Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in selected South African universities

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DECLARATION

This study followed an article format as the selected structure. The researcher, Janico Louw, assisted in conceptualising the approach and design of the study, conducted the literature review, collected the data, assisted with the data analysis and interpretation of statistical findings, and was responsible for writing all chapters contained in this mini-dissertation. Prof Leon Jackson acted as supervisor and aided the conceptualisation and design of the study, assisted with the analysis and interpretation of the data, and was the co-author of the article produced from the research. The article produced from this research project was accepted for publication in the conference proceedings of the 2022 International Business Conference held on 25-28 September 2022 in Somerset West, South Africa.

I, Janico Louw (29896533), declare herewith that "*Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in selected South African universities"* is a product of my own work. This manuscript has not been previously submitted for examination to another university. All academic sources utilised in the study are included in-text and in each chapter's separate reference list.

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"But this is not your calling. You will lead by a completely different model. The greatest one among you will live as the one who is called to serve others because the greatest honour and authority is reserved for the one with the heart of a servant." – Matthew 20:26-28 (The Passion Translation)

ABSTRACT

Title: Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in selected South African universities

Contemporary South African society is experiencing moral bankruptcy, as is evident through persistent acts of crime and corruption in media reports. The higher education sector has not remained unscathed, with a lack of leadership leading to recent breakdowns in governance at multiple public universities in South Africa. A need exists for a leadership approach that serves the interest of others, promotes ethical behaviour, restores trust in the leader, and improves the work engagement of academic staff to counter corruption's adverse effects.

This study aimed to assess the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in four selected South African universities. The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design, using a non-probability convenience sample (n=206) to achieve the study's objectives. The shortened servant leadership scale, the shortened Utrecht work engagement scale, and the trust in/loyalty to the leader scale were administered as measuring instruments. Descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis, mediation and moderation analyses, and regression analysis were used to analyse the data.

The findings of the study indicated a positive association between servant leadership, trust, and work engagement. Insignificant results were found to determine the mediating or moderating effect of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. Servant leadership and trust were found to successfully predict the outcome of work engagement, with servant leadership being the dominant predictor. The limitations are identified, including recommendations to address limitations in future research. Practical recommendations are also provided for higher education institutions.

Keywords: Servant leadership, work engagement, trust, academic staff, South Africa, university, higher education institutions

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CHAPTER 1 NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to assess the prevalence and effect of servant leadership behaviours in academic leaders on the work engagement of academic staff in higher education institutions in South Africa. The study further aims to investigate the relationship of servant leadership on followers' trust in their leader and the extent to which trust impacts the work engagement of academics. The research was conducted at four well-established public tertiary education providers in South Africa.

This chapter presents a background to the study, followed by an introduction to the concepts of servant leadership, trust, and work engagement. Next, the problem statement is provided, after which the research questions and objectives are defined. Then follows an outline of the research methodology, including the population profile, measuring instruments, and data analysis techniques utilised. Finally, the section concludes by addressing the ethical considerations and limitations and delivering the study's contribution.

1.2 Background to the study

Reports in both print and electronic media indicate that modern South African society has reached moral bankruptcy. Notwithstanding the economic and political crisis faced in the country, the prevalence of disturbing pathologies such as indiscipline, violence, assault, fraud, unaccountability, corruption, xenophobic attacks, gender-based violence, and the disintegration of families render South Africa an ailing society (Sekhaulelo, 2021:1). While poverty and severe inequality are highly attributable to this moral degradation, they fail to explain why some comparatively poorer and more unequal societies experience less of these atrocities against humanity (Sekhaulelo, 2021:3).

The increase in voter apathy in the country's most recent general election points to a possible answer and concerns itself with the lack of sufficient and effective leadership (Wolhuter *et al.*, 2020:1). According to a report by Schulz-Herzenberg (2020:5), the average percentage of eligible voters who exercised their right to vote decreased by 37 per cent, from 86 per cent in 1994 to 49 per cent in 2019. This relates to less than half of the eligible voting-age population exercising their democratic right to vote in 2019, as shown in Figure 1-1 below. In contrast with the hard-fought struggle for liberation in South Africa leading up to the first democratic election in 1994, the low voter turnover trend raises questions as to why the majority of South Africans have given up their right to decide on the future leadership of the country.

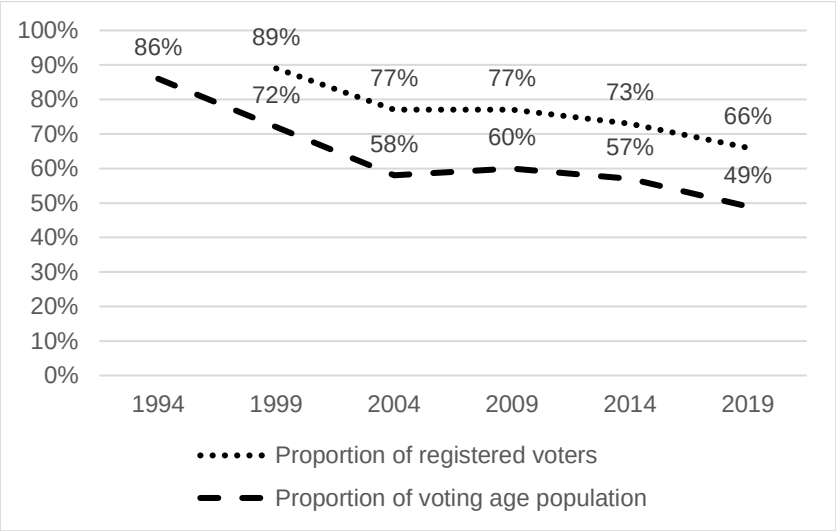

Figure 1-1: National voter turnover, 1994-2019, in percentages

Source: (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2020:6)

Considering the endemic spread of corruption as discussed above (De Klerk & Solomon, 2019:69-73; Odeku, 2018:44-45; Sekhaulelo, 2021:5-6), it is not surprising that voters have lost faith in leadership to serve the interest of the general public instead of their own. It can therefore be argued that the manifestation of systemic corruption in leadership originated from a lack of integrity rather than poverty or inequality.

In the midst of the moral decay experienced in South African society, service-orientated and ethical leadership approaches are required to combat corruption. Unfortunately, the higher education sector in South Africa has not remained untainted by vile acts of widespread crime and corruption. Student murders, the burning of academic buildings, and the destruction of university infrastructure have become increasing practices as South African academics navigate the volatile and hostile environment on the country's campuses (Hunter, 2017; Pijoos, 2022; Pityana, 2020; Singh, 2020). Student revolts have reached unprecedented levels in the past few years, with protests such as #FeesMustFall, Rhodes Must Fall, Open Stellenbosch, and numerous social uprisings regarding the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) gaining international attention (Chaudhuri, 2016; Mlaba, 2021; Nkosi, 2015b).

How leadership or poor leadership has affected the events leading up to student unrest is unclear. However, two recent incidents of universities being placed under administration due to breakdowns in leadership and governance are indicative of pervasive corruption that has infiltrated senior management structures in South African universities (Pityana, 2020). The governing council of the University of South Africa (UNISA) has also recently been severely criticised for its lack of governance and received a recommendation to be dissolved

(Kobokana, 2022). The Universities South Africa Board of Directors acknowledged that corruption has reached endemic levels in the country and noted the possibility that universities might be involved in corrupt activities (Universities South Africa, 2020). Other than issuing a joint statement declaring the board's consensus to root out corruption in all forms, the board has failed to provide a strategy to achieve its mission of eradicating corruption.

The higher education system in South Africa before 1994 is symbolised by fragmentation, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness. The apartheid regime left the country with a racially segregated and highly contested higher education system, where universities were classified based on race and language (Hay & Monnapula-Mapesela, 2009:11). The system was further characterised by the inequitable distribution of resources to higher education institutions. Significant disparities existed between institutions with regard to facilities, capacities, and student access to specific disciplines. The same skewness existed in the governance of these institutions of higher learning (Hay & Monnapula-Mapesela, 2009:12).

Then came 1994, epitomised by the culmination of liberation and the ignition of transformation in the country. Since then, higher education policy development has primarily been driven by the democratic constitution of South Africa (Hay & Monnapula-Mapesela, 2009:12). The process started with the proclamation of the Higher Education Act of 1997, followed by the Education White Paper 3: *A programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* in the same year, and later the first *National Plan for Higher Education* in 2001 (Hay & Monnapula-Mapesela, 2009:14).

The current plan for higher education put forward by the Ministry of Education forms part of the government's *National Development Plan – Vision for 2030* to improve education, innovation, and training (National Planning Commission, 2011:261-294). The following quantifiable targets for the higher education sector have been set to be achieved by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2011:277-279):

- University science and mathematics entrants must increase to 450 000.
- Graduation rates must increase to more than 25 per cent.
- Participation rates must increase to more than 30 per cent.
- More than 100 doctoral graduates per million per year must be produced.

However, as noted by Higher Education South Africa (HESA) in its reaction to the National Development Plan's vision for 2030, it is still unclear whose responsibility it is to meet these objectives and how to achieve them. (Higher Education South Africa, 2012:14). Simkins (2019) of the Helen Suzman Foundation has suggested that the goals of the National Development

Plan 2030 should be revisited as some of the goals are unrealistic and unattainable, even if given an additional ten years to achieve. A 2020 report by the Bureau for Economic Research (BER) indicates that priorities to improve education outcomes and skills revolution show weak performance in all preceding years (Bureau for Economic Research, 2020:8). Total university enrolment has increased by a mere 100 000 students (9.5 per cent) between 2012 and 2019, leaving a gap of 449 000 students to achieve the target of 1.6 million by 2030 (Bureau for Economic Research, 2020:18).

Dropout rates in South Africa remain a concern for higher education administrators and policymakers. As cited by Nkosi (2015a), South African higher education can accommodate approximately 18 per cent of learners matriculating secondary school each year, of which 50 to 60 per cent drop out during their first year of study. Mkhize and Otu (2018:161) have also cited that South Africa's 60 per cent dropout rate is 30 per cent higher than European standards. Dropout rates in the United States of America are reported at 33 per cent (Hanson, 2022). In the United Kingdom, a mere 5.3 per cent of first-years enrolled in 2019 failed to continue their studies in the subsequent year, with an estimation that only 9.4 per cent will drop out without attaining a higher degree (Adams, 2022).

A single precursor is unlikely to exist for the negative social symptoms experienced in South African higher education. Rather than focusing on the negative attributions, by assuming a positive psychological perspective, the emphasis is placed on actions that generate constructive outcomes (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:7). The other-oriented approach of servant leadership suggests deliberate measures directed at making a positive impact on the work engagement of academic staff (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020:626). This perspective provides a possible remedy for the spread of crime and corruption (Kgatle, 2018:7; Manala, 2014:262) in the higher education sector and a way to counteract their adverse effects on work engagement (Friesenbichler *et al*., 2018:71).

1.3 Definition of terms

Despite attempts to conceptualise, investigate, and measure leadership, the general definition of leadership has many variations (Hernandez *et al*., 2011:1165). While *servant leadership* suffers the same definition variations, it is generally accepted to focus on serving others and recognises that the purpose of organisations is to develop people who foster the building of a brighter future for the greater community, instead of the leader's self-interest (Parris & Peachey, 2013:378-380). In essence, servant leadership is a serving-oriented, people-centred, and morally inclined leadership perspective (Liden *et al.*, 2014:6; Sendjaya *et al.*, 2008:405; Van Dierendonck, 2011:1228).

Work engagement can be defined as the degree to which an employee applies themselves to a work role by investing personal energy and feeling connected with their work (Kahn, 1990:692). Work engagement is explained as a positive and gratifying psychological state related to work that comprises the three distinguishable elements of vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002:74).

Trust is defined as the expectation, assumption, or belief of the follower that the future actions of the leader will benefit or favour the follower or, as a minimum, are not detrimental to the follower's interest (Robinson, 1996:576). In a breakdown of its definition, trust can firstly be viewed as the extent of the willingness of a person to hold confidence in another (Mayer *et al.*, 1995:712; Moorman *et al.*, 1992:315) and secondly, an expectation that this person will behave in a mutually acceptable manner (Sako & Helper, 1998:388). In its simplest form, trust in the leader is expressed as the manifestation of followers' faith and loyalty to the leader (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990:113-114).

Academic staff in this study refers to personnel who hold titles such as professor, associate professor, assistant professor, lecturer, facilitator, instructor or the equivalent of any of these in academic ranks. Their primary responsibilities include instruction and research (OECD, 2001).

1.4 Literature review

In order to address the pervasive problems discussed in the background of the study, especially concerning higher education leadership, this study explores the theoretical constructs of servant leadership, trust, and work engagement within the study context to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of what this study set out to accomplish.

1.4.1 Servant Leadership

The concept of servant leadership was first introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970s and is currently experiencing rediscovery as practitioners and researchers search for a suitable leadership theory to assist in solving the issues of the twenty-first century (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011:249). Greenleaf's original research (as cited by Spears, 2010:27) identified ten behavioural characteristics of servant leaders, although more recent research has revived the interest in servant leadership by elaborating on existing concepts (Sendjaya *et al.*, 2008:402-424; Spears, 2010:25-30).

Liden *et al.* (2008:162) adapted the attributes of servant leaders and initially proposed nine characteristics. However, Liden *et al.* (2015:255) later reduced the characteristics to seven:

Firstly, emotional healing is the degree to which the leader expresses interest and care for the well-being and personal issues of followers. Secondly, creating value for the community indicates the leader's willingness to be involved and assist in building the community and the extent to which the leader encourages followers to participate actively in the community. Thirdly, conception skills demonstrate the leader's competence to conceptualise organisational goals and their ability to solve work-related problems. Fourthly, empowering indicates the extent to which a leader trusts followers by creating opportunities for followers to have autonomy, responsibility, and influence through decision-making. Fifthly, helping subordinates grow and succeed captures the leader's commitment to assisting followers to achieve and reach their full career potential. Sixthly, putting subordinates first is the extent to which leaders place the interest and needs of followers above their own needs. Lastly, behaving ethically implies that the leader acts with honesty, trustworthiness and serves followers by modelling integrity.

1.4.2 Work engagement

Work engagement stems from positive psychology's increased attention over the last two decades. Positive psychology aims to study individuals' strengths and optimum performance by exploring the human resources that favourably affect psychological capabilities (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2006:38).

Work engagement is a motivational concept fundamental to job performance, where personal resources are devoted to tasks related to job roles (Rich *et al.*, 2010:617). According to Rich *et al.* (2010:617), the investment that leads to work engagement stems from physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, connecting individuals to their work on multiple levels. Conversely, personal disengagement is the withdrawal of oneself from behaviours that allows for a connection with work. When a person performs work tasks with emotional and cognitive distance, they can be said to lack personal investment (Kahn, 1990:702).

Schaufeli *et al.* (2002:74) define work engagement as a positive and satisfying psychological state related to one's work that is identifiable through three distinct dimensions. The first dimension, vigour, assesses the extent to which individuals display highly energetic behaviour and psychological resilience in the workplace and are prepared to invest additional effort into work and persevere when faced with challenges. The second dimension, dedication, reflects a sense of pride or importance experienced, being a source of inspiration and enthusiasm. Lastly, absorption expresses the extent to which a person is engrossed in their tasks and applies significant concentration effort to the degree that they find it challenging to separate themself from their work.

Work engagement, in contrast to employee burnout, is a positive experience associated with positive behaviour and the well-being of employees at work (Schaufeli, 2003:2). Research also found work engagement to have a beneficial impact on mental health and emotions, assisting employees in obtaining favourable outcomes despite stress at work (Britt *et al.*, 2001:57; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001:285; Rothbard, 2001:680). According to Demerouti *et al.* (2001:280), being engaged at work leads to other positive work outcomes, and Kahn (1990:700) suggests that there is a direct influence on job performance.

1.4.3 Trust

Trust, much like leadership, has been considered a complex topic that is difficult to define and is not comfortability studied empirically (Hay, 2002:43; Reinke, 2004:50). Hay (2002:50) additionally states that the definition of trust largely depends on the context within which it is applied. Within the context of organisational trust, Mayer *et al.* (1995:712) propose trust to be the preparedness of a person to be vulnerable to another person's behaviour without feeling the need to control or monitor the actions of the other person. As such, trust is not similar to risk-taking but is instead a willingness to accept the risk taken by another person. Podsakoff *et al.* (1990:113-114) stated that trust is the expression of faith and loyalty by followers toward the leader.

Interpersonal trust, as a phenomenon widely present in organisation life, is also defined as the degree of confidence a person holds in the expressions of another person (McAllister, 1995:25). According to McAllister (1995:25-26), interpersonal trust has two distinct dimensions, namely cognitive and affective foundations. The cognitive foundation suggests that trust is based on reasoning and follows after evidence of trustworthiness has been assessed. The affective foundation leads to the belief that trust is an emotional response based on the bond that exists in the relationship between two people and how genuine the care for concern between them is perceived.

In addition to investigating the relationship between trust and the other study variables, this study also aimed to examine whether trust mediates or moderates the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. The mediating role of trust has recently been established between servant leadership and other variables such as satisfaction (Ilkhanizadeh & Karatepe, 2018:3567-3568; Zargar *et al.*, 2019:2264-2265) and organisational health (Tasker-Mitchell & Attoh, 2020:332). Previous studies have also confirmed the role of trust as a mediator (Ling *et al*., 2017:63) and moderator (Zhou *et al*., 2022:5) in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement.

1.4.4 Relationship between servant leadership, trust, and work engagement

Although the selected variables of this study are yet to be investigated within the higher education context in South Africa, numerous studies have been conducted to establish the direct relationship between these variables. The notion of servant leadership has been closely associated with trust through the display of leader integrity in organisational fidelity (De Pree, 1997:127). Trust has been considered a building block in servant leadership that fosters an environment of trust (Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010:645). Evidence exists to support the positive correlation between servant leadership and trust (Chatbury *et al.*, 2011:60; Joseph & Winston, 2005:15; Saleem *et al.*, 2020:9-11; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010:654; Zargar *et al.*, 2019:2264).

Trust in the leader can be explained as an employee's willingness to be vulnerable to the effects of a leader's behaviour (Schoorman *et al.*, 2007:347). Leaders who are thoughtful and supportive of subordinates have been found to increase work engagement (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2018:338). Previous research also supports the view that trust significantly impacts work engagement (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:375; Håvold *et al.*, 2021:153; Mohanty & P, 2021:1278; Wong *et al.*, 2010:897).

Work engagement is regarded as a positive job attitude frequently studied in relation to servant leadership (Van Dierendonck, 2011:1249). Although historically, leadership has been neglected as a primary job resource considered to facilitate work engagement, recent studies have indicated a positive relationship between servant leadership and work engagement (Bao *et al.*, 2018:413-414; De Clercq *et al.*, 2014:201; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2014:892; Kaur, 2018:82; Khan *et al.*, 2021:934).

1.5 Problem statement

The existence of systemic corruption in both private and public institutions, moral deterioration, voter apathy, the failure to meet National Development Plan objectives for higher education, and significant levels of dropout rates (Bureau for Economic Research, 2020:18; De Klerk & Solomon, 2019:69-73; Mkhize & Otu, 2018:161; Odeku, 2018:44-45; Sekhaulelo, 2021:5-6; Wolhuter *et al.*, 2020:1), lead to questions surrounding the causes of these negative social phenomena and what can be done to stop them from occurring. It is reasonable to suggest a lack of moral leadership in the social fibre of South Africa and the service of self-interest as possible explanations for the pervasiveness of these adverse effects on the higher education sector (Ebekozien, 2019:52; Hope, 2017:4). In light of this, the impact of inefficiencies in the higher education system and the absence of servant leadership on the employees at higher education institutions should be investigated in relation to their motivation to engage in their work optimally.

Serving in the educational sector was once thought to be a profession with subdued stress levels due to its vocational nature. However, in recent times educators have been reported to experience similar negative work-related outcomes to those experienced by other professions, such as stress and burnout (Jackson *et al.*, 2006:263). To ensure tertiary institutions achieve the country's educational goals, their academic staff require technical skills and motivation to perform their duties to the best of their ability. The extent to which employees are engaged in their work has been found to positively affect their performance and commitment to achieving the organisation's goals (Bailey *et al.*, 2017:42).

Although many factors that influence the work engagement of employees have been identified, one prominent aspect remains the leadership of an organisation (Anitha, 2014:311; Christian *et al.*, 2011:122; Kahn, 1990:711). According to Christian *et al.* (2011:99), leaders are fundamental to individuals' perception of their work. For organisations to be as effective and efficient as possible, researchers and management have investigated countless factors that may positively impact the performance of followers and leaders (Lee, 2005:656). Notwithstanding the significance of leadership in higher education institutions, leadership in the sector is comparatively underexplored in empirical leadership studies (Zacher & Johnson, 2015:1211).

Servant leadership has recently regained popularity among managers, placing focus on quality and ethical leadership that is required to take organisations forward (Reed *et al.*, 2011:1). While servant leadership has already shown promise by having a positive effect on work engagement of academic staff in Palestinian universities (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2020:627), little research has been performed on the combination of these variables within the South African context. Work engagement and its antecedents have been studied in the South African higher education context but without reference to leadership (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2006:43; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014:330; Coetzee & Rothmann, 2005:30-32; Rothmann & Jordaan, 2006:94-95).

Previous research has demonstrated a positive association between servant leadership and trust, but not necessarily within the context of higher education (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2020:627; Carter & Baghurst, 2014:461; Coetzer *et al.*, 2017:19; De Clercq *et al.*, 2014:201; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2017:21). The well-known existing correlation between servant leadership and trust (Saleem *et al*., 2020:9-11; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010:654; Zargar *et al*., 2019:2264) as well as between trust and work engagement (Ahamed *et al.*, 2013:168; Buckley, 2011:320-321; De Beer *et al.*, 2018:7; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:374; Lin, 2010:526) might also offer a solution to restore the tarnished faith in leadership within higher education institutions.

While corruption is negatively associated with the outcome of work engagement (Friesenbichler *et al*., 2018:71), there are indicators that corruption is reduced if employees experience high levels of work engagement (Schaufeli, 2018:103), job satisfaction (Tafolli & Grabner-Kräuter, 2020:1360), and organisational commitment (Fu, 2014:141; Okpara & Wynn, 2008:946). Given the established relationship between servant leadership, trust, and work engagement, an argument can be made that a leader that prominently serves the best interests of people, empowers communities, and prioritises ethical behaviour could provide a method to mitigate the detrimental consequences of pervasive corruption and fraud through the existence of work engagement. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate if trust may serve as a strategy to enhance work engagement among academic employees by virtue of academic leaders' servant leadership behaviour. This raised the question, what role does trust in the academic leader play in the relationship between servant leadership traits exhibited by the leader and the level of work engagement experienced among academic staff?

This study aims to contribute to understanding the leadership practices in higher educational institutions within the South African context by bridging a gap identified in current research. It also seeks to provide insight into the effectiveness of servant leadership in facilitating work engagement within the higher education sphere. In addition, the study investigated the effects of servant leadership on followers' trust and how and when trust facilitates increased work engagement. The study intended to conclude by suggesting servant leadership as a leadership style conducive to the work engagement of academic staff in South African universities. The study followed two conceptual frameworks. The first framework investigated the mediating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement, using a unidimensional perspective of the study variables and breaking down work engagement into the components thereof, as illustrated in Figure 1-2 below.

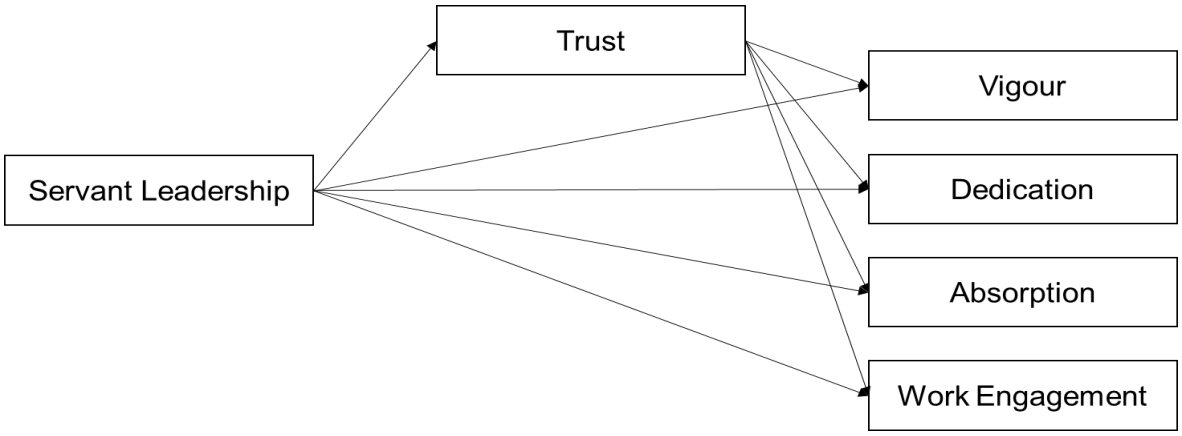

Figure 1-2: The conceptual framework, based on a mediation model

Source: (Author)

The second framework investigated the moderating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement from a unidimensional perspective of the study variables and by breaking down work engagement into the components of the construct, as demonstrated in Figure 1-3 below.

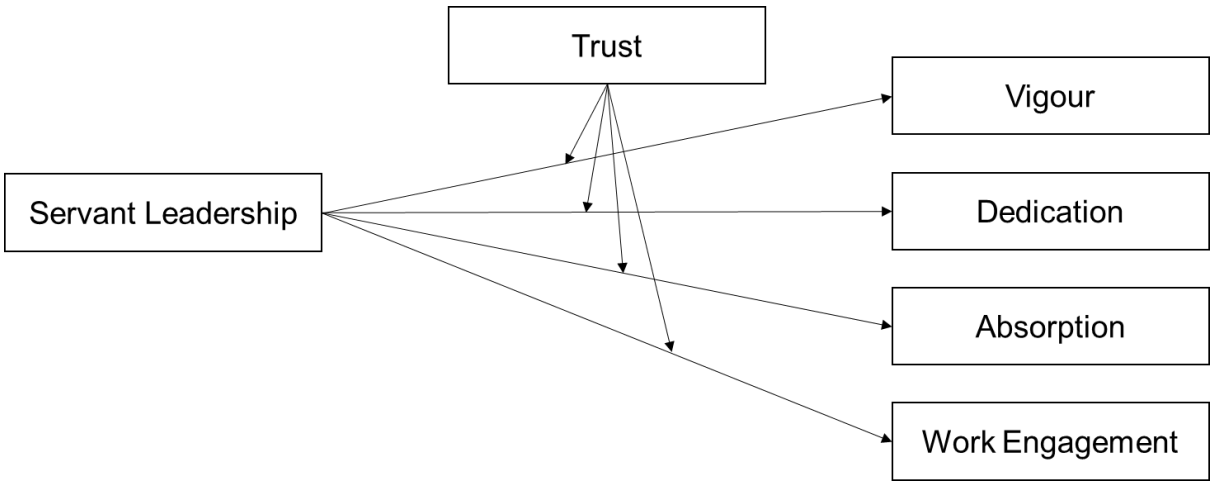

Figure 1-3: The conceptual framework, based on a moderation model

Source: (Author)

1.6 Research questions

1.6.1 Primary question

The primary question of this study concerned itself with the following: What is the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and the work engagement of academic staff in South African universities?

1.6.2 Secondary questions

The following secondary questions were formulated to assist in answering the primary research question:

- What is the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components among academic staff in South African universities?
- What is the relationship between servant leadership and trust among academic staff in South African universities?
- What is the relationship between trust and work engagement and its components among academic staff in South African universities?

- Does trust serve as a mediator in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components amongst academic staff in South African universities?
- Does trust serve as a moderator in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components amongst academic staff in South African universities?
- Do servant leadership and trust serve as significant predictors of work engagement and its components amongst academic staff in South African universities?

1.7 Research objectives

1.7.1 Primary objective

The primary objective of the study was to determine the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and the work engagement of academic staff in South African universities.

1.7.2 Secondary objectives

The following secondary objectives were established to aid the attainment of the primary objective:

- To evaluate the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components among academic staff in South African universities.
- To determine the relationship between servant leadership and trust among academic staff in South African universities.
- To establish the relationship between trust and work engagement and its components among academic staff in South African universities.
- To determine the mediating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement amongst academic staff in South African universities.
- To determine the moderating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components amongst academic staff in South African universities.
- To determine whether servant leadership and trust serve as significant predictors of work engagement and its components amongst academic staff in South African universities.

1.8 Scope of the study

1.8.1 Field of study

The field of this study forms part of the people management cluster. It addresses leadership in organisations by investigating servant leadership, trust in the leader, and the organisational psychology concept of work engagement.

1.8.2 Sector under investigation

This study investigates the higher education sector with specific reference to public universities in South Africa.

1.8.3 Geographical demarcation

The primary research of this study was conducted at the four public universities located across four of South Africa's provinces, namely: Western Cape (Stellenbosch University), Free State (Central University of Technology and University of the Free State), North-West (North-West University), and Gauteng (North-West University).

1.9 Research methodology

This study followed a two-phase research design to satisfy the defined study objectives. Firstly, a literature review was conducted of prevailing research on servant leadership, trust, and work engagement, with reference to the relationships previously discovered between these variables. Secondly, an empirical study examined the prevalence of these variables and their relationship within the context of the selected higher education institutions in South Africa.

1.9.1 Literature review

The purpose of the literature review was to gain a deeper understanding of the fundamental concepts of servant leadership, trust, and work engagement, which is set to be achieved by consulting various publications in the fields of leadership and organisational psychology. These included textbooks on organisational leadership and behaviour, academic studies on the study's fundamental concepts, and peer-reviewed journals such as *The Leadership Quarterly, Leadership and Organisational Development Journal, Personnel Review, and Journal of Business Ethics*. The focus was placed on publications by experts in the fields of study. Relevance was reached by using the most recently published studies. As information resources, journals and websites were accessed through Google, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and NWULIB.

1.9.2 Empirical study

1.9.2.1 Research paradigm

Positivism is an epistemological approach used in academic research, promoting the use of natural science procedures to gain an understanding of social realities (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:12). As research philosophy, positivism is primarily associated with an experimental methodology, using existing theory to generate and test hypotheses or answer research questions and is mainly quantitative (Petrovic *et al.*, 2017:182). Positivism follows the principle that only phenomena verifiable through observation with human senses can be accepted as sources of knowledge. The collection of observations must be objective and free from influence by researchers or existing theories (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:12). Considering the objectives of this study, supported by the answering of research questions in which the researcher assumed an objective position, the study adopted a positivistic research philosophy.

1.9.2.2 Research approach

The principal research orientation concentrates on the relationship between the research and the theory, with a deductive design emphasising the testing of existing theories with generated research data. In contrast, an inductive design aims to generate new theories from collected research information (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:31). Since this study aimed not to generate original theory but rather to test the existing theoretical frameworks of servant leadership, work engagement, and trust, the research design followed a deductive approach.

1.9.2.3 Methodological choice

According to Antwi and Kasim (2015:217-218), the research approach is selected based on the paradigm and orientation that underlines the study. A quantitative research methodology is underpinned by positivism, where interpretivism is fundamental to a qualitative research approach (Antwi & Kasim, 2015:220). Quantitative research utilises an objective and systematic approach using numerical data collected from a selected sample to generalise the findings over the broader population (Maree & Pietersen, 2013:145). The tendency exists for quantitative research approaches to focus on quantifying data in its collection and analysis. It also approaches the relationship between research and theory from a deductive orientation, emphasising the testing of developed theories. In accordance with positivism, quantitative research adopts a position external and objective to the social reality (Bryman *et al*., 2014:31). Considering that this study aimed to quantify the relationship between servant leadership, work engagement, and trust, a mono-method quantitative research approach was selected.

1.9.2.4 Research strategy

After deciding on the research paradigm, approach and methodological choice, the methodological strategy must be selected. Social survey research is primarily associated with data collection in quantitative analysis (Keith, 2003:1-2). Survey research data is predominantly collected by questionnaires or structured interviews to generate quantifiable data that can be analysed for patterns of association (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:107). Surveys typically consist of open-ended or closed-ended questions and can take various forms, including self-administered surveys, telephone surveys, and face-to-face interviews (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:191-199).

Considering the objectives of this study, research data was collected using a close-ended, self-administered online questionnaire with no interviewer present (Bryman *et al*., 2014:191). Self-administered surveys typically have closed questions that make it easier for the respondent to answer. Their design tends to be short and easy to follow, reducing respondent dropout due to fatigue (Bryman *et al*., 2014:192). Other advantages of self-administered questionnaires are that they are quick and relatively cost-effective to administer. They also eliminate the biases associated with interviews and can be completed when it is convenient for the respondent (Bryman *et al*., 2014:192). One of the disadvantages of self-administered questionnaires is lower response rates, which this study aimed to address by increasing the sample population (Bryman *et al*., 2014:193).

1.9.2.5 Time horizon

A cross-sectional research design involves collecting research data from multiple cases at an isolated point in time. The aim is to allow the researcher to examine the relationship between two or more variables by collecting quantifiable data and identifying any patterns that may exist (Bryman *et al*., 2014:106). Considering that the study's objectives were to examine the quantified relationships between the variables of servant leadership, work engagement, and trust at a single point in time, a cross-sectional approach was selected as the research design.

1.9.2.6 Study population and sampling

The population of this study was all academic employees of 26 public universities in South Africa. However, the target population deemed accessible to the researcher for this study was the academic staff of four selected public universities in South Africa. The four universities are North-West University, Central University of Technology, University of the Free State, and Stellenbosch University. These institutions have been selected due to the researcher's current or previous affiliation with the institutions.

The inclusion criteria for the study population were the academic employees from the four selected higher education institutions in South Africa. The employees had to be employed academically and have a direct line manager or leader to whom they report. The exclusion criteria were all administrative staff of the selected higher education institutions in South Africa.

According to Bryman *et al.* (2014:170), a sample is explained to be a segment selected from a wider population. Depending on the selection method, the sample can represent the entire population, from which generalisations of the sample can be drawn and portrayed in the broader population. Sampling strategies consist of probability or non-probability sampling techniques. With probability sampling, the process of selecting sampling units is random and each potential unit has an even statistical probability of being selected (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:170; Sarstedt *et al.*, 2018:651). In comparison, non-probability sampling does not utilise random selection but rather personal judgement or convenience to determine the selection of a sampling unit. As a result, the probability of being selected is unknown, restricting the target population to a sample population (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:171; Sarstedt *et al.*, 2018:651).

The study used non-probability convenience sampling to identify the sample population. A convenience sample is defined as a sample based on its accessibility to the researcher (Bryman *et al.,* 2014:178). This technique was selected due to time constraints, the complexity associated with including all higher education institutions in South Africa, and because a comprehensive sample frame within the selected institutions was inaccessible to the researcher.

Field (2009:58) explains that the sample size is intrinsically linked to the acceptable probability level, the statistical power, and the desired effect size. The probability level in social science is typically constant at a *p*-level of 0.05. The statistical power aimed to achieve this is at least an 80 per cent chance to detect an effect between the study variables if one exists. The remaining variable required to determine the sample size of effect size can be categorised into small ($r = 0.10$), medium ($r = 0.30$), and large ($r = 0.50$). By assuming a medium effect size as acceptable, three latent variables and 11 observable variables were used in the online sample size calculator by Soper (2021) to calculate a recommended minimum sample size of 123 respondents.

This study proposed using exploratory factor analysis to explain the relationship between the observed variables and the original latent construct. Exploratory factor analysis is performed by using existing theory or empirical research to detect patterns that emerge between variables and then proceeds to test hypotheses quantitatively (Suhr, 2006:1). The performance of exploratory factor analysis is enhanced when larger sample sizes are used (Gagne & Hancock,

2006:65). Although researchers have suggested lower limits to a sample size of between 100 and 200, the matter remains too complex for absolute minimum values to exist (Gagne & Hancock, 2006:79). However, after applying the experience and professional judgment of the study's supervisor, 160 respondents were selected as the minimum sample size.

1.9.2.7 Designing the measuring instrument

The study adopted existing questionnaires designed and tested by expert researchers to measure each construct. Since the measuring instruments used for this study were predeveloped, the reliability and validity of the questionnaires were previously determined. The research instrument (questionnaires) is attached in the appendices and marked Appendix B. The following table summarises the scales utilised to measure the study's constructs.

Table 1-1: Summary of the utilised measuring instruments

Construct	Source	Instrument
Servant leadership	Liden *et al.* (2015:254-269)	Servant leadership scale
Work engagement	Schaufeli *et al.* (2006:707-716)	Utrecht work engagement scale
Trust	Podsakoff *et al.* (1990:107-142)	Trust in/loyalty to the leader scale

1.9.2.7.1 Demographical information

This study collected demographical information of the respondent of the following nature: age, institution location, faculty, gender, academic qualification, and years of experience in their current position. The collection of demographical data served the purpose of describing the sample and was excluded from further analysis and refrained from being used to draw comparisons between groups.

1.9.2.7.2 Servant leadership

Several measuring instruments have been designed to assess the prevalence and extent of servant leadership behaviour within the context of organisations. For this study, the shortened seven-item servant leadership scale (SLQ7) developed by Liden *et al.* (2015:254-269) was selected as the measuring instrument for servant leadership. This scale was created as a shortened adaptation of a 28-item instrument developed by Liden *et al.* (2008:161-177). Shorter instruments, as suggested by Credé *et al.* (2012:875), might reduce the respondent's fatigue and improve the integrity of the instrument.

The shortened seven-item scale comprises the seven dimensions introduced by Liden *et al.* (2008:169), namely emotional healing, creating value for the community, conception skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically. Each dimension consists of one item measured on a five-point Likert scale and is represented by the following questions: “My leader can tell if something work-related is going wrong (conception skills)”, “My leader makes my career development a priority (helping subordinates grow and succeed)”, “I would seek help from my leader if I had a personal problem (emotional healing)”, “My leader emphasises the importance of giving back to the community (creating value for the community)”, “My leader puts my best interests ahead of his or her own (putting subordinates first)”, “My leader gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best (empowering)”, and “My leader would not compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success (behaving ethically)”.

The shortened scale was tested for reliability and validity by Liden *et al.* (2015:256), who found Cronbach’s alpha of 0.80, 0.81, and 0.89 in three separate samples of the scale, including satisfactory results from the confirmatory factor analysis conducted. This seven-item scale was also tested by Flotman & Grobler (2020:7-8) for its validity to be used in South African contexts and found the instrument to be of practical and scientific value, with Cronbach’s alpha demonstrated at 0.88. Convergent validity was also assessed using composite reliability and was found to be acceptable (Flotman & Grobler, 2020:6).

1.9.2.7.3 Work engagement

For this study, the shortened nine-item version (UWES9) of the Utrecht work engagement scale by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006:707-716) was selected as the measuring instrument for work engagement. This scale was adapted from the original 17-item Utrecht work engagement scale developed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002:85).

The items of the scale represent the work engagement dimension, as identified by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002:74), of vigour, dedication, and absorption. It contains three items proposed to reflect each of the three underlying work engagement dimensions and is measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale. Sample items for each dimension are: “At my job, I feel strong and vigorous (vigour)”, “My job inspires me (dedication)”, and “I am immersed in my work (absorption).” Higher scores indicate a larger extent of work engagement experienced by respondents.

The shortened scale was initially tested for validity and reliability across ten countries during its development, of which South Africa was one country (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006:708-709).

Cronbach's alpha for each of the three constructs varied between the ten countries. However, the median of Cronbach's alpha across all ten countries was found to be 0.92.

1.9.2.7.4 Trust

Furthering the investigation of the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement, the six-item trust in/loyalty to the leader scale developed by Podsakoff *et al.* (1990:107-142) was selected. The scale was initially designed to investigate the role of trust in the direct leader in the relationship between transformational leadership and organisational citizenship. It is therefore deemed appropriate to examine other conceptualisations of leadership using this instrument, specifically measuring trust in a direct leader from the followers' perspective.

In this six-item scale, trust is conceptualised using two dimensions. The extent to which a follower's faith in their leader is expressed is represented by three items, an example of which is: "My manager would never try to gain an advantage by deceiving workers". The degree to which a sense of loyalty is experienced by followers toward their leader is also represented by three items, an example of which is: "I have a strong sense of loyalty toward my leader". All six items are measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the trust in the leader scale by Podsakoff *et al.* (1990:117) and found all six items to be satisfactory in representing trust. In a reliability test of this scale conducted by Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010:652), the scale demonstrated Cronbach's alpha of 0.81.

1.9.2.8 Collection of data

Traditionally, self-administered questionnaires were delivered by hand or post, but since the emergence of new technologies, the use of web-based surveys has dramatically increased over the last decades (Kelfve *et al*., 2020:1). The benefits of web-based surveys are that distance between research and the sample population is eliminated, meaning a larger audience can be reached (Bryman *et al*., 2014:286). However, web-based surveys have been known to yield lower response rates than other traditional methods (Manfreda *et al*., 2008:97).

This study made use of a web-based survey platform named QuestionPro. Respondents were issued a hyperlink, with access to the online survey, shared via an email by the research host of the higher education institution, the dean of the faculty or the researcher. From this email, the respondent navigated to the website, where informed consent was provided and demographic information of the sample was collected. The online survey proceeded to the

measuring instruments' questions. To counter low response rates associated with web-based surveys, the researcher kept the questionnaire items to a minimum without compromising validity.

Research conducted using the employees of the four public universities selected for this study required approval from a gatekeeper committee before the sample population was made accessible to the researcher. The process to be followed to obtain permission to conduct research on the academic staff of these institutions was explored by the researcher. Although the application process of each university differed, in all instances, the application for gatekeeper's approval was formally submitted once ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant ethical committees at the North-West University and the University of the Free State. In instances where the study sample was not directly accessible to the researcher, access was provided through the liaising research host.

1.9.2.9 Statistical analysis

The research objectives the study aimed to achieve determined the data analysis techniques. Since this study focused on investigating the relationship between study variables, quantitative techniques were used to analyse the primary research data.

Data collected from the web survey platform QuestionPro was extracted and exported to IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Jamovi for statistical analysis. Data analysis was initiated with frequencies to describe the demographical data, followed by exploratory factor analysis. This analytical technique explored the study's factorial structure of the measured variables. Cronbach's alpha was utilised to assess the reliability of measuring instruments used in the context of this study.

Next, descriptive statistics were performed, comprising an array of quantitative instruments used to describe and interpret raw data (Modipane *et al*., 2019:6). Descriptive statistics are classified into four major categories: measures of frequency (per cent and frequency), measures of central tendency (mean, mode and median), measures of dispersion (variance and standard deviation), and distribution measures (kurtosis and skewness) (Mishra *et al*., 2019:68). Procedures that were selected for data analysis in this study included mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis.

Correlation analysis was utilised to analyse the data further to identify correlations between variables and to establish the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. Simple mediation and moderation modelling were conducted using PROCESS macros version 4 of Hayes (2017), installed as an add-on in IBM SPSS to analyse how, when, and under what

conditions trust plays a role in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components. Standardised regression analysis was conducted to investigate the predictive value (validity) of the independent variables (servant leadership and trust) on the dependent variables (work engagement and its components) of this study.

1.9.2.10 Reliability and validity

Reliability in quantitative research refers to the ability of a measuring instrument to consistently produce the same results if applied to the same conditions (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:36). Reliability covers the stability and the internal consistency of the measure. Stability refers to confidence that the measuring instrument will remain stable over time and that no discrepancies will be found in the results if re-administered under the same conditions. The simplest form of testing the stability of the scale is through the test-retest method, where the same sample is tested twice (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:36).

Internal consistency refers to whether the scale items, representing the variable dimensions as indicators, consistently reflect the construct it was designed to measure (Field, 2009:673). A common technique used to test internal consistency is the split-half method (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:37). This involves dividing the study sample into two groups and testing the correlation between the two halves (Field, 2009:674). Cronbach's alpha can be used to establish the average of all split-half possibilities, thereby ensuring consistency in the method used to divide the sample into two groups. Generally, an acceptable level of internal consistency is considered at an alpha of 0.80 (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:38).

Although this study utilised existing scales of which the reliability has already been determined, the reliability of the measuring instrument within the study context was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to ensure scientific rigour.

Validity in quantitative research refers to the extent to which the selected measuring instrument, or the set of indicators it contains, measures the concept the instrument is designed to measure (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:38). Face validity refers to the extent to which the measure appears to test the underlying concept at face value and is tested by obtaining the input of an expert in the area. Construct validity describes the extent to which a scale measures the fundamental construct it intends to evaluate (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:39). This requires collecting evidence from multiple sources to support construct validity. The evidence needs to demonstrate that the scale measures what it is designed to measure, referred to as convergent validity, and does not measure unintended and irrelevant features, referred to as discriminant validity.

Since this study used measuring instruments developed abroad, the validity of the measures was re-assessed within the South African context. The validity of the scales to be used within the context of this study was assessed using exploratory factor analysis.

1.10 Ethical considerations

At the initiation of the study, there was a risk that the selected topic might not hold significant worth for research or might have been intrusive. The worthiness of the topic was assessed by two experienced researchers at the North-West University Business School and deemed appropriate. The research proposal was reviewed and approved by the ethical committees at two of the selected universities. The ethical clearance certificates are attached as Appendix D. Academic staff at higher education institutions are considered vulnerable due to their proximity to academic researchers. The necessary approval from the research gatekeepers at each selected university was obtained before the initiation of data collection to address the potential intrusiveness of this study. The gatekeeper's permission certificates can also be found in the appendices, attached as Appendix E.

Due to the nature of the data collection approach selected for this study, the risk of a low response rate existed, which could have influenced the ability to perform the necessary statistical analysis to achieve the study's objectives. The risk also existed that gatekeepers at some of the selected institutions might not have permitted access to the sample. To compensate for this risk, the convenience sample, which initially included two universities, was expanded to four universities, increasing the likelihood that the identified minimum sample size would be reached.

During the data collection, the risk existed that respondents participated in the study without consent for their responses to be used for research purposes. Informed consent was obtained from research respondents before allowing access to the questionnaire to mitigate this risk. The content of the informed consent request can be found in Appendix A. The risk also existed that respondents did not carry sufficient ability or knowledge required to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire included a detailed briefing and instructions on completing the questionnaire to ensure the respondent's competence.

During the analysis of the data, the risk existed that the data analysed was miscalculated or misinterpreted due to the inexperience of the researcher. The data was analysed and interpreted with the assistance and guidance of the study supervisor, who has extensive experience in quantitative research.

During the sharing and storing of research data, the risk existed that data could be shared and used for purposes outside the scope of the informed consent that was provided. There was also a risk that the respondents' identities were not protected while reporting the results. These issues were addressed by allowing access to collected data solely to the parties authorised in the informed consent. The identity of the respondents remained anonymous throughout the research. Respondent codes were assigned without using any personal identifiers in the study. Permission was obtained to allow the publishing of results in the public domain. Data was password encrypted for safe storage and will be destroyed after three years.

1.11 Contribution of the study

This study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the current leadership practices in higher educational institutions within the South African context in general and also specifically in terms of the following:

- Theoretically, the research adds to the body of knowledge relating to leadership and management in South African higher education, as it determines the direction and intensity of the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement specifically within this study context. The study also identifies the mediating and moderating nature of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. Additionally, the study examines the appropriateness of using shortened scales to assess servant leadership and work engagement in the context of South African tertiary education.

- Practically, the research provides insight into a leadership approach that is effective at facilitating work engagement within the study context, leading to a focus on servant leadership and trust in the development of training and performance evaluation.

1.12 Limitations of the study

Although this research contributed to the existing literature on leadership in higher education, it was not without its limitations. The main limitation of this study is that its findings cannot be generalised over the broader population of South African public universities, given the type of sampling that was used, namely non-probability sampling. These samples are not representative of the entire selected population. Additionally, the study focused on a few public universities from only four of the nine geographically demarcated provinces of South Africa, which is not representative of greater South Africa. However, it is noted that, rather than generalising findings, the purpose of this study was to identify the prevalence and nature of the relationship between research variables. The limitations identified provide opportunities for future research to expand on the findings.

1.13 Layout of the study

The chapter layout of this mini-dissertation is as follows:

Chapter 1: Nature and scope of the study

Chapter 2: Research article

Chapter 3: Conclusions and recommendations

1.14 Timeframe

Considering this study is in partial fulfilment of the Master of Business Administration degree, the submission date of 25 November 2022 was set by the NWU Business School and Higher Degrees Administration of the NWU Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. All research activities were planned accordingly, as outlined in Figure 1-4 below.

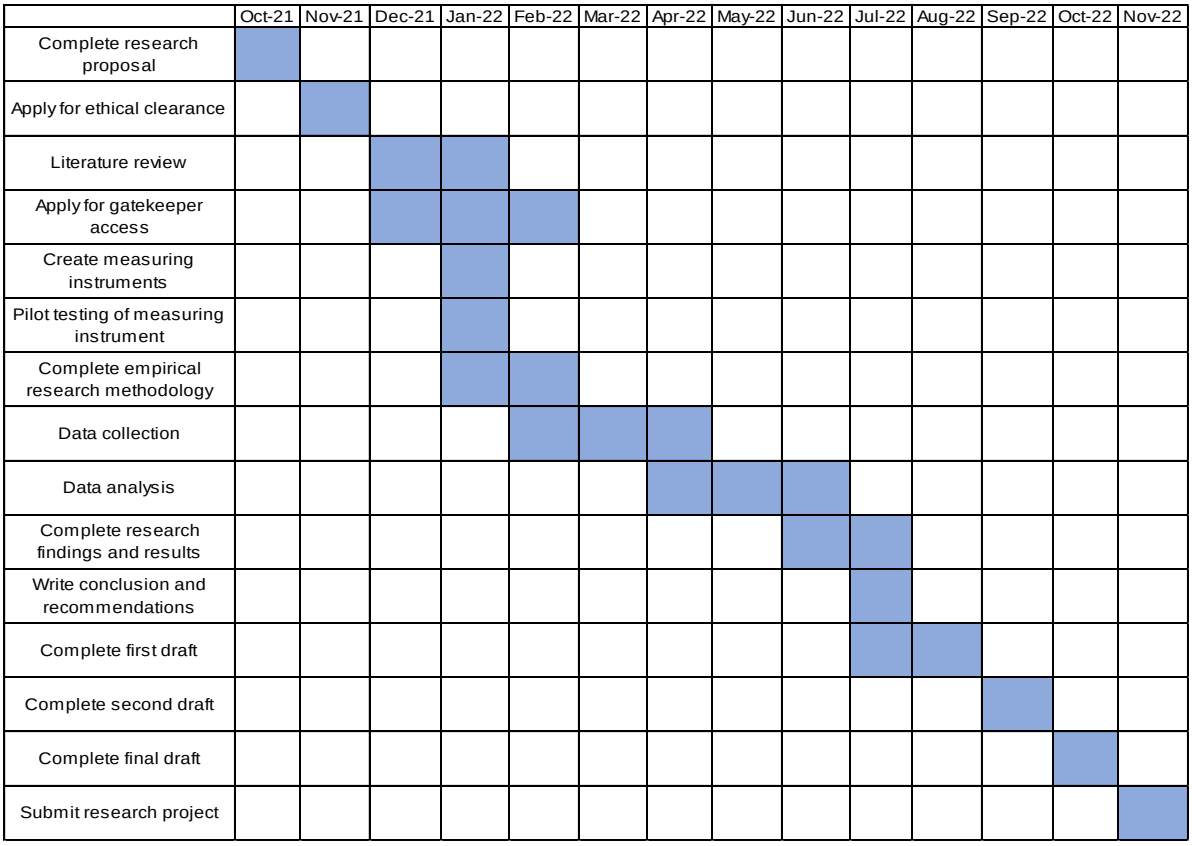

Figure 1-4: Research project timeframe

Source: (Author)

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CHAPTER 2 RESEARCH ARTICLE

ASSESSING THE ROLE OF TRUST IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND WORK ENGAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to assess the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in four selected South African universities. A cross-sectional survey design was employed using non-probability sampling (*n*=206). The servant leadership scale, Utrecht work engagement scale, and the trust in/loyalty to the leader scale were utilised to measure the study constructs. Results indicated that servant leadership was related to trust, while both servant leadership and trust serve as predictors for work engagement. The study could not confirm the mediating and moderating effect of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. Theoretical contributions and practical recommendations are provided, after which the study's limitations are addressed, and recommendations for future studies are offered.

KEYWORDS: Servant leadership, work engagement, trust, academic staff, South Africa, university, higher education institutions

INTRODUCTION

Reports in both print and electronic media are indicative of moral bankruptcy in contemporary South African society. Besides economic and political crisis, the prevalence of disturbing pathologies renders South Africa an ailing society (Sekhaulelo, 2021:1). The endemic spread of corruption (De Klerk & Solomon, 2019:69-73; Odeku, 2018:44-45; Sekhaulelo, 2021:5-6) and the increase in voter apathy (Wolhuter *et al*., 2020:1) lead to the conclusion that voters have lost faith in leadership to serve the interest of the general public instead of their own. Unfortunately, the effects described above have spilt over into the higher education sector (Hunter, 2017; Pijoos, 2022; Pityana, 2020; Singh, 2020), as recent breakdowns in leadership and governance in three South African universities indicate pervasive corruption that has infiltrated key management structures (Kobokana, 2022; Pityana, 2020).

Servant leadership can be described as a serving-oriented, people-centred, and morally inclined approach to leadership (Liden, Panaccio *et al*., 2014:6; Sendjaya *et al*., 2008:405; Van Dierendonck, 2011:1228), as first introduced by Greenleaf (1970:1-28) in the 1970s. Fundamental to this concept is the willingness to serve, prioritise the needs of others (Eva *et al*., 2019:114), and behave ethically (Liden *et al*., 2015:255). The focus on service and morality offers a solution to address the problem of a lack of integrity and the moral decay experienced in South African higher education.

Fostering a positive psychological perspective instead of focusing on the negative can help stakeholders in higher education generate constructive outcomes (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:7). The other-centred perspective of servant leadership is suggested to have a positive influence on the work engagement of academic staff (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020b:626). Thereby, this perspective provides a mitigative remedy for the spread of crime and corruption (Kgatle, 2018:7; Manala, 2014:262) in the higher education sector and a way to counteract its adverse effects on work engagement (Friesenbichler *et al*., 2018:71).

This paper aims to assess whether servant leadership behaviours exhibited by academic leaders have a positive impact on the work engagement of academic staff and to determine the role of trust in this relationship. The remainder of this paper follows the following structure: The next section defines the research problem, followed by the literature review of the constructs examined in the study. The succeeding section introduces the research questions and objectives. The paper continues with a description of the research method, after which the results and findings of the study are presented and discussed. The paper concludes with theoretical contributions, practical recommendations, limitations, and the identification of potential future research.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Systemic corruption in private and public institutions, moral decay, voter apathy, failing National Development Plan objectives for higher education, and significant levels of dropout rates are rampant in South Africa (Bureau for Economic Research, 2020:18; De Klerk & Solomon, 2019:69-73; Mkhize & Otu, 2018:161; Odeku, 2018:44-45; Sekhaulelo, 2021:5-6; Wolhuter *et al*., 2020:1). These problems raised the question of what is causing these negative social phenomena and what can be done to mitigate them. The lack of moral leadership in the South African social fibre and the serving of self-interest are possible explanations for the pervasiveness of these negative occurrences (Ebekozien, 2019:52; Hope, 2017:4).

It is also essential to consider how inefficiencies in the higher education system and the arguable lack of servant leadership at universities affect the academic personnel of higher education institutions and their optimal work engagement. While corruption is negatively associated with the outcome of work engagement (Friesenbichler *et al*., 2018:71), some findings suggest that engaged (Schaufeli, 2018:103) and satisfied (Tafolli & Grabner-Kräuter, 2020:1360) employees, committed to the organisation (Fu, 2014:141) can reduce the prevalence of corruption.

Even though the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement in the context of higher education has previously been confirmed (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020b:626), it remains to be examined in the South African higher education context, a gap this research paper aims to address. Likewise, the positive relationship between servant leadership and trust has been well established in previous research, but not necessarily in the context of higher education. The same goes for the favourable relationship between trust and work engagement. The well-known association between servant leadership and trust (Saleem *et al*., 2020:9-11; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010:654; Zargar *et al*., 2019:2264) might offer a solution to restore broken faith in leadership.

It is worth considering whether trust can be used as a mechanism to facilitate work engagement in academic staff through the presence of servant leadership behaviour in academic leaders. In other words, the question can be posed: what role does trust in the academic leader have in the relationship between servant leadership characteristics displayed by the leader and the extent to which academic staff are fully engaged in their work?

Accordingly, the main purpose of this study was to investigate the role of trust in the leader in the relationship between academic servant leaders and the work engagement of academic staff. The study followed two conceptual frameworks to address the study's objectives. The first framework investigated the mediating role of trust in the relationship between servant

leadership and work engagement by using a unidimensional perspective of the study variables and breaking down work engagement into respective components, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

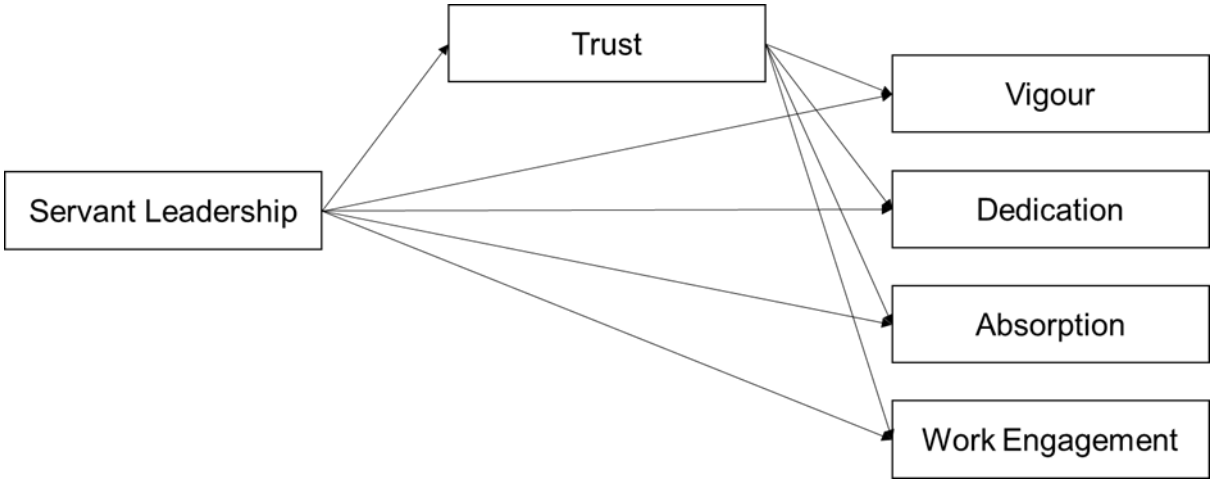

Figure 1: The conceptual framework, based on a mediation model

Source: (Author)

The second framework investigated the moderating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement from a unidimensional perspective concerning each of the study variables and by breaking down work engagement into the components of vigour, dedication, and absorption, as demonstrated in Figure 2 below.

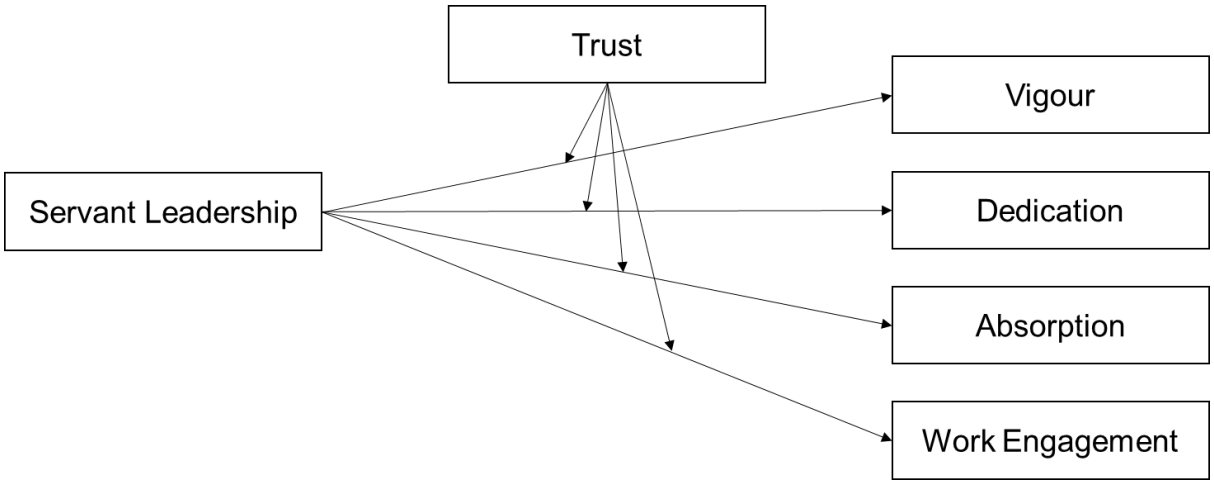

Figure 2: The conceptual framework, based on a moderation model

Source: (Author)

The study also aimed to make recommendations for future studies and practical recommendations for higher education institutions on ways to improve academic staff work engagement by employing strategies that build servant leadership and trust.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Servant leadership

The conceptualisation of servant leadership

Many prominent business and leadership theorists regard service as one of the most critical attributes of contemporary leaders in the 21st century (Dannhauser, 2007:19). Although power is inherently associated with leadership (Nair, 1994:59), this power exists only to serve. The concept of servant leadership was first introduced by Greenleaf (1970:1-28) and can be defined as a people-centred, serving-oriented, and morally inclined leadership perspective (Liden, Panaccio *et al*., 2014:6; Sendjaya *et al*., 2008:405; Van Dierendonck, 2011:1228). Greenleaf (1977:13) describes the servant leader as a servant first, from which a conscious decision is made to lead in selfless service to others. The servant leader's responsibility extends beyond prioritising the needs of individual followers to serving society as a whole (Liden *et al*., 2008:162). Parris and Peachey (2013:378) summarise servant leadership theory as a focus on serving others by recognising that the purpose of organisations is not to achieve the self-interest of their leaders but to develop people who foster the building of a brighter future for the greater community.

In a recent systematic review of the main characteristics of servant leadership, Eva *et al.* (2019:114) offer an integrative definition consisting of the servant leader's motive, mode and mindset. In this three-feature definition, servant leadership is defined as (1) an other-oriented approach to leadership, (2) established through the individualised prioritising of follower needs and interests, (3) and the outward reorientating of the leader's self-concern towards a concern for others within the organisation and the wider community (Eva *et al*., 2019:114). Notably, an additional undertaking of the servant leader is to nurture followers into becoming servant leaders through the behavioural modelling of serving others (Greenleaf, 1977:14; Xu *et al.,* 2020:46).

Drawing on the foundational elements of servant leadership laid by Greenleaf, Spears (1995:4-7) offers elaborated explanations of the ten servant leadership characteristics of listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2010:27-29). The first generally accepted servant leadership measure was designed by Ehrhart (2004:93), which

consists of 14 items and measures the seven dimensions proposed by Ehrhart (Eva *et al*., 2019:112; Liden, Panaccio *et al*., 2014:3; Xu *et al*., 2020:51). The seven dimensions comprise putting followers first, possessing conceptual skills, ethical behaviour, assisting followers to succeed and grow, forming relationships, empowering followers, and creating value for the community (Ehrhart, 2004:67-70). Another prominent conceptual framework proposed by Sendjaya *et al.* (2008:406-409) identifies six servant leadership dimensions: voluntary subordination, authentic self, covenantal relationship, responsible morality, transcendental spirituality, and transforming influence. In a literary analysis and interviews conducted with servant leaders, Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011:251-252) selected eight elements deemed most appropriate to indicate servant leadership, namely empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, authenticity, courage, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship.

Based on the existing taxonomies of servant leadership (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006:300-326; Page & Wong, 2000:69-110; Spears & Lawrence, 2002:1-414), Liden *et al.* (2008:162) initially identified nine characteristics of servant leaders, but subsequently reduced the dimensions to seven (Liden *et al*., 2008:169; Liden *et al*., 2015:255). The first taxonomy, emotional healing, is the degree to which a leader shows concern for the well-being and personal matters of followers. The second, creating value for the community, indicates the extent to which the leader promotes and assists community participation. Thirdly, conception skill refers to the problem-solving ability of a leader and the competency to conceptualise organisational objectives. Fourthly, empowering reflects the degree to which a leader creates opportunities for followers to possess autonomy, responsibility, and influence through the manifestation of trusting relationships. Fifthly, helping subordinates grow and succeed indicates a leader's commitment to empowering followers to reach their full career potential. Sixthly, putting followers first shows how a leader prioritises the needs and pursuits of followers above their own. Lastly, behaving ethically implies that a leader serves by building trust, modelling integrity, and acting honestly.

Consequences of servant leadership

Since the conceptualisation and measurement of servant leadership are well established, researchers have turned to investigate the consequences of servant leadership (Xu *et al*., 2020:52). Servant leadership has the potential to benefit an array of stakeholders, including employees, the organisation, customers, and the community (Xu *et al*., 2020:55). The importance of servant leadership, especially in South African higher education's current climate, is found in its association with positive psychological employee and organisational outcomes and can reverse the adverse effects of corruption. Corruption is less likely to occur

when employees are, for instance, engaged (Schaufeli, 2018:103), satisfied (Tafolli & Grabner-Kräuter, 2020:1360), and committed to the organisation (Fu, 2014:141; Okpara & Wynn, 2008:946).

Servant leadership has been found to enhance job performance (Bayram & Zoubi, 2020:1775; Chiniara & Bentein, 2016:135; Liden, Wayne *et al*., 2014:1445; Van Dierendonck, 2011:1249), increase job satisfaction (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020a:575; Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006:316; Cerit, 2009:615; Chan & Mak, 2014:281; Mayer *et al*., 2008:192), lead to more engaged employees (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020b:627; Carter & Baghurst, 2014:461; Coetzer *et al*., 2017:19; De Clercq *et al*., 2014:201; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2017:21), foster organisational commitment (LaPointe & Vandenberghe, 2018:109; Liden *et al*., 2008:174; Miao *et al*., 2014:738; Van Dierendonck *et al*., 2014:559), reduce stress levels (Babakus *et al*., 2011:25; Jaramillo *et al*., 2009b:269), and improve trust (Saleem *et al*., 2020:9-11; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010:654; Zargar *et al.*, 2019:2264). The most commonly examined follower behavioural outcome associated with servant leadership is likely that of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), which has been found to be a positive factor in numerous studies (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016:135; Hunter *et al*., 2013:325; Liden *et al*., 2015:264-265; Mahembe & Engelbrecht, 2014:8; McCallaghan *et al*., 2020:381; Newman *et al*., 2017:58; Panaccio *et al*., 2015:670; Shim *et al*., 2016:15; Walumbwa *et al*., 2010:526; Zhao *et al*., 2016:909).

Findings have also indicated a positive relationship between servant leadership and the reduction of negative employee attitudes, such as intentions to quit (Hunter *et al*., 2013:327; Jang & Kandampully, 2018:135; Jaramillo *et al*., 2009a:358; Liden, Wayne *et al*., 2014:1446), burnout (Babakus *et al*., 2011:25; Upadyaya *et al*., 2016:106), deviant behaviour in the workplace (Sendjaya *et al*., 2019:950; Verdorfer *et al*., 2015:245), and job cynicism (Bobbio *et al*., 2012:239; Chi *et al*., 2020). According to Xu *et al*. (2020:59), diminishing negative employee outcomes can be explained through the impact of fundamental processes associated with servant leadership, such as fostering a serving culture (Liden, Wayne *et al*., 2014:1446), building a climate of trust (Ling *et al*., 2017:64) and satisfying the basic psychological needs of followers, including that of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016:135; Mayer *et al*., 2008:192; Van Dierendonck *et al*., 2014:559).

Despite the many positive aspects identified, servant leadership also possesses potentially harmful consequences. Less researched than the benefits are servant leadership challenges associated with followers, the leader, and the organisation. For followers, servant leadership is not necessarily the leadership style by which all followers prefer to be led, especially in cultures prone to high power distance, where close relationships between servant leaders and their followers might discomfit some followers (Xu *et al*., 2020:64). Lacroix and Verdorfer

(2017:8) identified a small but significant tendency in servant leadership followers to experience leadership avoidance, possibly due to the follower's perception that leadership standards are overwhelming. In other cases, followers might be manipulated by disingenuous leaders portraying servant leadership attributes but only as a means of selfish gain (Stone *et al*., 2004:358) and who, in doing so, fail to meet the servant-first essence of servant leadership.

For servant leaders, the potential harm is found in experiences of emotional fatigue, work overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict (Liden, Panaccio *et al*., 2014:5) caused by indicators of short- and long-term strain associated with servant leadership characteristics (Rivkin *et al*., 2014:67-68). In contrast to the improved quality of family life found in their followers (Wang *et al*., 2017:399; Zhang *et al*., 2012:761), servant leaders experience an increase in work-life conflict, brought on by emotional exhaustion (Liden, Panaccio *et al*., 2014:5; Tang *et al*., 2016:293; Zhou *et al*., 2020:7). Engaging in daily servant leadership behaviour may result in experiences of self-control depletion for leaders and consequently a disengagement from leadership responsibilities (Liao *et al*., 2021:1207). For organisations, the potential harm is associated with the high regard servant leaders place on enhancing the well-being of all stakeholders served. The balancing of needs, interests, and desires from multiple stakeholders can be troublesome, particularly in instances where these elements are conflicting (Xu *et al*., 2020:66). Scenarios where servant leaders prioritise the well-being of others over that of the organisation have raised concerns about the adverse consequences of servant leadership in organisations (Andersen, 2009:11-12).

Work engagement

The conceptualisation of work engagement

Work engagement stems from positive psychology's increased attention over the last two decades. Positive psychology moves beyond the traditional perspective of disease, disorder, damage, and disability; it also examines the strength and virtues of human beings (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:7). The purpose of which is to study the strengths and optimum performance of individuals while exploring the human resources that positively affect psychological capabilities (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2006:38).

The first proposal toward a conceptualisation of engagement at work was put forward by Kahn (1990:694), who defines work engagement as fully harnessing one's physical, emotional, and mental efforts in performing tasks and duties of work. Otherwise stated, engaged employees are driven to put additional effort into their job because they identify with it (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010:12). Kahn (1990:700) continues by explaining work engagement as the concurrent employment and expression of an individual's ideal self in activities that facilitate personal

presence, active job performance, and connection with work. Therefore, work engagement is a motivational concept driven by the investment of personal resources that results in physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, creating a meaningful connection between employees and their work roles (Rich *et al.*, 2010:617).

The opposite of work engagement is work disengagement and is described as an individual's withdrawal from the behaviours that facilitate a connection with their work, consequently leading the individual to perform work activities at an emotionally and cognitively distanced capacity (Kahn, 1990:702). Based on the foundation of Kahn, Rothbard (2001:656) presents work engagement as a two-dimensional construct that consists of attention and absorption. Attention refers to the intellectual capacity and amount of time spent thinking about work, while absorption represents the extent to which a person is engrossed in their work and the intensity of their focus (Rothbard, 2001:656). In an attempt to measure work engagement, May *et al.* (2004:31) propose work engagement to consist of three components, namely the physical, emotional, and cognitive components. An alternative perspective on work engagement is offered by scholars who view work engagement as the antithesis of burnout (Maslach *et al.,* 2001:416). According to Maslach and Leiter (1997:34), work engagement is characterised by energy, involvement, and efficacy, which are considered opposites to the burnout dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy (Maslach *et al.,* 2001:402-403).

A third perspective, and arguably the most widely held, is that work engagement is an independent, distinct concept and, although negatively related to burnout, should be measured separately (Schaufeli *et al.,* 2002:74). According to Schaufeli *et al*. (2002:74), work engagement is defined as a positive and gratifying psychological state related to work that is identifiable through the three dimensions of vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour refers to the display of sustained high energy levels and psychological resilience in the workplace, investments in work effort, and persistence when faced with challenges or adversity. Dedication refers to the experience of a strong sense of pride or importance for being involved in work which serves as a source of enthusiasm and feelings of significance. Lastly, absorption refers to the pleasant state of being fully engrossed in work, characterised by the experience of the quick passing of time through the application of significant concentration and effort, and the extent to which the individual finds it difficult to detach from work. Rather than being directed at a specific task, person, item or event, engagement is considered a persistent and universal affective-cognitive state (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004:295).

According to Bakker (2011:265), work engagement can be viewed as different from job satisfaction to the extent that the former merges the pleasure of work with high levels of activity, whereas job satisfaction is considered a passive form of employee well-being. Even though a

significant correlation exists between work engagement and satisfaction, work engagement has been found to offer increased task and contextual performance (Christian *et al*., 2011:120). Work engagement differs from motivation in its association with affect and cognition beyond mere dedication (Bakker, 2011:265). Work engagement also differs from work-related flow in duration, as flow is typically viewed as a short peak in performance and work engagement as a more extended performance episode (May *et al*., 2004:13). Workaholism is a result of over-absorption and can explain why workaholism is characterised by an inability to disengage from work (Schaufeli *et al*., 2008:193). The fundamental difference between engaged employees and workaholics is that engaged employees work hard because they find their work challenging and pleasurable, unlike their counterparts who display an inability to resist an inner urge (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010:15). Schaufeli *et al.* (2008:189) also found a positive relationship between workaholism and burnout, while burnout shares a negative relationship with work engagement.

Consequences of work engagement

Work engagement is considered a positive experience related to constructive behaviour and employee well-being (Schaufeli, 2002:74) and has also been found to have a favourable impact on organisational outcomes and customer experience. Considering the endemic nature of corruption in higher education in contemporary South Africa, work engagement might play an essential role in combating its prevalence as it has been found to have a direct negative effect on corruption (Schaufeli, 2018:103) and a potential indirect effect through other positive employee and organisational outcomes (Fu, 2014:141; Okpara & Wynn, 2008:946; Tafolli & Grabner-Kräuter, 2020:1360).

Work engagement has been found to promote job satisfaction (Cole *et al*., 2012:1569; Diedericks & Rothmann, 2013:230-231; Karanika-Murray *et al*., 2015:1026; Saks, 2006:613; Yeh, 2013:229), facilitate organisational commitment (Aboramadan *et al*., 2019:162; Cole *et al*., 2012:1569; Hakanen *et al*., 2006:507; Saks, 2006:613; Taba *et al.*, 2014:7), foster OCB and extra-role behaviour (Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010:322; Eldor & Harpaz, 2016:227-228; Saks, 2006:613; Shantz *et al.*, 2013:2620-2621; Sulea *et al.*, 2012:200), increase job performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010:200; Christian *et al*., 2011:116; Lin *et al*., 2016:153; Rich *et al*., 2010:628; Van Wingerden & Van Der Stoep, 2018:7), and improve health and well-being (Cole *et al*., 2012:1569; Radic *et al*., 2020:5; Tesi *et al*., 2019:133).

On an organisational level, work engagement has been found to have a significant impact on team performance, financial indicators, and customer satisfaction (Harter *et al*., 2002:275; Schneider *et al*., 2018:13; Xanthopoulou *et al*., 2009:197) as well as entrepreneurial

performance, innovative behaviour, and business growth (Gorgievski *et al*., 2014:115). Work engagement is also known to reduce negative employee outcomes, such as intentions to quit (Chen & Chen, 2012:54; Saks, 2006:613; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004:310), hindrance demands (Crawford *et al*., 2010:842-843), and deviant behaviour (Shantz *et al*., 2013:2620-2621; Sulea *et al*., 2012:200).

Despite the many known positive effects of work engagement, there is the potential for adverse effects. Bakker *et al.* (2011:18) and Sonnentag (2011:33) propose that being over-engaged may be detrimental to performance and work-life balance. According to Halbesleben *et al.* (2009:1460), work engagement is positively related to work interference with family. With OCB mediating the relationship, conscientiously engaged employees fare better in balancing work and family obligations. A recent study suggests that work engagement holds a curvilinear relationship with health and performance (Shimazu *et al*., 2018:10). In the short term, high levels of work engagement are found to yield significant levels of psychological distress that diminish over an extended period. According to Shimazu *et al.* (2018:10), over time, employees craft their job roles in such a manner as to accumulate additional job resources, which reduces job demand and improves mental health.

Trust

The conceptualisation of trust

Trust has largely been considered a complex topic that is difficult to define and study empirically (Hay, 2002:43; Reinke, 2004:50). Despite the confusion surrounding a universal definition and conceptualisation, trust remains one of the most frequently investigated constructs in contemporary organisational literature (Burke *et al*., 2007:607; Ferrin, 2013:149; Kim *et al.*, 2018:946). In an attempt to move toward a definition in terms of human resources and psychology research, trust is generally concerned with two issues (Nienaber *et al*., 2015:568). Firstly, trust is viewed as the extent to which a person is prepared to rely on another person in whom confidence is kept (Mayer *et al*., 1995:712; Moorman *et al*., 1992:315). Secondly, trust expects that the person in whom trust is placed will behave in a mutually acceptable manner (Sako & Helper, 1998:388). Sheppard and Sherman (1998:422) define trust as accepting the risks inherent to the interdependence of all relationships. For Rousseau *et al*. (1998:395), trust is a psychological state in which a person accepts vulnerability built on the expected behaviour or intentions of another.

According to Hay (2002:50), the definition of trust largely depends on the context within which it is applied. Definitions of trust can therefore be classified based on the fundamental perspective of what trust is (an unchanging trait, process, or emergent state), who is trusted,

and at what level (individual, group, or organisational level) (Bunker *et al*., 2004:413; Burke *et al*., 2007:610). Interpersonal trust is defined as the extent to which a person has faith in the positive expressions of another person (McAllister, 1995:25). In a conceptual framework proposed by McAllister (1995:25-26) and later supported by Gillespie and Mann (2004:589), interpersonal trust has two separately measurable dimensions, namely cognitive and affective trust. Cognitive trust is explained as trust based on reasoning after analysing the evidence of trustworthiness presented. Affective trust describes the element of trust associated with an emotional response based on the bond that exists in the relationship between two people and the perception of genuine concern for each other.

Group trust is defined as the shared belief by members of a group about the extent to which the group is collectively willing to be vulnerable to another group (Serva *et al*., 2005:627). The significance of group trust is found due to the normality and prevalence of group formation in the contemporary business environment and its criticality for business performance. Serva *et al.* (2005:627) also highlight the finding that groups are not merely collections of individuals; groups exist as separate entities with traits of their own and common characteristics that represent the group as a whole. Within the context of organisational trust, trust is described as the orientation of the collective trust held by the focal members of an organisation toward the partner organisation (Zaheer *et al*., 1998:142).

In adapting the definition of organisational trust as proposed by Mayer *et al*. (1995:712) for the context of leader-follower relationships, trust can be explained as a person's readiness to be vulnerable to the behaviour of a leader and their expectation that the leader will perform a specific act of significance to the follower without the need to control or monitor the leader's actions. Podsakoff *et al.* (1990:113-114) define trust in the leader as the expression of faith and loyalty by followers toward the leader.

In this paper, trust is viewed from the perspective of interpersonal relationships and leadership characteristics, including ability, integrity, benevolence, responsibility, and loyalty (Colquitt *et al*., 2007:910; Mayer *et al*., 1995:717; McAllister, 1995:25; Podsakoff *et al*., 1990:115). Ability refers to the level of skills, competency, and characteristics required within a particular area of expertise to enable the ability to exercise influence (Mayer *et al*., 1995:717; McAllister, 1995:25). Integrity refers to the follower's perception that the leader believes in and behaves according to a set of principles that is acceptable to the follower (Mayer *et al*., 1995:719-720; Podsakoff *et al*., 1990:115). Benevolence refers to the extent to which the follower believes the leader will act in the follower's best interest and put aside any self-centred motives (Mayer *et al*., 1995:718-719). Responsibility refers to the degree to which the leader meets the obligations of their role (McAllister, 1995:25). Loyalty refers to the extent to which followers

express support and possess a strong sense of alliance with their leader (Podsakoff *et al*., 1990:115).

Consequences of trust

The consequences of trust can be summarised based on two levels of outcomes. Behavioural and performance outcomes found to be positively associated with trust are OCB (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002:621; Flavian *et al*., 2018:15; McAllister, 1995:48; Nohe & Michaelis, 2016:891; Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990:129), knowledge sharing (Abrams *et al*., 2003:65; Burke *et al*., 2007:624; Kim, 2019:346; Wickramasinghe & Widyaratne, 2012:229), and job performance (Colquitt *et al*., 2007:921; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002:621; Kim *et al*., 2018:954; McAllister, 1995:48; Saleem *et al*., 2020:11). Job attitude and intention outcomes, as a result of trust, are job satisfaction (Cho & Park, 2011:564; Cook & Wall, 1980:47; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002:621; Lambert *et al*., 2021:203; Palupi *et al*., 2017:405), organisational commitment (Chen *et al*., 2015:9; Cook & Wall, 1980:47; Flavian *et al*., 2018:15; Miao *et al*., 2014:737; Ndlovu *et al*., 2021:7), and work engagement (Ahamed *et al*., 2013:168; Buckley, 2011:320-321; De Beer *et al*., 2018:7; Engelbrecht *et al*., 2017:374; Lin, 2010:526). Trust is also negatively associated with deviant behaviour (Colquitt *et al*., 2007:921; Demir, 2011:216; Litzky *et al*., 2006:98) and intentions to quit (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002:620; Kim, 2019:346; Tan & Tan, 2000:255; Yurtkoru *et al*., 2018:20).

The relationship among servant leadership, work engagement, and trust

Servant leadership and trust

Although the selected variables of this study are yet to be investigated within the higher education context in South Africa, numerous studies have been conducted to establish the direct relationship between these variables. Trust resonates with a follower's confidence based on their perception of the leader's competence and willingness to behave fairly and ethically (Mayer *et al*., 1995:720; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000:551). Based on the underpinnings of social exchange theory, researchers have identified that a positive psychological state emerges in followers when leaders display sincere concern for their well-being. Followers then reciprocate this concern through the expression of gratitude and increased trust (Kelloway *et al*., 2012:42; Zhang & Zhou, 2014:152). According to Kalshoven and Den Hartog (2009:113), trusted leaders display higher leadership effectiveness in improving the performance of subordinates. As expressed by Martin (1998:48), "trust is the root of all great leadership".

The concept of servant leadership has been strongly associated with trust through the display of leader integrity and ethical behaviour, which translates into organisational fidelity (De Pree,

1997:127). Greenleaf (1977:25) believed trust to be the primary antecedent and the cornerstone of servant leadership. Several other researchers agree with the importance of building trust among followers as an integral component of effective servant leadership (Farling *et al*., 1999:60; Joseph & Winston, 2005:11; Russell & Stone, 2002:148; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010:645-646; Van Dierendonck, 2011:1246). While the servant leader's ability to influence followers stems from the existence of trusting relationships (Beck, 2014:304), the relationship is suggested to be circular as servant leadership consequently increases trust through the creation of a trust climate (Ling *et al*., 2017:62-63). Further evidence exists to support the positive influence of servant leadership on trust (Chatbury *et al*., 2011:60; Joseph & Winston, 2005:15; Saleem *et al*., 2020:9-11; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010:654; Zargar *et al*., 2019:2264).

This study not only focused on the relationship between trust and the other study variables but also investigated whether trust mediates and moderates the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. A mediator variable is explained as the variable situated between other variables that impart the impact of the independent variable onto the dependent variable (Saunders *et al*., 2019:808). Existing literature provides evidence that trust in the leader mediates the effects of leadership on employee outcomes such as job performance (Zhu *et al*., 2013:102), OCB (Rubin *et al*., 2010:405) and well-being (Kelloway *et al*., 2012:50). Recent research has also confirmed the mediating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and other work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction (Chan & Mak, 2014:281; Ilkhanizadeh & Karatepe, 2018:3567-3568; Zargar *et al*., 2019:2264-2265), team performance (Schaubroeck *et al*., 2011:866), organisational commitment (Ling *et al*., 2017:62; Miao *et al*., 2014:737), OCB (Shim *et al*., 2016:15), organisational health (Tasker-Mitchell & Attoh, 2020:332), employee creativity (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017:14), and work engagement (Ling *et al*., 2017:62).

In relation to the formerly mentioned variables, a moderating variable is described as a variable that impacts the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Saunders *et al*., 2019:808). While a mediator examines the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, a moderator aims to identify under what circumstances the relationship between the independent and dependent variables will hold. A recent study by Zhou *et al*. (2022:1-9) examined the moderating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of university staff within the context of tertiary education in Pakistan. The study confirmed that trust in the leader successfully moderates the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement (Zhou *et al*., 2022:5).

Trust and work engagement

Trust in the leader is explained as the willingness of an employee to be vulnerable to the effects of a leader's behaviour (Schoorman *et al*., 2007:347). Trust is seen as a critical ingredient required to sustain organisations in the long term and ensure the well-being of their employees (Lin, 2010:521; Tan & Tan, 2000:255). According to Lin (2010:521-522), trust signifies followers' confidence in and positive expectations of their leader's actions, while work engagement echoes their subsequent enthusiasm and participation in work activities. This implies the potential influence of trust on work engagement and can be linked to the three dimensions of dedication, vigour, and absorption. Firstly, followers are dedicated to the objectives of an organisation for the time a trusting relationship with the leader is enjoyed (Gill, 2008:101). Secondly, in the presence of trust, employees become energised and motivated to perform (Dong & Howard, 2006:381). Lastly, trust provides a foundation for employees to be continually absorbed and improve all aspects of the organisation (Townsend & Gebhardt, 2008:24).

Research conducted by Brower *et al*. (2009:338) suggests that the positive impact of trust may rest in reciprocated trust. Where leaders display high levels of trust in employees' abilities and the employees trust the leader, employees have shown to deliver optimal commitment. Where followers trust in the ability and expertise of their leader, the leader is seen as a resource that assists in delivering on work objectives, which potentiates the confidence to exercise additional effort in their work (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008:57). Feelings of mutuality and psychological safety make an employee feel less vulnerable, potentially leading to greater work engagement (Koçak & Küçük, 2021:184). Leaders who have demonstrated thoughtfulness and support for their subordinates have been shown to build trust and increase work engagement (Cooper-Thomas *et al*., 2018:338).

Alternatively, events that cause a breach in the psychological contract between leaders and followers, such as downsizing, result in reduced work engagement based on dwindling trust (Buckley, 2011:320-321). In the absence of trust, employees tend to focus their efforts on protecting themselves instead of supporting the organisation (Agarwal, 2014:53). Similarly, followers who feel they can trust their leader are inclined to go beyond what is required or expected in their work (Engelbrecht *et al*., 2017:370). Current literature supports the notion that trust is a significant predictor of work engagement (Agarwal, 2014:59; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:375; Håvold *et al*., 2021:153; Koçak & Küçük, 2021:188; Wong *et al*., 2010:897).

Servant leadership and work engagement

Work engagement is regarded as a positive job attitude, primarily predicated by the two separable aspects of job and personal resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007:319). Job resources represent aspects such as organisational support, management feedback, and level of autonomy. Personal resources include individual attributes of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007:323). By reflecting on these antecedents, it is possible to identify the potential influence of servant leadership in creating optimal conditions required for work engagement to flourish (De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2017:16). Servant leadership focuses on the needs and development of followers by creating an environment aimed to foster personal growth and provide individual support (Van Dierendonck, 2011:1229). This produces the impression among followers that the leader cares about them and their development. According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004:296), creating a socially supportive work environment reduces job demands, encourages the achievement of work objectives, and promotes personal growth, learning, and development. Aspects of servant leadership that distinguish it from other leadership approaches are its focus on motivational and aspirational characteristics and recognising the need for psychological support to assist in mitigating the challenges presented by modern work (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020b:618; Xu *et al*., 2020:49).

Although leadership has historically been neglected as a primary job resource to facilitate work engagement, recent studies have emerged to indicate a positive relationship between work engagement and leadership styles that share common characteristics with servant leadership. Examples of such styles are empowering leadership (Cai *et al*., 2018:7; Tuckey *et al*., 2012:22), authentic leadership (Giallonardo *et al*., 2010:999; Oh *et al*., 2018:283), transformational leadership (Monje Amor *et al*., 2020:174; Zhu *et al*., 2009:608-609), engaging leadership (Rahmadani *et al*., 2019:464), and ethical leadership (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012:42; Engelbrecht *et al*., 2017:375). Recent studies to determine the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement have found servant leadership to impact work engagement positively and significantly (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020b:627; Bao *et al*., 2018:412; De Clercq *et al*., 2014:201; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2014:892; Kaur, 2018:82; Khan *et al*., 2021:934).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary question of this study concerns itself with the following: What is the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and the work engagement of academic staff in South African universities?

The following secondary questions were formulated to assist in answering the primary research question:

- What is the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components among academic staff in South African universities?
- What is the relationship between servant leadership and trust among academic staff in South African universities?
- What is the relationship between trust and work engagement and its components among academic staff in South African universities?
- Does trust serve as a mediator in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components amongst academic staff in South African universities?
- Does trust serve as a moderator in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components amongst academic staff in South African universities?
- Do servant leadership and trust serve as significant predictors of work engagement and its components amongst academic staff in South African universities?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the study was to determine the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and the work engagement of academic staff in South African universities. The following secondary objectives were established to aid the attainment of the primary objective:

- To evaluate the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components among academic staff in South African universities.
- To determine the relationship between servant leadership and trust among academic staff in South African universities.
- To establish the relationship between trust and work engagement and its components among academic staff in South African universities.
- To determine the mediating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement amongst academic staff in South African universities.

- To determine the moderating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components amongst academic staff in South African universities.

- To determine whether servant leadership and trust serve as significant predictors of work engagement and its components amongst academic staff in South African universities.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research approach, sample and procedure

This study adopted a positivistic research philosophy where the researchers assumed an objective position (Bryman *et al*., 2014:12). Since this study aimed not to generate original theory but to test the existing theoretical frameworks of servant leadership, work engagement, and trust, the research design followed a deductive approach (Bryman *et al*., 2014:31). Considering this study aimed to quantify the relationships between servant leadership behaviour, trust, and work engagement, a mono-method quantitative research approach was selected (Bryman *et al*., 2014:107). The study adopted a cross-sectional research strategy, using a non-probability convenience sample to collect data at a single point in time. The study sample comprised academic employees from four selected public universities in South Africa.

A web-based survey platform was used to collect research data. Respondents were issued a hyperlink with access to the online survey via an email sent by the research host of each of the higher education institutions. From this email, the respondent navigated to the website, where informed consent was provided and demographic information of the sample was collected. The online survey proceeded to the questions on the measuring instruments of the study variables. To counter low response rates associated with web-based surveys, the researchers kept the questionnaire items to a minimum without compromising validity.

Research conducted on the employees of the four public universities selected for this study required approval from a gatekeeper committee before the sample population was made accessible to the researcher. Once permission was obtained to conduct research at the selected institutions, a research host to whom the sample population was accessible was identified within the organisation. Informed consent was obtained from respondents before allowing access to the research questionnaire. The informed consent letter explained the study's purpose, including its voluntary and confidential nature. The respondents' confidentiality was honoured and maintained during data collection, analysis, and dissemination by assigning each respondent a code instead of using personal identifiers.

All academic staff members working at South Africa's 26 public universities were included in this study's population; however, the target population for this study consisted of the academic staff of four selected public tertiary institutions. These institutions are the North-West University, Central University of Technology, University of the Free State, and Stellenbosch University. These were chosen based on the researcher's current or prior involvement with these institutions.

The inclusion criteria for the study population were all academic employees of the four selected South African higher education institutions. Eligible participants had to be employed in an academic capacity and report to a direct supervisor or leader. The exclusion criteria included all administrative personnel from the four South African higher education institutions.

Invitations to participate in the study reached approximately 3 000 potential respondents, of which the questionnaire was viewed 1 315 times, and 246 responses were initiated. After eliminating incomplete responses, the dataset was narrowed down to 206 complete responses appropriate for data analysis. With the sole objective of profiling the sample, respondents were requested to provide demographic information, including age, gender, highest academic qualification, institution location, faculty, and years of experience in their current position. The demographic profile of the sample respondents is featured in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Category	*Class*	*n*	*%*
Age of respondent	18 to 24 years	2	0.97%
	25 to 34 years	37	17.96%
	35 to 44 years	47	22.82%
	45 to 54 years	65	31.55%
	55 to 64 years	48	23.30%
	Older than 64 years	7	3.40%
Institution location	Free State	77	37.38%
	Gauteng	11	5.34%
	North-West	43	20.87%
	Western Cape	75	36.41%
Faculty	Economic and Management Sciences	68	33.01%
	Education	10	4.85%
	Engineering	18	8.74%
	Health Sciences	21	10.19%
	Humanities	45	21.84%
	Natural and Agricultural Sciences	33	16.02%
	Theology	1	0.49%
	Other	10	4.85%
Gender	Female	120	58.25%
	Male	84	40.78%
	Other	2	0.97%
Highest academic qualification	National certificate	2	0.97%
	Bachelor's degree	7	3.40%
	Honours degree	13	6.31%
	Master's degree	65	31.55%
	Doctoral degree	119	57.77%
Years of experience in current position	0 to 3 years	30	14.56%
	4 to 5 years	15	7.28%
	6 to 10 years	52	25.24%
	11 years and more	109	52.91%

Inspection of Table 1 suggests the sample's main characteristics consisted of female respondents (58.25%), between the age of 45 to 54 (31.55%), holding doctoral degrees (57.77%), from the Economic and Management Sciences faculty (33.01%), and have been employed in their current position for more than 11 years (52.91%). Respondents were

employed by institutions predominantly located in the Free State province (37.38%), mainly attributable to the fact that two of the four universities in the target population are located in this province.

Measuring instruments

The study adopted existing questionnaires to measure each construct designed and tested by expert researchers. Since the measuring instruments are predeveloped, the reliability and validity of the questionnaires have previously been determined. The study questionnaire comprised the following four sections:

Section 1 - Demographical information

This study collected demographical information of the respondent of the following nature: age, institution location, faculty, gender, academic qualification, and years of experience in their current position. The collection of demographical data served the purpose of describing the sample and has been excluded from further analysis and was not used to draw comparisons between groups.

Section 2 - Servant leadership

Several measuring instruments have been designed to assess the prevalence and extent of servant leadership behaviour within the context of organisations. For this study, the shortened seven-item version scale (SLQ7) developed by Liden *et al*. (2015:254-269) was selected as the measuring instrument for servant leadership. This scale was created as a shortened adaptation of a 28-item instrument developed by Liden *et al*. (2008:161-177). Shorter instruments, as suggested by Credé *et al*. (2012:875), might reduce the respondent's fatigue and improve the integrity of the instrument.

The shortened seven-item scale comprises the seven dimensions introduced by Liden *et al*. (2008:169), namely emotional healing, creating value for the community, conception skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically. Each dimension consists of one item measured on a five-point Likert scale and is represented by the following questions: "My leader can tell if something work-related is going wrong" (conception skills), "My leader makes my career development a priority" (helping subordinates grow and succeed), "I would seek help from my leader if I had a personal problem" (emotional healing), "My leader emphasises the importance of giving back to the community" (creating value for the community), "My leader puts my best interests ahead of his or her own" (putting subordinates first), "My leader gives me the freedom to handle difficult

situations in the way that I feel is best" (empowering), and "My leader would not compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success" (behaving ethically).

The shortened scale was tested for reliability and validity by Liden *et al*. (2015:256), who found Cronbach's alpha of 0.80, 0.81 and 0.89 in three separate samples of the scale, including satisfactory results from the confirmatory factor analysis conducted. This seven-item scale was also tested by Flotman and Grobler (2020:7-8) for its validity to be used in South African contexts and found the instrument to be of practical and scientific value, with Cronbach's alpha demonstrated at 0.88. Convergent validity was also assessed using composite reliability and was found to be acceptable (Flotman & Grobler, 2020:6).

Section 3 - Work engagement

For this study, the shortened nine-item version (UWES9) of the Utrecht work engagement scale by Schaufeli *et al*. (2006:707-716) was selected as the measuring instrument for work engagement. This scale was adapted from the original 17-item Utrecht work engagement scale developed by Schaufeli *et al*. (2002:85).

The items of the scale represent the work engagement dimension, as identified by Schaufeli *et al*. (2002:74), of vigour, dedication, and absorption. It contains three items proposed to reflect each of the three underlying work engagement dimensions and is measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale. Sample items for each dimension are: "At my job, I feel strong and vigorous" (vigour), "My job inspires me" (dedication), and "I am immersed in my work" (absorption). Higher scores selected by respondents indicate a larger extent of work engagement experienced.

The shortened scale was initially tested for validity and reliability across ten countries during its development, of which South Africa was one (Schaufeli *et al*., 2006:709). Cronbach's alpha for each of the three constructs varied between the ten countries. However, the median of Cronbach's alpha across all ten countries was found to be 0.92, with South Africa scoring above the acceptable 0.70 for internal consistency (Drost, 2011:114). Factorial validity was also assessed and was found to be acceptable for the shortened scale (Schaufeli *et al*., 2006:708).

Section 4 - Trust

The six-item trust in/loyalty to the leader scale (TLLS) developed by Podsakoff *et al*. (1990:107-142) was selected to investigate the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. The scale was originally designed to examine the role of trust in the

direct leader in the relationship between transformational leadership and organisational citizenship. It is therefore deemed appropriate to investigate other conceptualisations of leadership using this instrument, measuring trust in a direct leader specifically from the perspective of their followers.

In this six-item scale, trust is conceptualised using two sections. The extent to which a follower's faith in their leader is expressed is represented by three items, an example of which is: "My manager would never try to gain an advantage by deceiving workers". The degree to which a sense of loyalty is experienced by followers toward their leader is also represented by three items, an example of which is: "I have a strong sense of loyalty toward my leader". All six items are measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the trust in/loyalty to the leader scale by Podsakoff *et al*. (1990:117) and found all six items to be satisfactory in representing trust. A reliability test of this scale conducted by Sendjaya & Pekerti (2010:652) rendered a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81.

Statistical analyses

The research objectives the study aimed to achieve determined the data analysis techniques. Given this study's focus on investigating the relationship between study variables, quantitative techniques were used to analyse the primary research data.

Data collected from the web survey platform QuestionPro was extracted and exported to IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Jamovi for statistical analysis. Data analysis was initiated with frequencies to describe the demographical data, followed by exploratory factor analysis. This analytical technique was used to explore the factorial structure of the measured variables in the study. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of measuring instruments used in the context of this study.

Next, descriptive statistics were performed comprising an array of quantitative instruments used to describe and interpret raw data (Modipane *et al*., 2019:6). Descriptive statistics are classified into four major categories, namely measures of frequency (per cent and frequency), measures of central tendency (mean, mode, and median), measures of dispersion (variance and standard deviation), and distribution measures (kurtosis and skewness) (Mishra *et al*., 2019:68). Procedures that were selected for data analysis in this study included mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis.

Correlation analysis was used to analyse the data further, identify the relationships between the variables, and establish their strength and direction. Simple mediation and moderation modelling were conducted using PROCESS macros version 4 of Hayes (2017), installed as an add-on in IBM SPSS to analyse under which conditions trust plays a role in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components. A standardised regression analysis was conducted to investigate the predictive value (validity) of the independent variables (servant leadership and trust) on the dependent variables (work engagement and its components) of this study.

RESULTS

The study's findings are presented in five sections discussed below. The results are introduced by the findings of the exploratory factor analysis, after which the results of the descriptive statistics of the measuring instrument utilised and the correlations found between the study variables are exhibited. It continues by revealing the findings of the mediation analysis and moderation analysis. The section concludes with an unveiling of the outcome of the regression analysis.

Exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using a simple principal component analysis on the items of the individual scales [Servant leadership scale (SLQ7); (eigenvalue = 4.36; variance explained = 62.31%; KMO =.91), Trust in/loyalty to the leader scale (TLLS); (eigenvalue = 4.23; variance explained = 70.45%; KMO =.89), and Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES9); (eigenvalue = 5.62; variance explained = 62.43%; KMO =.89)]. The results confirm that servant leadership, trust, and work engagement were unidimensional constructs. The analysis also considered and validated the subscales of work engagement [vigour; (eigenvalue = 2.5; variance explained = 83.39%; KMO =.91), dedication; (eigenvalue = 2.29; variance explained = 76.40%; KMO =.65), and absorption; (eigenvalue = 2.11; variance explained = 71.20%; KMO =.69)] as unidimensional constructs respectively.

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

This section exhibits the findings of descriptive statistics and the correlation analysis of the constructs investigated in the study. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2 below, including the internal consistency calculations using Cronbach's alpha, skewness, and kurtosis. The findings of Pearson's correlation coefficients between the study variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics (*n*=206) and Cronbach's alpha coefficients

Variables	*α*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Skewness*	*Kurtosis*
1. Servant leadership	.90	3.38	.94	-.42	-.42
2. Trust	.77	3.59	.80	-1.01	1.08
3. Work engagement	.92	5.54	1.19	-.83	-.18
4. Vigour	.90	5.11	1.56	-.81	-.25
5. Dedication	.84	5.71	1.28	-.94	-.08
6. Absorption	.77	5.81	1.13	-1.24	1.27

An observation of Table 2 indicates that Cronbach's alpha of all scales falls within the acceptable range of 0.70 and above (Drost, 2011:114), as required for data to be useable in research of a similar nature. Mean scores above the mid-point for each of the study variables indicate a prevalence of these variables in the experiences of the respondents. Table 2 also confirms that the data extracted from the measuring instruments of the study were normally distributed given the guidelines of 2.00 for skewness and 7.00 for kurtosis (Finch & West, 1997:454).

Table 3: Correlation coefficients (*n*=206) between servant leadership, trust, and work engagement

Constructs	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
1. Servant leadership	-				
2. Trust	.83**	-			
3. Work engagement	.45**	.39**	-		
4. Vigour	.49**	.42**	.92**	-	
5. Dedication	.44**	.37**	.95**	.85**	-
6. Absorption	.24**	.24**	.81**	.55**	.68**

**Coefficient is statistically significant at the.01 level (one-tailed) / The practical significance of the results was interpreted as 0.10 (small effect), 0.30 (medium effect) and 0.50 (large effect) (Steyn, 2002:12).

The findings in Table 3 indicate a practically significant relationship between servant leadership and trust (r = .83; p <0.01; large effect) and between servant leadership and work engagement (r = .45; p <0.01; medium effect) as unidimensional constructs. Servant leadership also has a practically significant relationship with two of the subconstructs of work engagement, namely vigour (r = .49; p <0.01; medium effect) and dedication (r = .44; p <0.01; medium effect). Trust was also found to have a practically significant relationship with work engagement (r = .39; p <0.01; medium effect) and two of its subconstructs, namely vigour (r = .42; p <0.01; medium effect) and dedication (r = .44; p <0.01; medium effect). There is a great degree of practical

significance between work engagement and all three subconstructs (r = .92, .95 & .81; p <0.01; large effect) and signifies the interrelated nature of the relationship between the constructs as a unidimensional construct and their constituents. Vigour seems practically significantly related to the subconstructs of dedication (r = .85; p <0.01; large effect) and absorption (r = .55; p <0.01; large effect). Dedication was found to be practically significantly related to absorption (r = .68; p <0.01; large effect).

Mediation and moderation analyses

This study was also interested in determining the mediating and moderating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components. The mediating effect was examined to describe in what circumstances trust will impact the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its components. The mediation and moderation analyses results are presented in Tables 4 and 5 below.

Bootstrap confidence intervals of the indirect effects were considered to determine mediation effects. The inclusion of 0 in the confidence intervals suggests the absence of significant indirect effects. Therefore, the mediation role of trust could not be confirmed, as presented in Table 4. In fact, according to the table, the mediating role of trust could not be confirmed in any of the associations with servant leadership as an independent variable and work engagement and its respective dimensions as dependent variables.

Table 4: Indirect effects of servant leadership on work engagement via trust

Constructs	Estimate	SE	Bootstrapping BC 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
1. Work engagement	.06	.12	-.19	.30
2. Vigour	.04	.17	-.29	.37
3. Dedication	.02	.13	-.24	.29
4. Absorption	.12	.12	-.12	.34

Next, the focus was on the possible moderating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its individual dimensions. The significance and confidence intervals of the interaction effects (Servant leadership * Trust) were considered to determine moderation effects. Inspection of Table 5 suggests that the moderating role of trust

could not be confirmed in any of the models tested because of the insignificant effects and the inclusion of 0 in the confidence intervals.

Table 5: Moderation effect of trust between servant leadership and work engagement

Constructs	Estimate	SE	Bootstrapping BC 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
1. Work engagement (*p*=.82)	-.02	.09	-.20	.16
2. Vigour (*p*=.43)	-.09	.12	-.32	.14
3. Dedication (*p*=.76)	-.03	.10	-.22	.16
4. Absorption (*p*=.51)	.06	.09	-.12	.25

After exploring the mediation and moderating effects of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement and its dimension, the data analysis considered the role of servant leadership and trust in explaining the variance in work engagement and its dimensions. The following section focuses on this analysis.

Regression analysis

The study aimed to determine the significant predicting value of servant leadership and trust on the dependent variable of work engagement and its components. A regression analysis was conducted using servant leadership and trust as independent variables to determine the predictability of the dependent variable of work engagement and each of the three components of vigour, dedication, and absorption. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6 reveals that a combination of servant leadership characteristics and trust in the leader accounted for 20 per cent (medium practical significance) of the variance in work engagement, with servant leadership (β = .51 / t = 3.61) proving to be the only statistically significant predictor of work engagement.

Table 6: Regression analysis with work engagement, vigour, dedication, and absorption as dependent variables (*n*=206)

Independent variables	Work engagement		Vigour		Dedication		Absorption	
	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
1. Servant leadership	.51	3.61	.78	4.321	.58	3.751	.17	1.17
2. Trust	.09	.54	.06	.28	.04	.16	.17	1.02
F	26.3		33		24.2		6.93	
p	<.001		<.001		<.001		<.001	
R	.45		.5		.44		.25	
R^2	.21		.25		.19		.06	
Adjusted R^2	.20		.24		.18		.05	
f^2	.25		.32		.22		.05	
Effect size	medium		medium		medium		small	

The parameters for f^2 are set for practical significance: .01 ≥ small effect, .10 ≥ medium effect, .35 ≥ large effect (Steyn, 2002:12).

The combination of servant leadership and trust also explained 24 per cent (medium practical significance) of the variance in vigour, with servant leadership (β = .78 / t = 4.321) proving to be the only statistically significant predictor of vigour. The collective variance of 18 per cent (medium practical significance) in dedication was also primarily driven by the statistically significant predictor of servant leadership (β = .58 / t = 3.751).

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of the study was to examine the relationship between servant leadership, trust, and work engagement among academic staff at four universities in South Africa. Data collected from 206 respondents were analysed and investigated for direct relationships between study constructs and the mediating and moderating effect of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. The predicting value of servant leadership and trust in relation to work engagement was also examined. The findings suggest that servant leadership and trust were both positively and significantly related to work engagement and each of its constituents, namely vigour, dedication, and absorption. Results also validated the interrelatedness of these three dimensions. These findings are consistent with previous studies that suggest significant correlations between the three dimensions of work engagement (Demerouti *et al*., 2001:282; Kibatta & Samuel, 2021:1048; Schaufeli *et al*., 2002:80).

The study's first secondary objective was to confirm the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement in academic staff in South African universities. In line with previous empirical studies (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020b:627; Bao *et al*., 2018:412; De Clercq *et*

al., 2014:201; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2014:892; Kaur, 2018:82; Khan *et al*., 2021:934), the findings of this study suggest a significantly positive correlation between servant leadership and work engagement, including the three dimensions of vigour, dedication and absorption. The results suggest that when academic leaders exhibit servant leadership characteristics, academic staff are more likely to spend more energy on work and experience a sense of importance associated with their work. Additionally, the results show the propensity of academic staff to be immersed in job activities and easily get carried away when engaged in work.

The second secondary objective was to determine the relationship between servant leadership and trust in academic staff in South African universities. The results indicated that servant leadership is highly connected to trust, positively affecting a leader's ability to build trust. This finding is consistent with previous studies that report a similar direction and intensity to the relationship between these variables (Chatbury *et al*., 2011:60; Joseph & Winston, 2005:15; Saleem *et al*., 2020:9-11; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010:654; Zargar *et al*., 2019:2264). Servant leadership behaviours displayed by academic leaders, such as not compromising on ethical principles, prioritising the best interest of academic staff, and being concerned for their well-being, are suggested to generate a sense of loyalty and confidence that the leader will treat followers fairly and with integrity.

The third secondary objective of the study was to establish the relationship between trust and work engagement in academic staff in South African universities. The results confirm that trust in the leader is an antecedent of work engagement, with a significantly positive relationship between the two constructs. This finding supports previous empirical research that established similar associations (Agarwal, 2014:59; Engelbrecht *et al*., 2017:375; Håvold *et al*., 2021:153; Koçak & Küçük, 2021:188; Wong *et al*., 2010:897). It can be deduced that a sense of trust and loyalty toward an academic leader successfully brings about enthusiasm and inspiration about work, promoting academic staff's work engagement. Since a trusting relationship exists, academic staff members spend no energy determining whether their leader is trying to take advantage of them, allowing them as followers to pay full attention to their work instead.

The fourth and fifth secondary objectives were to determine trust's mediating and moderating role in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement amongst academic staff in South African universities. The results did not confirm the mediating or moderating role of trust in relation to servant leadership and positive employee outcomes found in previous studies (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017:14; Ling *et al*., 2017:63; Miao *et al*., 2014:737; Shim *et al*., 2016:15; Tasker-Mitchell & Attoh, 2020:332). These results illustrate the distinctive setting in which South African university faculty members work and offer insight into the uniqueness of

this working environment. Servant leadership is adequate to affect work engagement in the South African higher education context. While trust positively impacts work engagement, its effect on the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement was insignificant within the South African higher education environment. This result contradicts studies that confirmed the mediating (Ling *et al*., 2017:63) and moderating (Zhou *et al*., 2022:5) effect of trust between servant leadership and work engagement.

The final secondary objective was to determine whether servant leadership and trust serve as significant predictors of work engagement amongst academic staff in South African universities. A combination of servant leadership and trust was confirmed to predict work engagement, with servant leadership having considerably more influence on the outcome. While both successfully contributed to the explanation of why some academic staff are more engaged than others, servant leadership plays the dominant role in fostering work engagement in academic staff members.

Theoretical contributions

This study's theoretical contribution is based on the importance of servant leadership in facilitating improved work engagement, specifically in the context of South African higher education. As a result, the need exists for short and valid measures of servant leadership and work engagement to allow the measurement and monitoring of these constructs' presence and effect in higher education institutions in South Africa. This study confirmed the validity and reliability of the shortened seven-item servant leadership scale (SLQ7) and the shortened nine-item Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES9) within the South African higher education context. These findings contribute to the achievement of the objective of the shortened leadership scale to be viewed as a concise scale intended to assess servant leadership globally and, as a result, expedite the testing of servant leadership theory (Liden *et al*., 2015:266). Confirming the applicability of these shortened scales in a new context improves the possible generalisability of the findings of the scales across additional contexts.

Furthermore, this study builds on the foundation laid by Aboramadan *et al*. (2020b:628) and Zhou *et al*. (2022:5) to empirically examine the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement in the context of higher education. This study has expanded current research on servant leadership and work engagement by elaborating on the research of Aboramadan *et al*. (2020b:628) through its investigation into the mediating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement in the context of higher education.

Practical recommendations

Based on the developments in the South African higher education context, there is a need for practical measures to improve the work engagement of academic staff. Higher education institutions are knowledge-intensive organisations and require highly vigorous, dedicated, and absorbed academic staff for academic success (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020b:628). For this reason, a focus should be placed on mechanisms that enhance the work engagement of academic staff. Since this study confirms the positive impact of trust and servant leadership on work engagement, the study's practical recommendations suggest ways to improve servant leadership and trust among academic leaders.

This paper provided insight into the importance of servant leadership in its ability to result in positive employee outcomes and highlights the need for human resources practitioners and managers to pay attention to recruiting candidates with servant leadership characteristics (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020b:628). Psychometric assessments can assist in identifying candidates with servant leadership traits and competencies when hiring new managers. Servant leaders can be developed internally through academic leadership development programmes (Liden, Wayne *et al*., 2014:1447; Scott *et al*., 2008:105), focusing on training managers on servant leadership behaviours. Performance assessments and reward systems should be aligned with the display of servant leadership characteristics and promote future servant leadership behaviour (Coetzer *et al.*, 2017:19). These could include 360-degree leadership evaluations and work engagement surveys to assess the portrayal of servant leadership behaviour in institutions of higher learning.

From an organisational perspective, servant leadership values should be instilled into the institution's values to create a general climate and organisational culture conducive to servant leadership behaviour (Liden, Wayne *et al.,* 2014:1447; Mayer *et al*., 2008:194). As servant leaders, managers are required to pay close attention and be responsive to the basic needs of subordinates (De Clercq *et al*., 2014:203). It is recommended that leaders ensure clarity in role-related expectations and provide continuous developmental feedback and support to followers.

Considering the established positive impact of trust on the work engagement of academic staff, leaders should spend time directing their attention to activities, procedures, systems, and policies that facilitate increased trust in the leader. On an organisational level, if subordinates believe that organisational policies and procedures are implemented in their best interest and directed toward their well-being, they are more likely to trust their leaders (Searle *et al.*, 2011:182). Hence, it is recommended that leaders be trust-conscious when devising and

implementing new organisational policies and procedures. Trust-sensitive policies aimed at the sustenance and care of academic staff, such as job security, performance-based remuneration, training opportunities, development appraisal, and selective staffing, should be implemented to promote staff well-being (Chughtai & Buckley, 2013:414; Gould-Williams, 2003:48) and build a trusting relationship between academic managers and staff. On an interpersonal level, trust can be facilitated through regular team-building exercises, encouraging the managers and subordinates to engage in trust-enhancing activities, such as collaborative problem-solving, contribution recognition, and information sharing (Greenberg *et al*., 2007:330; Webber, 2008:764). Additionally, reshaping the workplace, job responsibilities, and work tasks to allow for increased interaction between managers and subordinates may facilitate the development of a closer bond that could potentially strengthen the trust relationship between parties (Chughtai & Buckley, 2013:414).

Limitations

As with other empirical studies, this research paper contains certain limitations. Firstly, the study's cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences (Cohen *et al.,* 2011:219). For example, trust in the leader may exist independently from servant leadership characteristics displayed by the leader, resulting in work engagement. However, due to the well-established positive impact of servant leadership on trust, it is believed that causal direction, as exemplified in the study's conceptual framework, is a more likely occurrence.

Secondly, the findings of this study were derived from a single data source, self-administered questionnaires, which potentially introduce common method bias. Common method bias refers to the systematic error variance associated with using a single method to measure the constructs of a study (Kock *et al*., 2021:1). This study is exposed to common method bias in two manners. Due to the self-administered approach to capturing the questionnaire data, the study potentially suffers from respondent-related method bias inferred by the individual characteristics of the respondents. For example, research by Baumgartner and Steenkamp (2001:145) indicated that different personality traits could result in stylistic responses.

Furthermore, measurement-related method bias could also cause potential systematic error variances. The fact that the scales were only presented in English, while it is likely in the South African context that English might not be the first language for most of the respondents, may cause a variance in the interpretation of scale items. Due care was taken to mitigate other measurement-related biases. The study made use of shortened scales to reduce fatigue commonly associated with lengthy questionnaires (Kock *et al*., 2021:3). Furthermore, the measuring instruments that were used in this study were designed by research experts, the

instruments' reliability and validity being well-known, and the applicability and suitability of these scales having been tested within the study context as part of the data analysis. However, the fact that all study variables were measured simultaneously can still present a degree of common method bias (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003:885).

Thirdly, due to the nature of the sampling technique, the findings of this study may not characterise consensus across the wider population. Since the study uses non-probability sampling to select the members of the study population, it introduces a sampling bias that does not allow all members of the population with the same statistical probability to be selected for the study (Bryman *et al*., 2014:171). Consequently, the study sample might not represent the population and care must be taken to infer generalisations from the study results (Cohen *et al*., 2011:237).

Lastly, the response rate for this study is relatively low, estimated to be approximately 6.87 per cent, and introduces the likelihood of non-response bias. University employees likely experience survey fatigue as they are bombarded with daily requests from researchers to complete questionnaires. Considering that a low response rate for the study was expected, the study was designed to mitigate this by increasing the study population. However, whether the findings would remain unchanged if 100 per cent of the sample completed the survey remains a question that further deducts from the ability to generalise the results (Lindner *et al*., 2001:50).

Recommendations for future research

Based on the results and limitations of this study, various opportunities for future research exist. While this confirmed the importance of trust in explaining the occurrence of work engagement, other constructs have also been identified to influence the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. For example, goal congruence moderates the effect of servant leadership on work engagement at higher levels of social interaction (De Clercq *et al*., 2014:197), while intrinsic motivation, psychological ownership, and empowerment mediate this relationship (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020b:627; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2014:892).

Since this study was unable to confirm the mediating or moderating role of trust found in previous studies (Ling *et al*., 2017:63; Zhou *et al*., 2022:5), future studies could re-examine the nature of this relationship to determine its consistency. Expanding the area of mediator and moderator research would provide better clarification into the importance of other constructs in determining the outcome of work engagement in relation to servant leadership behaviour.

Another direction for future research is to establish the generalisability of the results of the study by addressing some of this study's limitations. Sampling bias can be reduced by utilising a probability sampling method that allows a greater chance for population representation to be researched (Bryman *et al*., 2014:171). Generalisability can be improved by increasing the study population to include the academic staff at all South African universities. Similarly, restricting non-response variance through increased participation would also enhance the representativeness of the findings. The introduction of incentives may increase response rates (Smith *et al.*, 2019:11). However, due care needs to be taken for the ethical considerations associated with providing incentives to participate in academic research.

An additional limitation for future research to alleviate is the ability of causal inferences to be concluded. It is recommended that future studies adopt a longitudinal methodology to assess the prevalence of the study constructs over an extended period (Cohen *et al*., 2011:219). The result might verify the relational direction of trust as a consequence of servant leadership in its association with work engagement. Future research might take into account the specific demographics of the study population and provide options for various language translations for the scales to assess the study variables. These considerations may assist in reducing the common method bias associated with the measuring instruments only being presented in a single language.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff at selected South African universities. The results suggest that these three constructs are statistically and practically significantly related. The data analysis could not confirm the mediating or moderating role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement but found a combination of servant leadership and trust to be successful at predicting the outcome of work engagement. Results offer evidence to suggest that servant leadership behaviours tend to improve work dedication and increase the amount of energy spent on work-related tasks. The findings also indicate that servant leaders generate trust-based relationships with followers, which can be utilised to enhance the work engagement of academic staff.

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CHAPTER 3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter concludes the literature review and empirical investigation in accordance with the defined study objectives. Conclusions based on the theoretical findings and contributions are presented, followed by examining the limitations of the study. Furthermore, recommendations for higher education institutions based on the study's findings are discussed and suggestions for future research are provided.

3.1 Conclusion

3.1.1 Conclusions based on theoretical findings

The primary aim of this study was to examine the relationship between servant leadership, trust, and work engagement among academic staff at selected South African universities. A literature study was undertaken to conceptualise the study variables from which the following theoretical findings were drawn.

Servant leadership was defined as a serving-oriented, people-centred, and morally inclined leadership perspective (Liden, Panaccio *et al.*, 2014:6; Sendjaya *et al.*, 2008:405; Van Dierendonck, 2011:1228), as first introduced by Greenleaf (1970:1-28). Servant leadership is further described as an other-oriented approach to leadership, established by the individualised prioritisation of follower needs and interests and the outward reorienting of the leader's concern for the self towards a concern for others within the organisation and the wider community (Eva *et al.*, 2019:114). This study adopted the theoretical framework of servant leadership as proposed by Liden *et al.* (2015:255) to conceptualise the study construct. According to Liden *et al.* (2015:255), servant leadership consists of seven dimensions, namely emotional healing, creating value for the community, conception skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically.

Multiple stakeholders, notably employees, the organisation, and the community, can benefit from servant leadership (Xu *et al.*, 2020:55). Literature identified the primary benefits of servant leadership as its influence on the psychological well-being of followers (Babakus *et al.*, 2011:25; Jaramillo *et al.*, 2009:269) and its correlation with favourable psychological employee and organisational results, such as job performance (Bayram & Zoubi, 2020:1775; Chiniara & Bentein, 2016:135; Liden, Wayne *et al.*, 2014:1445; Van Dierendonck, 2011:1249), job satisfaction (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2020a:575; Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006:316; Cerit, 2009:615; Chan & Mak, 2014:281; Mayer *et al.*, 2008:192), work engagement (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2020b:627; Carter & Baghurst, 2014:461; Coetzer *et al.*, 2017:19; De Clercq *et al.*, 2014:201;

De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2017:21), organisational commitment (LaPointe & Vandenberghe, 2018:109; Liden *et al.*, 2008:174; Miao *et al.*, 2014:738; Van Dierendonck *et al.*, 2014:559), and OCB (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016:135; Hunter *et al.*, 2013:325; Liden *et al.*, 2015:264-265; Mahembe & Engelbrecht, 2014:8; McCallaghan *et al.*, 2020:381; Newman *et al.*, 2017:58; Panaccio *et al.*, 2015:670; Shim *et al.*, 2016:15; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2010:526; Zhao *et al.*, 2016:909).

Although less researched than the benefits, servant leadership presents potentially negative consequences, which should be considered when selecting and developing leaders. Servant leadership followers have been found to experience leadership avoidance (Lacroix & Verdorfer, 2017:8), be manipulated by disingenuous leaders portraying servant leadership attributes (Stone *et al.*, 2004:358), and experience discomfit due to the close relationships servant leaders form with followers (Xu *et al.*, 2020:64). Furthermore, servant leaders may experience work-life conflict, role ambiguity, emotional exhaustion, and work overload (Liden, Panaccio *et al.*, 2014:5; Tang *et al.*, 2016:293; Zhou *et al.*, 2020:7), which ultimately lead to disengagement from leadership responsibilities (Liao *et al.*, 2021:1207).

Work engagement, as proposed by Kahn (1990:694), has been defined as fully harnessing one's physical, emotional, and mental efforts in performing tasks and duties of work. While some scholars view work engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach *et al.*, 2001:416), Schaufeli *et al.* (2002:74) propose work engagement as a distinct and independent concept required to be measured separately. This study adopted the theoretical framework of Schaufeli *et al.* (2002:74) to conceptualise the construct of work engagement. According to Schaufeli *et al.* (2002:74), work engagement is a positive and gratifying psychological state related to work that consists of the three identifiable dimensions of vigour, dedication, and absorption.

The positive consequences of work engagement in the literature focus mainly on the positive employee outcomes and the well-being of employees (Schaufeli, 2003:2). Work engagement was identified to facilitate job satisfaction (Cole *et al.*, 2012:1569; Diedericks & Rothmann, 2013:230-231; Karanika-Murray *et al.*, 2015:1026; Saks, 2006:613; Yeh, 2013:229), organisational commitment (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2019:162; Cole *et al.*, 2012:1569; Hakanen *et al.*, 2006:507; Saks, 2006:613; Taba *et al.*, 2014:7), OCB and extra-role behaviour (Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010:322; Eldor & Harpaz, 2016:227-228; Saks, 2006:613; Shantz *et al.*, 2013:2620-2621; Sulea *et al.*, 2012:200), job performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010:200; Christian *et al.*, 2011:116; Lin *et al.*, 2016:153; Rich *et al.*, 2010:628; Van Wingerden & Van Der Stoep, 2018:7), and improved health and well-being (Cole *et al.*, 2012:1569; Radic *et al.*, 2020:5; Tesi *et al.*, 2019:133). However, the benefits of work engagement were also found to

extend beyond the employee, with constructive outcomes identified for both the organisation and its customers (Gorgievski *et al.*, 2014:115; Harter *et al.*, 2002:275; Schneider *et al.*, 2018:13; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009:197).

Potential negative costs were identified for the over-engaged employee, which could have detrimental effects on performance and work-life balance (Bakker *et al.*, 2011:18; Sonnentag, 2011:33). These employees are also likely to experience work interference with family, exacerbated by the prevalence of OCB (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2009:1460). Work engagement further has been suggested to produce high levels of psychological distress in the short-term but which diminishes over longer periods as the employee applies job crafting to accumulate additional job resources (Shimazu *et al.*, 2018:10).

The conceptualisation of trust often focuses on two aspects (Nienaber *et al.*, 2015:568). First, trust is viewed as the degree to which a person is willing to rely on someone as a measure of their confidence in them (Mayer *et al.*, 1995:712; Moorman *et al.*, 1992:315). Second, trust requires the recipient of trust to behave in a manner that reciprocates and confirms the other's trust (Sako & Helper, 1998:388). Podsakoff *et al.* (1990:113-114) depicted trust in the leader as the manifestation of followers' faith in and loyalty to the leader, with statements such as "I feel a strong loyalty to my leader" and "I have complete faith in the integrity of my manager/supervisor" used to describe its prevalence (Podsakoff *et al.,* 1990:120).

Trust on a behavioural and performance level was found to be positively associated with OCB (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002:621; Flavian *et al.*, 2018:15; McAllister, 1995:48; Nohe & Michaelis, 2016:891; Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990:129), knowledge sharing (Abrams *et al.*, 2003:65; Burke *et al.*, 2007:624; Kim, 2019:346; Wickramasinghe & Widyaratne, 2012:229), and job performance (Colquitt *et al.*, 2007:921; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002:621; Kim *et al.*, 2018:954; McAllister, 1995:48; Saleem *et al.*, 2020:11). From a job attitude and intention perspective, trust was found to lead to improved job satisfaction (Cho & Park, 2011:564; Cook & Wall, 1980:47; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002:621; Lambert *et al.*, 2021:203; Palupi *et al.*, 2017:405), organisational commitment (Chen *et al.*, 2015:9; Cook & Wall, 1980:47; Flavian *et al.*, 2018:15; Miao *et al.*, 2014:737; Ndlovu *et al.*, 2021:7), and work engagement (Ahamed *et al.*, 2013:168; Buckley, 2011:320-321; De Beer *et al.*, 2018:7; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:374; Lin, 2010:526).

Investigating the interrelatedness of the study variables yielded concrete connections identified in previous research. The notion of servant leadership has been directly linked to trust through the demonstration of leader integrity and ethical behaviour, which transfers into organisational loyalty fidelity (De Pree, 1997:127). Greenleaf (1977:25) considered trust a critical precondition and the foundation of servant leadership. Consequently, many empirical studies have

confirmed the ability of servant leadership to generate trust (Chatbury *et al.*, 2011:60; Joseph & Winston, 2005:15; Saleem *et al.*, 2020:9-11; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010:654; Zargar *et al.*, 2019:2264).

Trust is linked to work engagement, where trust represents followers' confidence and optimistic anticipation of their leader's actions, while work engagement reflects their subsequent zeal and involvement in work activities (Lin, 2010:521-522). Correlation between trust and the three aspects of dedication (Gill, 2008:101), vigour (Dong & Howard, 2006:381), and absorption (Townsend & Gebhardt, 2008:24) were also established. Further research supports the notion that trust is an important determinant of work engagement (Agarwal, 2014:59; Ahamed *et al.*, 2013:168; Buckley, 2011:320-321; De Beer *et al.*, 2018:7; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:375; Håvold *et al.*, 2021:153; Koçak & Küçük, 2021:188; Lin, 2010:526; Wong *et al.*, 2010:897).

The potential influence of servant leadership to create optimal conditions required for work engagement to flourish was observed (De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2017:16) when servant leadership is viewed as a job resource (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007:319) that assists in reducing job demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004:296). Servant leadership succeeds by creating an environment that fosters personal growth and provides individual support (Van Dierendonck, 2011:1229). Recent research investigating the connection between servant leadership and work engagement has indicated that servant leadership has a positive and substantial effect on work engagement (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2020b:627; Bao *et al.*, 2018:412; Carter & Baghurst, 2014:461; Coetzer *et al.*, 2017:19; De Clercq *et al.*, 2014:201; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2014:892; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2017:21; Kaur, 2018:82; Khan *et al.*, 2021:934).

3.1.2 Theoretical contributions

The theoretical contribution of this study is focused on the significance of servant leadership in facilitating increased work engagement, particularly in the South African higher education setting. Consequently, credible and brief measuring instruments of servant leadership and work engagement are required. This study established the appropriateness of the shortened seven-item servant leadership scale (SLQ7) and the shortened nine-item Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES9) in the setting of South African higher education.

These results contribute to the shortened leadership scale's purpose of being recognised as a compact scale designed to assess servant leadership internationally and, as a result, accelerate the development of servant leadership theory (Liden *et al.*, 2015:266). Confirming the applicability of these shortened scales in a new setting increases the generalisation ability of the scales' results across further contexts.

In addition, this study develops the groundwork established by Aboramadan *et al.* (2020b:628) and Zhou *et al*. (2022:5) to quantitatively assess the association between servant leadership and work engagement in the context of higher education. This study contributes to the existing literature on servant leadership and work engagement as it extended the research of Aboramadan *et al.* (2020b:628) by examining the function of trust as a mediator in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement in the higher education context.

3.1.3 Conclusions based on empirical findings

The primary research aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between servant leadership, trust, and work engagement among academic staff at four South African higher education institutions. The responses of 206 online questionnaires were analysed for any direct correlation between the research components and to investigate the mediating and moderating role that trust plays in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. According to the findings, trust and servant leadership were positively and substantially associated with each subconstruct of work engagement (vigour, devotion, and absorption) and work engagement as a unidimensional construct. The results also supported the interrelationship of the three components of work engagement, which confirms earlier research that found strong relationships among the three constituents of work engagement (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001:282; Kibatta & Samuel, 2021:1048; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002:80).

The study's first objective was to evaluate the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement among academic staff at higher education institutions in South Africa. The results reveal a significantly favourable association between servant leadership and work engagement and its encompassing three characteristics, i.e. vigour, devotion, and absorption, which is consistent with other empirical investigations (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2020b:627; Bao *et al.*, 2018:412; Carter & Baghurst, 2014:461; Coetzer *et al.*, 2017:19; De Clercq *et al.*, 2014:201; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2014:892; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2017:21; Kaur, 2018:82; Khan *et al.*, 2021:934). According to the findings of this study, academic staff members are more inclined to exert additional effort at work and feel that their work is valuable when academic leaders demonstrate servant leadership traits. Additionally, servant leaders tend to inspire academic staff members to become deeply involved in work-related tasks and prone to getting carried away when working.

The second objective was to determine how the portrayal of servant leadership characteristics by academic leaders in South African institutions relates to trust in the leader experienced by academic staff. According to the findings, servant leadership has a strong relationship with trust in the leader and positively affects the leader’s ability to gain their subordinates’ trust. This

finding is consistent with prior research that indicates a connection between these factors with a similar direction and intensity (Chatbury *et al.*, 2011:60; Joseph & Winston, 2005:15; Ling *et al.*, 2017:62-63; Saleem *et al.*, 2020:9-11; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010:654; Van Dierendonck, 2011:1246; Zargar *et al.*, 2019:2264). It is suggested that by exhibiting servant leadership behaviours, such as upholding ethical standards, prioritising academic staff interests, and showing concern for their welfare, academic leaders can foster loyalty and build followers' confidence in the leader's ability to treat them fairly and with integrity.

The study also sought to establish the relationship between trust and work engagement among academic employees at South African higher education institutions as the third objective. The findings demonstrate a substantial positive correlation between the two constructs. This corroborates the results of prior empirical research (Agarwal, 2014:59; Ahamed *et al.*, 2013:168; Buckley, 2011:320-321; De Beer *et al.*, 2018:7; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:375; Håvold *et al.*, 2021:153; Koçak & Küçük, 2021:188; Lin, 2010:526; Wong *et al.*, 2010:897). It may be determined that a sense of trust and devotion toward an academic leader produces sentiments of passion and inspiration about work, allowing academic personnel to become increasingly involved. Since a relationship of trust exists, academic staff members devote little effort to determining whether their leader is attempting to take advantage of them and instead focus solely on their work.

The fourth objective was to determine the function of trust as a mediator between servant leadership and academic staff engagement in South African universities. The results were not able to demonstrate the role of trust as a mediator between servant leadership and favourable employee outcomes, as demonstrated in earlier research (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017:14; Ling *et al.*, 2017:63; Miao *et al.*, 2014:737; Shim *et al.*, 2016:15; Tasker-Mitchell & Attoh, 2020:332). This result is also inconsistent with the findings of Ling *et al.* (2017:63), who verified the mediating effect of trust between servant leadership and work engagement.

The fifth objective aimed to determine the moderating effect of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in South African universities. Inconsistent with the findings of Zhou *et al*. (2022:5), which support trust as a moderator between servant leadership and work engagement, this study was unable to confirm the role of trust as a moderator in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement in selected South African universities' academic staff.

The last objective was to determine whether a combination of servant leadership and trust significantly predicts the positive outcome of work engagement amongst academic staff in selected South African universities. The findings of this study confirm that servant leadership

and trust serve as significant predictors of work engagement, where servant leadership imparts a more substantial effect than trust, promoting confidence in the academic leader and potentially explaining why certain academic staff are more engaged than others.

3.2 Limitations

Similar to other empirical investigations, there are limitations to this research project.

Firstly, the study's cross-sectional design restricts the capacity to draw causal judgments from its findings (Cohen *et al.,* 2011:219). For instance, trust in the leader may exist regardless of the servant leadership traits exhibited by the leader, resulting in the presence of work engagement. However, due to the well-established beneficial effect of servant leadership on trust, it is more likely that causal direction will occur as depicted in the conceptual framework of this study.

Secondly, conclusions drawn from this study are taken from a single data source, self-administered surveys, which may introduce common method bias. Common method bias is the systematic error variance associated with using a single technique to measure a study's constructs (Kock *et al.*, 2021:1). This research is susceptible to common method bias in two ways. Firstly, due to the self-administered nature of the questionnaire data collection, the study may be vulnerable to respondent-related method bias inferred from the unique features of the respondents. According to a study by Baumgartner and Steenkamp (2001:145), certain personality factors might result in responses unique to the individual.

Secondly, measurement-related method bias may potentially contribute to potential systematic error variances. The fact that the scale was solely provided in English, even though English may not be the first language of the majority of respondents in the South African environment, may lead to variations in the interpretation of scale items. Efforts were made to eliminate the impact of other measurement-related biases by using shortened scales to lessen the fatigue often associated with long surveys. As part of the data analysis, the study evaluated the applicability and appropriateness of these scales within the context of the study using measuring instruments created by specialists in the field of research and renowned for their reliability and validity. Nonetheless, the fact that all research variables were assessed concurrently might still introduce a degree of common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003:885).

Thirdly, as a result of the sampling procedure, the results of this study may not represent the perspective of the broader population. Since non-probability sampling was used to choose the members of the research population, sampling bias was introduced that prevented all

members of the population from having the same statistical likelihood of being elected for the study (Bryman *et al*., 2014:171). As a result, the research sample may not be typical of the population and caution must be used when extrapolating from the findings of the study (Cohen *et al*., 2011:237).

Lastly, the approximate response rate for this study is 6.87 per cent, which presents the possible occurrence of non-response bias. Due to the proximity to university employees, researchers regularly invite academic staff to participate in research questionnaires, causing them to experience survey fatigue. A low response rate for the study was anticipated and intended to be mitigated by expanding the study population. However, the low response rate further reduces the results' generalisability (Lindner *et al.*, 2001:50) and raises the question of whether the study's results would be the same if 100 per cent of the sample completed the survey.

3.3 Recommendations

3.3.1 Recommendations for higher education institutions

As a result of the recent developments in the environment of higher education in South Africa, there is an urgent requirement for implementing practical measures to raise the level of work engagement among academic staff. Higher education institutions are knowledge-intensive organisations that need an energetic, devoted, and assimilated faculty for academic achievement (Aboramadan *et al*., 2020b:628), which could also assist in combating the prevalence of corrupt activity in higher education institutions (Schaufeli, 2018:103). Therefore, strategies that promote the work engagement of academic personnel should be prioritised. Since this study demonstrates the favourable influence of trust and servant leadership on work engagement, the study's recommendations for higher education provide ways academic leaders may strengthen servant leadership and trust.

This study investigated the significance of servant leadership in its potential to provide favourable employee outcomes and emphasises the necessity for human resources practitioners and managers to pay special attention to recruiting individuals with servant leadership traits (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2020b:628). From an organisational standpoint, it is advised that the fundamental elements of servant leadership be included in the institution's core values to foster an environment and culture conducive to servant leadership behaviour (Liden, Wayne *et al*., 2014:1447; Mayer *et al*., 2008:194). When hiring new managers, psychometric evaluations may help to identify applicants with servant leadership characteristics and skills. Internally created servant leaders can be cultivated through academic leadership development courses that promote servant leadership behaviour training

for managers (Liden, Wayne *et al*., 2014:1447; Scott *et al*., 2008:105). Performance evaluations and rewards should be connected with the demonstration of servant leadership traits and should encourage future servant leadership behaviour (Coetzer *et al*., 2017:19). These might include 360-degree leadership assessments and work engagement surveys to analyse the representation of servant leadership in higher education institutions.

As servant leaders, managers must be attentive and sensitive to the fundamental needs of subordinates (De Clercq *et al.*, 2014:203). It is suggested that leaders ensure role-related expectations are clear and give continual developmental feedback and assistance to subordinates. It is also important for academic leaders to prioritise the interest of academic staff above that of the administrative agenda by actively listening and responding to their needs. Faculty members also experience increased engagement when given autonomy and should be trusted to take difficult decisions directly affecting their work. The principle of ethical behaviour is central to the concept of servant leadership (Liden *et al*., 2015:255). Servant academic leaders should avoid portraying any willingness to sacrifice integrity to achieve success.

Aware of the proven positive effect of trust on the work engagement of academic staff, leaders need to devote time to activities, processes, systems, and policies that provide greater trust in the leader. On an organisational level, subordinates are more inclined to trust their leaders if they feel that organisational procedures and regulations are applied in their best interest and for their well-being (Searle *et al*., 2011:182). When developing and implementing new organisational rules and processes, it is advised that leaders be trust-conscious. The introduction of trust-sensitive policies, such as job security, performance-based compensation, training opportunities, development assessment, and selective staffing, can facilitate a trusting connection between academic management and employees (Chughtai & Buckley, 2013:414; Gould-Williams, 2003:48).

On an interpersonal level, trust may be fostered through frequent team-building exercises that encourage managers and subordinates to engage in trust-enhancing activities, such as collaborative problem-solving and appreciation for contributions and information sharing (Greenberg *et al*., 2007:330; Webber, 2008:764). In addition, restructuring the workplace, job duties, and activities to allow for more interaction between managers and subordinates may assist in creating a deeper connection, which could boost the trust between parties (Chughtai & Buckley, 2013:414).

3.3.2 Recommendations for future research

According to the findings and limitations of this study, several avenues for further research exist. In addition to trust, numerous factors have been identified that affect the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. For example, goal congruence moderates the effect of servant leadership on work engagement at higher levels of social interaction (De Clercq *et al.*, 2014:197), while intrinsic motivation, psychological ownership, and empowerment mediate this relationship (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2020b:627; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2014:892). Expanding the scope of research on mediators and moderators would give greater insight into the significance of other factors in influencing the relationship between work engagement and servant leadership behaviour. In addition, as this study was unable to demonstrate the mediating and moderating influence of trust between servant leadership and work engagement found in previous studies (Ling *et al*., 2017:63; Zhou *et al*., 2022:5), future research might replicate this study to establish consistency in the nature of this relationship.

Future research may also establish the generalisability of the study's findings by resolving certain limitations. Using a probability sampling strategy that provides a higher possibility of researching a population-representative sample helps lessen sampling bias (Bryman *et al*., 2014:171). Reduced sampling bias may be accomplished by expanding the study population to include faculty from all South African universities. Similarly, limiting non-response variance through increased participation would increase the representativeness of the results. An improved response rate may be accomplished by introducing incentives (Smith *et al.*, 2019:11). However, ethical issues must be considered when offering incentives for participation in academic research.

The capability of drawing causal conclusions is an additional constraint that may be addressed by further study in the future. It is suggested that future studies use a longitudinal research methodology to examine the prevalence of the components of this study over an extended period (Cohen *et al*., 2011:219). The outcome can confirm the relational orientation of trust resulting from servant leadership regarding work engagement. Future research could consider the specific demographics of the study population and provide options for multiple language translations of scales to be used to assess the study variables. Providing respondents with additional translations of the study scales will assist in reducing the common method bias associated with measuring instruments being presented in only English.

3.4 Summary

This study aimed to assess the role of servant leadership and trust in the respective relationships with the work engagement of academic staff at universities in South Africa. These relationships were found to be statistically and practically significant. The study data could not determine whether or not trust had a mediating or moderating role in the connection between servant leadership and work engagement in the academic workplace. However, it did find that a combination of servant leadership and trust are antecedents of work engagement, with servant leadership being the predominant predictor. This finding suggests that servant leadership behaviours tend to boost job devotion and increase the energy expended on work-related tasks. The results also imply that servant leaders build trust-based connections with followers, which may be utilised to increase academic staff's engagement at work.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear respondent,

Sincere thanks for your willingness to participate in the following study titled:

Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in South African universities.

My name is Janico Louw, and I am an MBA student at the NWU Business School at North-West University. The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between servant leadership, trust and work engagement in academic staff at selected public universities in South Africa. The research shall form part of a mini-dissertation in accordance with the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Business Administration at the North-West University. The qualification is internationally accredited and warrants strict adherence to ethical standards as a requirement to perform this research.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and withdrawal from the study may be done at any stage. As a respondent, you are requested to complete the questions in the sections to follow but may refrain from answering any question. This questionnaire will require 5 minutes to complete.

Please take note that data collected through this study will be analysed for academic research purposes, the results of which will be published in the public domain. To ensure confidentially, all respondents' identities will remain anonymous by assigning a respondent code instead of personally identifiable characteristics. Limited demographic information will be collected to allow for the profiling of the sample. However, this information will not be used for further statistical considerations or to assess group comparisons.

Collected data will only be accessible to the researcher, the study supervisor and the Statistical Consultation Services at the North-West University, who shall be contracted for data analysis. The data will be password encrypted to protect against unauthorised access and destroyed after three years.

The study has been approved by the NWU Business School's People Management Scientific Committee, chaired by Prof Leon Jackson, who is also the supervisor for this study. He can be contacted at 018 285 2040 or via email at leon.jackson@nwu.ac.za for any questions or concerns regarding this research project.

Ethical clearance has been obtained by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS-REC) and allocated the following ethical clearance number: NWU-01299-21-A4. The chair of EMS-REC is Prof Mark Rathbone, who may be contacted at 018 299 1356 or via email at mark.rathbone@nwu.ac.za.

Your contribution to this study is of great value and appreciated.

Sincerely,

JANICO LOUW

NWU Business School

North-West University, Potchefstroom

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A: Demographic Information

Please answer the items in section A by selecting one option that applies to your profile.

1. Age of respondent

18 - 24 years	
25 - 34 years	
35 - 44 years	
45 - 54 years	
55 - 64 years	
Older than 64 years	

2. Institution location

Eastern Cape	
Free State	
Gauteng	
Kwa-Zulu Natal	
Limpopo	
Northern Cape	
North-West	
Mpumalanga	
Western Cape	

3. Identify your faculty

Economic and Management Sciences	
Education	
Engineering	
Health Sciences	
Humanities	
Natural and Agricultural Sciences	
Theology	
Other	

4. Gender

Female	
Male	
Other	

5. Highest academic qualification

National certificate	
Bachelor's degree	
Honours degree	
Master's degree	
Doctoral degree	

6. Years of experience in current position

0 - 3 years	
4 - 5 years	
6 - 10 years	
11 and more	

Section B: Servant leadership characteristics in academic line managers

The following seven statements are about the leadership characteristic you perceived in your immediate line manager. Please read each statement carefully and answer the items in this section by selecting one option that reflects the extent to which you agree with the statements. The scale ranges from one, strongly disagree to five, strongly agree.

Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Not sure**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1. My leader can tell if something work-related is going wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My leader makes my career development a priority.	1	2	3	4	5

3. I would seek help from my leader if I had a personal problem.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My leader emphasises the importance of giving back to the community.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My leader puts my best interest ahead of his or her own.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My leader gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in a way that I feel is best.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My leader would NOT compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.	1	2	3	4	5

Section C: Trust in and loyalty to academic line managers

The following six statements describe how you feel toward your immediate line manager. Please read each statement carefully and answer the items in this section by selecting one option that reflects the extent to which you agree with the statements. The scale ranges from one, strongly disagree to five, strongly agree.

Items	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Not sure**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1. I feel quite confident that my leader will always try to treat me fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My manager would never try to gain an advantage by deceiving workers.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have complete faith in the integrity of my manager	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel a strong loyalty to my leader	1	2	3	4	5

5. I would support my leader in almost any emergency	1	2	3	4	5
6. I have a divided sense of loyalty toward my leader*	1	2	3	4	5

Section D: Work engagement of academic staff

The following nine statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and answer the items in this section by selecting one option that reflects the extent to which you agree with the statements in your current position. If you have never had this feeling, select the "0" (zero) next to the statement. If you have had this feeling, indicate how often you feel it by selecting the number (from 1 to 6) that best describes how frequently you feel that way.

	Almost never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day

Items	**Never**	**Almost never**	**Rarely**	**Sometimes**	**Often**	**Very often**	**Always**
1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

3. I am enthusiastic about my job.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. My job inspires me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I feel happy when I am working intensely.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I am proud of the work that I do.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I am immersed in my work.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I get carried away when I'm working.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION OF INSTRUMENT AUTHORS

Servant leadership scale

From: Robert Liden <bobliden@uic.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, 26 October 2021 18:30
To: Janico Louw <jlouw@live.co.za>
Subject: Re: Permission to use SL-7 scale for academic research

Dear Janico,
Yes, you may use our scale and it is attached along with a recent article.
Best of luck with your research,
Bob Liden

Liden, Robert C.

Professor of Management and Associate Dean for CBA Doctoral Program

University Scholar

UIC Business
The University of Illinois at Chicago
601 S. Morgan, Room Number 2232, MC 243
Chicago, IL 60607

UIC BUSINESS

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

Re: Permission to use short UWES for academic research

SW Schaufeli, W.B. (Wilmar) <w.schaufeli@uu.nl>
To Janico Louw

You replied to this message on 2021/10/27 13:29.

Dear Janico,

Thank you very much for your interest in my work.

You may use the UWES free of charge, but only for non-commercial, academic research. In case of commercial use, we should draft a contract.

Please visit my website (address below) from which the UWES can be downloaded, as well as all my publications on the subject.

Good luck with your research.

With kind regards,

Wilmar Schaufeli

Wilmar B. Schaufeli, PhD | Professor emeritus of Work and Organizational Psychology | *Social, Health & Organizational Psychology* | Utrecht University | P.O.

APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATES

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

Economic and Management Sciences Research
Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)

26 November 2021

Prof LTB Jackson
Per e-mail
Dear Prof Jackson,

EMS-REC FEEDBACK: 26112021
Student: Louw, J (29896533)(NWU-01299-21-A4)
Study leader: Prof LTB Jackson - MBA

Your ethics application on, ***Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in South African universities,*** which served on the EMSREC meeting of 26 November 2021, refers.

Outcome:

Approved as a minimal risk study. A number **NWU-01299-21-A4** is given for one year of ethics clearance.

Please note that the ethics approval of this application is subject to the Covid-19 protocols.

Kind regards,

Mark Rathbone

Digitally signed by Mark Rathbone
DN: cn=Mark Rathbone, o=North-West University, ou=Business management, email=mark.rathbone@nwu.ac.za, c=ZA
Date: 2021.11.30 16:12:59 +02'00'

Prof Mark Rathbone
Chairperson: Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

UFS UV

GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

03-May-2022

Dear Janico Louw

Application Approved

Research Project Title:
Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in South African universities

Ethical Clearance number:
UFS-HSD2021/2087

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adri Du Plessis
Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

Dr Adri du Plessis
Digitally signed by Dr Adri du Plessis
Date: 2022.05.03 14:34:38 +02'00'

205 Nelson Mandela Drive
Park West
Bloemfontein 9301
South Africa

P.O. Box 339
Bloemfontein 9300
Tel: +27 (0)51 401 9337
duplessisA@ufs.ac.za
www.ufs.ac.za

APPENDIX E: GATEKEEPER'S PERMISSION CERTIFICATES

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: +2718 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

Research Data Gatekeeper Committee

NWU RDGC PERMISSION GRANTED / DENIED LETTER

Based on the documentation provided by the researcher specified below, on 04/02/2022 the North-West University (NWU) Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (NWU-RDGC) hereby **grants permission** for the specific project (as indicated below) to be conducted at the NWU:

Project title: Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in South African universities.

Project leader: Prof LTB Jackson
Researcher/Project Team: J Louw

Ethics reference no: NWU-01299-21-A4
NWU RDGC reference no: NWU-GK-22-007

Specific Conditions:

- **Request Ms Marelize Santana (Marelize.Santana@nwu.ac.za) to send out an invite to prospective participants.**

Approval date: 04/02/2022 **Expiry date: 03/02/2023**

General Conditions of Approval:

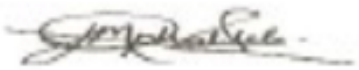
- The NWU-RDGC will not take the responsibility to recruit research participants or to gather data on behalf of the researcher. This committee can therefore not guarantee the participation of our relevant stakeholders.
- Any changes to the research protocol within the permission period (for a maximum of 1 year) must be communicated to the NWU-RDGC. Failure to do so will lead to withdrawal of the permission.
- The NWU-RDGC should be provided with a report or document in which the results of said project are disseminated.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemics the Committee would like to advice the researcher to practice the necessary caution and adhere to the National Covid-19 Guidelines when conducting research with participants.

Please note that under no circumstances will any personal information of possible research subjects be provided to the researcher by the NWU RDGC. The NWU complies with the Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000 (PAIA) as well as the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPI). For

an application to access such information please contact Ms Annamarie De Kock (018 285 2771) for the relevant enquiry form or more information on how the NWU complies with PAIA and POPI.

The NWU RDGC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the NWU RDGC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Prof Jeffrey Mphahlele

Chairperson NWU Research Data Gatekeeper Committee

Original details: (22251930) C:\Users\22251930\Desktop\test 2.docm
13 November 2015

Current details: (22251930) M:\DSS1\5533\Monitoring and Reporting Cluster\Ethics\Applications RDGC\Updated RDGC Permission Letter.docm
15 November 2015

File reference: 1.1.4.3

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA
UFS UV

Office of the Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation
Kantoor van die Viserektor: Navorsing en Internasionalisering

21-Apr-2022

Dear Janico Louw

UFS AUTHORITIES APPROVAL

Research Project Title:
Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in South African universities

This letter serves as confirmation that your request to collect data from students and/or staff members at the University of the Free State for your research project has been approved **provided that you also have ethical clearance for the research from the ethics committee at the University of the Free State.**

Please make sure that you also obtain your ethics clearance letter containing your reference number from the ethics committee after you have received this letter before you conduct your research.

Kind Regards

PROF RC WITTHUHN
VICE-RECTOR: RESEARCH & INTERNATIONALISATION
CHAIR: SENATE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

205 Nelson Mandela Drive/Rylaan
Park West/Parkweg
Bloemfontein 9301
South Africa/Suid-Afrika

P.O. Box / Posbus 339
Bloemfontein 9300
South Africa / Suid-Afrika
T:+27(0)51 401 2116
F:+27(0)51 401 3752
WitthuhnRC@ufs.ac.za
www.ufs.ac.za

UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION:

AGREEMENT ON USE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION IN RESEARCH

Name of Researcher: Mr Janico Louw

Name of Research Project: Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in South African universities

Service Desk ID: IG- 3299

Date of Issue: 07 April 2022

The researcher has received institutional permission to proceed with this project as stipulated in the institutional permission application and within the conditions set out in this agreement.

1 WHAT THIS AGREEMENT IS ABOUT	
What is POPI?	1.1 POPI is the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013. 1.2 POPI regulates the entire information life cycle from collection, through use and storage and even the destruction of personal information.
Why is this important to us?	1.3 Even though POPI is important, it is not the primary motivation for this agreement. The privacy of our students and employees are important to us. We want to ensure that no research project poses any risks to their privacy. 1.4 However, you are required to familiarise yourself with, and comply with POPI in its entirety.
What is considered to be personal information?	1.5 'Personal information' means information relating to an identifiable, living, individual or company, including, but not limited to: 1.5.1 information relating to the race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, national, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental health, well-being, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth of the person; 1.5.2 information relating to the education or the medical, financial, criminal or employment history of the person;

	1.5.3 any identifying number, symbol, e-mail address, physical address, telephone number, location information, online identifier or other particular assignment to the person; 1.5.4 the biometric information of the person; 1.5.5 the personal opinions, views or preferences of the person; 1.5.6 correspondence sent by the person that is implicitly or explicitly of a private or confidential nature or further correspondence that would reveal the contents of the original correspondence; 1.5.7 the views or opinions of another individual about the person; and 1.5.8 the name of the person if it appears with other personal information relating to the person or if the disclosure of the name itself would reveal information about the person.
Some personal information is more sensitive.	1.6 Some personal information is considered to be sensitive either because: 1.6.1 POPI has classified it as sensitive; 1.6.2 if the information is disclosed it can be used to defraud someone; or 1.6.3 the disclosure of the information will be embarrassing for the research subject. 1.7 The following personal information is considered particularly sensitive: 1.7.1 Religious or philosophical beliefs; 1.7.2 race or ethnic origin; 1.7.3 trade union membership; 1.7.4 political persuasion; 1.7.5 health and health related documentation such as medical scheme documentation; 1.7.6 sex life; 1.7.7 biometric information; 1.7.8 criminal behaviour; 1.7.9 personal information of children under the age of 18; 1.7.10 financial information such as banking details, details relating to financial products such as insurance, pension funds or other investments.

	1.8	You may make use of this type of information, but must take extra care to ensure that you comply with the rest of the rules in this document.
2 COMMITMENT TO ETHICAL AND LEGAL RESEARCH PRACTICES		
You must commit to the use of ethical and legal research practices.	2.1	You must obtain ethical clearance before commencing with this study.
	2.2	You commit to only employing ethical and legal research practices.
You must protect the privacy of your research subjects.	2.3	You undertake to protect the privacy of the research subjects throughout the project.
3 RESEARCH SUBJECT PARTICIPATION		
Personal information of identifiable research subjects must not be used without their consent.	3.1	Unless you have obtained a specific exemption for your research project, consent must be obtained in writing from the research subject, before their personal information is gathered.
Research subjects must be able to withdraw from the research project.	3.2	Research subjects must always be able to withdraw from the research project (without any negative consequences) and to insist that you destroy their personal information.
Consent must be specific and informed.	3.3	Unless you have obtained a specific exemption for your research project, the consent must be specific and informed. Before giving consent, the research subject must be informed in writing of:
	3.3.1	The purpose of the research,
	3.3.2	what personal information about them will be collected (particularly sensitive personal information),
	3.3.3	how the personal information will be collected (if not directly from them),
	3.3.4	the specific purposes for which the personal information will be used,
	3.3.5	what participation will entail (i.e. what the research subject will have to do),
	3.3.6	whether the supply of the personal information is voluntary or mandatory for purposes of the research project,
	3.3.7	who the personal information will be shared with,

	3.3.8 how the personal information will be published, 3.3.9 the risks to participation (if any), 3.3.10 their rights to access, correct or object to the use of their personal information, 3.3.11 their right to withdraw from the research project, and 3.3.12 how these rights can be exercised.
Consent must be voluntary.	3.4 Participation in the research project must always be voluntary. You must never pressure or coerce research subjects into participating and persons who choose not to participate must not be penalised.
Using the personal information of children?	3.5 A child is anybody under the age of 18. 3.6 Unless you have obtained a specific exemption in writing for your research project, you must obtain 3.6.1 the consent of the child's parent or guardian, and 3.6.2 if the child is over the age of 7, the assent of the child, before collecting the child's information.
Research subjects have a right to access.	3.7 Research subjects have the right to access their personal information, obtain confirmation of what information is in your possession and who had access to the information. It is strongly recommended that you keep detailed records of access to the information.
Research subjects have a right to object.	3.8 Research subjects have the right to object to the use of their personal information. 3.9 Once they have objected, you are not permitted to use the personal information until the dispute has been resolved.
4 COLLECTING PERSONAL INFORMATION	
Only collect what is necessary.	4.1 You must not collect unnecessary or irrelevant personal information from research subjects.
Only collect accurate personal information.	4.2 You have an obligation to ensure that the personal information you collect is accurate. Particularly when you are collecting it from a source other than the research subject. 4.3 If you have any reason to doubt the quality of the personal information you must

	verify or validate the personal information before you use it.
5 USING PERSONAL INFORMATION	
Only use the personal information for the purpose for which you collected it.	5.1 Only use the personal information for the purpose for which you collected it. 5.2 If your research project requires you to use the personal information for a materially different purpose than the one communicated to the research subject, you must inform the research subjects and Stellenbosch University of this and give participants the option to withdraw from the research project.
Be careful when you share personal information.	5.3 Never share personal information with third parties without making sure that they will also follow these rules. 5.4 Always conclude a non-disclosure agreement with the third parties. 5.5 Ensure that you transfer the personal information securely.
Personal information must be anonymous whenever possible.	5.6 If the research subject's identity is not relevant for the aims of the research project, the personal information must not be identifiable. In other words, the personal information must be anonymous (de-identified).
Pseudonyms must be used whenever possible.	5.7 If the research subject's identity is relevant for the aims of the research project or is required to co-ordinate, for example, interviews, names and other identifiers such as ID or student numbers must be collected and stored separately from the rest of the research data and research publications. In other words, only you must be able to identify the research subject.
Publication of research	5.8 The identity of your research subjects should not be revealed in any publication. 5.9 In the event that your research project requires that the identity of your research subjects must be revealed, you must apply for an exemption from this rule.
6 SECURING PERSONAL INFORMATION	
You are responsible for the confidentiality and security of the personal information	6.1 Information must always be handled in the strictest confidence. 6.2 You must ensure the integrity and security of the information in your possession or under your control by taking appropriate and reasonable technical and organisational measures to prevent: 6.2.1 Loss of, damage to or unauthorised destruction of information; and

	6.2.2 unlawful access to or processing of information. 6.3 This means that you must take reasonable measures to: 6.3.1 Identify all reasonably foreseeable internal and external risks to personal information in your possession or under your control; 6.3.2 establish and maintain appropriate safeguards against the risks identified; 6.3.3 regularly verify that the safeguards are effectively implemented; and 6.3.4 ensure that the safeguards are continually updated in response to new risks or deficiencies in previously implemented safeguards.
Sensitive personal information requires extra care.	6.4 You will be expected to implement additional controls in order to secure sensitive personal information.
Are you sending any personal information overseas?	6.5 If you are sending personal information overseas, you have to make sure that: 6.5.1 The information will be protected by the laws of that country; 6.5.2 the company or institution to who you are sending have agreed to keep the information confidential, secure and to not use it for any other purpose; or 6.5.3 get the specific and informed consent of the research subject to send the information to a country which does not have data protection laws.
Be careful when you use cloud storage.	6.6 Be careful when storing personal information in a cloud. Many clouds are hosted on servers outside of South Africa in countries that do not protect personal information to the same extent as South Africa. The primary example of this is the United States. 6.7 It is strongly recommended that you use hosting companies who house their servers in South Africa. 6.8 If this is not possible, you must ensure that the hosting company agrees to protect the personal information to the same extent as South Africa.
7 RETENTION AND DESTRUCTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION	
You are not entitled to retain personal information when you no longer need it for the purposes of the research project.	7.1 Personal information must not be retained beyond the purpose of the research project, unless you have a legal or other justification for retaining the information.

If personal information is retained, you must make sure it remains confidential.	7.2 If you do need to retain the personal information, you must assess whether: 7.2.1 The records can be de-identified; and/or whether 7.2.2 you have to keep all the personal information. 7.3 You must ensure that the personal information which you retain remains confidential, secure and is only used for the purposes for which it was collected.
8 INFORMATION BREACH PROCEDURE	
In the event of an information breach you must notify us immediately.	8.1 If there are reasonable grounds to believe that the personal information in your possession or under your control has been accessed by any unauthorised person or has been disclosed, you must notify us immediately. 8.2 We will notify the research subjects in order to enable them to take measures to contain the impact of the breach.
This is the procedure you must follow.	8.3 You must follow the following procedure: 8.3.1 Contact the Division for Institutional Research and Planning at 021 808 9385 and permission@sun.ac.za; 8.3.2 you will then be required to complete the information breach report form which is attached as Annexure A. 8.4 You are required to inform us of a information breach within 24 hours. Ensure that you have access to the required information.
9 MONITORING	
You may be audited.	9.1 We reserve the right to audit your research practices to assess whether you are complying with this agreement. 9.2 You are required to give your full co-operation during the auditing process. 9.3 We may also request to review: 9.3.1 Forms (or other information gathering methods) and notifications to research subjects, as referred to in clause 3; 9.3.2 non-disclosure agreements with third parties with whom the personal information is being shared, as referred to in clause 5.4; 9.3.3 agreements with foreign companies or institutes with whom the personal

	information is being shared, as referred to in clause 6.5.
10 CHANGES TO RESEARCH	
You need to notify us if any aspect of your collection or use of personal information changes.	10.1 You must notify us in writing if any aspect of your collection or use of personal information changes (e.g. such as your research methodology, recruitment strategy or the purpose for which you use the research). 10.2 We may review and require amendments to the proposed changes to ensure compliance with this agreement. 10.3 The notification must be sent to permission@sun.ac.za.
11 CONSEQUENCES OF BREACH	
What are the consequences of breaching this agreement?	11.1 If you do not comply with this agreement, we may take disciplinary action or report such a breach to your home institute. 11.2 You may be found guilty of research misconduct and may be censured in accordance with Stellenbosch University or your home institute's disciplinary code.
You may have to compensate us in the event of any legal action.	11.3 Non-compliance with this agreement could also lead to claims against Stellenbosch University in terms of POPI and/or other laws. 11.4 Unless you are employed by or studying at Stellenbosch University, you indemnify Stellenbosch University against any claims (including all legal fees) from research subjects or any regulatory authority which are the result of your research project. You may also be held liable for the harm to our reputation should there be an information breach as a result of your non-compliance with this agreement.
12 CONTACT US	
Please contact us if you have any questions.	Should you have any questions relating to this agreement you should contact permission@sun.ac.za.

Annexure 'A'

Instruction:

Please send this Notice to permission@sun.ac.za. If you have any difficulty completing the Notice, please contact the Division for Institutional Research and Planning at 021 808 9385. You must confirm that the Notice was received.

NOTIFICATION OF INFORMATION BREACH

Name of Researcher: _____

Name of Research Project: _____

Service Desk ID: _____

A security breach happens when you know (or you **reasonably believe)** that there has been:

(a) loss of Personal Information ("PI")
(b) damage to PI
(c) unauthorised destruction of PI
(d) unauthorised access to PI
(e) unauthorised processing of PI

Date and time of security breach:	
Brief description of the security breach (what was lost and how). Please identify the equipment, software and/or physical premises and whether it is by hacking, lost device, public disclosure (email), theft or other means:	
Name of the person/s responsible for the security breach (if known):	
Is the security breach ongoing?	
Describe the steps taken to contain the security breach:	
What steps are being taken to investigate the cause of breach?	

Central University of Technology, Free State

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

MR J LOUW 13.12.2021

PERMISSION FOR MR J LOUW TO CONDUCT HIS RESEARCH AT CUT ENTITLED "ASSESSING THE ROLE OF TRUST IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND WORK ENGAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES"

Dear Mr. Louw

This is to confirm that you have been granted permission to conduct research project at the Central University of Technology for your MBA project entitled "Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in South African universities"

The conditions of the conditional permission are:

- The research will not interrupt any of the official activities at The Central University of Technology;
- You will supply us with the copy of your report;
- The cost of all related activities will be covered by yourself;
- Recruitment of participants is the sole responsibility of yourself;
- Voluntary nature of the potential participants decision to consent to participate should be strictly observed;
- You should not disclose a potential participant's decision to participate or otherwise to any other party;
- Permission does not compel, in any sense, participation of staff members or students in your research.

Acting Senior Director: Institutional Planning and Quality Enhancement

Prof A Szubarga

APPENDIX F: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

Language Editor's Declaration

Language Matters Pty Ltd
info@languagematters.co.za
082 920 2991
www.languagematters.co.za

Language editing – Translation – Transcription – Simultaneous interpreting

info@languagematters.co.za
156 O R Tambo Street
Miederpark
Potchefstroom
2531

This document certifies that the manuscript/title listed below has been edited, within reasonable, ethical and professional limits, for syntax, grammar, spelling, punctuation and specific stylistic requirements of the English language by one or more qualified/accredited language practitioner(s) at Language Matters. The editor's revisions and comments serve as recommendations; the overall quality of the final manuscript's contents remains the responsibility of the client/author. The language editor does not accept responsibility for any changes made to the manuscript after the issuing of this declaration.

Manuscript title:	Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in selected South African universities
Author(s):	J Louw
Date Issued:	8 November 2022
Issued by:	BGS Language Matters and Media Services Pty Ltd.

APPENDIX G: ACCEPTANCE OF COMPETITIVE PAPER

International Business Conference (IBC)
NWU Business School
Private Bag X6001
North-West University Potchefstroom Campus
Potchefstroom
2520
Tel: + 27 (0) 18 299 1411
Fax: + 27 (0) 18 299 1416
E-Mail: ib-conference@nwu.ac.za

Thursday, 18 August 2022

Dear authors Janico Louw & Leon Jackson

Your Competitive Paper, **CP102**: **Assessing the role of trust in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement of academic staff in South African universities** has been accepted by the conference Research Committee after their perusal of the referees' reports of the review process.

Your presentation and research will be a key component to the success of this conference. We want to thank you in advance for your contribution to the success of this event.

You will have 15 minutes for your presentation plus five minutes for questions and discussion. The programme for the conference will be finalised early in September and will be posted on the conference website before the conference (www.ibc-conference.com). Since the programme is tightly scheduled, we are asking speakers to stay within their allocated time.

The **registration fees** amount to **R6,950** (International fees: US $500)

Please register by:

1. Completing the registration form on the conference website: https://ibc-conference.com/2022-ibc/fees-registration/

2. Paying the registration fee into the designated account, using your name as the reference.
4. E-mailing proof of payment to Mrs Antoinette Bisschoff at ib-conference@nwu.ac.za
5. Formal invoice will be generated on receipt of registration

Payment of conference fees

The conference registration fee is to be deposited at ABSA, taking into account the following very important details:

Bank: ABSA
Branch code: 632 005
Account name: International Business Conference
Account type: Cheque Account
Swift code: ABSAZAJJ
Account number: 40 928 163 60
Reference: Your name and surname **(most important)**

The conference is a contact face-to-face conference. There will not be online facilities to deliver a paper remotely.

Kind regards

Mrs Antoinette Bisschoff
(On behalf of the Conference Chair: **Prof Geoff Goldman**)