


Figure 2. 1: Conceptual model of the leadership–motivation–employee outcomes relationship

Source: Constructed by the author based on the focus of the study

Guided by this framework, the chapter reviews relevant leadership and motivation literature to establish the conceptual foundation for the study. Section 2.2 clarifies leadership as a construct and outlines core leadership roles and behaviours. Section 2.3 examines major leadership styles and their relevance to employee motivation. Section 2.4 introduces motivation as a workplace construct and reviews key motivational drivers and outcomes, while Section 2.5 evaluates influential motivation theories and contemporary frameworks. Section 2.6 then integrates the leadership and motivation literature to demonstrate how leadership behaviours interact with motivational processes to shape employee outcomes.

2.2. Leadership: Definitions, Roles, and Skills

Leadership is commonly described as a process through which individuals influence others to achieve collective goals. Contemporary scholarship places emphasis on influence, direction, and collective goal attainment rather than formal authority alone, framing leadership as a relational and

social process that involves guiding, motivating, and enabling individuals or groups to work towards shared objectives (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). Within organisational contexts, leadership plays a central role in aligning employees with strategic objectives and fostering commitment, collaboration, and trust. Unlike management, which focuses primarily on planning, organising, and control, leadership is concerned with setting direction, motivating people, and enabling change (Uhl-Bien, et al., 2014; Gede, 2025).

Leadership roles typically encompass articulating goals, making decisions, motivating employees, and facilitating communication. Effective leadership extends beyond reliance on hierarchical authority and involves creating work environments in which employees feel valued, supported, and able to contribute meaningfully. Empirical research consistently indicates that leadership behaviours characterised by clarity, respectful interaction, open communication, and psychological safety are associated with more positive employee attitudes, stronger team functioning, and improved performance outcomes (Flores, et al., 2023; Macpherson, 2024).

Research has consistently highlighted specific skills and competencies that underpin effective leadership. Communication is particularly important, as leaders are required to communicate expectations clearly, engage in active listening, and provide meaningful feedback (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). Emotional intelligence has also been shown to enhance leadership effectiveness by supporting leaders' ability to regulate emotions, build trust, and respond appropriately to employee needs (Miao, et al., 2017; Abuzaid, et al., 2024). In addition, decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict-management skills enable leaders to navigate complex organisational challenges while maintaining team cohesion (Yahong & Loang, 2023).

While early leadership research focused heavily on personality traits, contemporary perspectives emphasise behavioural flexibility and adaptability. Leadership effectiveness is increasingly understood as the capacity to adjust behaviours in response to situational demands and employee needs rather than reliance on a fixed set of traits. Leaders may adopt more directive approaches in periods of crisis while employing participative or empowering behaviours when developing employee capability and commitment (Dirani, et al., 2020; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). This adaptive

capacity is widely regarded as a critical leadership competence in dynamic and high-pressure organisational environments.

Overall, leadership can be viewed as a dynamic and relational process that integrates influence, communication, and adaptability. Its effectiveness is ultimately reflected in its impact on employee attitudes, motivation, and collective performance.

2.3. Leadership Styles

Leadership style can be understood as the pattern through which leaders enact authority, provide direction, and engage with employees in the workplace (Dirani, et al., 2020; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). Contemporary leadership scholarship increasingly views leadership behaviour as adaptable rather than static, recognising that leaders vary in how they balance control and empowerment, as well as task-focused and relational approaches. These behavioural orientations influence employee motivation in different ways, particularly through how autonomy, support, and expectations are communicated and experienced within specific organisational and cultural settings (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023; Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013).

Building on this understanding, leadership research has developed a range of frameworks to categorise leadership styles. The GLOBE study represents a notable contribution by identifying broad leadership orientations, including charismatic or value-based, team-oriented, participative, humane-oriented, autonomous, and self-protective leadership, and by emphasising the influence of cultural and organisational context on leadership expectations and outcomes (Alexander, et al., 2024). More recent studies have shifted toward behaviourally defined leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, servant, and ethical leadership. These approaches differ in the extent to which leaders prioritise direction, employee involvement, and development, providing a useful basis for examining how leadership behaviour shapes motivation within organisational settings (Irianti, et al., 2024; Eva, et al., 2019).

Empirical research frequently associates leadership approaches that emphasise empowerment, ethical conduct, and employee development with higher levels of intrinsic motivation, engagement,

and resilience. In contrast, leadership styles characterised by excessive control or disengagement are more frequently linked to diminished motivation and reduced initiative over time. Transactional leadership occupies an intermediate position, as it can regulate performance through contingent rewards and monitoring, but may be less effective in sustaining motivation in the absence of intrinsic drivers (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Makhwiting & Bruhns, 2025). Importantly, contemporary scholarship emphasises that leadership effectiveness is context-dependent, with the motivational impact of leadership styles shaped by situational demands, task characteristics, and employee expectations.

Table 2.1 summarises the defining characteristics and typical motivational implications of major leadership styles based on contemporary empirical research. Overall, leadership behaviours that support vision, empowerment, ethical conduct, and employee development tend to strengthen intrinsic motivation and discretionary effort, while overly controlling or disengaged approaches are more commonly associated with reduced morale and weaker commitment, particularly in skill- and knowledge-intensive work environments.

Table 2. 1: Summary of Leadership Styles – Key Traits and Motivational Impact

Leadership Style	Key Characteristics	Typical Impact on Employee Motivation
Transformational	Vision-driven; inspires change; empowers employees	Strongly positive – enhances intrinsic motivation, engagement, and meaning at work by supporting growth and autonomy (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019; Bakker, et al., 2023).
Transactional	Goal-focused; contingent rewards and corrective actions	Moderately positive – improves short-term effort through extrinsic rewards but offers limited support for sustained intrinsic motivation (Makhwiting & Bruhns, 2025).
Autocratic (Authoritarian)	Centralised authority; limited employee input	Often negative – may secure short-term compliance but tends to undermine morale and intrinsic motivation over time (Harms, et al., 2017; Southgate, et al., 2023).
Democratic (Participative)	Employee involvement in decision-making	Positive – strengthens ownership, satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation by supporting autonomy and voice (Somech, 2006; Pervaiz, et al., 2021).
Team-Oriented	Emphasis on collaboration and shared goals	Positive – enhances collective motivation and commitment through cohesion and mutual support (Wang, et al., 2013; Mathieu, et al., 2019).
Humane-Oriented (Supportive)	Compassionate; attentive to employee well-being	Positive – promotes trust, loyalty, and psychological safety, supporting sustained motivation (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004; Slemp, et al., 2021).
Laissez-Faire	Minimal guidance; avoidance of leadership responsibility	Mostly negative – lack of feedback and direction often leads to ambiguity, disengagement, and low motivation (Skogstad, et al., 2007; Breevaart & Zacher, 2019).
Servant Leadership	Prioritises employee growth; power sharing	Highly positive – supports higher-order needs, organisational citizenship behaviours, and long-term commitment (Eva, et al., 2019; Nunes & Palma-Moreira, 2024).
Ethical Leadership	Integrity, fairness, and transparency	Positive – builds trust and moral legitimacy, encouraging reciprocal effort and commitment (Bedi, et al., 2016; Abuzaid, et al., 2024).
Charismatic	Visionary; emotionally expressive; inspirational	Highly positive – generates enthusiasm and identification with the leader, though risks dependency if unchecked (Boas, et al., 1993; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023).
Adaptive (Situational)	Behavioural flexibility across contexts	Positive – sustains motivation by aligning leadership behaviour with situational and employee needs (Del Pino-Marchito, et al., 2025; Dirani, et al., 2020).

Source: Adapted by the author based on literature

2.3.1. Transformational Leadership Style

Transformational leadership refers to a leadership approach in which leaders motivate, empower, and support employees to perform beyond routine or contractual expectations. Rather than concentrating solely on task completion or short-term performance outcomes, transformational leaders aim to enhance employees' values, aspirations, and capabilities, thereby fostering individual growth alongside organisational advancement. Contemporary literature conceptualises transformational leadership as a pattern of behaviours that includes articulating an inspiring vision, modelling desired values, encouraging intellectual stimulation, and demonstrating individualised consideration. Collectively, these behaviours contribute to the development of shared purpose, trust, and alignment between leaders and followers (Bakker , et al., 2023; Breevaart & Zacher, 2019; Mphaluwa, et al., 2025; Hamoumi, et al., 2025).

From a motivational standpoint, transformational leadership has been strongly linked to the enhancement of intrinsic motivation among employees. This leadership approach places emphasis on shared purpose, personal development, and the meaningful contribution of work, thereby supporting employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Research informed by self-determination theory suggests that when leadership is perceived as supportive and development-oriented, employees are more likely to internalise organisational goals and exhibit higher levels of discretionary effort and engagement (Abu-Qutaish, et al., 2025; Slemp, et al., 2021).

In addition, transformational leaders promote motivation by encouraging critical reflection, learning, and experimentation within the workplace. Such behaviours can strengthen employees' sense of self-efficacy and resilience, while also reducing apprehension associated with failure. Empirical evidence indicates that these motivational mechanisms are associated with positive work-related outcomes, including higher job satisfaction, stronger organisational commitment, and increased organisational citizenship behaviours. These effects are particularly evident in operational and manufacturing environments, where continuous improvement and problem-solving are central to performance expectations (Bakker , et al., 2023; Mphaluwa, et al., 2025; Hamoumi, et al., 2025).

Overall, transformational leadership reframes motivation from a predominantly transactional exchange to a more developmental and purpose-driven process. By aligning organisational objectives with employees' values and development needs, transformational leaders foster engagement and commitment that support sustained performance over time.

2.3.2. Transactional Leadership Style

Transactional leadership is characterised by an exchange-based relationship between leaders and employees, in which performance is regulated through clearly defined expectations, monitoring, and contingent rewards. This leadership style prioritises structure, control, and task execution by linking rewards or corrective actions directly to performance outcomes, thereby reinforcing compliance and procedural discipline rather than long-term development or inspiration (Asante, 2025; Makhwiting & Bruhns, 2025).

Transactional leadership is typically expressed through two primary behavioural mechanisms, namely contingent reward and management by exception. Under contingent reward, leaders offer material or symbolic incentives in response to employees' achievement of specified performance standards. Management by exception, by contrast, involves leader intervention when performance falls outside agreed expectations, with corrective action taken to address deviations. Empirical evidence suggests that these mechanisms enhance role clarity, predictability, and perceptions of fairness, particularly in structured environments where performance standards are explicit and measurable (Mphaluwa, et al., 2025; Chen, et al., 2023).

From a motivational perspective, transactional leadership primarily activates extrinsic motivation by encouraging effort in anticipation of external rewards such as pay, recognition, or performance-based incentives. Evidence suggests that this approach is effective in promoting task compliance, operational consistency, and baseline job satisfaction, especially in routine or safety-critical roles where precision and adherence to procedures are essential (Cerasoli, et al., 2014; Asante, 2025). In manufacturing contexts, transactional leadership therefore plays a stabilising role by supporting standardisation, quality control, and procedural discipline.

However, research informed by self-determination theory indicates that excessive reliance on contingent rewards may limit the depth and sustainability of motivation by shifting attention away from task meaning and personal development. Over time, such emphasis on external reinforcement can reduce intrinsic motivation, creativity, and discretionary effort (Ng & Cheah, 2025; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021). Consistent with this perspective, contemporary studies show that while transactional leadership is associated with task efficiency and short-term performance stability, it demonstrates weaker relationships with long-term engagement and commitment, particularly in dynamic or innovation-driven environments (Mphaluwa, et al., 2025; Makhwiting & Bruhns, 2025).

Overall, transactional leadership remains a functional and necessary approach in contexts requiring control, consistency, and compliance, such as automotive manufacturing operations. Nevertheless, empirical evidence increasingly supports integrating transactional mechanisms with more empowering leadership styles to balance operational discipline with sustained motivation and adaptability.

2.3.3. Autocratic Leadership Style

Autocratic leadership, often described as authoritarian leadership, is associated with highly centralised decision-making, tight managerial control, and limited participation by employees. Leaders adopting this approach typically make decisions unilaterally and expect compliance with minimal consultation, relying on hierarchical authority, formal rules, and close supervision. Communication is predominantly top-down, with emphasis placed on efficiency, discipline, and adherence to procedures rather than participation or empowerment (Harms, et al., 2017; Nunes & Palma-Moreira, 2024).

In operational settings such as manufacturing, autocratic leadership may have limited short-term utility in situations requiring rapid decision-making, risk containment, or immediate compliance, particularly during crises or safety-critical incidents where ambiguity must be minimised (Vanichchinchai, 2023; Ziegler & Heidling, 2023). However, the effectiveness of this leadership style is highly context dependent and generally constrained to exceptional circumstances.

Extensive empirical evidence indicates that sustained reliance on autocratic leadership is associated with predominantly negative motivational outcomes. By restricting autonomy and excluding employees from decision-making processes, this leadership style undermines intrinsic motivation and psychological empowerment. Employees exposed to prolonged authoritarian control frequently report lower self-efficacy, reduced job satisfaction, diminished engagement, and suppressed voice and initiative (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Southgate, et al., 2023).

Recent studies further link authoritarian leadership behaviours to adverse workforce outcomes, including increased burnout, absenteeism, and turnover intentions, particularly in labour-intensive and repetitive operational roles where discretion is already limited (Nunes & Palma-Moreira, 2024; Senayah & Biney-Aidoo, 2024). Such outcomes pose significant risks for manufacturing organisations that depend on stable, skilled, and engaged operational workforces.

Overall, while autocratic leadership may retain situational relevance in temporary or emergency contexts, its continued or excessive use is widely regarded as incompatible with sustained employee motivation, engagement, and performance. Contemporary leadership research therefore advocates limiting authoritarian practices and complementing them with more participative or supportive leadership approaches to promote long-term organisational effectiveness.

2.3.4. Participative (Democratic) Leadership Style

Participative leadership, commonly referred to as democratic leadership, emphasises the involvement of employees in organisational decision-making, problem-solving, and goal-setting activities. Rather than relying on unilateral authority, participative leaders encourage dialogue, information sharing, and collective input while retaining responsibility for final decisions. Contemporary leadership research frames participative leadership as a relational and inclusive approach that values employee voice, transparency, and shared responsibility, particularly in environments requiring coordination and continuous improvement (Southgate, et al., 2023; Van der Hoek, et al., 2018).

In organisational settings, participative leadership is commonly reflected through regular team consultations, collaborative planning, and open communication channels that enable employees to contribute ideas and feedback. Such practices signal respect for employee expertise and foster climates of trust and psychological safety, in which employees feel able to express views and participate constructively without fear of negative consequences (Sherf & Venkataramani, 2015; Dirani, et al., 2020; Toufighi, et al., 2024).

From a motivational standpoint, participative leadership has been repeatedly linked to elevated levels of intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment. By involving employees in decisions that affect their work, leaders support key psychological needs related to autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby encouraging internalisation of organisational goals and discretionary effort (Abu-Qutaish, et al., 2025). Empirical studies within industrial contexts further indicate that participative leadership enhances empowerment and accountability by strengthening employees' sense of ownership over work outcomes (Southgate, et al., 2023; Kim & Yoon, 2025).

Participative leadership also contributes to higher-quality leader–member relationships by promoting mutual respect and reciprocal influence, which are associated with trust, commitment, and sustained motivation in team-based operational environments (Van der Hoek, et al., 2018; Mpuangnan, et al., 2024). However, the approach has limitations. In time-sensitive or highly regulated contexts, extensive consultation may slow decision-making or create ambiguity regarding authority, and some employees may prefer more directive leadership when tasks are urgent or technically complex.

Overall, despite these constraints, empirical evidence suggests that the motivational benefits of participative leadership generally outweigh its drawbacks in stable or moderately dynamic environments. By fostering inclusion, autonomy, and shared responsibility, participative leadership supports engagement, collaboration, and longer-term organisational sustainability.

2.3.5. Team-Oriented Leadership Style

Team-oriented leadership emphasises collaboration, mutual trust, and shared responsibility in the pursuit of collective goals. Rather than prioritising individual authority or performance, this leadership approach focuses on aligning individual contributions with team objectives, strengthening interdependence, and reinforcing collective accountability. Contemporary research characterises team-oriented leaders as facilitators who promote coordination, role clarity, and cohesive execution, particularly in contexts where task interdependence and cooperation are essential (Mathieu, et al., 2019; Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017; Sacavém, et al., 2025).

In practice, team-oriented leadership supports open communication, cooperative problem-solving, and constructive conflict management, creating environments in which employees feel psychologically safe to collaborate and support one another. Empirical evidence indicates that such behaviours strengthen relational trust, enhance coordination, and reduce siloed working, especially in operational and project-based settings (Wu & Cormican, 2021; Dirani, et al., 2020). Unlike participative leadership, which places greater emphasis on shared decision-making, team-oriented leadership focuses more strongly on collective execution and cohesion once goals and roles are defined.

From a motivational perspective, team-oriented leadership enhances intrinsic and social motivation by fostering belonging, shared identity, and collective commitment. By supporting employees' relational needs, leaders strengthen engagement, morale, and persistence, particularly in work environments that require sustained collaboration and shared accountability (De Vos, et al., 2020; Slemp, et al., 2021). Closely linked to this process is collective efficacy, defined as a shared belief in a team's capability to perform effectively, which has been shown to reinforce motivation, resilience, and adaptive performance in complex or uncertain contexts (Mathieu, et al., 2019; Tang, et al., 2024).

However, the effectiveness of team-oriented leadership depends on balance. Excessive emphasis on consensus and harmony may delay decision-making or weaken individual accountability if roles and expectations are insufficiently clear. Research therefore highlights the importance of

integrating collective cohesion with clear performance standards and role definition to avoid diffusion of responsibility (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017; Gopalakrishnan, 2024).

Overall, team-oriented leadership supports employee motivation by promoting belonging, mutual respect, and shared purpose. By integrating individual effort into coordinated team processes, this leadership style enhances sustained engagement, cooperation, and performance in environments where collaboration and interdependence are critical.

2.3.6. Humane-Oriented (Supportive) Leadership Style

Humane-oriented leadership, derived from the GLOBE cultural framework, reflects a people-centred approach that emphasises compassion, fairness, and respect for employees (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004; Dorfman, et al., 2012; Lašáková, et al., 2025). Leaders adopting this style demonstrate concern for employee well-being and cultivate supportive interpersonal relationships. In culturally diverse and high-pressure organisational contexts, such behaviours are particularly influential, as they shape leader–follower interactions and employees’ experiences of dignity, inclusion, and fair treatment (Zander, 2021).

In applied organisational settings, humane-oriented leadership is reflected in supportive behaviours that extend beyond formal task requirements, such as assisting employees during periods of difficulty, acknowledging individual contributions, and promoting open and respectful communication. Research indicates that these behaviours contribute to higher levels of engagement and employee voice by fostering work environments characterised by trust and psychological safety. In such contexts, employees are more willing to express concerns and share ideas without fear of negative repercussions (Adikoeswanto, et al., 2024; Kim, et al., 2021).

From a motivational perspective, humane-oriented leadership has been linked to favourable employee outcomes, including increased job satisfaction, stronger work engagement, and enhanced organisational commitment. When leaders are perceived as genuinely caring and supportive, employees are more likely to develop a sense of attachment to the organisation and to display discretionary effort, particularly when supportive behaviours are evident in routine

interactions and collaborative practices (Uman, et al., 2023; Eva, et al., 2019). These effects are commonly interpreted through need-based motivational mechanisms, whereby supportive leadership fulfils employees' needs for relatedness and psychological security, thereby reinforcing more autonomous and sustained forms of motivation (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Hein & Urban, 2025).

However, supportive leadership is most effective when balanced with clear performance expectations and accountability. Contemporary research cautions that high levels of psychological safety without sufficient role clarity or performance standards may weaken task focus in certain operational contexts (Eldor, et al., 2023). Accordingly, humane-oriented leadership is most motivating when empathy and care are complemented by clearly communicated expectations, ensuring that trust and commitment are maintained without compromising performance discipline.

2.3.7. Laissez-Faire Leadership Style

Laissez-faire leadership is commonly described as a passive and avoidant approach in which leaders provide minimal guidance, delay decision-making, and refrain from intervening when support is required. Rather than actively shaping goals, standards, or performance expectations, leaders adopting this style withdraw from structured engagement, leaving employees with limited direction and inconsistent feedback (Zhang, et al., 2023). In organisational settings, this leadership approach is often reflected in low supervisory involvement, delayed responses to operational issues, and ambiguity regarding responsibilities and acceptable performance.

Empirical research consistently associates laissez-faire leadership with reduced role clarity, weakened coordination, and poorer relational outcomes. Longitudinal studies indicate that limited leadership involvement is linked to lower job satisfaction and higher burnout, largely due to uncertainty surrounding expectations and reduced access to support (Lundmark, et al., 2022). From a relational perspective, laissez-faire leadership has also been shown to undermine leader–member exchange quality, weakening social exchange relationships and reducing affective organisational commitment (Robert & Vandenberghe, 2021).

As a result, laissez-faire leadership is generally associated with lower levels of motivation, engagement, and sustained performance, as employees may interpret leader non-involvement as neglect or lack of organisational support. Although some evidence suggests that under highly specific conditions, such as high individual capability or strong alternative support structures, this leadership style may be perceived as autonomy-enhancing, such effects are limited and not widely generalisable (Zheng & Li, 2024).

Overall, laissez-faire leadership is widely regarded as among the least effective leadership approaches in operational contexts, as it weakens accountability, coordination, and feedback processes essential for consistent performance. While a small proportion of highly self-directed employees may tolerate limited supervision, empirical evidence indicates that laissez-faire leadership more commonly undermines motivation and engagement by eroding role clarity and reducing the leader's active guidance and involvement (Lundmark, et al., 2022; Zheng & Li, 2024).

2.3.8. Servant Leadership Style

Servant leadership is a leadership approach that prioritises the needs, development, and well-being of followers, emphasising service to others rather than personal authority or self-interest. Originating in Greenleaf's work on ethical and values-based leadership, contemporary scholarship conceptualises servant leadership as a relational and morally grounded style characterised by humility, empowerment, and stewardship (Greenleaf, 1977; Lee, et al., 2020; Silvestre, et al., 2024). Rather than relying on hierarchical control, servant leaders seek to enhance performance by fostering trust, inclusivity, and a shared sense of purpose.

Servant leadership is characterised by behaviours that prioritise the needs, development, and well-being of employees, including empathy, ethical conduct, active listening, and a sustained focus on personal growth. Empirical research indicates that servant leaders tend to decentralise authority, promote participative decision-making, and foster work environments in which employees are regarded as valued contributors rather than passive recipients of leadership direction (Lee, et al., 2020; Hoch, et al., 2016). In organisational practice, these principles are reflected through

mentoring relationships, open communication, and the recognition of shared contributions to collective outcomes.

A substantial body of research associates servant leadership with positive motivational and attitudinal outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction, stronger work engagement, and enhanced affective commitment. Meta-analytic evidence further suggests that servant leadership supports intrinsic motivation by fulfilling employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are central to contemporary motivation theory (Lee, et al., 2020; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021). When leaders are perceived as genuinely invested in employees' development and well-being, employees are more likely to internalise organisational goals and to sustain discretionary effort over time.

Servant leadership is also associated with psychologically safe work environments in which employees feel able to express ideas, acknowledge errors, and engage in learning-oriented behaviours. Such climates have been shown to support proactive behaviour, creativity, and continuous improvement, particularly in team-based and service-oriented settings (Karatepe, et al., 2019; Dirani, et al., 2020). These benefits are strongest when supportive leadership behaviours are complemented by clear performance expectations and accountability, ensuring that care and empathy reinforce rather than weaken goal clarity (Ozturk, et al., 2021).

Overall, servant leadership motivates employees by embedding trust, ethical behaviour, and care within everyday leadership practices. By placing people at the centre of organisational life, servant leaders foster deeper engagement, stronger emotional attachment, and sustained commitment to both performance and ethical standards.

2.3.9. Ethical Leadership Style

Ethical leadership can be described as an approach in which leaders demonstrate and promote normatively appropriate behaviour through their actions, interpersonal interactions, and decision-making processes. This form of leadership is reinforced through practices such as role modelling, open and transparent communication, and the consistent application of accountability mechanisms

that signal acceptable standards of conduct within the organisation (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Nørgaard, 2022). Rather than relying solely on formal rules, ethical leadership emphasises the visible alignment between leaders' behaviour and the values they espouse

Within organisational contexts, ethical leaders are commonly associated with integrity, fairness, and consistency between stated principles and enacted decisions. These characteristics strengthen employees' perceptions of procedural justice and enhance leader credibility, both of which are important for sustaining trust in leadership (Bedi, et al., 2016; Moon & Christensen, 2021). Ethical leadership is therefore reflected not only in individual moral conduct, but also in the deliberate establishment, communication, and enforcement of ethical standards that guide behaviour within teams.

In practice, ethical leaders reinforce appropriate conduct by promoting transparency in decision-making and by applying reward and corrective systems that are perceived as impartial and legitimate. Contemporary research highlights the relevance of ethical leadership in diverse and high-pressure environments, where clear ethical standards can reduce exclusionary dynamics and strengthen collective commitment by signalling fairness and inclusion as core organisational values (Moon & Christensen, 2021; Nguyen, et al., 2023). Although ethical leadership overlaps with authentic and values-based leadership, it is distinguished by its explicit focus on influencing follower behaviour through ethical communication and reinforcement (Bedi, et al., 2016; Nørgaard, 2022).

From a motivational perspective, ethical leadership is associated with higher levels of trust, perceived fairness, and psychological security. When leaders are viewed as principled and consistent, employees are more likely to perceive their work environment as predictable and just, which supports autonomous motivation and sustained engagement (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Saleem, et al., 2024). Empirical studies further indicate that ethical leadership contributes to positive employee attitudes by reducing uncertainty about acceptable behaviour and strengthening relational trust (Moon & Christensen, 2021; Saleem, et al., 2024).

Ethical leadership has also been linked to discretionary and pro-social behaviours, including organisational citizenship behaviour, particularly when ethical norms are visible and consistently upheld (Li, 2024). However, boundary research suggests that contextual factors, such as team value orientations and organisational systems, influence the extent to which ethical leadership translates into commitment and reduced negative behaviour, underscoring the importance of embedding ethical leadership within broader organisational practices rather than treating it solely as an individual leader attribute (Nguyen, et al., 2023).

Overall, ethical leadership supports employee motivation and commitment by embedding fairness, transparency, and integrity into everyday leadership practice. By reinforcing ethical standards consistently and building moral credibility, ethical leaders foster engagement and discretionary effort through both compliance mechanisms and employees' identification with organisational values (Bedi, et al., 2016; Li, 2024).

2.3.10. Charismatic Leadership

Charismatic leadership refers to a form of influence through which leaders inspire followers by articulating a compelling vision, communicating with confidence, and displaying emotionally engaging behaviours that foster commitment beyond routine compliance (Klein & Delegach, 2023; Nassif, et al., 2021). In organisational contexts, charismatic leaders typically project optimism, conviction, and confidence in collective capability, which can strengthen follower identification with organisational goals, particularly during periods of uncertainty or change (Klein & Delegach, 2023). Empirical research further suggests that when perceptions of charismatic leadership are shared within teams, such influence is more likely to enhance communication quality and collective performance (Eman, et al., 2024).

From a motivational perspective, charismatic leadership operates primarily through meaning-based and relational mechanisms. By framing work in terms of shared purpose and collective identity, charismatic leaders increase employees' willingness to invest effort, persist under pressure, and align personal goals with organisational priorities (Klein & Delegach, 2023; Zhang, et al., 2025). Charismatic influence may also affect motivation through emotional contagion, whereby

leaders' affective expressions elevate collective energy and engagement when such displays are perceived as authentic and credible (Wan, et al., 2022). These motivational effects are strongest when charismatic behaviours support coordination and shared understanding rather than fostering individual dependency (Eman, et al., 2024).

However, charismatic leadership is not inherently beneficial and may generate adverse outcomes when not anchored in ethical norms and accountability structures. Research highlights a potential “dark side” of charisma, whereby strong personal influence can increase susceptibility to unethical pro-organisational behaviour or create dependency on individual leaders, weakening institutionalised motivation grounded in systems and shared values (Zhang, et al., 2020; Nassif, et al., 2021). Consequently, contemporary scholarship increasingly evaluates charismatic leadership alongside ethical leadership attributes to distinguish constructive inspiration from manipulative or unsustainable influence.

Overall, charismatic leadership can act as a powerful motivational force by enhancing meaning, confidence, and collective identity. Its effectiveness and sustainability, however, depend on ethical framing, transparency, and accountability, ensuring that inspirational influence supports engagement and performance without undermining ethical conduct or long-term organisational resilience.

2.3.11. Adaptive / Situational Leadership

Adaptive leadership, commonly discussed within situational leadership perspectives, refers to leaders' capacity to adjust their behaviours in response to changing task demands, contextual pressures, and employees' evolving needs rather than relying on a single, fixed leadership style (Nöthel, et al., 2023). Effective adaptive leaders diagnose situational factors such as urgency, ambiguity, and risk, and calibrate the degree of direction, support, and autonomy provided to ensure that employees receive adequate structure without becoming over-controlled (Aslam, et al., 2022; Nöthel, et al., 2023).

In practice, adaptive leadership involves shifting leadership behaviours in line with situational requirements. Leaders may adopt more directive approaches during time-sensitive or disruptive conditions, while transitioning towards coaching, participative, or delegative behaviours when work conditions are stable and employees demonstrate higher capability. Contemporary research increasingly conceptualises adaptability as an observable pattern of leadership behaviour rather than a prescriptive ideal, reinforcing the view that leadership effectiveness depends on behavioural flexibility across contexts and individuals (Nöthel, et al., 2023). Within organisational change settings, adaptive leadership has been associated with improved confidence in managing change, enhanced learning processes, and greater capacity for innovation (Chughtai, et al., 2023; Khaw, et al., 2022).

From a motivational perspective, adaptive leadership is particularly relevant because it aligns leadership support with employees' competence levels and psychological needs. Providing clear guidance to less experienced employees while allowing greater discretion for more capable employees supports both skill development and autonomy, which are central to sustained motivation and engagement (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Nöthel, et al., 2023). During periods of uncertainty, adaptive leaders may further reduce anxiety and withdrawal by clarifying priorities, maintaining open communication, and encouraging constructive responses to change (Khaw, et al., 2022). Overall, by combining responsiveness with contextual judgement, adaptive leadership supports employee motivation, resilience, and performance across dynamic organisational conditions (Aslam, et al., 2022; Nöthel, et al., 2023; Kim & Yoon, 2025).

2.4. Motivation Theories

2.4.1. Motivation in the Workplace

Motivation occupies a central position in explaining how employees direct effort, sustain persistence, and regulate behaviour in the workplace, with clear implications for engagement, performance, and organisational effectiveness. Contemporary work-psychology research views motivation as a combination of internal and external forces that initiate work-related behaviour and influence its direction, intensity, and durability over time (Shkoler & Kimura, 2020; Bandhu, et al., 2024). Within organisational settings, motivation affects not only how much effort

employees apply to their tasks, but also how consistently that effort is maintained, how employees respond to competing demands, and the extent to which they invest discretionary energy in collaboration, learning, and problem-solving activities (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Grant & Shandell, 2021; Nusraningrum, et al., 2024).

Building on this understanding, motivation research commonly distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation. Intrinsic motivation arises when work is experienced as interesting or meaningful in its own right, whereas extrinsic motivation is shaped by external incentives such as pay, recognition, or opportunities for advancement (Deci, et al., 2017; Bandhu, et al., 2024). Self-determination theory extends this distinction by emphasising differences in the quality of motivation, particularly the extent to which behaviour is autonomously regulated rather than externally controlled. This differentiation is significant, as empirical syntheses consistently show that more self-determined forms of motivation are associated with higher levels of engagement, psychological well-being, and sustained involvement at work, while controlled motivation is less effective in supporting long-term adaptive performance (Deci, et al., 2017; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; McAnally & Hagger, 2024).

In organisational settings, motivation is strongly influenced by leadership behaviour and the broader work environment. Leaders shape motivation through task structuring, goal communication, and the extent to which they create conditions that support employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci, et al., 2017; Vo, et al., 2022). Recent research highlights the salience of supportive leadership behaviours in contemporary work arrangements, where employees increasingly depend on leaders for clarity, guidance, and psychological support (Caniëls, 2023). Meta-analytic evidence further suggests that leadership styles characterised by empowerment, ethical conduct, high-quality exchange relationships, and service orientation are positively associated with intrinsic motivation, whereas destructive leadership behaviours are associated with diminished motivation (Xue, et al., 2022). Leadership practices that promote recognition, fairness, and meaningful involvement are therefore consistently linked to favourable employee outcomes closely related to motivation, including engagement and job satisfaction (Jo & Shin, 2025).

Given its centrality to leadership effectiveness and organisational performance, motivation remains a core focus of organisational research. Motivation theories have evolved from early need-based explanations toward more dynamic frameworks that integrate cognitive evaluation, social context, and psychological need support. The sections that follow review motivation theory in a structured sequence, beginning with content theories, followed by process theories, and concluding with contemporary perspectives that reflect modern work contexts and current psychological evidence (Deci, et al., 2017; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021).

2.4.2. Content Theories of Motivation

Content theories of motivation seek to explain behaviour by identifying the underlying needs that drive individual effort and goal-directed action. These perspectives are grounded in the assumption that motivation emerges when certain needs remain unfulfilled, and that work environments can be structured in ways that either support or undermine the satisfaction of these needs. Within the motivation literature, key content-based frameworks include Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory, McClelland's theory of needs, and Alderfer's ERG theory, each of which offers a distinct perspective on how different categories of needs influence employee motivation and commitment.

2.4.2.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs remains a foundational framework for understanding motivation within organisational settings. Originally proposed by Maslow (1943; 1954), the model conceptualises motivation as a progression through categories of needs, with lower-level needs generally requiring reasonable satisfaction before higher-order needs become salient. Although initially developed as a general psychological theory, the hierarchy has been widely applied in workplace motivation and leadership research as an interpretive framework rather than a rigid prescriptive model.

The hierarchy is commonly illustrated as a pyramid (see Figure 2.2) comprising the following need categories:

- **Physiological needs:** adequate remuneration, rest, and acceptable physical working condition
- **Safety needs:** job security, predictable work arrangements, fair organisational policies, and psychological safety
- **Belongingness needs:** social inclusion, supportive relationships, and team affiliation
- **Esteem needs:** recognition, competence, responsibility, and respect
- **Self-actualisation needs:** personal growth, meaningful work, creativity, and fulfilment

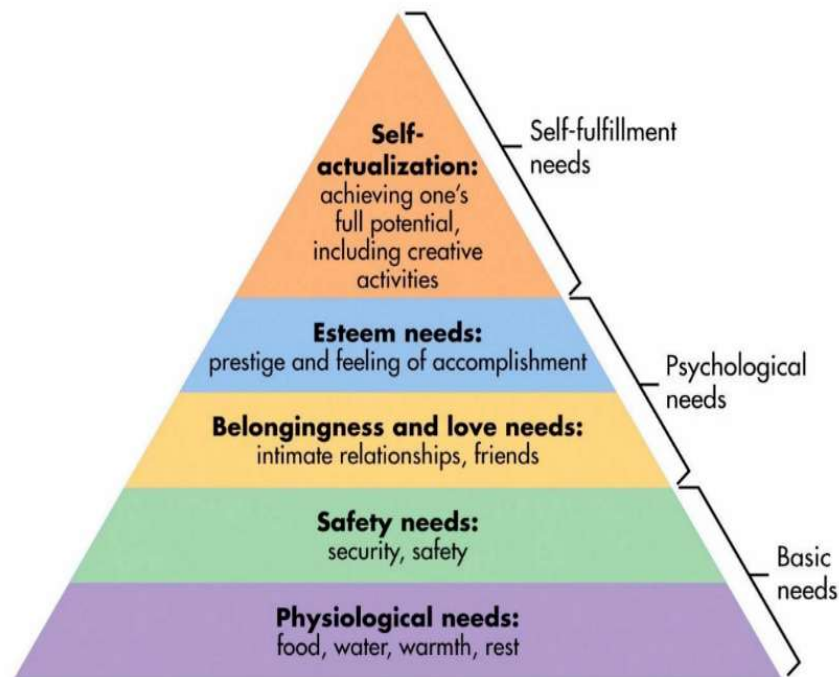


Figure 2. 2: The five levels of Maslow's pyramid

Source: (McLeod, 2025).

Within organisational contexts, unmet physiological and safety needs undermine sustained engagement and discretionary effort, as employees prioritise stability and security over higher-order motivation (Montag, et al., 2020; McAnally & Hagger, 2024). Once foundational needs are reasonably met, social and psychological needs become more salient. Belongingness is supported through inclusive leadership and positive peer relationships, which are associated with reduced

withdrawal and stronger motivation (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021). Esteem needs are reinforced through leadership practices such as constructive feedback, recognition, and responsibility delegation, strengthening perceptions of competence and value (Vo, et al., 2022).

Self-actualisation reflects the pursuit of meaning, growth, and fulfilment of potential. Contemporary research links self-actualisation in the workplace to autonomy, learning opportunities, and engagement in creative or innovative work, particularly in dynamic and knowledge-intensive environments (Montag, et al., 2020; Maunz & Glaser, 2023). Employees operating at this level are more likely to demonstrate intrinsic motivation, proactive behaviour, and sustained commitment.

Importantly, Maslow did not propose a strictly linear or universal sequence of need satisfaction. Needs may overlap, regress, or coexist depending on contextual conditions and individual differences. Empirical evidence supports this non-linearity, with studies showing that security-related and growth-oriented needs may be simultaneously salient rather than sequentially ordered (Montag, et al., 2020; Saepudin & Rahmayanti, 2025).

Contemporary applications have further adapted the hierarchy to modern work arrangements. Research indicates that flexible and hybrid work structures allow multiple needs, particularly safety, autonomy, and self-actualisation, to be addressed concurrently (McConnell & Metz, 2024). Leadership responses during crisis conditions also illustrate the framework's practical relevance, as prioritising employees' physical and psychological safety has been shown to support morale and performance under extreme stress (Hayre-Kwan, et al., 2021; Zhou, et al., 2023).

From a leadership perspective, Maslow's hierarchy is most useful as a diagnostic lens for identifying motivational constraints rather than as a stepwise prescription. Leaders who recognise that unmet basic or safety needs restrict higher-order motivation are better positioned to design leadership practices that support sustained engagement. When applied critically and in conjunction with contemporary empirical evidence, Maslow's framework continues to provide valuable insight into how leadership practices influence employee motivation.

2.4.2.2. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's two-factor theory, often described as the motivator–hygiene framework, differentiates between aspects of work that contribute to job satisfaction and those that function primarily to prevent dissatisfaction. Drawing on qualitative analyses of employees' accounts of their work experiences, Herzberg argued that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are shaped by two distinct categories of factors rather than representing opposite ends of a single dimension (Herzberg, 1959; Herzberg, 1987; Jaffar, et al., 2024). From this perspective, improvements in extrinsic working conditions may help reduce dissatisfaction, but such changes alone are unlikely to generate higher levels of motivation or engagement.

The theory differentiates between hygiene factors and motivators, as illustrated in Figure 2.3:

- **Hygiene factors:** salary, organisational policies, supervision quality, interpersonal relationships, job security, and physical working conditions
- **Motivators:** achievement, recognition, responsibility, meaningful work, advancement, and personal growth

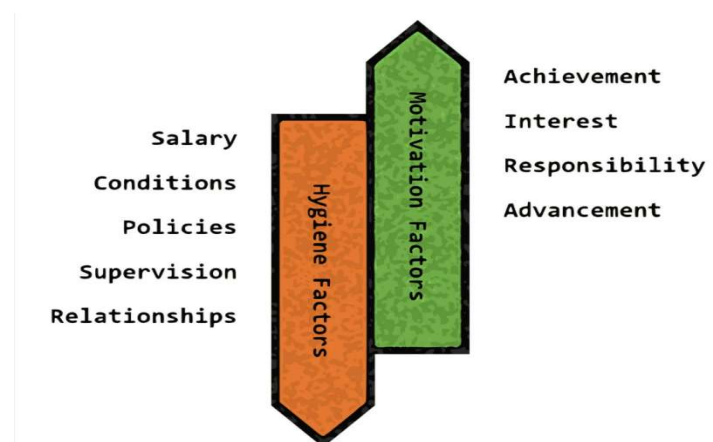


Figure 2. 1: Herzberg Two Factors

Source: (Nickerson, 2025).

Hygiene factors function primarily to prevent dissatisfaction when adequately managed, whereas motivators are embedded in the content of the work itself and play a central role in fostering satisfaction, engagement, and discretionary effort (Jaffar, et al., 2024). Herzberg's findings

indicated that intrinsic aspects of work were more consistently associated with positive motivational outcomes, while extrinsic conditions were linked to negative experiences when deficient.

A central practical implication of the theory is the concept of job enrichment, which involves redesigning roles to increase autonomy, responsibility, and meaningful challenge. Rather than relying on external incentives, job enrichment positions motivation as a function of work design and opportunities for psychological growth (Jung & Moon, 2024). Empirical evidence continues to show that while poor hygiene conditions generate dissatisfaction, intrinsic motivators are more influential in sustaining long-term engagement and commitment (Ng & Cheah, 2025).

Leadership plays a critical role in managing both dimensions of the theory. Leaders influence hygiene factors through fair policies, consistent supervision, and psychologically safe work environments, while also activating motivators by recognising contributions, delegating responsibility, and supporting employee development. Leadership approaches characterised by empowerment and ethical conduct have been shown to strengthen intrinsic motivation by enhancing access to motivator factors (Kim, et al., 2021; Li, 2024).

Herzberg's two-factor framework is often considered alongside other motivation theories in order to provide a more comprehensive explanation of employee motivation. Comparative research suggests that hygiene factors broadly parallel lower-order needs in Maslow's hierarchy, whereas motivators correspond more closely with higher-order needs, including esteem and self-actualisation (Ihensekien & Joel, 2023). Although the methodological foundations of Herzberg's original studies have been subject to criticism, contemporary reviews and bibliometric analyses continue to recognise the theory's relevance within research on leadership, job design, and employee engagement (Durmuş, 2024). When used as an analytical lens rather than a prescriptive model, Herzberg's two-factor theory remains valuable for understanding how leadership practices can reduce dissatisfaction while supporting more meaningful and motivating work experiences.

2.4.2.3. McClelland's Acquired Needs Theory

McClelland's Acquired Needs Theory conceptualises motivation as the product of learned psychological needs shaped through experience and socialisation rather than innate or hierarchical drives. Proposed by McClelland (1961), the theory posits that individuals differ in the relative strength of three dominant motivational needs, achievement, affiliation, and power, and that these differences significantly influence work behaviour, preferences, and leadership effectiveness. Unlike hierarchical models, the framework emphasises individual variability and situational relevance, making it particularly applicable in diverse and dynamic organisational contexts (Baptista, et al., 2021).

The theory identifies three core needs that operate as overlapping motivational drivers rather than sequential stage:

- **Need for Achievement (nAch):** a desire to excel, attain challenging goals, and demonstrate competence. Individuals high in nAch prefer moderate risk, assume personal responsibility for outcomes, and actively seek performance feedback (McClelland, 1961; Baptista, et al., 2021).
- **Need for Affiliation (nAff):** a preference for positive interpersonal relationships, cooperation, and social acceptance. Employees high in nAff typically respond well to inclusive and supportive work environments (McClelland, 1961; Mdhlalose, 2023).
- **Need for Power (nPow):** a motivation to influence others. McClelland distinguished between personalised power and socialised power, with the latter associated with ethical influence and effectiveness in leadership roles oriented toward collective goals (McClelland, 1961; Baptista, et al., 2021).

These needs are commonly represented as distinct but potentially coexisting motivational orientations (see Figure 2.4). Because the needs are acquired rather than innate, individuals may exhibit one dominant need or a combination of needs, with their salience shifting across roles,

organisational cultures, and leadership contexts (Mdhlalose, 2023). This characteristic helps explain variation in employee responses to leadership behaviours, incentives, and job design.

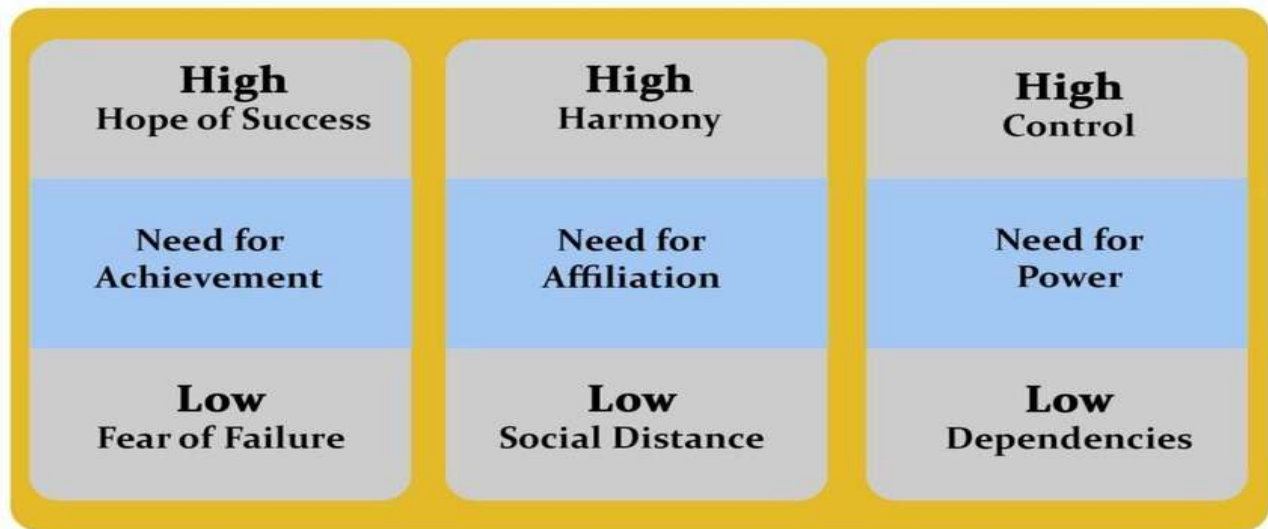


Figure 2. 4: McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory Source

Source: (Mdhlalose, 2023).

Contemporary empirical research supports the continued relevance of the theory across sectors and cultural settings. Studies indicate that high nAch is associated with proactive goal orientation and innovative behaviour, particularly in manufacturing environments, while high nAff is linked to cooperation and teamwork (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021; Mdhlalose, 2023). Individuals characterised by socialised nPow are more likely to assume leadership responsibilities and influence organisational processes, especially where ethical and governance mechanisms are present (Baptista, et al., 2021).

From a leadership perspective, McClelland's framework offers practical guidance for tailoring motivational strategies to individual profiles. Motivation is enhanced when leadership behaviours align with dominant needs, such as providing challenging goals and feedback for high nAch employees, fostering inclusive climates for those high in nAff, and offering leadership or decision-making opportunities to individuals motivated by socialised power. Empirical leadership research supports the view that such alignment strengthens engagement, role fit, and performance, particularly in team-based and knowledge-intensive environments (Mphaluwa, et al., 2025).

Despite its strengths, the theory has been criticised for paying limited attention to lower-order needs such as remuneration, job security, and working conditions, which are addressed more explicitly in other motivation models. As a result, scholars recommend integrating McClelland's framework with broader motivational theories to account for both individual differences and contextual constraints (Baptista, et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the theory's enduring contribution lies in demonstrating that employees are motivated by different dominant needs and that effective leadership requires differentiated, context-sensitive approaches.

Overall, McClelland's Acquired Needs Theory provides an individualised lens on workplace motivation. By recognising and aligning leadership practices with employees' dominant needs for achievement, affiliation, or power, leaders can enhance motivation, engagement, and organisational effectiveness.

2.4.2.4. Alderfer's ERG Theory

Alderfer's ERG Theory refines earlier need-based motivation models by restructuring Maslow's hierarchy into a more flexible and empirically responsive framework. Proposed by Alderfer (1969), the theory consolidates human needs into three categories and allows for the simultaneous pursuit of multiple needs rather than a fixed progression, increasing its relevance in contemporary organisational environments characterised by uncertainty and change (Thangal, et al., 2021; Koutalas, et al., 2024).

The ERG framework groups need as follows:

- **Existence needs:** material and physiological requirements such as remuneration, job security, safe working conditions, and physical well-being
- **Relatedness needs:** interpersonal relationships, social belonging, trust, and external recognition
- **Growth needs:** intrinsic aspirations for autonomy, competence, personal development, and self-fulfilment

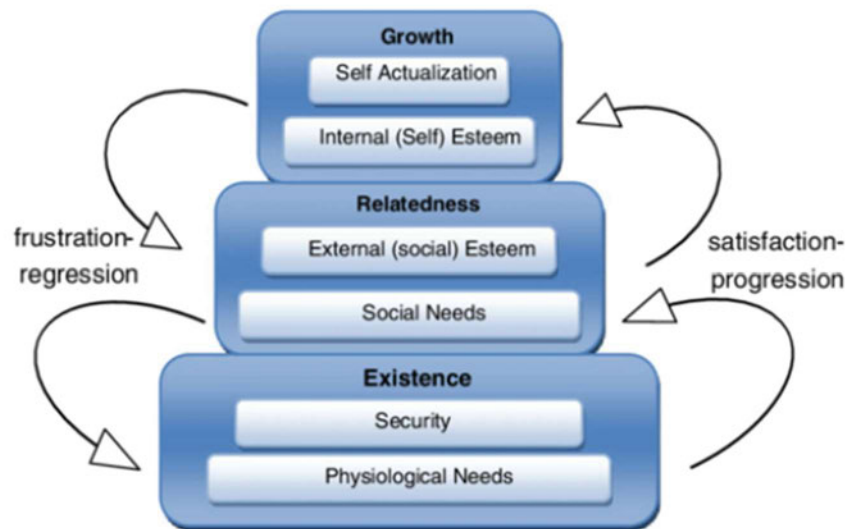


Figure 2. 5: Alderfer's ERG theory

Source: (Avradinis, 2013).

Within organisational contexts, existence needs provide a foundational platform for employee functioning, while relatedness and growth needs are more directly associated with sustained motivation and commitment. Empirical evidence indicates that although satisfying existence needs alone rarely generates high motivation, unmet material or security needs consistently undermine morale and performance (Thangal, et al., 2021; Koutalas, et al., 2024).

A distinguishing feature of ERG theory is the frustration–regression principle, which proposes that when higher-order needs, particularly growth needs, are persistently blocked, individuals may redirect motivational energy toward lower-order needs such as relatedness or existence. This mechanism provides a more context-sensitive explanation of motivational shifts than strictly hierarchical models. Empirical support is evident in studies showing that strong social support and leadership trust can partially offset constrained growth opportunities and sustain motivation under prolonged pressure (Koutalas, et al., 2024; Senayah & Biney-Aidoo, 2024).

Research further demonstrates that ERG needs remain jointly salient across diverse contexts. For example, Yu and Hsu (2022) found that existence, relatedness, and growth need simultaneously influenced engagement behaviour, reinforcing the theory's broader applicability. Within high-

stress organisational environments, relatedness needs are particularly critical, as social support and trust in leadership buffer the negative effects of unmet material or developmental needs (Slemp, et al., 2021).

From a leadership perspective, ERG theory highlights that motivation is multidimensional and adaptive rather than sequential. Leaders who focus narrowly on a single category of needs risk overlooking compensatory mechanisms that sustain engagement. Effective leadership therefore requires simultaneous attention to existence needs (fair pay, security, safety), relatedness needs (trust, inclusion, support), and growth needs (autonomy, learning opportunities, and meaningful work) (Vo, et al., 2022; Thangal, et al., 2021).

Overall, Alderfer's ERG Theory offers a flexible and context-sensitive framework for understanding employee motivation. By recognising that unmet needs redirect rather than eliminate motivational effort, the theory provides practical guidance for sustaining engagement in complex and resource-constrained organisational environments, making it particularly relevant for contemporary leadership practice (Slemp, et al., 2021).

2.4.3. Process Theories of Motivation

In contrast to content-based perspectives that focus on identifying underlying needs, process theories of motivation seek to explain how motivation is initiated, directed, and maintained through cognitive and behavioural processes. These approaches conceptualise motivation as dynamic, emphasising how employees' expectations, evaluations, and perceptions influence effort allocation and goal-directed behaviour in organisational settings. Rather than attributing behaviour primarily to unmet needs, process theories highlight the role of anticipated outcomes, perceived fairness, behavioural reinforcement, and goal clarity in shaping motivational responses at work.

Within this study, attention is given to four process theories that are particularly relevant to organisational leadership: Vroom's expectancy theory, Adams' equity theory, Skinner's reinforcement theory, and Locke and Latham's goal-setting theory. Collectively, these frameworks illustrate how leadership practices influence employee motivation by shaping expectations,

reinforcing desired behaviours, promoting perceptions of fairness, and establishing clear and challenging goals that guide performance.

2.4.3.1. Vroom's Expectancy Theory

Vroom's expectancy theory conceptualises work motivation as the result of individuals' cognitive evaluations regarding the relationship between effort, performance, and valued outcomes. First introduced by Vroom (1964), the theory frames motivation as a deliberate decision-making process, in which employees assess whether investing effort is likely to result in effective performance and whether such performance will lead to outcomes they find desirable. Subsequent research continues to support the relevance of expectancy-based judgments in shaping employee engagement, persistence, and work behaviour across a range of organisational contexts (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Ce, et al., 2025).

The theory is built around three interrelated cognitive components:

- **Expectancy:** reflects the belief that increased effort will translate into improved performance and is influenced by factors such as perceived competence, role clarity, and access to adequate resources (Mofokeng, et al., 2025; Vo, et al., 2022)
- **Instrumentality:** refers to the belief that effective performance will be followed by desired outcomes and is shaped by perceptions of fairness, transparency, and consistency in reward allocation (Chen, et al., 2023; Osafo, et al., 2021).
- **Valence:** the subjective value individuals attach to anticipated outcomes, which varies according to personal goals, needs, and situational priorities (Ce, et al., 2025; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021).

These components interact multiplicatively, expressed as:

$$\mathbf{Motivation = Expectancy \times Instrumentality \times Valence}$$

This formulation implies that motivation is weakened when any single component is low, even if the others are strong, underscoring the need for all three conditions to be present simultaneously (Osafo, et al., 2021; Chen, et al., 2023).

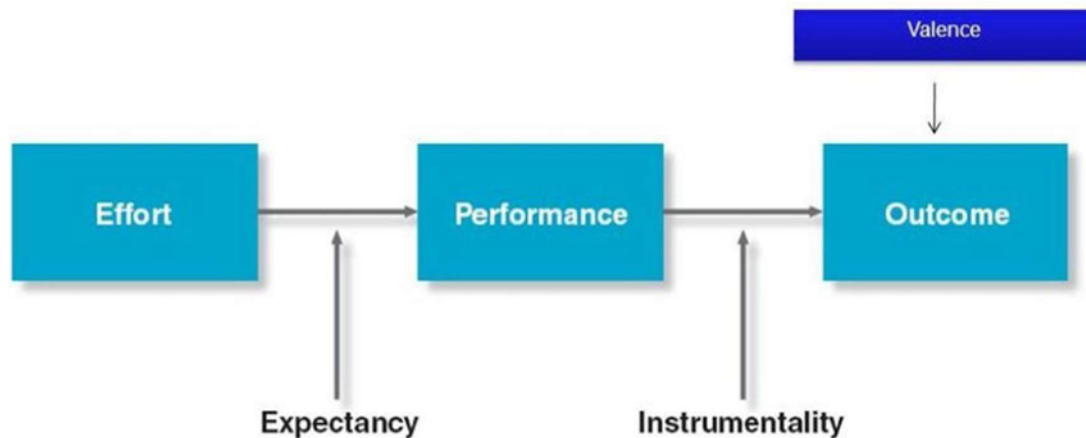


Figure 2. 6: Basic Expectancy Model

Source: (Agah, et al., 2020).

Empirical evidence supports the applicability of Expectancy Theory across sectors. Studies indicate that strong expectancy and instrumentality beliefs are associated with higher engagement, improved task performance, and stronger retention intentions, particularly when employees perceive reliable connections between effort, performance, and rewards (Yeh & Huang, 2025; Ce, et al., 2025). Sector-specific research further shows that motivation and persistence increase when performance is perceived as contributing to outcomes that are personally meaningful (Yeh & Huang, 2025).

From a leadership perspective, Expectancy Theory provides clear guidance for shaping motivational conditions. Expectancy is strengthened when leaders clarify performance expectations, provide adequate resources, and support capability development. Instrumentality depends on credible and consistently applied reward systems, while valence is enhanced when outcomes align with individual preferences, such as recognition, development opportunities, and autonomy rather than financial incentives alone (Osafo, et al., 2021; Vo, et al., 2022).

Research further highlights the role of communication and feedback in sustaining expectancy-based motivation. Inconsistent feedback or unpredictable reward practices can weaken confidence in effort–outcome relationships, even when rewards are valued (Yeh & Huang, 2025; Slemp, et al., 2021). Integrating expectancy processes with constructs such as psychological empowerment has been shown to strengthen expectancy and instrumentality beliefs, resulting in higher engagement and persistence (Ce, et al., 2025; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021).

Although the theory has been criticised for emphasising rational evaluation and underplaying emotional or relational influences, recent studies demonstrate that expectancy-based explanations are strengthened rather than undermined when contextual factors such as trust and organisational climate are incorporated (Mofokeng, et al., 2025; Vo, et al., 2022). The core proposition that motivation depends on perceived effort–performance–outcome linkages therefore remain empirically robust (Vroom, 1964; Ce, et al., 2025).

Overall, Vroom’s Expectancy Theory continues to provide a valuable framework for understanding employee motivation. By aligning leadership practices and organisational systems to strengthen expectancy, instrumentality, and valence, organisations can support sustained motivation, engagement, and productivity in contemporary work environments (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Yeh & Huang, 2025).

2.4.3.2. Adams’ Equity Theory

Adams’ Equity Theory conceptualises work motivation as a function of perceived fairness in social exchange. Developed by Adams (1965), the theory proposes that employees assess motivation not only according to the absolute rewards they receive but also by comparing their input–outcome ratio with that of relevant others. Inputs typically include effort, time, skills, experience, responsibility, and loyalty, while outcomes encompass pay, recognition, promotion opportunities, benefits, and socio-emotional rewards such as respect and development (Adams, 1965; González-Cánovas, et al., 2024). Leadership is central to this process, as leaders influence both the allocation of outcomes and the interpretation of fairness through communication, justification, and interpersonal treatment (González-Cánovas, et al., 2024; Jo & Shin, 2025).

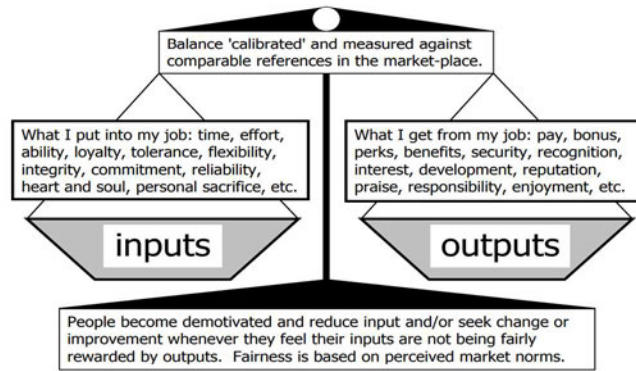


Figure 2. 7: Adams' Equity Theory - Job Motivation

Source: (Chapman, 2025)

Equity is perceived when employees judge their input–outcome ratio to be comparable to that of a referent, whereas perceived under-reward or over-reward creates psychological tension that motivates attempts to restore balance (Adams, 1965; Chen, et al., 2023). Such responses may include adjusting effort, seeking changes to outcomes, reinterpreting contributions or rewards, altering comparison referents, or withdrawing psychologically or behaviourally from work (Adams, 1965; Jo & Shin, 2025). Importantly, fairness judgements are socially embedded rather than purely instrumental, meaning that contextual factors and the perceived legitimacy of managerial decisions can amplify or buffer reactions to inequity (Sherf & Venkataramani, 2015; González-Cánovas, et al., 2024).

Equity-based motivation is particularly salient in contemporary organisations characterised by transparent performance metrics, visible reward practices, and frequent peer comparison enabled by team-based work and digital communication. These conditions can intensify perceived inequity even when objective reward levels are competitive (Chen, et al., 2023; Jo & Shin, 2025). Empirical research on performance-based reward systems indicates that incentives influence motivation through both motivating and pressurising mechanisms, with fairness perceptions determining whether rewards enhance engagement or generate strain (Chen, et al., 2023). Complementary studies further show that fairness and recognition interact with leadership behaviour to shape engagement and job satisfaction, highlighting the leader’s role in sustaining a positive motivational climate (Jo & Shin, 2025).

From a practical standpoint, Equity Theory implies that leaders must manage both reward distribution and its interpretation. Motivation is shaped by whether allocations are perceived as proportionate, consistent, and justifiable relative to contributions and relevant comparisons (Adams, 1965; Jo & Shin, 2025). This requires aligning recognition and development opportunities with transparent performance criteria, maintaining consistency across comparable roles, and communicating decision rationales in ways that are perceived as respectful and legitimate (González-Cánovas, et al., 2024; Jo & Shin, 2025). Failure to do so can allow inequity perceptions to spread through social comparison processes, reducing collective engagement and increasing withdrawal behaviours (Adams, 1965; Jo & Shin, 2025).

Although Equity Theory remains influential, it also has limitations. Fairness judgements are inherently subjective, as perceptions of legitimate inputs, outcomes, and comparators vary across individuals and contexts, complicating standardisation efforts (Sherf & Venkataramani, 2015; Jo & Shin, 2025). In addition, relational dynamics such as trust and leader credibility can bias equity perceptions, leading inequity to be tolerated or amplified depending on social context (Sherf & Venkataramani, 2015; González-Cánovas, et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the theory retains strong relevance in modern organisations that rely on differentiated performance, collaboration, and visible recognition systems, all of which heighten the importance of fairness perceptions and reinforce the central role of leadership in preventing inequity from undermining motivation, trust, and discretionary performance (Chen, et al., 2023, pp. 3-6; Jo & Shin, 2025).

2.4.3.3. Skinner's Reinforcement Theory

Skinner's reinforcement theory conceptualises motivation as a behavioural process in which actions are shaped through their consequences rather than through internal cognitive evaluations. Grounded in principles of operant conditioning, the theory proposes that behaviours followed by positive reinforcement are more likely to be repeated, while behaviours that are punished or not reinforced tend to diminish over time (Skinner, 1953; Grill, 2025). This perspective differs from cognitive motivation theories by focusing on observable behaviour and external contingencies rather than psychological states. In organisational contexts, reinforcement theory highlights the influential role of leadership in shaping behaviour through the strategic use of feedback, rewards,

and corrective actions. By controlling reinforcement mechanisms, leaders can signal desired performance standards, encourage consistent work behaviours, and discourage actions that undermine organisational objectives, thereby establishing clear behavioural expectations within the workplace (Laulié, et al., 2021; Grill, 2025).

Reinforcement theory identifies four mechanisms through which behaviour can be shaped:

- **Positive reinforcement**, strengthening behaviour through desirable outcomes such as recognition, incentives, or development opportunities.
- **Negative reinforcement**, increasing behaviour by removing undesirable conditions once acceptable performance is achieved.
- **Punishment**, reducing unwanted behaviour through negative consequences.
- **Extinction**, weakening behaviour by withdrawing reinforcement previously associated with it.

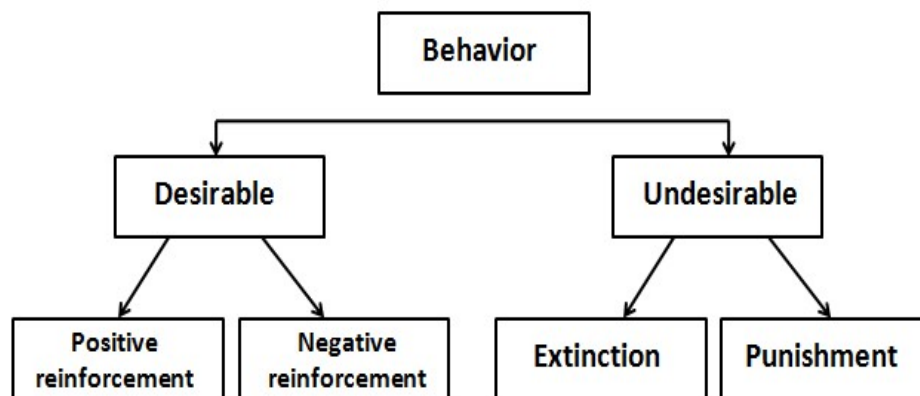


Figure 2. 8: Skinner's reinforcement theory

Source: (Joy, 2016).

Empirical research demonstrates that the effectiveness of reinforcement depends on the immediacy, consistency, and clarity of consequences. Delayed or inconsistent reinforcement weakens learning

and reduces motivational impact, particularly in operational and safety-critical environments where behavioural expectations must be explicit (Grill, 2025; Moon, 2024).

Contemporary organisational studies continue to support the relevance of reinforcement principles. Leadership intervention research shows that frequent, behaviour-specific feedback can produce sustained improvements in managerial behaviour and employee performance, reinforcing the core assumption that behaviour is shaped through contingent consequences (Grill, 2025; Grill, et al., 2024). Evidence further suggests that contingent reward practices are associated with higher engagement and lower turnover intentions, although effects vary depending on employee expectations and perceptions of fairness (Laulié, et al., 2021). Reinforcement processes have also been shown to support collaborative and learning-oriented behaviour when rewards are aligned with team-based rather than purely output-focused goals (Ghosh, et al., 2024).

From a leadership perspective, reinforcement theory highlights both practical utility and ethical considerations. Leaders must apply reinforcement consistently and transparently, as biased or inconsistent reinforcement undermines trust and can unintentionally legitimise counterproductive behaviour. In high-risk environments, reinforcing outcomes achieved through unsafe or unethical practices may normalise deviance and weaken formal standards (Moon, 2024; Samuelsson, et al., 2023).

Despite its strengths, reinforcement theory is often criticised for its emphasis on external control and its limited attention to intrinsic motivation and autonomy. Contemporary motivation research indicates that reinforcement is most effective when integrated with leadership approaches that also support competence, autonomy, and relatedness, reducing the risk of compliance without genuine engagement (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Slemp, et al., 2021). Reinforcement theory is therefore best applied as a complementary mechanism that guides observable behaviour within a broader, psychologically informed leadership framework.

Overall, Skinner's Reinforcement Theory remains a valuable and empirically supported approach for understanding how leaders influence behaviour through consequences. Its enduring relevance lies in its capacity to translate organisational expectations into clear behavioural standards that are

consistently reinforced through leadership action, supporting disciplined yet adaptive work environments (Grill, 2025; Moon, 2024).

2.4.3.4. Locke's Goal-Setting Theory

Locke's Goal-Setting Theory explains work motivation by emphasising the role of goals that are clearly defined, sufficiently challenging, and supported by feedback. The theory proposes that such goals influence behaviour by directing attention, mobilising effort, sustaining persistence, and encouraging the development of task-relevant strategies, particularly when individuals view goals as meaningful and achievable (Locke & Latham, 2002; Shkoler & Kimura, 2020; Pervaiz, et al., 2021). Leadership plays a central role in this process, as leaders are responsible for translating organisational priorities into operational goals and shaping how these goals are communicated, accepted, and pursued within the workplace (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023).

For goals to function as effective motivational mechanisms, they must be clearly defined, sufficiently challenging, accepted by employees, and accompanied by regular feedback. When these conditions are present, goals activate self-regulatory processes that sustain focus and effort; when they are absent, motivational effects are substantially weakened (Locke & Latham, 2002; Pervaiz, et al., 2021). Contemporary evidence indicates that participative goal-setting enhances commitment and psychological ownership, reinforcing the importance of leadership behaviour in facilitating goal acceptance and perceived fairness (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023).

Empirical studies continue to demonstrate the relevance of goal-setting theory in modern organisational contexts. Clearly articulated goals are associated with higher engagement and discretionary effort, whereas ambiguous or frequently changing goals undermine motivational clarity and perceptions of fairness (Shkoler & Kimura, 2020; Nagy & Walsh, 2024). These findings highlight that the motivational value of goals depends on leadership consistency and credibility rather than goal presence alone.

From a leadership perspective, effective goal setting involves:

- translate strategic objectives into specific, challenging, and time-bound goals,
- ensure goal acceptance through explanation, participation, and perceived fairness,
- provide regular feedback to enable adjustment and sustain persistence, and
- balance challenge with attainability to avoid perceptions of arbitrariness or futility (Shkoler & Kimura, 2020; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023).

Conversely, unrealistic targets, weak feedback mechanisms, or deliberate ambiguity can erode motivation, increase disengagement, and weaken trust in leadership (Nagy & Walsh, 2024). Despite its strong empirical foundation, goal-setting theory has attracted critique when goals are applied rigidly or within high-pressure control systems. Research shows that excessive emphasis on demanding performance targets may increase unethical behaviour, short-termism, and rule-bending when outcomes are prioritised over process integrity and organisational values (Welsh, et al., 2020; Fayyaz & Waheed, 2023; Ferdiansah, et al., 2025). Evidence from stretch-goal research further suggests that while highly challenging goals can stimulate effort for some employees, they may narrow attention and suppress learning for others, particularly in complex or knowledge-intensive roles (Ahmadi, et al., 2021; Liu, et al., 2024).

These limitations underscore the importance of leadership judgement in goal implementation. The motivational impact of goal setting depends not only on goal characteristics but also on how leaders communicate acceptable methods, model ethical standards, and foster psychologically safe environments that support learning alongside performance demands (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). When applied with ethical oversight, consistent feedback, and sensitivity to context, Goal-Setting Theory remains one of the most robust and practically valuable frameworks for understanding and enhancing employee motivation and performance in contemporary organisations (Nagy & Walsh, 2024).

2.4.4. Contemporary Perspectives on Motivation

Although classical motivation theories provide a foundational understanding of needs and behavioural drivers, contemporary work environments introduce additional complexities, including greater expectations for autonomy, knowledge-intensive roles, and flexible or hybrid work arrangements. In response, modern motivation frameworks extend earlier models by incorporating psychological, relational, and job-design influences that shape motivation in more differentiated ways. This section focuses on two influential contemporary perspectives: Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasises intrinsic motivation and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, and the Job Characteristics Model, which links motivation to the design and structure of work roles. These frameworks are particularly relevant in leadership and human resource contexts that prioritise empowerment, innovation, and employee well-being, and they provide a conceptual bridge between traditional motivation theories and evolving organisational practices.

2.4.4.1. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT, developed by Deci and Ryan, frames work motivation in terms of its qualitative nature rather than the sheer amount of effort exerted, with emphasis placed on whether behaviour is autonomously regulated or externally controlled (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci, et al., 2017; McAnally & Hagger, 2024). The theory proposes that optimal motivation and psychological functioning are most likely to emerge when three fundamental psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are adequately supported within the work environment. These needs offer a useful framework for explaining how individuals internalise organisational goals and maintain sustained effort over time (Deci, et al., 2017; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021). Within this framework, autonomy refers to experiencing a sense of choice and volition in one's actions, competence relates to feelings of effectiveness and mastery in performing work tasks, and relatedness reflects experiences of belonging and meaningful connection with others in the workplace. A substantial body of empirical research has linked the satisfaction of these psychological needs to positive work outcomes, including higher levels of engagement, job satisfaction, and performance across diverse occupational settings. Conversely, frustration of these needs has been associated with diminished

well-being and less adaptive forms of motivation (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; McAnally & Hagger, 2024).

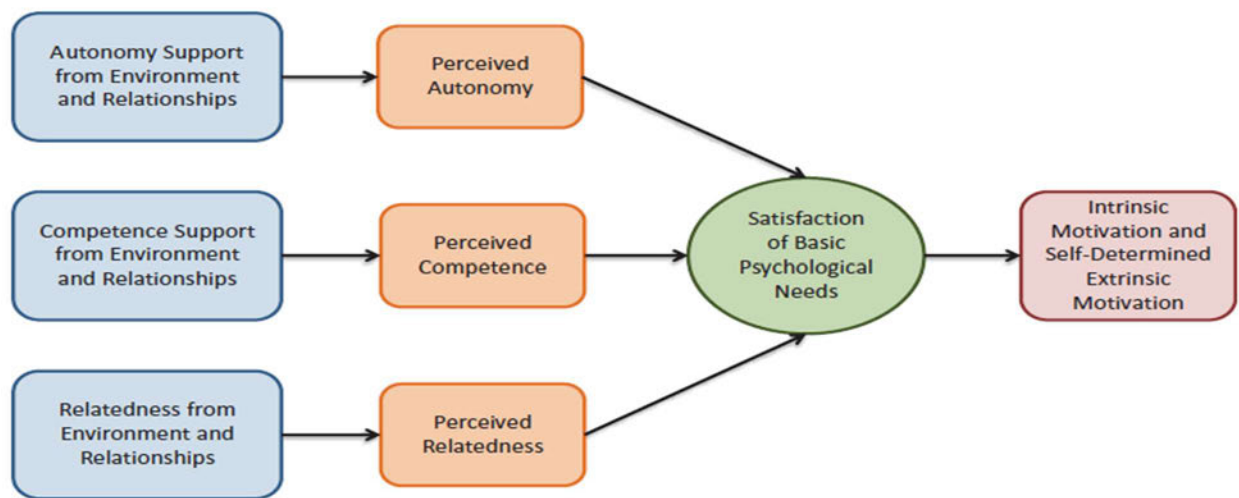


Figure 2. 9: The role of need satisfaction in motivation according to SDT

Source: (Legault, 2017).

Within organisational contexts, SDT offers a useful framework for examining how leadership behaviours and work design shape the internalisation of work-related goals. Leadership practices that support autonomy, such as providing meaningful choice, acknowledging employee perspectives, and limiting unnecessary control, are associated with higher-quality forms of motivation and increased discretionary effort (Slemp, et al., 2021; Landry, et al., 2022). Competence support through clear expectations, developmental feedback, and opportunities for skill use strengthens confidence and persistence, while relatedness support through respectful and inclusive leadership fosters trust, cooperation, and psychological safety (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021).

Large-scale and multi-context studies provide robust support for SDT in contemporary workplaces. Meta-analytic findings demonstrate that satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is positively associated with employee engagement, task performance, and psychological well-being, whereas need frustration predicts outcomes such as burnout, withdrawal, and turnover intentions (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021). More recent research indicates that leadership practices supporting

psychological needs promote adaptive motivation and resilience, particularly in environments characterised by uncertainty and change (McAnally & Hagger, 2024).

From a leadership perspective, SDT offers practical guidance for fostering motivation without undermining performance accountability. Leaders who combine clear structure with autonomy support, deliver feedback that enhances competence, and cultivate relational trust create conditions in which employees engage because work is experienced as meaningful rather than purely instrumental (Landry, et al., 2022; Slemp, et al., 2021). Such conditions are associated with stronger organisational commitment, lower turnover intentions, and higher levels of proactive behaviour (McAnally & Hagger, 2024).

Although SDT has been criticised for its applicability in highly regulated or compliance-driven environments, contemporary evidence suggests that autonomy support does not require the absence of structure. Providing rationales, acknowledging constraints, and allowing discretion within defined boundaries can still support internalisation and engagement in standardised contexts (Landry, et al., 2022; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021). SDT therefore complements performance management systems, with leadership behaviour determining whether such systems are experienced as motivating or controlling.

Overall, SDT remains one of the most empirically supported frameworks for understanding work motivation. Its enduring contribution lies in explaining not only whether employees are motivated, but the sustainability and quality of that motivation, linking leadership behaviour and work design to long-term engagement and performance through psychological need satisfaction (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; McAnally & Hagger, 2024).

2.4.4.2. The Job Characteristics Model (JCM)

The Job Characteristics Model (JCM), developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976), explains employee motivation by linking job design to psychological states that influence motivation, satisfaction, and performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Carter, et al., 2023). The model proposes that specific features of work give rise to three critical psychological states, experienced

meaningfulness of work, experienced responsibility for work outcomes, and knowledge of results, which together underpin internal work motivation and performance. According to the model, skill variety, task identity, and task significance primarily contribute to the experienced meaningfulness of work, autonomy fosters a sense of responsibility for outcomes, and feedback provides employees with insight into the effectiveness of their performance.

From a leadership perspective, the model remains highly relevant because leaders directly influence job characteristics through decisions relating to task allocation, work structuring, delegation, workflow design, and feedback practices. Through these mechanisms, leadership shapes both the quality of employee motivation and the extent of discretionary performance in operational roles (Doblinger, 2023; Carter, et al., 2023).

Within the model, five core job characteristics are identified as central to motivating job design. Skill variety refers to the extent to which a role requires the use of multiple skills and activities, while task identity reflects whether a job involves completing a whole and identifiable piece of work. Task significance relates to employees’ perceptions of the impact their work has on others or on the organisation more broadly. Autonomy denotes the degree of discretion and independence employees have in scheduling and executing their tasks, and feedback concerns the extent to which work activities themselves provide clear information about performance effectiveness. Together, these characteristics illustrate how job design, shaped through leadership practices, can foster meaningful, responsible, and motivating work experiences.

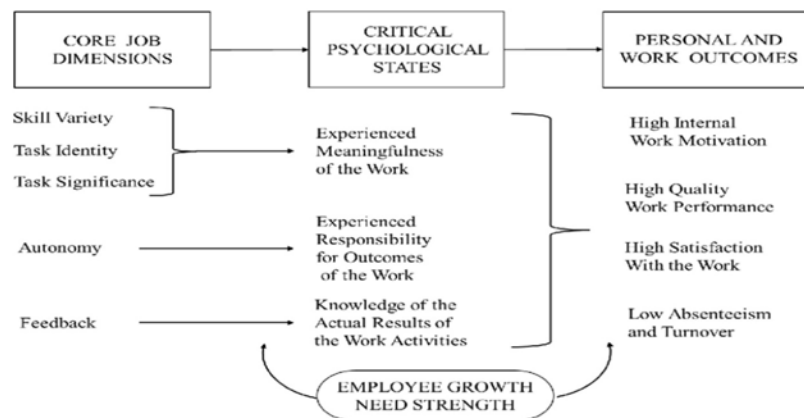


Figure 2. 10: The job characteristics mode

Source: (Batchelor, et al., 2014).

Operationally, JCM introduced the Motivating Potential Score (MPS) as a diagnostic indicator of a job's capacity to generate internal motivation, calculated as:

$$\text{MPS} = ((\text{Skill Variety} + \text{Task Identity} + \text{Task Significance}) / 3) \times \text{Autonomy} \times \text{Feedback}$$

The multiplicative structure of the formula highlights that low autonomy or weak feedback can substantially reduce motivational potential, even when other characteristics are present at high levels (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Carter, et al., 2023). Contemporary research supports this logic, showing that autonomy and feedback function as high-leverage design resources by strengthening perceived control, learning, and goal-directed behaviour, which are central to sustained engagement (Nie, et al., 2023; Doblinger, 2023). Recent work-design scholarship further demonstrates that employees actively interpret and enact job characteristics through practices such as job crafting. As a result, leaders influence motivation not only by formally designing roles, but also by enabling employees to shape their work within defined boundaries (Nie, et al., 2023; Parker, et al., 2025).

Empirical studies confirm that autonomy, meaningful work, and feedback remain critical design levers in contemporary organisational contexts, including hybrid and flexible work arrangements, where they support engagement, adaptability, and performance resilience (Doblinger, 2023; Albrecht, et al., 2021).

From a practical leadership perspective, JCM translates into targeted job-design interventions. Job enrichment initiatives that expand skill variety and task identity, such as role rotation, multi-skilling, and end-to-end task ownership, enhance experienced meaningfulness by allowing employees to see the purpose and completeness of their contribution (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Carter, et al., 2023). Leaders can further strengthen experienced responsibility by delegating discretion over sequencing, pacing, and problem-solving within safe operational limits, while feedback can be enhanced through timely performance information, interpretable quality metrics, and developmental coaching conversations that reinforce learning without undermining autonomy (Albrecht, et al., 2021; Nie, et al., 2023).

Despite its enduring influence, JCM has recognised limitations. Job characteristics do not operate uniformly across individuals or contexts, as cultural norms, task interdependence, and employee preferences moderate whether autonomy or variety is experienced as empowering or stressful (Carter, et al., 2023). In addition, poorly calibrated job enrichment may increase role overload if expanded responsibilities are not matched with adequate resources, potentially undermining motivation through fatigue or burnout (Albrecht, et al., 2021). Effective application therefore requires leadership judgement, aligning autonomy with capability development, maintaining developmental rather than controlling feedback, and monitoring workload sustainability (Doblinger, 2023; Carter, et al., 2023). Nevertheless, contemporary evidence continues to support JCM as a robust framework for understanding how leaders can create motivational conditions through deliberate job design in both traditional and hybrid organisational models (Albrecht, et al., 2021; Carter, et al., 2023).

2.5. Leadership and Motivation – Conceptual Integration

Understanding how leadership shapes employee motivation is central to effective human capital management. Although leadership and motivation are conceptually distinct, they are closely interrelated in organisational contexts. Beyond directing work and maintaining control, leaders influence employees' psychological states, behavioural responses, and performance outcomes. This section integrates the leadership styles discussed in Section 2.3 with the motivation theories reviewed in Section 2.4 to demonstrate how specific leadership behaviours interact with motivational processes to influence employee outcomes.

2.5.1. How Leadership Shapes Motivation

Leadership shapes employee motivation primarily through the way leaders design work, communicate expectations, and regulate the psychological conditions under which employees operate. Through practices such as goal formulation, feedback provision, reward allocation, and need support, leadership behaviour influences how employees interpret their roles, assess effort–outcome relationships, and attach meaning to their work. Empirical evidence consistently shows that leadership styles characterised by empowerment and developmental support are more likely

to generate autonomous and sustained forms of motivation than styles grounded in control or withdrawal.

Transformational leadership has been widely associated with higher intrinsic motivation because it promotes meaning, personal development, and alignment between individual and organisational values. By articulating purpose and encouraging growth, transformational leaders support autonomous motivation processes aligned with Self-Determination Theory and higher-order motivational needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Abu-Qutaish, et al., 2025; Bakker, et al., 2023). Similarly, participative and servant leadership approaches enhance motivation by supporting autonomy, relatedness, and psychological safety, which strengthens engagement and discretionary effort, particularly in collaborative and knowledge-intensive work settings (Eva, et al., 2019; Lee, et al., 2020; Sudiarti & Saepudin, 2024). In contrast, autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles are consistently associated with weaker motivational outcomes, as excessive control or leadership absence undermines perceptions of autonomy, competence, and support, increasing disengagement and withdrawal behaviours (Skogstad, et al., 2007; Lundmark, et al., 2022; Zhang, et al., 2023).

Leadership also influences motivation through expectancy-based processes that shape employees' beliefs about the relationship between effort, performance, and outcomes. Leaders who clarify goals, provide adequate resources, and reinforce consistent performance–reward linkages strengthen expectancy and instrumentality perceptions, thereby enhancing motivation in line with expectancy theory principles (Vroom, 1964; Kim & Yoon, 2025; Pervaiz, et al., 2021). Recent evidence indicates that empowering leadership strengthens self-efficacy, goal ownership, and innovation by reinforcing these cognitive linkages, whereas inconsistent rewards or ambiguous performance criteria weaken expectancy beliefs and diminish motivational coherence (Kim & Yoon, 2025).

In addition, leadership behaviour critically shapes motivation through fairness and equity perceptions. Ethical leadership strengthens distributive and procedural justice by modelling integrity, transparency, and consistency, which are positively associated with trust, commitment, and sustained motivation (Adams, 1965; Li, 2024; Jo & Shin, 2025). Conversely, perceived favouritism, inconsistent feedback, or opaque decision-making erodes equity perceptions and may

trigger motivational withdrawal, reduced effort, or turnover intentions when employees judge their input–outcome balance as unfair (Colquitt, et al., 2001; Nguyen, et al., 2023). Taken together, the literature demonstrates that leadership does not merely influence motivation indirectly. Rather, leadership behaviour actively determines the quality, stability, and direction of employee motivation by shaping need satisfaction, expectancy beliefs, and fairness perceptions, thereby aligning or misaligning employee effort with organisational objectives.

2.5.2. Linking Leadership Styles to Motivation Theories

Different leadership styles engage with different motivational theories and mechanisms:

Table 2. 2: Linking Leadership & Motivation

Leadership Style	Key Motivational Influence	Theoretical Link
Transformational	Inspires purpose, aligns personal and organizational values	Maslow (self-actualization), SDT, Goal setting (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bakker , et al., 2023)
Transactional	Motivates through extrinsic rewards and contingencies	Reinforcement Theory, Expectancy Theory (Laulié, et al., 2021; Ghosh, et al., 2024)
Servant/Ethical	Builds trust, support, fairness, and development	SDT, Equity Theory, Maslow (esteem/relatedness) (Greenleaf, 1977; Bedi, et al., 2016)
Participative/Democratic	Fosters autonomy and decision-making	SDT (autonomy), Goal-Setting Theory (Lewin, et al., 1939; Somech, 2006)
Team-Oriented	Enhances relatedness, cohesion, and peer support	Maslow (social needs), Equity Theory (Dorfman, et al., 2012; Wu & Cormican, 2021)
Autocratic	May suppress autonomy; useful for compliance-driven tasks	Reinforcement (punishment), short-term expectancy (Lewin, et al., 1939; Harms, et al., 2017)
Laissez-Faire	Undermines structure, feedback, and motivational clarity	Negative SDT, Low expectancy, Role ambiguity (Skogstad, et al., 2007; Zheng & Li, 2024)
Adaptive	Matches leadership to employee readiness and task complexity	Vroom’s Theory, Situational approaches, Competence (Nöthel, et al., 2023; Del Pino-Marchito, et al., 2025)

Source: Adapted by the author based on leadership and motivation literature.

Leadership is most effective when leaders adapt their behaviours to fit both the motivational characteristics of employees and the specific conditions under which work is performed.

2.5.3. The Role of Job Design and Rewards

Employee motivation is shaped not only by leadership behaviour, but also by the structural features of work and the way performance outcomes are recognised and reinforced. Leadership decisions directly influence job design by determining levels of autonomy, task scope, responsibility, and feedback embedded in roles (Deci, et al., 2017; Grant & Shandell, 2021). Research on work design consistently demonstrates that jobs offering discretion, meaningful task variety, visible impact, and timely feedback are associated with stronger intrinsic motivation, higher engagement, and improved performance, particularly when leaders deliberately design roles to encourage ownership and accountability (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Carter, et al., 2023; Parker, et al., 2025). When such design features are supported by leadership, employees are more likely to regulate their own effort, adapt to changing demands, and sustain motivation over time, reflecting the mechanisms proposed by Self-Determination Theory and the Job Characteristics Model (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Doblinger, 2023).

In addition to shaping work structure, leaders play a decisive role in how reward and reinforcement systems influence motivation. Empirical studies indicate that rewards strengthen motivation when they are clearly linked to performance, applied consistently, and perceived as procedurally fair. Under these conditions, rewards reinforce persistence and signal the value of desired behaviours (Skinner, 1953; Chen, et al., 2023; Kim & Yoon, 2025). However, rewards do not operate independently of leadership behaviour. Leaders influence whether rewards are interpreted as supportive or controlling through the transparency of decision-making, consistency of application, and clarity of performance criteria (Chen, et al., 2023).

Where reward practices are perceived as arbitrary, poorly communicated, or weakly aligned with effort, motivational benefits deteriorate. Such conditions are associated with frustration, reduced discretionary effort, and withdrawal behaviours, even when formal reward systems exist (Kim & Yoon, 2025). These patterns highlight that leadership credibility is central to maintaining

motivational integrity: job design and rewards enhance motivation only when leadership behaviour ensures coherence between effort, recognition, and organisational values.

2.5.4. Leadership as a Mediator of Motivation in Practice

Recent empirical scholarship increasingly conceptualises leadership as an intervening mechanism through which employee motivation is activated, shaped, and sustained, rather than as a passive background influence. Contemporary studies demonstrate that leadership styles such as transformational, ethical, and empowering leadership do not motivate employees directly, but instead operate by shaping key psychological and relational conditions that underpin motivation. Specifically, leadership behaviours influence the satisfaction of psychological needs, perceptions of fairness, and the degree to which employees internalise organisational goals, which subsequently affect engagement and performance outcomes (Vo, et al., 2022; Abu-Qutaish, et al., 2025). For instance, Vo et al. (2022) show that transformational and ethical leadership enhance work engagement by strengthening employees' experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, indicating that leadership converts organisational conditions into motivational capacity rather than functioning as a simple stimulus–response driver.

Empowering and autonomy-supportive leadership further contributes to motivation by facilitating goal internalisation and affective attachment to the organisation. When employees perceive leadership behaviours as supportive rather than controlling, they are more likely to align personal effort with organisational objectives and sustain motivation over time. Empirical evidence confirms that such leadership approaches are particularly effective in complex, interdependent work environments, where collaboration, discretion, and adaptability are essential for performance (Kim & Beehr, 2018; McAnally & Hagger, 2024).

Leadership-mediated motivation also operates through relational and social-exchange processes that extend beyond individual psychological mechanisms. Research indicates that respectful, empowering leadership strengthens leader–member exchange quality, which in turn mediates the relationship between leadership behaviour and both in-role performance and discretionary, extra-role contributions (Nguyen, et al., 2023). These relational dynamics influence how employees

interpret organisational intentions, evaluate reciprocity, and decide whether to invest effort beyond formal job requirements.

Collectively, this evidence supports an integrative view of leadership as a motivational conduit. Through daily interactions, communication practices, and behavioural consistency, leaders translate organisational systems, job design, and reward structures into meaningful psychological experiences that shape the direction, intensity, and persistence of employee motivation in practice (Vo, et al., 2022; McAnally & Hagger, 2024).

2.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed leadership and employee motivation literature to establish the theoretical foundation for the study. Contemporary leadership research emphasises leadership as a behavioural and relational process through which leaders influence employee motivation, engagement, and performance, rather than as a function of formal authority alone. The review showed that empowering, ethical, participative, servant, and transformational leadership styles are consistently associated with stronger motivational quality, psychological safety, and sustainable performance outcomes. In contrast, autocratic and laissez-faire leadership approaches are generally linked to reduced intrinsic motivation, lower engagement, and weaker long-term commitment.

The chapter further examined classical and contemporary motivation theories to explain both the sources of motivation and the mechanisms through which motivation is sustained at work. Content theories clarified fundamental motivational drivers and individual differences, while process theories explained how motivation is shaped through expectancy, equity, reinforcement, and goal clarity. Contemporary frameworks, particularly Self-Determination Theory and the Job Characteristics Model, extended these perspectives by demonstrating how leadership behaviours and job design jointly influence motivation through autonomy, competence, relatedness, meaningful work, and feedback.

By integrating leadership styles with motivation theories, the chapter demonstrated that leadership functions as a central mediating mechanism in organisational settings. Leadership behaviours translate organisational structures, job design, and reward systems into employees' psychological experiences, shaping both the quality and durability of motivation. The conceptual model presented in this chapter synthesised these relationships, illustrating how leadership styles influence motivation through multiple motivational processes that ultimately affect job satisfaction and performance.

Despite extensive scholarship, important gaps remain. Much of the existing research focuses on Western or service-oriented contexts, with limited empirical attention given to operational-level employees in manufacturing environments, particularly within the South African automotive sector. Furthermore, relatively few studies explicitly position leadership as a mediating link between work design, motivational processes, and employee outcomes within a single framework. These gaps provide a clear justification for the present study.

This chapter has established the theoretical foundation informing the empirical component of the study. The following chapter outlines the research methodology employed to examine the influence of leadership styles on employee motivation within an automotive manufacturing context, ensuring coherence between the reviewed literature, the conceptual framework, and the empirical analysis.

CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation within a South African automotive manufacturing organisation. Consistent with the study's objective of empirically assessing relationships between leadership behaviours and employee motivation, a quantitative research approach was selected. Quantitative methods are well suited to leadership and organisational behaviour research, as they allow for the systematic measurement of variables and the application of statistical techniques to identify patterns and relationships in an objective manner (Mphaluwa, et al., 2025).

The study is grounded in a positivist research paradigm and employs a cross-sectional survey design. This design supports the collection of data at a single point in time without intervention in the organisational environment, thereby enabling efficient data gathering while minimising disruption to operational activities (Kaputri, et al., 2025).

In addition, the chapter details the research design, data collection process, analytical procedures, and ethical considerations that guide the study. Together, these methodological components ensure coherence between the research objectives and the empirical analysis, while supporting the rigour and reliability of the findings.

3.2. An Overview of Research Methodology

A quantitative research methodology was employed to examine the influence of leadership styles on employee motivation within a South African automotive manufacturing context. This approach aligns with the study's objective of empirically analysing relationships between clearly defined constructs and assessing the predictive effects of leadership behaviours on employee motivation through the application of statistical techniques (Van den Broeck, et al., 2021; Figueiredo, et al., 2025).

The methodological approach is grounded in the assumption that leadership behaviours and employee motivation can be operationalised into measurable variables and assessed objectively across a defined population. Contemporary organisational research supports the application of quantitative designs for ensuring consistency, reliability, and comparability when examining behavioural phenomena in workplace settings (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). This approach is particularly suitable in manufacturing environments, where structured data collection minimises operational disruption and supports standardised analysis.

A cross-sectional survey design was utilised to capture employees' perceptions at a single point in time. This design is commonly applied in leadership and motivation research, as it enables the efficient examination of prevailing organisational conditions without introducing experimental manipulation or disruption to normal work processes (Barkhuizen & Gumede, 2021; Makhwiting & Bruhns, 2025). In the context of this study, the approach was considered appropriate for examining existing leadership practices and their motivational implications within a real-world automotive manufacturing environment.

Primary data were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire incorporating Likert-scale items to measure multiple leadership style dimensions and overall employee motivation. Survey-based instruments are widely used in leadership research due to their capacity to support standardised data collection and subsequent inferential statistical analysis across relatively large employee groups (Southgate, et al., 2023; Hamoumi, et al., 2025). The use of established measurement scales further strengthened construct validity and enhanced the robustness of the analytical process.

Data analysis followed a structured quantitative procedure. Preliminary data screening and preparation were undertaken using Microsoft Excel to ensure accuracy and completeness prior to analysis. Statistical analyses were then conducted using appropriate software to assess measurement reliability, generate descriptive statistics, analyse demographic characteristics, and examine the predictive relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation through multiple regression analysis. In line with best-practice guidelines in organisational research, relevant regression diagnostics were performed to evaluate key model assumptions, and where

necessary, refinements were made to support the validity and robustness of the statistical results (Hair, et al., 2018; Hair, et al., 2019).

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Participation in the study was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and measures were implemented to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Research data were securely stored and managed in accordance with institutional ethical requirements and applicable data protection standards.

Overall, the methodological framework provides a coherent and theoretically aligned basis for addressing the research objectives. By maintaining alignment between the research questions, data collection methods, and analytical techniques, the approach supports the credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study's empirical findings.

3.3. Research Type

Research is commonly classified according to its primary purpose as either basic or applied. While basic research is primarily concerned with advancing theoretical understanding, applied research is directed toward addressing practical organisational issues and producing findings that can inform managerial decision-making (York, et al., 2025). Given that this study is conducted within a manufacturing organisation and aims to generate actionable insight into how leadership styles influence employee motivation, it is classified as applied research.

The study employs a quantitative research type, which is well suited to examining relationships between predefined constructs using numerical data and statistical analysis. Quantitative approaches are widely used in organisational research where variables such as leadership behaviour and employee motivation can be operationalised into measurable indicators and examined empirically (Lo, et al., 2020; Slater & Hasson, 2025).

In addition, the study utilises a cross-sectional survey design, whereby data are collected from respondents at a single point in time. Such designs are well established in management research

because they allow for the efficient examination of prevailing perceptions and behavioural patterns without introducing manipulation of the organisational environment (Maier, et al., 2023).

Accordingly, the study is best characterised as an applied, quantitative, cross-sectional investigation, aligned with its objective of producing empirically grounded findings with direct relevance for leadership practice in organisational contexts.

3.4. Research Process Overview

The research process adopted for this study followed a structured sequence consistent with applied organisational research practice. The study began with the identification of the research problem and the clarification of its purpose, which informed the formulation of the research objectives. A focused review of relevant literature was then conducted to establish the theoretical foundation of the study and to guide key methodological choices. Based on this foundation, the research design and data collection approach were determined, after which primary data were collected and analysed using appropriate statistical techniques. The process concluded with the interpretation of the empirical findings and the integration of the results into the overall dissertation.

This sequence reflects a conventional research workflow described in methodological literature, whereby conceptual development precedes empirical investigation and is followed by analysis and interpretation (Saunders, et al., 2023). To support clarity and transparency, the principal stages of the research process are summarised in Figure 3.1, which illustrates the logical progression from problem formulation to data analysis and reporting.

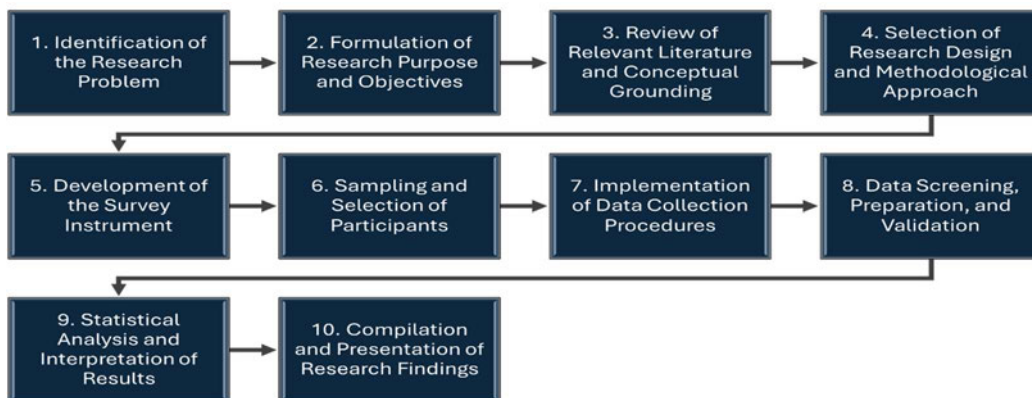


Figure 3. 1: Overview of the research process

3.5. Research Design and Methods

3.5.1. Overview of Different Research Designs

Research design refers to the structured framework that guides how a study is organised to address its research objectives and answer its research questions. In organisational and management research, the most commonly applied designs are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches, each distinguished by differences in data type, analytical focus, and underlying methodological assumptions (Haq & Yasin, 2025).

A quantitative research design involves the collection of numerical data and the application of statistical techniques to examine relationships between variables. This design is particularly appropriate for studies that seek to test associations, identify patterns, or evaluate the predictive influence of independent variables on defined outcomes (Aguinis, et al., 2019; Slater & Hasson, 2025). Quantitative designs are therefore widely used in leadership and organisational behaviour research, where constructs such as leadership style and employee motivation can be operationalised into measurable indicators.

In contrast, qualitative research designs focus on non-numerical data, such as interview narratives, observations, and open-ended responses, to generate deeper insight into participants' experiences and perceptions. These designs are most suitable for exploratory research or for studies seeking to understand complex social processes in context (Saunders, et al., 2023). While qualitative approaches provide depth and interpretive richness, their findings are not intended for statistical generalisation.

Mixed-methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single study, enabling researchers to combine numerical analysis with contextual and interpretive insight. Although this approach can enhance explanatory depth and triangulation, it requires greater methodological complexity, time, and analytical integration, which may not be appropriate for studies with a narrowly defined empirical focus (Gamage, 2025; Mulili, et al., 2025).

The selection of the research design was guided by the study’s objectives, the type of data required, and the analytical techniques to be applied. In line with the aim of empirically examining the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation, a quantitative research design was adopted. The justification for this design choice is elaborated in the subsequent subsection.

Table 3. 1: Comparison of Research Design Approaches

Design Type	Nature of Data	Typical Methods	Strengths	Limitations	Sources
Qualitative	Non-numerical	Interviews, focus groups, observations	Context-rich insights; flexibility	Limited generalisability; interpretive subjectivity	(Saunders, et al., 2023; Gamage, 2025)
Quantitative	Numerical	Surveys, experiments, statistical analysis	Pattern identification; statistical generalisation	Reduced contextual depth	(Hair, et al., 2018; Saunders, et al., 2023)
Mixed-methods	Numerical and non-numerical	Surveys with interviews/focus groups	Integrates breadth and depth	Resource-intensive; analytical complexity	(Saunders, et al., 2023; Mulili, et al., 2025)

Source: Constructed by the author based on literature on types of research design approach.

3.5.2. Selection of the Research Design – A Quantitative Approach

The selection of an appropriate research design was guided by the study’s objective of empirically examining the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation. Given the intention to measure defined constructs, test statistical relationships, and evaluate the predictive influence of leadership behaviours on motivational outcomes, a quantitative research design was deemed most suitable.

Quantitative approaches are particularly appropriate when variables can be operationalised into measurable indicators and analysed using statistical techniques. In organisational research, such

designs allow researchers to identify patterns, assess the strength and significance of relationships, and generate findings that are systematic, replicable, and comparable across contexts (Aguinis, et al., 2019). In this study, leadership styles and employee motivation were quantified through structured survey items, enabling objective analysis using inferential statistics.

Alternative methodological approaches were considered but not adopted. A qualitative design, while valuable for exploring subjective experiences and contextual nuances, would not have supported the study's requirement to statistically assess the magnitude and direction of relationships between leadership styles and motivation. A mixed-methods approach was also excluded, as the research followed a clearly specified, hypothesis-driven focus and practical constraints limited the feasibility of collecting and integrating multiple data sources (Haq & Yasin, 2025).

Within the quantitative framework, a cross-sectional survey design was employed. This design enabled the collection of data at a single point in time, allowing for an efficient examination of existing leadership practices and employee motivation without interfering with organisational operations. Cross-sectional designs are widely used in leadership and behavioural studies where the aim is to analyse associations and predictive relationships within natural workplace settings (Maier, et al., 2023).

In summary, the adoption of a quantitative, cross-sectional research design ensures alignment between the study's objectives, data collection method, and analytical approach. This design provides a robust methodological foundation for examining the influence of leadership styles on employee motivation and supports the application of multiple regression analysis to address the research questions.

3.6. Area and Scope of the Study

This study was conducted within a South African automotive manufacturing organisation operating in a structured, production-driven environment. The name of the organisation is not disclosed in this dissertation in order to preserve organisational confidentiality and comply with

ethical research requirements. The organisation forms part of the automotive value chain and is characterised by formalised production systems, standardised operational procedures, and clearly defined supervisory hierarchies. Such an environment provides a suitable context for examining leadership styles and employee motivation, as leadership behaviours directly influence task execution, performance expectations, and daily employee experiences in manufacturing operations.

The scope of the study was deliberately limited to operational-level employees, including team members, team leaders, and group leaders who interact regularly with supervisory leadership. Senior and executive management were excluded to maintain a focused examination of leadership as experienced at shop-floor level, where motivation is closely linked to productivity, attendance, quality performance, and operational discipline. This delimitation strengthens internal consistency and enhances the comparability of responses across participants.

Geographically, the research was confined to a single automotive manufacturing site located in South Africa. Although this limits the generalisability of the findings to other organisations or industries, it enables an in-depth and context-sensitive analysis of the leadership–motivation relationship. This focused approach aligns with the applied nature of the study and supports the objective of generating practical insights relevant to manufacturing environments.

In terms of content boundaries, the study examined selected leadership styles and their relationship with employee motivation using a structured questionnaire. Variables such as remuneration systems, organisational culture, macroeconomic conditions, and external labour-market factors were excluded from the analysis. These boundaries were necessary to maintain analytical focus, reduce model complexity, and ensure feasibility within the study's time and resource constraints.

3.7. Sampling Design

Sampling design refers to the systematic process through which a subset of participants is selected from a defined population to represent that population in empirical analysis. In organisational research, the choice of sampling design is a critical methodological decision, as it directly influences the validity, reliability, and interpretability of research findings (Cornesse, et al., 2020).

This section therefore discusses the conceptual basis of sampling design and explains the rationale for the sampling strategy employed in the current study.

3.7.1. Theoretical Overview of Sampling Design

In quantitative research, sampling strategies are commonly distinguished according to whether selection is based on random or non-random procedures. Probability sampling involves random selection, ensuring that each unit within the population has a known and non-zero chance of inclusion. This approach enhances representativeness and supports statistical generalisation and is typically implemented through techniques such as simple random sampling, stratified sampling, and systematic sampling (Mulisa, 2022).

In contrast, non-probability sampling does not rely on random selection and is frequently used in applied organisational research where access to the full population is limited by operational, logistical, or ethical constraints. Methods such as convenience, purposive, and quota sampling are commonly employed in these contexts, particularly when participation depends on specific organisational roles, experiences, or exposure to the phenomena under investigation, including leadership behaviours and workplace practices (Zickar & Keith, 2023).

The selection between probability and non-probability sampling is guided by the study's objectives, accessibility of the target population, and feasibility of implementation. In organisational contexts, non-probability sampling is often appropriate when the research seeks to examine relationships within a defined setting rather than to produce broadly generalisable population estimates (Cornesse, et al., 2020; Ahmed, 2024).

Irrespective of the sampling approach adopted, a sound sampling design should support internal validity, ensure that participants possess adequate knowledge of the research topic, and generate data that are appropriate for robust statistical analysis. These considerations are particularly important in leadership research, where respondents must have sufficient and sustained exposure to leadership practices in order to provide reliable and meaningful response.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the conceptual relationship between the broader population, the defined target population, the sampling frame, and the final study sample.

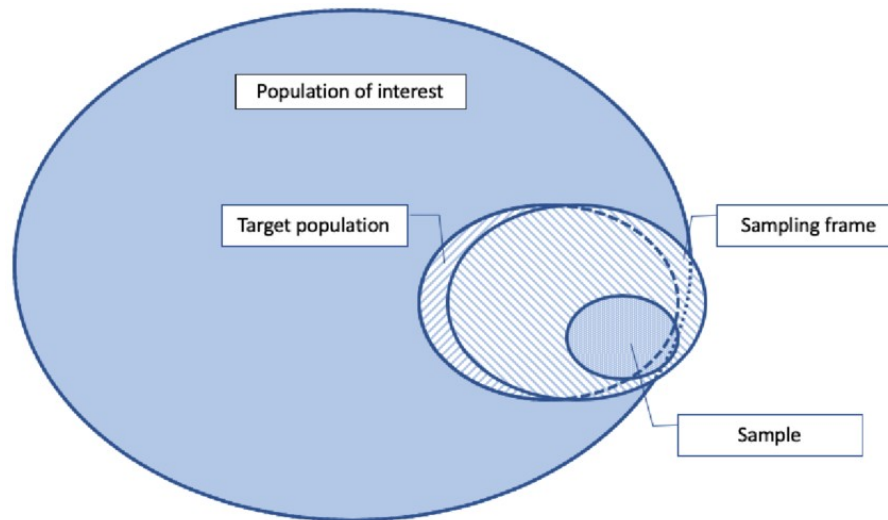


Figure 3. 2: Relationship between Population, Target population, Sampling Frame, and Sample

Source: (Casteel & Bridier, 2021).

The specific sampling technique applied in this study, together with its justification and inclusion criteria, is detailed in the following subsection.

3.7.2. Sampling Design Selection and Rationale

The sampling approach adopted in this study was determined by the research objectives, the organisational context, and access constraints typical of a production-based manufacturing environment. The target population comprised employees in a South African automotive manufacturing organisation who were directly exposed to supervisory leadership in their routine work activities. The study specifically focused on operational-level employees who reported directly to team leaders and group leaders. These employees constituted the accessible population of 165.

The sampling frame consisted of permanent operational employees within the organisation. Employees with less than one year of service were excluded to ensure that participants had sufficient exposure to prevailing leadership practices. Temporary and contract employees were

also excluded, as differing employment arrangements could result in uneven leadership experiences. These criteria were applied to enhance internal consistency and strengthen the validity of employee perceptions captured in the study.

In line with the applied nature of the research and the practical constraints associated with conducting research in an operational manufacturing environment, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was adopted. This approach is commonly employed in organisational and leadership research where participants are selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and their capacity to provide informed, experience-based insights (Zickar & Keith, 2023). The use of purposive sampling was particularly appropriate given that the study was conducted within a single organisational setting and focused on employees directly exposed to leadership practices.

At the time of data collection, the operational workforce consisted of 165 employees who met the defined inclusion criteria and therefore constituted the accessible population for the study. All eligible employees were invited to participate in the survey, consistent with the purposive sampling approach adopted in this study. A total of 107 usable responses were received, resulting in a response rate of approximately 65 per cent. This level of participation is considered acceptable within organisational survey research and is sufficient to support the statistical analyses undertaken in the study, including reliability assessment and multiple regression analysis. Methodological literature suggests that response rates above 60 per cent are generally adequate in single-organisation quantitative studies and provide a sound basis for statistical inference (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Ponto, 2015; Cornesse, et al., 2020).

Overall, the achieved sample provided a robust empirical basis for examining the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation, while remaining consistent with practical feasibility considerations and ethical requirements associated with workplace-based research.

3.8. The Survey Instrument

The development of the survey instrument was informed by a targeted review of recent peer-reviewed measurement scales used in leadership and employee motivation research. This review focused on identifying instruments with demonstrated empirical validity and reliability that have been applied effectively in quantitative organisational studies. Emphasis was placed on tools suitable for measuring leadership behaviours and motivational constructs within structured workplace environments. Drawing on this body of literature ensured that the questionnaire design was grounded in established measurement practice and aligned with contemporary methodological standards for organisational research (Aguinis, et al., 2019; Gonzales, et al., 2024).

3.8.1. The Process of Instrument Selection

The selection of the survey instrument was guided by the study's research objectives, the nature of the leadership and motivation constructs under investigation, and the analytical requirements of a quantitative research design. In leadership and organisational behaviour research, the use of previously validated measurement instruments is strongly recommended, as it enhances conceptual precision, comparability with prior studies, and methodological robustness (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023).

To inform instrument selection, recent empirical literature was reviewed to identify widely used scales for measuring leadership styles and employee motivation in organisational contexts. Particular attention was given to instruments applied in operational or manufacturing environments and to those employing Likert-type response formats, as such scales are compatible with reliability testing and multivariate statistical techniques, including regression analysis (Aguinis, et al., 2019; Grobler & Sibanda, 2024).

Survey items were drawn from established and empirically tested instruments reported in the literature. Where contextual adaptation was required, items were carefully reworded to reflect the organisational setting of the study while retaining their theoretical intent. The adaptation of validated measures is an accepted practice in organisational research, provided that construct integrity is maintained and reliability is assessed during data analysis (Oamen, et al., 2022).

The resulting questionnaire (see Appendix C) consisted of structured Likert-scale items designed to capture employees' perceptions of leadership behaviours and their overall level of work motivation. This standardised format supported consistent responses, minimised respondent effort, and enabled the application of inferential statistical analyses aligned with the study's objectives.

3.8.2. Descriptions of Instruments Reviewed

The development of the survey instrument was informed by a focused review of peer-reviewed measurement tools commonly used in quantitative leadership and motivation research. The purpose of this review was to identify empirically validated instruments that have demonstrated reliability and applicability in organisational survey studies and that could be adapted appropriately for the context of this research.

- **Leadership Measurement Instruments**

Leadership styles are most frequently measured using perception-based survey instruments that assess observable leadership behaviours. One of the most widely applied tools is the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which captures transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership dimensions through employee ratings. Empirical studies using the MLQ have consistently employed cross-sectional survey designs to examine relationships between leadership behaviour and outcomes such as motivation, engagement, and performance. For example, Hoch et al. (2017) utilised MLQ-based survey data across multiple organisations to analyse how perceived leadership behaviours influence employee attitudes, demonstrating the instrument's suitability for quantitative leadership–outcome research. In addition to the MLQ, leadership research within manufacturing and operational settings has increasingly adopted behaviour-focused measurement approaches tailored to specific organisational contexts. Xuefeng (2023) for instance, employed a structured Likert-scale questionnaire to assess transformational and transactional leadership behaviours among manufacturing employees and examined their effects on employee motivation. Such studies illustrate that leadership styles can be reliably operationalised through behaviour-based survey items, particularly in production-oriented environments where leadership is experienced through daily supervisory interactions.

- **Motivation Measurement Instruments**

Employee motivation is commonly assessed using structured questionnaires grounded in established motivation theories, with instruments typically distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational dimensions. Aljumah (2023) for example, used Likert-scale items to measure intrinsic motivation (e.g., enjoyment and personal fulfilment) and extrinsic motivation (e.g., rewards and recognition), and applied quantitative analysis to examine their relationships with job satisfaction and performance. This approach demonstrates how motivation can be translated into measurable constructs suitable for regression-based analysis. Other studies adopt broader work-motivation or engagement instruments that capture employees' overall motivational state rather than discrete motivational categories. These measures typically assess enthusiasm, willingness to exert effort, and commitment to work tasks. Figueiredo et al. (2025), applied such a general motivation instrument in an organisational survey to examine the influence of workplace practices on employee motivation and engagement, supporting the use of aggregate motivation measures as dependent variables in quantitative organisational research.

Overall, the instruments reviewed provided a foundation for the selection and adaptation of questionnaire items used in the present study. By drawing on leadership and motivation measures that have been empirically validated and applied in comparable quantitative research contexts, the final questionnaire was designed to ensure conceptual alignment, measurement clarity, and suitability for statistical analysis within the organisational setting examined.

3.8.3. Questionnaire Development and Description

The survey instrument employed in this study was developed using insights derived from established leadership and motivation measurement tools discussed in the preceding section. Questionnaire items were adapted to reflect the specific organisational context of the study while maintaining consistency with the theoretical constructs and empirical foundations reported in previous research. This approach aligns with accepted practice in quantitative organisational research, where contextual adaptation of instruments is considered appropriate provided that the

underlying construct meaning is retained and reliability is assessed during data analysis (Aguinis, et al., 2019; Manuel, et al., 2024).

The final questionnaire comprised three structured sections. Section A collected demographic information and included four items relating to respondents' gender, age category, departmental affiliation, and length of service. These variables were incorporated to describe the characteristics of the sample and to enable comparative or subgroup analysis where relevant.

Section B focused on leadership styles and comprised 24 Likert-type items designed to capture employees' perceptions of their immediate leaders' behaviours. These items reflected observable leadership practices such as decision-making, communication, support, control, and involvement, and were informed by established leadership measurement approaches reported in prior survey-based studies.

Section C measured employee motivation and consisted of 16 Likert-type items assessing intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of motivation, including enjoyment of work, personal achievement, recognition, growth, and job security. Collectively, Sections B and C facilitated a quantitative assessment of the association between employees' perceptions of leadership behaviours and their levels of work motivation.

All perceptual items in Sections B and C were measured using a consistent Likert-type response format, allowing for standardisation of responses and supporting reliability testing and regression-based analysis. The questionnaire was designed to ensure clarity, logical flow, and reasonable completion time.

The questionnaire was finalised during the first week of July 2025 following an initial pilot test conducted in the final week of June 2025 to assess clarity, usability, and overall suitability prior to full-scale deployment. Pilot testing is recognised as an important step in strengthening face validity and ensuring the practical applicability of survey instruments in quantitative research (Ponto, 2015). The pilot study was conducted with ten respondents who were excluded from the final sample. Respondents completed the questionnaire via the online survey platform and were

requested to provide feedback regarding the clarity of the items, the overall structure of the questionnaire, and the ease with which it could be completed. Responses from the pilot test were entirely positive, with respondents indicating that the questionnaire was clear, easy to understand, and required no additional explanation or guidance. The online format was reported to be user-friendly, and the average completion time was approximately 10 to 15 minutes, which was considered reasonable for operational-level employees.

Although no substantive issues were identified during the pilot phase, minor wording refinements were implemented to further enhance clarity and ensure consistency across items. Following these refinements, the questionnaire was deemed suitable for full administration. The full questionnaire is provided in Appendix C.

3.9. Survey Administration

Data collection was conducted using an online survey platform (Google Forms) during the final week of July 2025 and the first week of August 2025, to enable efficient distribution and convenient access for respondents across operational departments. Online survey administration is widely used in organisational research as it supports standardised dissemination, reduces administrative workload, and facilitates secure data capture (Stevens, et al., 2024).

The distribution of the questionnaire was managed in collaboration with the organisation's Human Resources Training Department through established internal communication channels. This method ensured that the survey invitation was directed to the appropriate target group while adhering to organisational procedures and minimising interference with production activities. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, together with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

The survey link was available for a specified data collection period, during which follow-up reminders were circulated via internal communication to encourage participation. Access to the questionnaire was limited to eligible operational-level employees in line with the defined sampling criteria. No incentives were offered, and participants were able to complete the survey at a time that suited their work schedules, which supported response participation.

All completed questionnaires were automatically recorded by the online platform and stored securely in a digital format accessible only to the researcher. This data collection approach ensured uniform survey administration, minimised the potential for data entry errors, and maintained the integrity of the dataset for subsequent statistical analysis.

3.10. Data Collection and Analysis

This section describes the procedures applied for recruiting participants, collecting data, managing responses, and conducting statistical analysis. The methods employed were consistent with the study's quantitative research design and were intended to encourage participant engagement, safeguard data quality, and enable robust statistical assessment of the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation (Aguinis, et al., 2019; Reio, 2024).

3.10.1. Participant Recruitment Strategy

Participants were recruited within the organisation through formal internal communication channels facilitated by the Human Resources Training Department. Prior to distributing the questionnaire, the purpose and scope of the study were communicated to relevant organisational stakeholders in accordance with ethical requirements. Operational-level employees who satisfied the inclusion criteria were invited to participate on a voluntary basis and were provided with clear information regarding the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

The recruitment strategy was designed to balance accessibility with minimal disruption to operational activities. The use of online survey distribution enabled participants to engage with the study at a time convenient to them, which has been shown to support participation in organisational research settings characterised by time and workload constraints (Stevens, et al., 2024).

3.10.2. Participant Optimisation Strategy

Survey-based research is dependent on participants' willingness and ability to engage meaningfully with the research process. Empirical research indicates that participation rates and response quality are influenced by factors such as perceived relevance of the research topic, clarity

of communication, time burden, and ease of access to the survey instrument (Cornesse, et al., 2020; Kunz & Gummer, 2025).

Taking these considerations into account, a number of steps were taken to encourage participation in the current study. The questionnaire was intentionally designed to be brief, logically organised, and manageable in terms of completion time, as verified during the pilot testing phase. The use of an online platform further reduced participation barriers by allowing flexible access. Follow-up reminders were communicated through internal organisational channels during the data collection period to encourage participation and reduce non-response. These measures contributed to achieving a satisfactory response rate and supported the collection of data suitable for quantitative analysis.

3.10.3. Data Capturing Protocols and Information Security

Data were captured electronically using an online survey platform, which automatically recorded responses in a structured digital format. Electronic data capture reduces the likelihood of transcription errors and supports consistency and accuracy in survey-based research (Saunders, et al., 2023). No personally identifiable information was collected, and individual responses could not be linked to specific participants. All downloaded data files were securely stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. Data management procedures complied with institutional ethical requirements relating to confidentiality, data protection, and responsible research conduct. These measures ensured that the data remained secure and that its integrity was preserved throughout the study.

3.10.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a systematic, multi-stage process consistent with quantitative organisational research practices. Raw survey data were initially exported from the online survey platform and subjected to preliminary screening using Microsoft Excel. This phase involved converting questionnaire responses into numerical codes, screening the data for missing or inconsistent entries, and preparing the dataset for statistical analysis.

The final stage of data analysis was conducted using the SPSS. Descriptive statistical methods were applied to summarise respondents' demographic profiles and the primary study variables. The internal consistency of the leadership and motivation measurement scales was assessed through reliability analysis. To evaluate the predictive relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation, multiple regression analysis was performed, with overall model significance assessed using the ANOVA F-statistic. The selection of these analytical techniques was aligned with the research objectives and the measurement characteristics of the data, supporting an appropriate and rigorous quantitative analysis.

The outcomes of the reliability and regression diagnostics were subsequently used to inform analytical decisions, including confirmation of scale adequacy and refinement of the final regression model where necessary to satisfy key statistical assumptions and ensure interpretability of the results.

3.11. Validity and Reliability of the Data

Establishing the validity and reliability of the data is a critical requirement in quantitative research, as these attributes underpin the credibility and interpretability of the study's findings. In this study, validity and reliability were addressed through a combination of careful instrument design, the use of established measurement scales, and appropriate analytical procedures applied during data analysis to ensure consistency and accuracy in the measurement of key constructs.

In quantitative research, the quality of a measurement instrument is commonly evaluated through its psychometric properties, which include reliability and validity. These properties assess the extent to which the instrument produces consistent measurements and accurately captures the underlying theoretical constructs. In this study, psychometric evaluation focused on internal consistency reliability, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and construct validity, assessed through theoretical alignment of measurement items and consistency with established literature. Acceptable reliability thresholds were guided by established criteria ($\alpha \geq 0.70$), which indicate satisfactory internal consistency for organisational research instruments (Hair, et al., 2018).

3.11.1. Validity of the Questionnaire

Validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument accurately measures the constructs it is intended to assess. In questionnaire-based quantitative research, validity is commonly considered in relation to both internal and external dimensions. In applied organisational studies, particular emphasis is placed on internal validity, as the primary objective is to examine relationships accurately within a defined organisational context rather than to achieve broad population generalisability (Saunders, et al., 2023).

In this study, internal validity was addressed through careful consideration of both content and construct validity (Amirzadeh, et al., 2024). Content validity relates to the degree to which questionnaire items adequately represent the conceptual domain of the variables under investigation. To strengthen content validity, a comprehensive review of peer-reviewed literature on leadership styles and employee motivation was undertaken, and established measurement instruments from prior empirical research were adapted for use in the questionnaire (Mohammadi, et al., 2024; Hossan, et al., 2025). This process ensured that the instrument captured the key dimensions relevant to the study's objectives and theoretical framework.

Construct validity concerns the extent to which an instrument accurately reflects the theoretical constructs it seeks to measure (Mohammadi, et al., 2024; Shrestha, 2021). In the present study, construct validity was supported by organising questionnaire items into conceptually coherent sections corresponding to leadership behaviours and employee motivation, consistent with recognised theoretical models. The use of multiple items to measure each construct further enhanced construct representation and reduced the likelihood of measurement error.

Face validity was supported through a pilot testing process conducted during the final week of May 2025, prior to full-scale data collection. The pilot involved ten operational-level employees who were excluded from the final sample. Feedback obtained during this phase indicated that the questionnaire items were clear, relevant, and appropriately framed for the organisational context, and that they reflected participants' experiences of leadership and motivation (Mohammadi, et al.,

2024). This feedback supported the practical suitability of the instrument before wider administration.

External validity refers to the extent to which study findings may be applied beyond the specific sample examined (Cornesse, et al., 2020). Given the applied nature of the research, the use of a non-probability sampling approach, and the focus on a single organisation, the findings are intended to support analytical rather than statistical generalisation. Emphasis is therefore placed on contextual relevance and internal consistency, which is consistent with accepted practice in applied organisational research (Cornesse, et al., 2020).

3.11.2. Reliability of the Questionnaire

Reliability refers to the degree to which a measurement instrument produces consistent and stable results across items intended to assess the same construct. A research instrument is regarded as reliable when it yields similar outcomes under comparable conditions. Although reliability alone does not confirm validity, it is a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring valid measurement (Amirzadeh, et al., 2024).

In quantitative survey research, reliability is most evaluated through internal consistency, which examines the extent to which items within a scale are measuring a single underlying construct. Internal consistency is typically assessed using Cronbach's alpha, a widely recognised statistical measure in organisational and behavioural research (Hair, et al., 2018).

In the present study, internal consistency reliability was evaluated during the data analysis stage using SPSS. Separate reliability analyses were conducted for the leadership and employee motivation scales. The use of multiple Likert-type items for each construct enabled a robust assessment of internal consistency and supported the aggregation of items into composite variables for subsequent regression analysis.

The standardised response format, consistent scale direction, and careful item wording further contributed to measurement reliability by reducing random error and response ambiguity.

Collectively, these procedures ensured that the questionnaire demonstrated an acceptable level of reliability for the purposes of quantitative analysis and interpretation.

3.12. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were given careful attention throughout the research process, in line with accepted standards for social and organisational research involving human participants. In workplace-based studies, ethical research practice requires that participants' rights are respected, confidentiality and trust are maintained, and all research activities are conducted with integrity and transparency (Saunders, et al., 2023).

Prior to the commencement of data collection, ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) (see Appendix D), under System ID: 212515111. The study was reviewed and approved in accordance with institutional policies governing research involving human participants. In addition, formal gatekeeper permission was secured from the participating organisation before data collection commenced (see Appendix A), ensuring that the research was conducted with organisational consent and without disruption to normal operational activities.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the beginning of the questionnaire through the provision of a detailed consent statement (see Appendix B). This statement outlined the purpose and objectives of the study and informed participants that their involvement was entirely voluntary. Participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty, and no incentives were offered to encourage participation.

Measures were implemented to ensure confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all survey responses were recorded anonymously. Research data were stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher and supervisor. Findings are reported in aggregated form to prevent the identification of individual participants or organisational units.

The study was assessed as posing minimal risk to participants, as the questionnaire did not include sensitive or intrusive questions and did not involve vulnerable groups. Upon completion of the research, a summary of the findings will be made available to the participating organisation through appropriate internal communication channels, subject to management approval.

3.13. Chapter Summary

This chapter set out the methodological framework adopted to address the study's research objectives. It explained the overall research approach and design, detailing the use of a quantitative, cross-sectional methodology and a structured questionnaire to collect primary data. The chapter also described the procedures used for data collection and analysis, including the application of appropriate statistical techniques to examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation.

In addition, the chapter outlined the sampling strategy, instrument development process, and data handling procedures employed in the study. Consideration was also given to issues of data security, ethical compliance, and methodological limitations relevant to organisational research. Together, the methodological choices presented in this chapter provide a coherent foundation for the presentation and interpretation of the empirical findings in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter reports the empirical findings generated from the quantitative analyses undertaken to examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation among operational-level employees within a South African automotive manufacturing organisation. The results are presented in line with the research design and analytical procedures outlined in the preceding chapter and are derived from responses to the structured questionnaire.

The chapter opens with an overview of the response rate and the data preparation procedures applied prior to analysis, followed by a demographic profile of the respondents. Descriptive statistical techniques are then used to identify the leadership styles most frequently experienced by employees and to assess overall levels of employee motivation. The internal consistency of the measurement scales is evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Finally, multiple regression analysis is employed to examine the predictive relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation, with the ANOVA F-statistic reported to indicate the overall significance of the regression model.

In keeping with the conventions of quantitative research reporting, this chapter is limited to the presentation of statistical results through tables and figures, supported by brief explanatory text. Interpretation of the findings and their alignment with existing literature are reserved for discussion in Chapter 5.

4.2. Response Rate and Data Preparation

4.2.1. Response Rate

The accessible population consisted of 165 operational-level employees at a South African automotive manufacturing organisation. The structured questionnaire was distributed electronically via Google Forms to all eligible members of this population, constituting a census approach. Before the full rollout, the questionnaire was pilot tested with ten employees to evaluate

item clarity and instrument reliability. Responses obtained during the pilot phase were used exclusively for refining the questionnaire and were not included in the final dataset for analysis.

In total, 107 completed questionnaires were received and considered suitable for statistical analysis. This corresponds to a response rate of approximately 65 per cent, which is regarded as acceptable for quantitative organisational research and adequate to support the statistical procedures applied in this study. Accordingly, the final sample for the study consisted of 107 respondents drawn from the accessible population of 165 employees.

4.2.2. Data Collection, Screening, and Preparation

Data were collected electronically via Google Forms and subsequently exported into Microsoft Excel for preliminary screening and preparation. Responses to the questionnaire items were converted into numerical values in accordance with the five-point Likert scale applied in the study. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded using the transformation formula $(6 - n)$ to ensure consistency in scale direction.

Basic data verification procedures were performed in Excel to confirm data completeness and accuracy. These checks included the use of counting functions to identify missing responses and the application of minimum and maximum value checks to ensure that all responses fell within the expected Likert scale range of 1 to 5. No blank or out-of-range values were detected in the final dataset.

Once verification was completed, the finalised dataset was transferred to the SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Composite scores for leadership styles and employee motivation were computed in accordance with the measurement framework described in Chapter 3.

4.2.3. Suitability of Data for Statistical Analysis

As part of the analytical process, the dataset was reviewed to confirm its suitability for descriptive and multiple regression analysis. Standard preliminary checks were conducted to confirm that the

data satisfied the assumptions required for regression analysis. These checks indicated that the dataset was appropriate for the statistical analyses conducted in this study.

In keeping with the focus of this chapter, detailed diagnostic statistics are not reported separately and are reflected implicitly in the regression results presented later in the chapter.

4.3. Demographic Profile of Respondents

4.3.1. Gender

Gender was measured on a nominal scale with two categories: male and female. Table 4.1 summarises the gender distribution of respondents. Of the 107 respondents, 64 (59.8%) were male and 43 (40.2%) were female, indicating a predominantly male sample. The distribution is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Table 4. 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents (n = 107)

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)”
Male	64	59.8
Female	43	40.2
Total	107	100.0

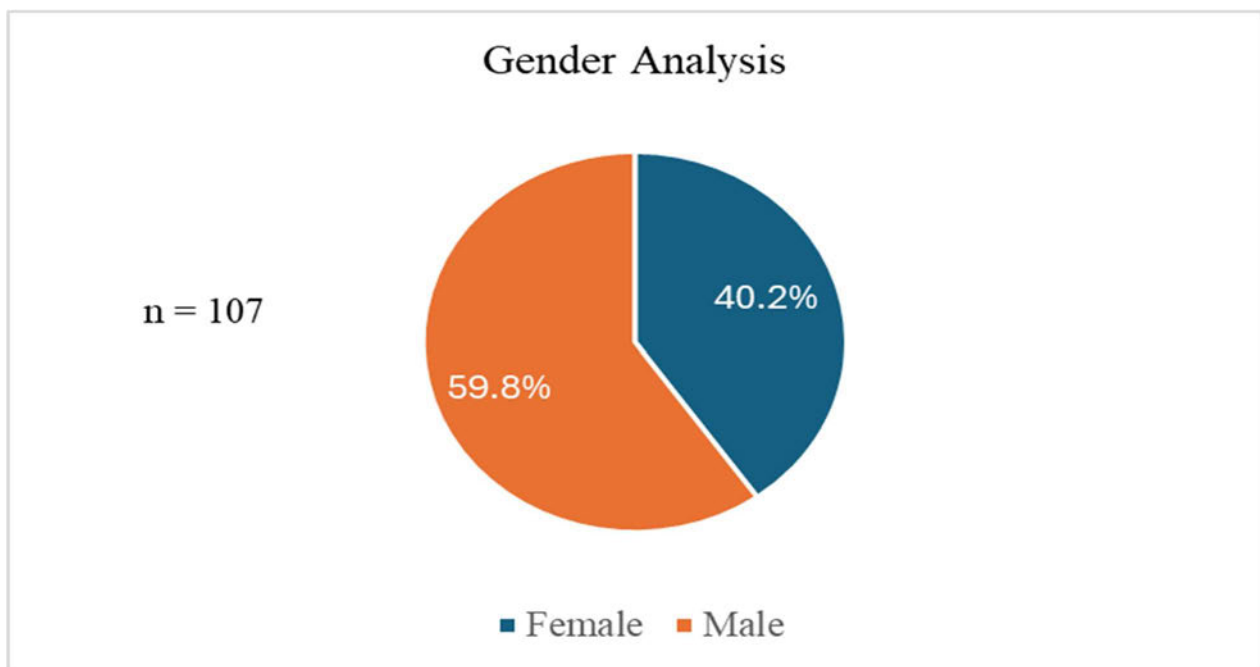


Figure 4. 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

4.3.2. Age Group (Years)

Respondents' age was captured using predefined categories. As indicated in Table 4.2, the majority of respondents were aged 26–35 years (57.0%), followed by those aged 36–45 years (29.9%). Smaller proportions were recorded in the 46–55 age group (11.2%) and among respondents over 55 years (1.9%). No respondents fell within the 18–25 age category. The age distribution is illustrated in Figure 4.2.

Table 4. 2: Age Group Distribution of Respondents (n = 107)

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
18–25	0	0.0
26–35	61	57.0
36–45	32	29.9
46–55	12	11.2
Over 55	2	1.9
Total	107	100.0

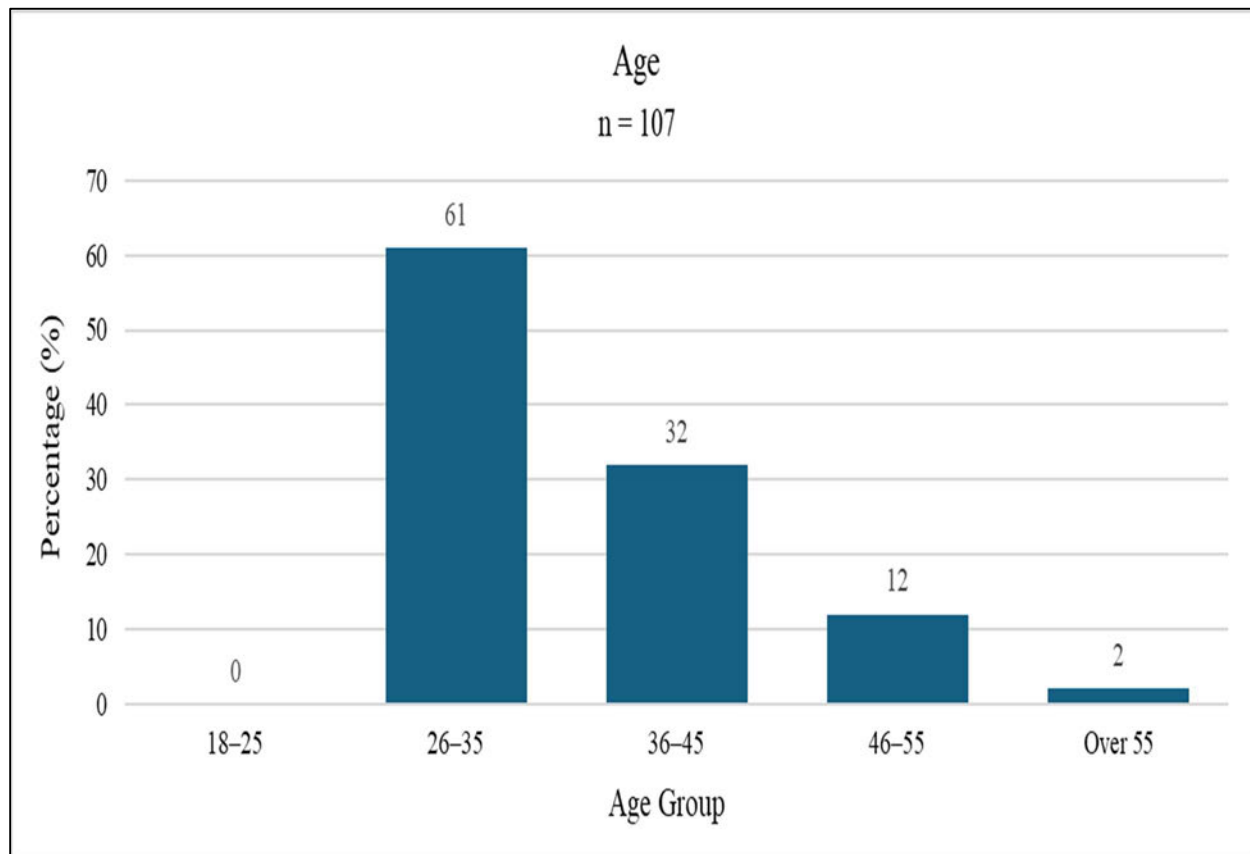


Figure 4. 2: Age Group Distribution of Respondents

4.3.3. Department

Departmental affiliation was captured using a nominal scale representing the organisation’s functional areas. As shown in Table 4.3, most respondents were based in Production (46.7%), with Quality constituting the second-largest group (19.6%). Smaller proportions of respondents were drawn from Finance (9.3%), Maintenance (5.6%), Production Engineering (5.6%), Human Resources and Training (5.6%), Production Control (4.7%), and Information Technology (2.8%). The departmental distribution is further illustrated in Figure 4.3.

Table 4. 3: Departmental Distribution of Respondents (n = 107)

Department	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Production	50	46.7
Quality	21	19.6
Maintenance	6	5.6
Production Control	5	4.7
HR & Training	6	5.6
Finance	10	9.3
IT	3	2.8
Production Eng	6	5.6
Total	107	100.0

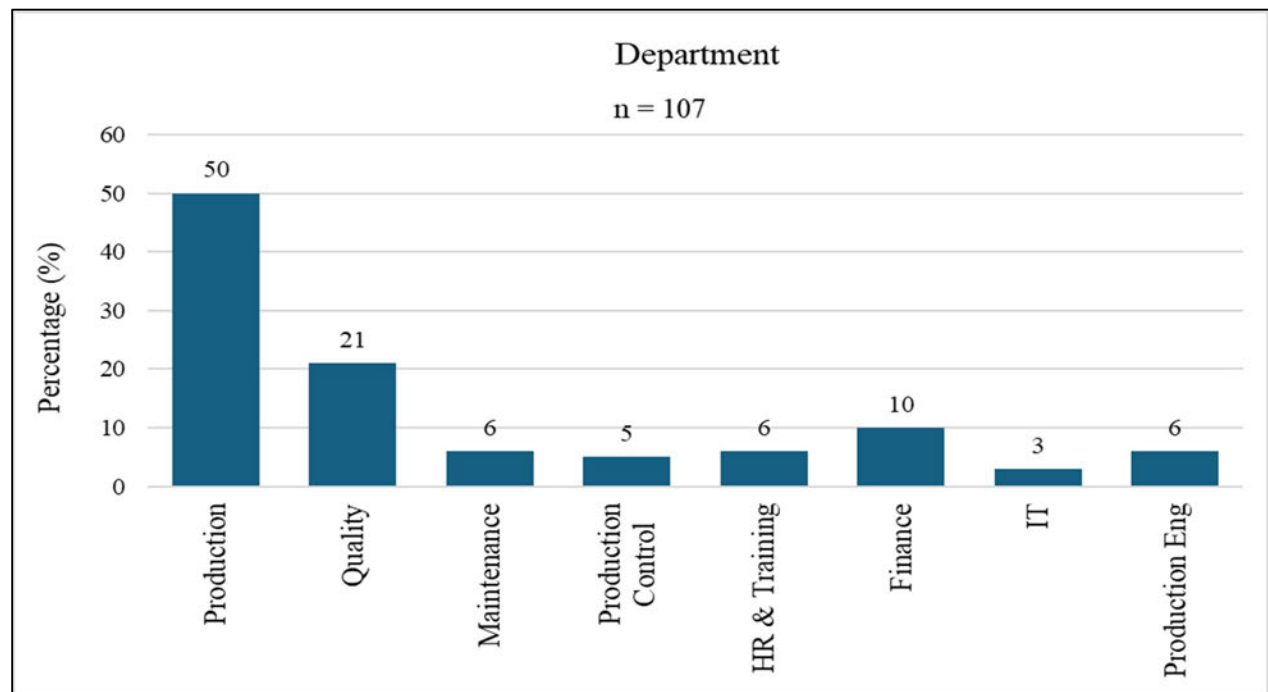


Figure 4. 3: Departmental Distribution of Respondents

4.3.4. Length of Service

Length of service was measured using categorical tenure groupings ranging from less than one year to more than ten years. As presented in Table 4.4, the highest proportion of respondents reported 6–8 years of service (37.4%), followed by more than 10 years (24.3%) and 3–6 years (17.8%). Lower proportions were observed for 8–10 years of service (15.9%) and 1–3 years (4.7%), with no respondents indicating less than one year of tenure. Figure 4.4 presents the length-of-service distribution.

Table 4. 4: Length of Service Distribution of Respondents (n = 107)

Length of Service Segment	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 year	0	0.0
1 - 3 years	5	4.7
3 - 6 years	19	17.8
6 - 8 years	40	37.4
8 -10 years	17	15.9
More than 10 years	26	24.3
Total	107	100.0

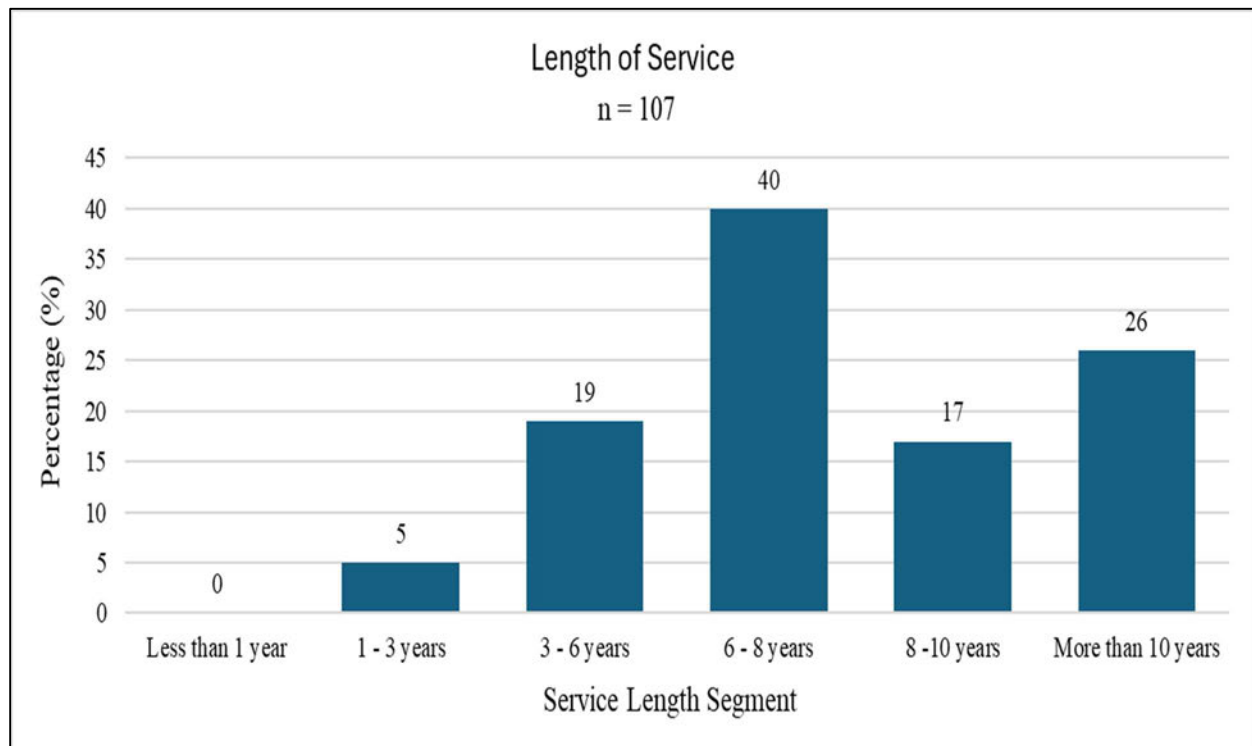


Figure 4. 4: Length of Service Distribution of Respondents

4.3.5. Summary of Demographic Characteristics

In summary, the respondent profile indicates a predominantly male, mid-career operational workforce, with most respondents concentrated within production-related departments and reporting moderate to long organisational tenure. This demographic profile provides context for the analyses that follow in this chapter.

4.4. Objective one - Leadership Styles

This section sought to identify the dominant leadership styles experienced by operational-level employees at the automotive manufacturing company. For each leadership style, multiple items/questions were set that were perceived to measure the specific leadership style. In order to obtain reliable composite scales for each leadership style, Cronbach's alpha was applied to the set of items to determine whether they were internally consistent and yield a reliable composite variable. In some cases, items had to be dropped because they did not correlate highly enough with the overall scale and negatively affected reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were interpreted according to established guidelines, whereby values above 0.70 indicate acceptable reliability, values above 0.80 indicate good reliability, and values above 0.90 indicate excellent reliability (Hair, et al., 2019, p. 161).

Composite variables were formed by calculating the average across the scores for the items included in the construct. Descriptive statistics are presented using mean scores and standard deviations to summarise respondents' perceptions of leadership behaviours.

4.4.1. Leadership Style Constructs

Table 4.5 outlines the items included in each leadership style and reports the reliability of these scales. In addition, the mean and standard deviations for each leadership style are presented. The reported mean values indicate the relative prevalence of each leadership style as perceived by respondents, while the standard deviations reflect the degree of variability in responses across the sample.

Table 4. 5: Reliability and Descriptive Statistics of Leadership Styles (n = 107)

Leadership Style	Items included	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	Std. Deviation
Transformational (TFORM)	4, 5, 11, 14, 16, 18	0.911	3.61	0.885
Transactional (TACT)	12, 15, 20, 21	0.867	3.48	0.937
Autocratic (AUTO)	6, 8, 13, 23	0.644	3.12	0.755
Democratic / Participative (DEM)	2, 10, 19	0.783	3.70	0.867
Servant / Coaching (SERV)	7, 9, 22	0.894	3.49	1.027

Notes:

- Scores were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 to 5).
- Higher mean values indicate stronger perceived presence of the leadership style.

To support visual comparison, Figure 4.5 depicts the mean scores for each leadership construct, providing a graphical overview of respondents' perceptions across the leadership styles assessed.

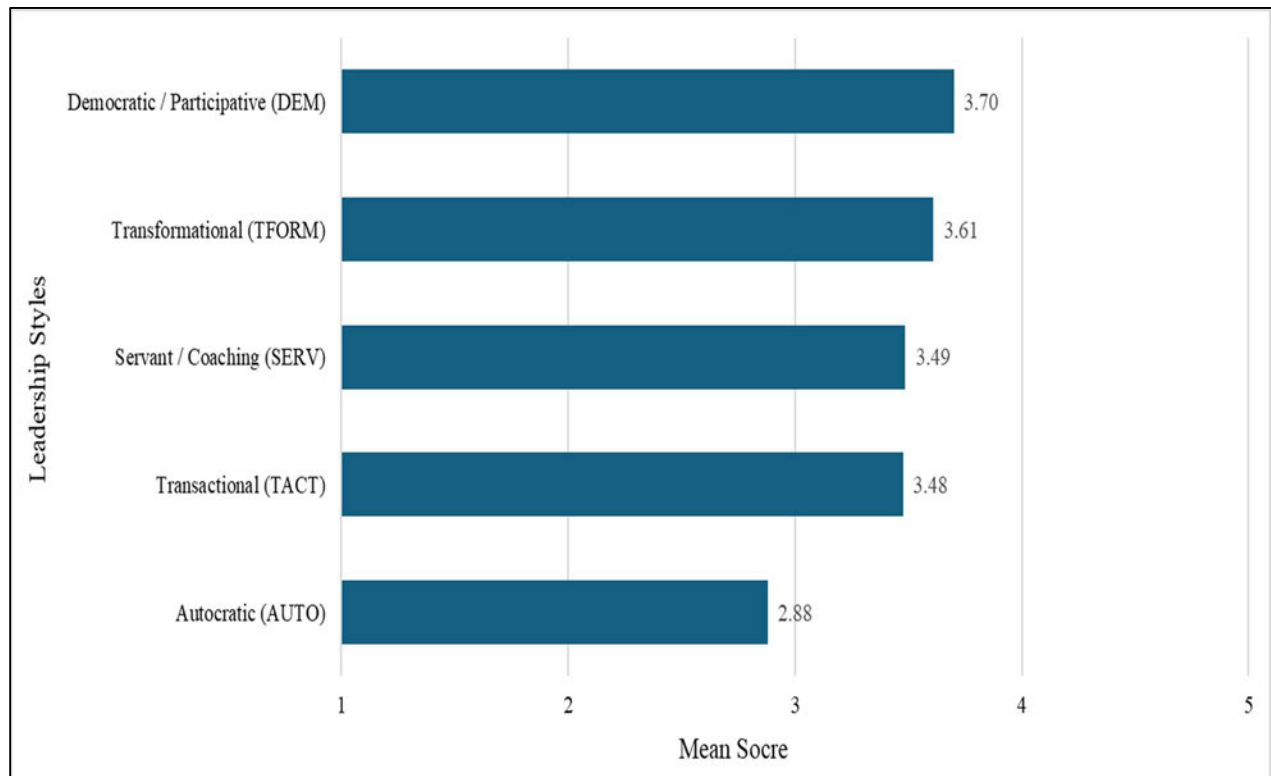


Figure 4. 5: Mean Scores of Leadership Style Constructs

Results show that reliability coefficients ranged from 0.644, which is marginally acceptable, to 0.911, which indicates excellent internal consistency. Mean scores show that democratic style of leadership is most prevalent followed by transformational. Autocratic leadership is least represented. Further analysis shows that there is significant agreement that transformational, transactional, democratic and servant leadership styles are evident ($p < 0.001$ for all); however, there is not significant agreement that autocratic leadership is evident, $p = 0.106$.

In summary, this section explored the leadership styles experienced by operational-level employees. The results presented in Table 4.5 and Figure 4.5 highlight the relative prominence of the leadership styles measured and provide a foundation for subsequent analyses of employee motivation and its relationship with leadership styles.

4.5. Objective Two - Employee Motivation

This section examined the level of employee motivation among operational-level employees within the automotive manufacturing organisation. Motivation was assessed using a set of 16 questionnaire items, which were combined to form a composite motivation scale by calculating the average score across all items. The internal consistency of this scale was verified using Cronbach's alpha. Overall motivation levels were summarised using descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation.

4.5.1. Employee Motivation Construct

Table 4.6 reports the composition and reliability as well as the mean score and standard deviation for the employee motivation construct. The mean represents respondents' overall motivation level, while the standard deviation reflects the variability in motivation across the sample.

Table 4. 6: Descriptive Statistics of Employee Motivation (n = 107)

Description	Items included	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	Std. Deviation
Motivation (MOTIV)	Motivation items 1-16	0.916	3.7138	0.64176

Notes:

- Scores are based on a five-point Likert scale.

To complement the descriptive statistics in Table 4.6, Figure 4.6 illustrates the mean employee motivation score, providing a visual summary of respondents' overall motivation level.



Figure 4. 6: Mean Score of Employee Motivation

Results show that the scale has excellent reliability. The mean score of 3.7138 suggests that, on average, respondents reported a relatively high level of motivation.

In summary, this section has presented statistics relating to employee motivation among operational-level employees. These results outline the overall motivation level within the sample and form a basis for subsequent analyses of the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation.

4.6. Objective Three - Relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation

This section presents the findings of the multiple regression analysis conducted to address Objective Three, which focused on examining the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation among operational-level employees. In the analysis, employee motivation was specified as the dependent variable, while the leadership style constructs were included as independent variables. Multiple regression analysis was applied to assess both the collective

influence of leadership styles and the unique contribution of each leadership construct to employee motivation

4.6.1. Initial Model

The initial regression model included five leadership style constructs as predictors: Transformational, Transactional, Autocratic, Democratic/Participative, and Servant/Coaching leadership. Employee motivation was specified as the dependent variable, and all variables were entered into the model simultaneously.

Table 4.7 presents the results of analysis of the initial model.

Table 4. 7: Initial model summary

IV	R ²	F	df1; df2	p-value	B (regression coefficient)	t	p-value	VIF
TFORM	0.431	15.280	5; 101	<0.001	0.055	0.400	0.690	6.443
TACT					0.035	0.288	0.774	5.543
AUTO					0.069	0.948	0.346	1.305
DEM					0.100	0.849	0.398	4.500
SERV					0.287	2.624	0.010	5.424

These results indicate that the set of leadership style variables, when considered together, account for 43.1% of the variance in employee motivation and significantly predicts employee motivation, $F(5, 101) = 15.280, p < 0.001$. SERV is a significant predictor of employee motivation $\beta = 0.287, p = 0.010$.

An assessment of collinearity diagnostics indicated elevated Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for certain leadership style predictors in the full model. To address potential multicollinearity and improve model stability, a refined regression model was estimated by removing the Transactional leadership construct, which exhibited high collinearity with other leadership style variables. The refined model resulted in acceptable VIF values across all predictors while maintaining comparable explanatory power.

4.6.2. Refined Model

Table 4.13 reports the regression coefficients for the refined model, detailing the effects of Transformational, Autocratic, Democratic/Participative, and Servant/Coaching leadership on employee motivation, along with the updated collinearity statistics.

Table 4. 8: Regression Coefficients for Leadership Styles (Refined Model)

IV	R ²	F	df1; df2	p-value	B (regression coefficient)	t	p-value	VIF
AUTO	0.430	19.252	4; 102	<0.001	0.069	0.948	0.346	1.305
DEM					0.104	0.887	0.377	4.454
SERV					0.296	2.848	0.005	4.951
TFORM					0.076	0.643	0.522	4.732

4.6.3. Summary of Regression Results

In summary, the multiple regression analyses show that leadership styles, when examined collectively, significantly predict employee motivation. The refined regression model yielded results that were substantively consistent with those of the full model, suggesting that multicollinearity in the initial model did not materially influence the overall findings. These results provide the empirical basis for addressing the third research objective and are examined further in Chapter 5.

4.7. Chapter Summary

This chapter reported the empirical findings of the study investigating the influence of leadership styles on employee motivation among operational-level employees within a South African automotive manufacturing organisation. The analysis began with descriptive statistics to profile the respondent sample and to summarise employees' perceptions of leadership styles and overall motivation. The reliability of the measurement scales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, with all retained constructs demonstrating acceptable to high internal consistency.

Multiple regression analysis was then applied to assess the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation. The results indicated that leadership styles, when considered

collectively, are significant predictors of employee motivation. Further refinement of the regression model to address multicollinearity concerns confirmed the stability of the findings, as the adjusted model produced results consistent with those of the initial analysis. Taken together, the empirical results presented in this chapter address the study's research objectives and provide a robust foundation for the discussion and interpretation of findings in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret and discuss the study's empirical findings in relation to the research objectives. Whereas the preceding chapter presented results from the quantitative analysis, this chapter examines the meaning and implications of those findings within the context of leadership styles and employee motivation in an automotive manufacturing organisation.

The discussion in this chapter is structured around the three research objectives of the study. Each objective is addressed separately, with findings interpreted and contextualised using relevant and credible literature. The results presented in Chapter 4 are taken as given and are not re-analysed. Instead, emphasis is placed on explaining patterns, relationships, and implications arising from the findings.

This chapter opens with a brief overview of the organisational context and a concise summary of the key empirical findings, followed by a discussion structured around each research objective. It concludes with an integrated discussion and consideration of the study's implications, providing a logical transition to the final chapter.

5.2. Overview of Key Empirical Findings

5.2.1. Summary of Key Empirical Findings

The findings show that democratic leadership was the most prominent style experienced by operational-level employees ($M \approx 3.70$), followed by transformational leadership ($M \approx 3.61$). Servant/coaching and transactional leadership were evident at moderate levels (both $M \approx 3.48$), while autocratic leadership recorded the lowest mean score ($M \approx 3.12$).

Overall employee motivation was found to be moderate to high across the sample, with an average motivation score of approximately 3.71. This suggests a generally positive motivational disposition among employees within the organisation.

The regression analysis further showed that leadership styles collectively explained a substantial proportion of the variance in employee motivation (approximately 43%). However, when entered simultaneously, servant/coaching leadership was the only style with a statistically significant unique effect on employee motivation, whereas democratic, transformational, transactional, and autocratic leadership did not exhibit significant independent effects.

5.2.2. Transition to Objective-Based Discussion

The sections that follow examine these findings in relation to each of the three research objectives, drawing on relevant contemporary literature to explain the observed patterns and relationships.

5.3. Objective 1 - Discussion of Findings

Research Objective 1: To identify the dominant leadership styles experienced by operational-level employees at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa.

5.3.1. Dominant Leadership Styles Experienced by Operational Employees

The results indicate that operational-level employees predominantly experience democratic/participative and transformational leadership styles, followed by servant/coaching and transactional leadership at moderate levels, while autocratic leadership is experienced at a comparatively low level. This pattern is evidenced by the descriptive mean scores reported in Chapter 4, where democratic leadership recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.70$), closely followed by transformational leadership ($M = 3.61$). Servant/coaching ($M = 3.49$) and transactional leadership ($M = 3.48$) were perceived at similar moderate levels, while autocratic leadership recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.88$). Collectively, these results suggest that leadership within the organisation is experienced as more participative and developmental than directive or authoritarian.

The relatively high mean score for democratic leadership suggests that employees perceive leaders as involving them in decision-making and valuing employee input in work-related matters. Practically, this implies that operational employees are not merely recipients of instructions but

experience a degree of inclusion in everyday work decisions. Given the production-oriented context of the organisation, this finding implies that leadership practices recognise the operational knowledge held by frontline employees. Empirical research similarly reports that participative leadership is associated with improved employee engagement, voice behaviour, and positive work attitudes in structured organisational environments (Southgate, et al., 2023; Kim, et al., 2021). Earlier studies support this interpretation, showing that shared decision-making enhances team functioning and performance by fostering collaboration and ownership of work outcomes (Somech, 2006). The presence of democratic leadership at the highest mean level in this study highlights participation as a central leadership characteristic experienced by employees, contributing to the broader leadership climate within which motivation is shaped.

Transformational leadership also emerged as a dominant style, with a mean score closely aligned to that of democratic leadership. This finding suggests that, alongside participation, employees experience leaders as providing inspiration, direction, and motivational support beyond routine task supervision. In the context of an operational manufacturing environment, this implies that leaders are perceived as articulating purpose and encouraging commitment rather than focusing solely on compliance. Contemporary empirical studies report that transformational leadership enhances employee engagement and work motivation by strengthening the perceived meaning of work and aligning individual and organisational goals (Bakker , et al., 2023; Hamoumi, et al., 2025). Earlier research similarly demonstrates that transformational leadership fosters discretionary effort and commitment through inspirational and supportive behaviours (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). The relatively high transformational leadership score observed in this study therefore indicates that leadership within the organisation extends beyond transactional control to include motivational and value-based influence.

Servant/coaching leadership was experienced at a moderate level, indicating that while developmental and supportive behaviours are present, they are not as dominant as participative or transformational practices. This indicates that leaders are perceived as providing guidance and support, but that such behaviours may be applied selectively rather than consistently across all operational contexts. Empirical research highlights that servant leadership is particularly relevant in operational environments where leader accessibility and concern for employee well-being

contribute to positive work attitudes and engagement (Ozturk, et al., 2021; Sudiarti & Saepudin, 2024). Earlier studies similarly link servant leadership to trust and psychological safety, which support employee performance and satisfaction (Eva, et al., 2019). The moderate mean score recorded in this study implies that while servant/coaching behaviours are evident, there may be scope for greater emphasis on employee development and support.

Transactional leadership was also reported at a moderate level, reflecting the structured and performance-driven nature of the operational environment. This result indicates that leadership practices continue to rely on performance monitoring, role clarity, and contingent reinforcement to ensure operational efficiency. In a manufacturing setting, such leadership behaviours are often necessary to maintain quality standards and production targets. Recent empirical research confirms that transactional leadership remains relevant in environments where adherence to procedures and performance requirements is critical (Ghosh, et al., 2024; Makhwiting & Bruhns, 2025). Earlier studies similarly show that transactional leadership contributes to role clarity and performance stability, particularly when combined with more relational leadership approaches (Podsakoff et al., 2006). The moderate transactional leadership score in this study therefore reflects an expected and functional leadership component rather than a dominant leadership orientation.

In contrast, autocratic leadership recorded the lowest mean score, indicating limited reliance on directive or authoritarian control. This finding suggests that employees generally do not experience leadership as coercive or overly controlling. Contemporary research links autocratic leadership to lower employee engagement and diminished voice behaviour, particularly in contexts where autonomy and participation are emphasised (Iqbal, et al., 2021; Nunes & Palma-Moreira, 2024). Earlier empirical studies similarly caution that excessive directive control can undermine morale and discretionary effort by restricting autonomy (Harms, et al., 2017). The low autocratic leadership score observed in this study therefore reinforces the conclusion that leadership practices within the organisation are more aligned with inclusive and employee-centred approaches.

Overall, the results demonstrate that operational-level employees experience a hybrid leadership configuration, characterised by strong participative and transformational leadership, supported by moderate servant/coaching and transactional behaviours, and minimal autocratic leadership. This

configuration suggests that leadership within the organisation balances employee involvement and motivation with the structural and performance demands inherent in a manufacturing environment. Empirical research indicates that such hybrid leadership approaches are increasingly effective in operational contexts, as they allow leaders to respond flexibly to both people-oriented and task-oriented requirements (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023; Mphaluwa, et al., 2025).

5.3.2. Objective 1 Summary

The findings indicate that operational-level employees experience a leadership environment characterised predominantly by democratic and transformational leadership styles, with servant/coaching and transactional leadership present at moderate levels and autocratic leadership experienced to a comparatively limited extent. This leadership profile reflects an environment in which participation, motivational influence, and performance structure coexist within daily supervisory practices. The combination of leadership styles observed provides important contextual insight into how leadership is experienced at the operational level and establishes a foundation for examining how these leadership practices relate to employee motivation in subsequent sections.

5.4. Objective 2 - Discussion of Findings

Research Objective 2: To assess the level of employee motivation across operational roles at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa.

5.4.1. Employee Motivation Levels Experienced by Operational Employees

The results indicate that employee motivation among operational-level employees is generally moderate to high, as reflected by an average motivation score of approximately 3.7 on a five-point Likert scale. This score suggests that, on average, employees report motivation levels that are clearly positive and above neutrality, although not consistently high across the workforce. Interpreted in practical terms, this finding indicates that employees are generally willing to engage with their work and meet performance expectations, but that motivational conditions may not be uniformly optimal across all operational areas.

In the context of a structured automotive manufacturing environment, a motivation level of this nature suggests that organisational systems and supervisory practices are sufficiently supportive to sustain day-to-day effort and engagement, even under routine and performance-driven conditions. Research in operational and manufacturing contexts similarly reports that moderate-to-high motivation levels are common where work processes are clearly defined and performance expectations are stable, but where opportunities for enhanced autonomy or development may be constrained by operational requirements (Aljumah, 2023; Vasileva & Datta, 2021). The motivation level observed in this study is therefore consistent with what would be expected in a production-oriented setting that prioritises reliability and efficiency.

From an interpretive perspective, the observed motivation score implies that employees experience partial satisfaction of key motivational drivers rather than their full optimisation. Contemporary evidence grounded in self-determination theory suggests that work motivation is enhanced when employees experience competence, relatedness, and some degree of autonomy, even within standardised environments (Van den Broeck et al., 2021). In this study, the motivation mean of approximately 3.7 indicates that such need-supportive conditions are present to a meaningful, though not uniform or intensive, extent across roles. Prior research also shows that managerial practices such as constructive feedback, role clarity, and supportive supervision can sustain moderate-to-high motivation in structured work settings (Slemp et al., 2021), offering a plausible explanation for the observed pattern within the organisation.

Within the South African and automotive manufacturing context, motivation has also been shown to be influenced by broader systemic and relational factors, including production stability, supervisory consistency, and perceived organisational support. Recent studies focusing on industrial and automotive organisations report that employees tend to maintain moderate-to-high motivation levels when leadership practices reinforce fairness, recognition, and predictability in work demands (Macpherson, 2024; Hamoumi, et al., 2025). The findings of this study are consistent with this evidence, indicating that the motivational climate experienced by operational employees is generally supportive, albeit with some potential areas of strain.

Importantly, the results should not be interpreted as indicating uniformly high motivation across all operational employees. Prior research cautions that motivation in operational environments is sensitive to fluctuations arising from workload pressures, production disruptions, and variations in leadership consistency (Ilke, et al., 2018; Jo & Shin, 2025). Accordingly, the moderate-to-high motivation level observed in this study reflects an overall positive but potentially variable motivational climate, rather than a consistently high level of motivation across all operational contexts.

5.4.2. Objective 2 Summary

The findings indicate that operational-level employees experience a generally moderate-to-high level of motivation, as reflected by an average score of approximately 3.7 on a five-point scale. This suggests that employees are broadly engaged and willing to meet work demands, although motivational conditions are not uniformly optimal across the organisation. The observed motivation level offers important insight into the organisational context in which leadership practices operate and provides a necessary basis for examining how specific leadership styles influence variations in employee motivation in the subsequent section.

5.5. Objective 3 - Discussion of Findings

Research Objective 3: To examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation experienced by operational-level employees at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa.

5.5.1. Leadership Styles as Predictors of Employee Motivation

The results indicate that leadership styles collectively exhibit a substantial explanatory relationship with employee motivation, accounting for approximately 43% of the variance in motivation levels ($R^2 = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$) among operational-level employees. This confirms that the regression model is statistically significant and that leadership practices constitute a meaningful contextual factor associated with variations in employee motivation within the organisation. In organisational behaviour research, explained variance of this magnitude is generally regarded as substantial in

field-based studies examining human attitudes and behaviour, where outcomes are influenced by multiple organisational, interpersonal, and individual factors (Hair, et al., 2019; Mathieu, et al., 2019). Practically, this suggests that a considerable proportion of variation in employee motivation is associated with how leadership is experienced at the operational level in this manufacturing context.

However, when leadership styles were analysed simultaneously, servant/coaching leadership emerged as the only style with a statistically significant unique influence on employee motivation, while democratic, transformational, transactional, and autocratic leadership did not demonstrate significant independent effects. This pattern indicates that although multiple leadership styles are present and experienced, they do not contribute equally to explaining motivational differences once shared variance is controlled. Similar findings have been reported in leadership research, where relationally focused leadership behaviours often show stronger motivational effects than structurally dominant leadership styles in contexts where multiple approaches coexist (Lee, et al., 2020; Xue, et al., 2022).

The unique significance of servant/coaching leadership suggests that leadership behaviours emphasising support, development, and individual consideration play a particularly influential role in shaping employee motivation within this organisation. Although servant/coaching leadership was experienced at a moderate level, its predictive strength indicates that even moderate exposure to such behaviours is associated with meaningful differences in motivation. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that servant leadership enhances motivation by fostering trust, psychological safety, and perceived leader support, particularly in operational and high-interdependence work environments (Hoch, et al., 2016; Karatepe, et al., 2019). Meta-analytic evidence further reinforces this interpretation, showing that servant leadership explains incremental variance in motivational outcomes beyond other leadership styles (Lee, et al., 2020).

In contrast, democratic and transformational leadership, despite being the most dominant styles experienced by employees, did not exhibit significant independent effects on motivation in the regression model. This suggests that while participative decision-making and inspirational leadership contribute to the broader leadership climate, their motivational influence may be

indirect or contingent upon other leadership behaviours. Research indicates that transformational and participative leadership frequently exert their influence through mediating mechanisms such as trust, empowerment, and supportive climate rather than through direct motivational pathways (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2019; Grant & Shandell, 2021). As such, these leadership styles may shape the conditions under which motivation is sustained without independently differentiating motivation levels once servant/coaching behaviours are considered.

Transactional leadership likewise did not exhibit a significant independent relationship with employee motivation. This suggests that performance monitoring, role clarity, and contingent reinforcement, although important for operational efficiency, are insufficient on their own to explain variations in motivation among operational employees. Empirical research similarly indicates that transactional leadership contributes more strongly to compliance, task execution, and performance stability than to sustained or intrinsic motivation, particularly in structured work environments (Laulié, et al., 2021; Figueiredo, et al., 2025).

Autocratic leadership also did not emerge as a significant predictor of motivation, consistent with the relatively low mean score reported in Chapter 4. This finding indicates that directive or authoritarian leadership behaviours are neither prevalent nor influential in shaping employee motivation within this organisation. Prior journal-based research associates autocratic leadership with reduced engagement, lower psychological safety, and diminished intrinsic motivation, particularly in contexts where employees expect participation and respect (Skogstad, et al., 2007; Zhang, et al., 2020). The absence of a significant relationship in this study therefore reinforces the limited motivational relevance of autocratic leadership in the operational context examined.

Taken together, the regression results demonstrate that leadership styles influence employee motivation in differentiated ways, with servant/coaching leadership playing a distinct and central role. While democratic and transformational leadership contribute to the overall leadership environment, it is the direct, relational, and developmental behaviours associated with servant/coaching leadership that most strongly explain differences in motivation among operational-level employees. This provides a clear empirical linkage between leadership practices

and the motivation levels discussed in Section 5.4 and identifies the leadership behaviours most relevant to sustaining employee motivation within this organisational context.

5.5.2. Objective 3 Summary

The results show that leadership styles, when considered collectively, explain a meaningful proportion of variation in employee motivation within the organisational context under study, indicating that leadership behaviour is an important explanatory factor. Although operational-level employees are exposed to multiple leadership styles, servant or coaching leadership emerges as the only style exhibiting a statistically significant unique association with employee motivation once shared variance among leadership styles is taken into account. This pattern suggests that leadership behaviours characterised by support, development, and guidance are particularly influential in shaping employee motivation in this organisation, whereas other leadership styles appear to contribute more generally to the broader leadership environment rather than exerting a distinct motivational effect.

5.6. Integrated Discussion of Findings and Implications

5.6.1. Integrated Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that operational-level employees predominantly experience democratic and transformational leadership styles, supported by servant/coaching and transactional leadership behaviours, with limited exposure to autocratic leadership. Despite the prominence of participative and inspirational leadership styles, the regression results indicate that servant/coaching leadership is the only style with a statistically significant unique influence on employee motivation. This differentiated pattern suggests that while multiple leadership styles shape the overall leadership climate, they do not exert equal motivational effects once shared variance is controlled (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023).

From a motivational theory perspective, this pattern aligns most closely with self-determination theory (SDT), which emphasises autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core drivers of sustained motivation (Deci, et al., 2017; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021). The moderate-to-high

motivation level observed among operational employees (mean ≈ 3.7) indicates that these psychological needs are partially satisfied within the organisation. Servant/coaching leadership, characterised by individualised support, developmental emphasis, and relational engagement, is particularly well suited to fulfil needs for relatedness and competence, which provides a plausible explanation for its unique predictive relationship with motivation. By contrast, democratic and transformational leadership, while contributing to a supportive and participative climate, may influence motivation more indirectly by shaping contextual conditions rather than directly addressing individual psychological needs.

The absence of significant independent effects for democratic and transformational leadership further suggests that participative decision-making and inspirational leadership alone may be insufficient to differentiate motivation levels once supportive and developmental leadership behaviours are considered. This finding is consistent with contemporary motivation research, which indicates that empowerment and inspiration are most effective when accompanied by concrete leadership behaviours that support employee development and well-being (Bakker, et al., 2023; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). In this sense, democratic and transformational leadership may create enabling conditions for motivation, but servant/coaching leadership appears to operationalise these conditions through direct interpersonal engagement.

Transactional leadership, although present at a moderate level, does not demonstrate a unique relationship with employee motivation. This finding can be interpreted through expectancy-based and reinforcement perspectives (Vroom, 1964; Laulié, et al., 2021), which suggest that contingent rewards and performance monitoring primarily influence compliance and task execution rather than intrinsic motivation. Within a structured manufacturing environment, transactional leadership may therefore support operational stability without substantially enhancing motivational differentiation among employees. The results indicate that transactional mechanisms alone are insufficient to explain variations in motivation when relational and developmental leadership behaviours are considered simultaneously.

The limited role of autocratic leadership is consistent with both its low prevalence and its lack of motivational relevance in the regression analysis. From a motivation theory standpoint, directive

and authoritarian leadership behaviours are typically associated with controlled forms of motivation, which may undermine autonomy and reduce sustained engagement (Harms, et al., 2017; Zhang, et al., 2023). The low exposure to autocratic leadership within the organisation may therefore contribute to the generally positive motivational climate observed, even if motivation is not uniformly high across all operational contexts.

Taken together, the integrated findings suggest that employee motivation within the organisation is shaped by a combination of leadership climate and specific leadership behaviours, with servant/coaching leadership playing a central role in translating supportive leadership environments into meaningful motivational outcomes. While participative and transformational leadership styles establish a broadly inclusive and purpose-oriented context, it is the relational and developmental behaviours associated with servant/coaching leadership that most directly influence employee motivation at the operational level (Eva, et al., 2019; Mphaluwa, et al., 2025).

5.6.2. Implications of the Findings

The integrated findings have several important implications for leadership practice and employee motivation in operational and manufacturing environments. First, the results indicate that although participative and transformational leadership styles contribute to a positive leadership climate, they are insufficient on their own to meaningfully differentiate employee motivation levels. This implies that organisations should not rely solely on broad participative structures or inspirational leadership messaging to sustain motivation at the operational level. Instead, attention should be directed toward how leadership behaviours are enacted in day-to-day supervisory interactions.

Second, the central role of servant/coaching leadership in explaining variation in employee motivation highlights the importance of relational and developmental leadership capabilities among frontline and middle-level supervisors. The findings imply that leadership effectiveness in operational contexts is less about positional authority or visionary influence and more about leaders' ability to provide individualised support, guidance, and development. This has implications for leadership development initiatives, suggesting that organisations may derive

greater motivational benefit from strengthening coaching skills, active listening, and employee development practices than from focusing exclusively on directive performance management.

Third, the lack of a significant independent relationship between transactional leadership and employee motivation suggests that performance monitoring and contingent reward mechanisms, although necessary for operational efficiency, may have limited motivational impact when applied in isolation. This suggests that organisations operating in highly structured environments should be cautious about over-emphasising control-based management practices, as these may stabilise performance without enhancing motivation. Instead, transactional mechanisms appear most effective when embedded within a broader leadership approach that includes relational support and developmental engagement.

Fourth, the limited motivational relevance of autocratic leadership reinforces the importance of maintaining leadership approaches that support autonomy and psychological safety, particularly in environments where employees are required to exercise judgement, coordination, and problem-solving within defined operational constraints. The findings imply that minimising authoritarian leadership behaviours may contribute indirectly to sustaining a positive motivational climate, even where motivation is not uniformly high across all operational areas.

Finally, the moderate-to-high motivation levels observed among operational employees suggest that the organisation has established a broadly supportive motivational environment, but one that is potentially sensitive to leadership consistency and behavioural quality. This implies that motivation sustainability may depend less on introducing new motivational mechanisms and more on strengthening the quality and consistency of leadership behaviours, particularly those aligned with servant and coaching orientations. Collectively, these implications underscore the role of leadership behaviour as a critical lever through which organisations can influence employee motivation in operational contexts.

5.7. Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the study's findings in relation to the three research objectives by integrating results on leadership styles, employee motivation levels, and the relationship between leadership and motivation. The discussion indicated that operational-level employees predominantly experience democratic and transformational leadership styles, supported by servant/coaching and transactional behaviours, with minimal exposure to autocratic leadership. Although these styles collectively shape the leadership climate, servant/coaching leadership emerged as having a distinct and significant influence on employee motivation.

The findings further showed that employee motivation within the organisation is generally moderate to high, reflecting a broadly supportive motivational environment influenced by leadership practices and organisational context. The integrated discussion demonstrated that motivation is not uniformly driven by all leadership styles but is most strongly associated with leadership behaviours that emphasise support, development, and relational engagement. The implications derived from these findings underscore the importance of consistent, people-centred leadership practices in sustaining employee motivation within operational and manufacturing settings. Collectively, this chapter provides a coherent foundation for the concluding chapter, which presents the study's overall conclusions and practical recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

The South African automotive manufacturing sector operates within an environment marked by operational complexity, global competitive pressures, and sustained requirements for productivity, quality, and workforce stability. Within such settings, leadership practices assume particular importance in shaping employee motivation and everyday performance, especially at the operational level where production targets and quality standards are directly executed.

Within this context, the study investigated the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation in a South African automotive manufacturing organisation. Drawing on quantitative data obtained from operational-level employees, the study examined the leadership styles most frequently experienced, assessed prevailing levels of employee motivation, and analysed the extent to which specific leadership styles influence motivational outcomes.

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations arising from the study. It begins with a synthesis of the key findings in relation to the research objectives, followed by conclusions addressing each research question. Practical recommendations informed by the findings are then proposed. The chapter subsequently outlines the study's limitations and identifies opportunities for future research, before concluding with final reflections on the overall contribution of the study.

6.2. Research Conclusions

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation within a South African automotive manufacturing organisation. To address this purpose, the study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design focused on operational-level employees. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire that captured employees' perceptions of leadership behaviours and their levels of work motivation. Specifically, the study sought to determine the leadership styles most frequently experienced within the organisation, to evaluate prevailing levels of employee motivation, and to analyse the extent to

which leadership styles are associated with motivational outcomes. The sections that follow present conclusions aligned with each research objective and corresponding research question.

6.2.1. Objective 1: Dominant Leadership Styles Experienced

“What are the most dominant leadership styles experienced by operational-level employees at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa?”

The study concludes that democratic and transformational leadership styles are the most dominant leadership styles experienced by operational-level employees. Leadership within the organisation is largely characterised by participative decision-making, open communication, and supportive leadership behaviours. Servant/coaching and transactional leadership styles are present to a moderate extent, while autocratic leadership is not a dominant feature of the leadership environment experienced by employees.

These findings suggest that leadership practices within the organisation are generally aligned with contemporary leadership approaches that emphasise employee involvement and support. Within the operational manufacturing environment, where employees engage in structured and repetitive production tasks, such participative and supportive leadership behaviours are important in fostering engagement, improving communication, and maintaining alignment with operational objectives.

6.2.2. Objective 2: Employee Motivation Levels

“How motivated are employees across operational levels under different leadership styles at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa?”

The study concludes that operational-level employees exhibit moderate to high levels of motivation. This indicates a generally positive motivational climate within the organisation, suggesting that employees are engaged in their work and display a willingness to perform their operational roles effectively.

In the context of an automotive manufacturing environment characterised by strict production schedules and quality requirements, these motivation levels are particularly significant. Sustained motivation among operational employees supports consistent output, adherence to standardised processes, and the ability to respond effectively to operational demands and challenges.

6.2.3. Objective 3: Leadership Styles and Employee Motivation

“What is the relationship between specific leadership styles and the level of employee motivation at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa?”

The study concludes that leadership styles collectively demonstrate a meaningful relationship with employee motivation. However, when examined simultaneously, servant/coaching leadership is the only style that demonstrates a statistically significant unique effect on employee motivation.

This indicates that leadership behaviours emphasising support, guidance, and employee development are particularly influential in motivating operational-level employees, while other leadership styles do not show significant independent effects once shared variance is controlled. Within the manufacturing context, where employees often depend on immediate supervisory support to resolve production challenges and maintain workflow continuity, such leadership behaviours play a critical role in sustaining motivation and performance.

Overall, the findings indicate that although multiple leadership styles contribute to the broader leadership climate, servant/coaching leadership plays a central role in shaping employee motivation within the organisation.

6.3. Practical recommendations to the organisation

The study identified clear patterns in the leadership styles experienced by operational-level employees and their influence on employee motivation within the organisation. Although democratic and transformational leadership styles were prevalent, the findings indicate that servant and coaching leadership behaviours play a particularly critical role in motivating employees. These findings highlight specific leadership practices that warrant focused managerial attention. Based

on the study's conclusions, and supported by relevant leadership and motivation literature, the following practical recommendations are proposed for consideration by the organisation.

6.3.1. Strengthen Servant and Coaching Leadership Capabilities

The organisation should place deliberate emphasis on strengthening servant and coaching leadership behaviours among supervisors and team leaders. This recommendation is particularly salient given that servant/coaching leadership emerged as the only leadership style with a statistically significant unique influence on employee motivation. Leadership development initiatives should therefore prioritise behaviours such as active listening, individual support, mentoring, and the proactive removal of obstacles that impede employee performance. In the context of a production-driven automotive manufacturing environment, where employees rely on immediate supervisory support to resolve operational challenges and maintain output targets, such leadership behaviours are particularly important for sustaining motivation and performance. This recommendation is supported by prior research showing that servant leadership behaviours are associated with higher levels of employee motivation, trust, and empowerment (Greenleaf, 1977; Eva, et al., 2019).

6.3.2. Embed Supportive Leadership Practices into Daily Operations

Servant and coaching leadership behaviours should be embedded into routine operational practices rather than treated as abstract leadership ideals. Leaders within the organisation should engage in regular one-on-one interactions with employees, provide timely and constructive feedback, and demonstrate visible commitment to employee development. Embedding supportive leadership practices into daily operations ensures that leadership intent is translated into consistent and observable behaviours that sustain employee motivation over time. This is especially relevant within the organisation's structured production environment, where frequent supervisor–employee interaction provides a critical opportunity to reinforce motivation through daily operational engagement. This recommendation aligns with existing evidence linking supportive leadership behaviours to sustained employee engagement and motivation (Van Dierendonck, 2010; Van den Broeck, et al., 2021).

6.3.3. Integrate Participative Leadership with Development-Oriented Support

While democratic leadership was identified as a dominant leadership style within the organisation, participative practices should be complemented with stronger development-oriented support to maximise their motivational impact. Leaders should not only involve employees in decision-making processes but also guide them through problem-solving, skills development, and continuous improvement activities. This approach allows participation to translate into enhanced competence and confidence among employees. Within the automotive manufacturing context, where continuous improvement and problem-solving are essential, combining participation with development-oriented support enables employees to contribute more effectively to operational performance. Prior research supports the value of combining participative leadership with coaching-oriented behaviours to strengthen employee ownership and motivation (Somech, 2006; Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2019).

6.3.4. Align Leadership Training and Performance Management Systems

Leadership training programmes and performance management systems within the organisation should be reviewed to ensure that servant and coaching leadership behaviours are explicitly encouraged and reinforced. Including employee support, development, and engagement indicators within leadership performance criteria can promote sustained adoption of these behaviours. Such alignment helps ensure that leadership expectations are consistently reinforced across training, evaluation, and day-to-day management practices. This alignment is particularly important in a manufacturing setting where leadership behaviours must be consistently reinforced across shifts and teams to ensure uniform application of management practices. This recommendation is consistent with research highlighting the importance of reinforcing supportive leadership behaviours through organisational systems (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023).

6.3.5. Limit Reliance on Autocratic Leadership Practices

Given the low prevalence and limited motivational value of autocratic leadership identified in the study, the organisation should limit reliance on directive and control-based leadership approaches except where operationally necessary. Emphasis should instead remain on leadership behaviours

that promote respect, inclusion, and employee development. In the organisation's operational environment, excessive reliance on directive leadership may suppress initiative and problem-solving, which are critical for maintaining efficiency and quality in production processes. Maintaining this balance supports a leadership environment more conducive to sustained employee motivation in complex manufacturing settings, in line with prior findings on the negative motivational effects of excessive authoritarian leadership (Harms, et al., 2017; Nunes & Palma-Moreira, 2024).

6.4. Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides insight into the influence of leadership styles on employee motivation within a South African automotive manufacturing organisation, several opportunities exist for future research to extend and deepen understanding in this area.

Future studies could employ a longitudinal research design to examine how leadership behaviours and employee motivation change over time. Such an approach would enable stronger inferences regarding the direction and stability of relationships between leadership styles and motivation, particularly in dynamic operational environments.

Further research could also broaden the scope to include multiple organisations within the automotive sector or across different industries. Comparative studies would enhance the generalisability of findings and allow for examination of how organisational context shapes the leadership–motivation relationship.

In addition, future research could incorporate the perspectives of supervisors, middle management, and senior leaders to provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership practices and their motivational effects across organisational levels. This may assist in identifying alignment or gaps between leadership intent and employee experience.

Finally, future studies could integrate qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, alongside quantitative approaches to gain deeper insight into how specific leadership behaviours

influence employee motivation in practice. Mixed-method designs would complement survey findings by capturing contextual and experiential aspects of leadership that are not easily quantified.

6.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter concluded the study by presenting the research conclusions, practical recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future research arising from the investigation into the influence of leadership styles on employee motivation within a South African automotive manufacturing organisation. The chapter synthesised the study's findings in relation to the stated research objectives and translated these into actionable recommendations for the organisation.

In relation to the first research objective, the findings confirmed that democratic and transformational leadership styles were the most dominant leadership styles experienced by operational-level employees, while servant/coaching and transactional leadership were present to a moderate extent and autocratic leadership was relatively limited. These findings indicate that the leadership environment within the organisation is largely participative and supportive in nature.

Regarding the second research objective, the study established that employee motivation levels among operational-level employees were moderate to high. This suggests a generally positive motivational climate within the organisation, with employees demonstrating engagement and willingness to perform their operational roles effectively.

In addressing the third research objective, the study found that leadership styles collectively relate to employee motivation. However, when examined simultaneously, servant/coaching leadership emerged as the only leadership style with a statistically significant unique influence on employee motivation. This finding highlights the central role of supportive, developmental leadership behaviours in shaping motivation within the organisation.

Based on these conclusions, practical recommendations were proposed with a specific focus on strengthening servant and coaching leadership behaviours, embedding supportive leadership

practices into daily operations, aligning participative leadership with development-oriented support, reinforcing leadership behaviours through training and performance management systems, and limiting reliance on autocratic leadership practices. These recommendations are intended to support the organisation in enhancing employee motivation through more effective leadership practices.

The chapter further acknowledged the limitations of the study, including the use of a cross-sectional research design, reliance on self-reported data, and the focus on a single organisation and operational-level employees. Suggestions for future research were provided to address these limitations and to extend understanding of leadership and motivation through longitudinal designs, broader organisational samples, and mixed-method approaches.

Overall, this chapter brought the study to a close by consolidating its key contributions and outlining practical and research-oriented implications. In doing so, the study offers both empirical insight and practical guidance relevant to leadership practice and employee motivation within automotive manufacturing and similar operational contexts.

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APPENDIX A: GATEKEEPER'S LETTER



CATALER SOUTH AFRICA (PTY) LIMITED

Company Registration Number 2000/026433/07
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VAT REG : 4920192475

09 May 2025

Prof Cecile Gerwel Proches
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Westville Campus
Durban
3630



Dear Prof Proches

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

This letter serves to confirm that I, Mr. MacJerry Lesufi, Head of Human Resources and General Affairs at Cataler South Africa (Pty) Ltd hereby acknowledge and approve the research of Luchen Govender within the Company for the completion of his Masters degree.

Sincerely,

Signed by: Makubane Johannes Lesufi
Signed at: 2025-05-09 13:57:12 +02:00
Reason: Witnessing Makubane Johannes


MacJerry Lesufi
Head of Human Resources and General Affairs
Cataler South Africa (Pty) Ltd
T: +27 31 910 7615
C: +
E: mlesufi@cataler.co.za

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP MBA RESEARCH PROJECT

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Respondent,

My name is Luchen Govender, a Master of Business Administration (MBA) student at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Westville Campus.

Contact Information:

- Email: 212515111@stu.ukzn.ac.za
- Cell: [REDACTED]

You are invited to consider participating in a research study titled:

"The influence of leadership styles on employee motivation at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa."

This study investigates how various leadership styles influence the motivation of employees within an automotive manufacturing environment. The purpose is to identify which leadership approaches best promote employee engagement, satisfaction, and productivity.

The study involves completing a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire will be made available electronically via Google Forms and will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. You are one of about 165 employees invited to participate from a single site in Prospecton, Durban, which has a total workforce of approximately 180 employees. The study is not funded, and there are no costs or financial obligations associated with your participation.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study. The questionnaire is completely anonymous, and no sensitive personal or medical information will be requested.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: 00031011).

If you have questions or concerns, you may contact:

- Researcher: Luchen Govender – 212515111@stu.ukzn.ac.za [REDACTED]
- Supervisor: Prof. Cecile Gerwel Proches – gerwel@ukzn.ac.za / 031 260 8318

Alternatively, you may contact the UKZN Ethics Office:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality. No names, employee IDs, or other identifying details will be collected. Data will be stored securely in a password-protected file, accessible only to the researcher and supervisor, and will be used solely for academic purposes. Data may be retained for up to five years before being securely deleted.

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP
MBA RESEARCH PROJECT**

CONSENT

I, _____, confirm that I have been informed about the research study titled: "The Influence of Leadership Styles on Employee Motivation at an Automotive Manufacturing Company in South Africa", conducted by Luchen Govender, an MBA student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

I understand the purpose of the study is to explore how leadership styles affect employee motivation within a manufacturing environment. I understand that my participation involves completing an anonymous electronic questionnaire, which will take approximately 15–20 minutes.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research and understand that I may withdraw at any stage without penalty or loss of benefits.

If I have questions about the study, I may contact:

- Luchen Govender – 212515111@stu.ukzn.ac.za / [REDACTED]
- Prof. Cecile Gerwel Proches – gerwel@ukzn.ac.za / 031 260 8318.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional Consent (if applicable)

I hereby provide consent to:

Complete the questionnaire: YES / NO

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Participant (if applicable): _____ Date: _____

Signature of Translator (if applicable): _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: For each question, select the ONE response option that best applies to you

Section A: Demographics

1. Gender

Male	Female

2. Age Group (years)

18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	Over 55

3. Department

Production	Quality	Maintenance	Production Control
HR & Training	Finance	IT	Production Eng

4. Length of Service

Less than 1 year	1- <3 years	3 - <6 years	6- <8 years	8-10 years	More than 10 years

Section B: Leadership Styles

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. My leader closely controls how tasks are done.					
2. My leader values team members' opinions.					
3. My leader is often unavailable when support is needed.					
4. My leader shares a clear vision for our team.					
5. My leader leads by example through hard work.					
6. My leader makes decisions without input from the team.					
7. My leader supports my professional development.					
8. My leader avoids delegating tasks to others.					
9. My leader builds strong relationships with team members.					
10. My leader allows us to work independently when appropriate.					
11. My leader explains how my work contributes to the company.					
12. My leader gives helpful feedback to grow my skills.					
13. My leader expects full compliance without questions.					
14. My leader keeps us informed about important updates.					
15. My leader creates a friendly and supportive environment.					
16. My leader motivates me to give my best.					
17. My leader only steps in when issues escalate.					
18. My leader includes us in decisions that affect our work.					
19. My leader encourages open discussion of new ideas.					
20. My leader quickly addresses poor performance.					
21. My leader helps me find ways to improve.					

22. My leader genuinely cares about the team's well-being.					
23. My leader expects us to solve problems with little help.					
24. My leader sets high performance expectations.					

Section C: Employee Motivation

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I enjoy the work that I do.					
2. I look forward to coming to work each day.					
3. I feel a sense of personal achievement when I complete my tasks.					
4. I take pride in doing my job well.					
5. I am driven to grow and improve in my role.					
6. I feel inspired by the purpose of my work.					
7. I am self-motivated to meet and exceed my performance goals.					
8. I feel connected to the company's mission and values.					
9. Being noticed and appreciated at work has motivated me.					
10. I believe my work will lead to future career opportunities.					
11. I feel supported by the work environment to do my job effectively.					
12. I am motivated by the possibility of financial or non-financial rewards.					
13. Receiving recognition for good work has encouraged me to do well					
14. I believe there are fair opportunities for promotion or advancement.					
15. I am motivated by the stability and security of my job.					
16. I feel encouraged to perform well because my contribution matters.					

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



26 June 2025

Luchen Govender (212515111)
Grad School of Bus & Leadership
Westville Campus

Dear L Govender,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00008826/2025

Project title: The influence of leadership styles on employee motivation at an automotive manufacturing company in South Africa

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 10 June 2025 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 26 June 2026.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Doctor Shamila Naidoo (Interim Chair)

/nng

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

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