

## Key Success Factors in Managing Morale in a Business Administration Environment: A South African Perspective

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**ABSTRACT** The purpose of this exploratory research study was to investigate the challenges facing the management of morale in administrative environments. Inadequate understanding of the concept and its importance poses a threat to organizational success and even survival. The quantitative method was used for data collection. A structured questionnaire was designed as a measuring instrument to collect data. The target population comprised employees, middle managers and top managers in the private sector as well as the local government. A total of 409 respondents participated in the survey. Descriptive statistics were used in this research study. It was found that job satisfaction, performance appraisals, leadership style and stress management training were key success factors in managing employee morale. The findings indicate that employee morale can enhance cooperation and motivation in an organization.

### INTRODUCTION

Very few employees are satisfied with their organization as a place of work (Rajan 2014). The majority spend between one to two-thirds of their time at the workplace (Zirwatul et al. 2014). Unappreciated employees produce less and contribute fewer ideas to an organization (Chambers and Honeycutt 2009). Zirwatul et al. (2014) state that satisfaction in the working environment is important to employees' well-being and morale.

The importance of managing morale has been a primary focus and managers clearly underestimate its importance. Effective management of morale poses a challenge to South African organizations and managers dare not ignore this challenge (Harrison 2007). Employees in the private sector and metropolitan municipalities in South Africa experience morale problems, but few employers have found ways to resolve these problems. Research indicates that employees need to believe that their efforts create a positive social change and that managers should appreciate the value of their employees' inputs (Saager et al. 2012). Maintaining high employee morale should be a priority for every manager. Managers who keep their employees involved, engaged and connected will ultimately improve their morale. The well-being of employees affects an organization's performance and productivity. Improving the employees' sense of well-

being will increase their morale and consequently their performance (Cotton and Hart 2003).

This study is considered timely and relevant because little attention is being paid to the challenges and difficulties encountered in managing employee morale successfully. The study was carried out at a time when management realized that the morale of South African employees was a matter for concern. Since little research had been done in South Africa in this field, the researcher believed that the study's findings would substantiate greater attention to employee morale in the corporate world. At the same time, valuable new knowledge would become available in the subject field. This study was the first of its kind in South Africa and will add value to the business sector. The study would also contribute to the limited practical knowledge pertaining to morale in the South African business sector. The research would establish whether key factors such as job satisfaction, performance appraisal, leadership styles and employee stress have an impact in the working context as essential stimulators of improved employee morale.

The paper outlines the research objectives, the literature pertaining to the problem, and the particular method adopted for the study. The findings and their discussion present the research question. A synthesizing discussion subsequently addresses the research question, followed by concluding thoughts.

### Research Objectives

In light of the above, the objective of the study was to investigate key success factors relevant to managing morale in administrative environments, both in the private and local government sectors. The four specific factors pertaining to this study focused on the importance of job satisfaction, performance appraisal, leadership style, and the effect of stress on employee morale.

### Literature Review

Many organizations today are bedeviled by underperformance and inefficient achievement of their organizational goals (Mustapha and Utomi 2014). Globalization and competition in the business world have forced organizations to seek new and sustainable means in the face of fierce competition to succeed in their operations (Tudu and Pathak 2014). Ever since the Industrial Revolution (1760-1820), when people first began to work in large factories and office buildings, there have been managers concerned with the wellbeing of their subordinates. This concern was grounded in employee morale. Many early managers believed that treating their workers more humanely would increase their productivity. After the Industrial Revolution, however, employees were considered just another instrument in the production of goods and services. Subsequent research emphasized the importance of worker satisfaction as a key ingredient of employee morale (Zirwatul et al. 2014). The well-known Hawthorne studies conducted from 1924 to 1932 by Elton Mayo, a professor in industrial relations, demonstrated the overwhelming importance of social factors for behavior in the workplace, stating that productivity would improve if management succeeded in managing employee morale. The morale and productivity of employees could be significantly boosted when managers became more sensitive to their social needs (Newell 2002). For the purposes of this study, the importance of employee morale is discussed, as are factors that influence employee morale.

### Importance of Employee Morale

Employee morale plays a vital role in an organization's success. Employee morale refers to

satisfaction in the workplace and a consequent desire to attain the organization's objectives. Morale, which can range from very high to very low, is the degree of enthusiasm and the willingness of an organization's employees to pull together to achieve a common goal (Nagaraja 2007). A key factor to ensure positive employee morale in the working environment is for managers to communicate with their employees (Mustapha and Utomi 2014). Current employees in the South African economy experience low morale coupled with negative feelings (Steyn 2011).

A high morale is based on positive feelings among employees, for example enthusiasm, a desire to obey orders, and willingness to cooperate with co-workers. The following are advantages of high employee morale: willing cooperation to attain the organization's objectives, loyalty to the organization and its leadership, sound superior and subordinate relations, employees who are interested in their jobs and in their organization, who are proud of their organization, willing to build and work in teams, and thus feel empowered (Sageer et al. 2012).

A low morale is based on negative feelings among employees, for example, dissatisfaction with working conditions and therefore, discouragement. Low employee morale affects productivity, and the consequences include high rates of absenteeism and labor turnover, a decrease in work quality, a decrease in productivity, an excessive number of complaints and grievances, frustration and a lack of discipline (Nagaraja 2007; Mustapha and Utomi 2014). Consistent low morale destroys employee commitment, affects the organization's product or service, and alienates customers. Poor morale is contagious; it might begin with one dissatisfied employee and expand into a general malaise, or spread from one department to another. Eventually the entire organization will suffer (Chambers and Honeycutt 2009; Bach and Edwards 2013).

The literature on morale in the workplace reveals that employees are influenced by job satisfaction, performance appraisals, leadership styles and work stress. The importance of each factor and its impact on employee morale is discussed below.

### Job Satisfaction

Over the past four decades, job satisfaction has generated considerable interest in research

communities. The research sometimes produced conflicting findings and the influence of job satisfaction on a variety of factors is still widely debated. Minavand et al. (2013) defines job satisfaction as an employee's attitude to his or her work and the working environment. The drive to understand and explain job satisfaction for utilitarian reasons concentrates on reduced absenteeism, low staff turnover and increased productivity, and for humanitarian reasons on the health and well-being of workers (Taylor and Westover 2009).

In this age of modern technology and growing transformation in organizational cultures, job satisfaction has become a significant component of management strategies (Ellickson and Logsdon 2001). In fact, it has a vital role to play in modern organizational management policies (Halepota and Irani 2010). We live in a global economy, and work continues to be an essential part of our everyday lives. Employees naturally have attitudes to or viewpoints about many aspects of their jobs, their careers, and their organizations. However, from the perspectives of both research and practice, the most important employee attitude in the workplace is job satisfaction (Zirwatul et al. 2014). Zhang et al. (2014) define job satisfaction as a positive emotional state based on an appraisal of one's job or job experience (Saari and Judge 2004).

Job satisfaction is a major management issue in the private sector as well as in metropolitan municipalities in South Africa. McCoy et al. (2013) state that employee morale will increase if the relationships between employees and management are positive. Satisfied workers have positive perceptions of and attitudes to their organizations and are consequently more productive. The success of every organization therefore depends on the satisfaction, and therefore the happiness, of its workforce. Many studies have found that satisfied employees become more productive, efficient and committed to their organizations (Upadhyay and Gupta 2012; Waite et al. 2014).

On the other hand, dissatisfied workers means absenteeism and unproductive employee turnover (Spence 2013). Job satisfaction is related to an employee's perceptions and evaluations of his or her job, and is affected by needs, circumstances, and expectations. Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction is an emotional response to a job situation and is determined by how well outcomes meet or exceed expectations (Chien 2013). Employees who are treated fairly and suit-

ably compensated develop a positive attitude to their jobs, their managers and their colleagues (Din et al. 2010). In short, a relationship grows (Zareen 2013) which is also directly associated with customer loyalty. Maintaining a quality workforce would therefore be ideal to sustain a solid reputation and loyal customer base (Lee and Way 2010).

Din et al. (2010) have found that morale, career advancement, supervision, promotion and working conditions, all contribute to job satisfaction. Organizations, which are able to maintain sound social and working relationships, sustain performance and job satisfaction, would be positively impacted. A satisfied workforce is critical to attracting and retaining well-qualified personnel (Pushpakumari 2008; Chan 2013). Job characteristics (routine, autonomy and feedback), the defining characteristics of the work role (role conflict and role ambiguity), and the characteristics of the working environment (leadership, stress, advancement opportunities and participation) remain of the utmost importance to job satisfaction (Rad and Yarmohammadian 2006; Nibakuze 2013).

It is therefore evident that job satisfaction boosts morale, instills confidence, and provides employees with the courage to learn more about their working environment.

### **Performance Appraisals**

A performance appraisal is a formal management tool to evaluate the quality of an employee's performance. This appraisal is usually prepared by the employee's immediate supervisor (Grote 2002; Sholihaha and Sutrisno 2014). Sepcot (2011) believes that the performance appraisal reflects the objectives that have been accomplished and the contributions of the employee.

A fundamental aspect of employee recognition is its impact on improving job performance. A performance appraisal is a powerful tool in achieving strategic goals and focusing the energy of organizational members on achieving a mission and living up to the organization's vision and values (King and Demarie 2014). All employees should be made aware of the direct connection between their performance and achieving the organization's goals (Grote 2002).

Research by Dr. Gerald Graham of Wichita State University found that employees appreciated personalized instant recognition from their direct supervisors. In this particular study, employees perceived that manager-initiated rewards

for performance were least common, and that organization-initiated rewards for employee presence were most common. In other words, the technique that has the greatest motivational impact is practiced the least, despite it being easier and less expensive (Nelson 2005). A survey by the International Association of Administrative Professionals (Nelson 2005) revealed that as many as thirty percent of employees would be happy with a simple letter of appreciation from their managers. Only seven percent of the respondents reported having ever received such a letter.

Dattner (2010) and Bussin (2013) specified that a well-designed performance appraisal system included the following: recognizing and recording the employee's contributions, giving employees useful feedback on their performance, ensuring a more effective and equitable reward system, developing the professional capabilities of employees, communicating the organization's values and culture, and ensuring evidence-based, legally defensible personnel decisions. Another critical criterion of valid measurements is ensuring that appraisal items actually measured the intended or target behavior. If not, the system would encourage unacceptable work behaviors and have unintended and frequently negative outcomes. The most frequently used appraisal criteria are traits, behaviors, and task outcomes (McClintic 2006).

Consequently recognition is of the utmost importance, and employees increasingly believe that their job satisfaction depends on acknowledged performance (Nelson 2005). Sound management of the appraisal process improves service delivery and provides three important measurements: information delivery, performance oversight, and performance effectiveness. These measurements promote understanding, managing and improving the organizational environment.

Performance appraisals coordinate the performance of managers, staff, customers and suppliers in an integrated environment (Riverside 2011). West (2010) argues that sound management of the performance appraisal process also improves employee morale, ensures optimal team and individual contributions, and guarantees goal achievement. Moreover, the time required to formulate strategic changes and optimize motivational plans is reduced, and transparency is increased (Nel 2013).

### **Relationship between Leadership Style and Employee Morale**

The relationship between an organization's leadership style and its employees' morale is crucial. Organizations that fail to train future leaders, face a number of challenges (Monroe 2013). Ivancevich et al. (2014) state that leadership development encourages others to simplify the achievement of defined goals.

Different leadership styles may have either a positive or a negative correlation with organizational performance. The leadership style of administrative managers plays a vital role in an organization's overall operational performance (Wang et al. 2010).

Twenty-first century society yearns for a leadership of possibility, based more on hope, aspirations and innovation than on replication of historical patterns. Today's leaders recognize that they cannot create financially successful organizations, or equitable and sustainably peaceful ones by repeating historical approaches to business (Abbas and Yaqoob 2009). They have to inspire people to move from a current reality to a more desirable future. Traditional managerial frameworks primarily focused on motivation (Adler 2010), even if this is not true of South African organizations.

Leadership is a process of social influence whereby leaders seek voluntary participation of their subordinates in an effort to realize organizational goals. This social influence involves good performance and developing shared values, a shared vision and efficiency (Paterson 2013). Effective leadership is the extent to which a leader continually and progressively leads and directs his or her followers to a destination, which had been defined and accepted by the whole group (Omolayo 2007). McColl-Kennedy and Anderson (2002) write that although there has been reluctance to acknowledge the existence of emotions in a work setting, it has become clear that employees are exposed to situations that elicit emotions that can influence their feelings, attitudes and behaviors. Emotions appear to play a significant role in employees' enthusiasm for their work. Leaders who understand human emotions seem able to motivate their subordinates to work more effectively and efficiently. Employees who lose their enthusiasm for work no longer invest the same effort and it becomes increasingly difficult to achieve the organization's objectives (Cunningham 2014).

Developing valued employees is critical during periods of economic uncertainty. If organizations are to remain productive during a down cycle, their leaders must be committed to retaining the talent that is needed for the present and the future. Mattone and Xavier (2013) believe that leaders should plan for the future and compare goals with the current situation in order to design realistically attainable plans. This planning effort should encompass recognition and development of emerging leaders (Kaye 2010).

An organization's leadership style is one of the most important factors pertaining to employee morale (Smallwood and Ulrich 2010). Successful goal achievement depends on an organization's managers and their leadership style. This is the ability of a manager to persuade subordinates to invest maximum effort. This ability is obviously related to the extent of the manager's respect for his or her subordinates. It operates honestly and with integrity, promotes efficiency, and maintains open lines of communication between employees and their direct managers (Rad and Yarmohammadian 2006). Training sessions for communication skills, listening skills, motivation and genuine support, play an important role in improving organizational management performance (Abbas and Yaqoob 2009; Erasmus et al. 2014).

Organizational managers can effect change by charisma, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation and motivating their subordinates. Doing so would improve employee morale beyond expectations (Mattone and Xavier 2013). Enhanced capacity for individual and organizational transformation must be accompanied by moral responsibility because powerful social and institutional cultures are created, and if not handled responsibly could become either liberating or oppressive (Hay 2010). Organizations that fail to organize their future leaders face challenges in managing the morale of their employees (Monroe 2013).

### **The Effects of Work Stress**

Highly complex and stressful workplaces present specific challenges to organizational leaders in order to manage the workforce and maintain employee commitment and morale (Tudu and Pathak 2014). Hon et al. (2013) warn that work-related stress could damage morale and cause employees to become disloyal.

Newell (2002) defines work stress as a situation in which employees face a perceived threat, which they feel unable to cope with. Stress in the workplace has either psychological or physiological effects, or a combination of both. Prolonged strain causes illness, which is debilitating for the individual, and has serious consequences for employee morale. Work stress is ascribed to tension, discomfort, uncertainty, indecisiveness and distress due to social and physical circumstances. The availability of social support, on as well as off the job, is a vital determinant of work stress. Lyons and Schneider (2009) describe the most common causes of work stress as role ambiguity, an unpleasant working environment, too little participation in decision-making, conflict with other employees, and insufficient support from co-workers.

Stress is accompanied by a multitude of factors, some of which are elements of a particular situation while others are individual reactions to stressful situations. In view of their superior visioning and potential ability to reframe stressful situations into opportunities, it is expected of managers to enhance their subordinates' performance (Lyons and Schneider 2009). In today's working environment, it is essential for employers to develop stress management strategies for their employees. Keeping stress at bay will ensure a high morale and the overall wellbeing of employees (Tudu and Pathak 2014).

The primary objective of this study was to investigate key success factors relevant to managing morale in administrative environments. It is evident from the literature that job satisfaction, performance appraisals, leadership styles and work stress, all have a huge impact on morale in the modern working environment. Employees who are satisfied with their employers would be willing to put in extra effort. Performance appraisal systems offer an essential tool in addressing morale issues in order to reinforce excellence. It also became evident that leadership style has an impact on morale and job satisfaction, and therefore commitment and productivity. According to the literature, stress gives rise to behavioral changes (reduced effectiveness and inadequate goal achievement). It can be stated unequivocally that morale is a key performance area. The South Africa business sector will add value by managing its employees better.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Rationale

This paper examined data from both the private sector and metropolitan municipalities in South Africa to determine perceptions on morale in the workplace. Such information would relate to factors that contributed to a positive morale in order for organizations to be more productive and efficient.

### Design

A quantitative research design was used to identify how employees perceived morale in their places of work. Exploratory research involving descriptive statistics was used in this study.

### Instrument Design

A self-structured questionnaire was developed to ascertain the demographics of the respondents and to assist in identifying potential problems related to morale management in the South African private sector and metropolitan municipalities.

The questionnaire was divided into two main categories, namely a biographical section (A), and a section that covered the management of morale in the workplace (B). Section A contained demographic questions (age, gender, and years of service at current organization). Section B covered perceptions of morale in the workplace, job satisfaction, performance appraisals, leadership styles and work stress.

The questionnaire provided derivatives to each question, and the respondents had to select the applicable answer. The questionnaire consisted of closed questions that were self-explanatory and added to the user-friendliness of the instrument. However, as closed questions required either a "Yes" or "No" answer, it does not always provide satisfactory information. Questions were based on a five-point Likert scale, with the variations-Strongly agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

The questions in the questionnaire focused on the importance of morale, job satisfaction, performance appraisals, leadership style and work stress. In order to eliminate misunderstandings, a pilot study was conducted to check for typographical errors and to identify possible

ambiguities. This helped compile a clear set of questions. A covering letter accompanied the questionnaire, explaining the need for and the purpose of the research. The questions in the self-structured questionnaire originated from a literature study.

### Target Population

The target population comprised three unquantifiable groups that represented employees, middle managers and top managers in both the private sector and in metropolitan municipalities (local authorities) in South Africa. In this research the private sector included all companies, organizations and institutions whose primary goal was to produce goods or services to be sold to the general public at an economically significant price (Grobelaar 2006). A metropolitan municipality (the public sector) in South Africa renders all the functions of local government to a city or metropolis. South Africa has eight such metropolitan municipalities: Buffalo City, City of Cape Town, City of Johannesburg, City of Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, eThekweni, Mangaung and Nelson Mandela Bay.

### Data Collection

Since the population in the private sector and the metropolitan municipalities was too large to include in the investigation, purposive sampling was used to collect data. After consultation with contact persons at the metropolitan municipalities, permission was obtained to distribute the questionnaire. An internal memorandum was circulated, explaining that the researcher has obtained approval to conduct research, describing the purpose of the study, and encouraging staff members to support the envisaged research. The questionnaire was distributed via the municipal intranet.

The researcher approached a professional body for office administrators, namely the Association for Office Professionals of South Africa (OPSA), for information. A formal letter requesting permission to conduct research and to include the questionnaire in OPSA's weekly electronic newsletter was sent to the editor. Permission was granted, and a brief explanation of the purpose of the research accompanied the questionnaire. The researcher transferred the questionnaire from hard copy to electronic format as

a URL-embedded text message. Electronic feedback was required from the respondents by clicking on the hypertext link to the Web browser that presented the Web-based questionnaire. The respondents completed and submitted the completed questionnaires electronically. A total of 409 completed questionnaires was received.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and a respondent's willingness to click through the electronic questionnaire served as his or her tacit consent to participate in the research. The respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. No vulnerable populations had been involved in this study.

### Data Analysis

The services of a Tshwane University of Technology statistician were acquired. Since the study included both private and local government sectors, the two sectors were compared. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Data obtained from the questionnaire were subjected to preliminary preparation before analysis. Data preparation included data editing, coding and statistical adjustment of the data. Upon receipt of the questionnaire, each question was cleaned to identify omissions, ambiguities and errors in the responses. A statistical software program, Stata Statistical Software (StataCorp 2007), Release 10, TXStataCorp LP was used to analyze the data. The data was validated by statistical software and descriptive statistics, and Chronbach's alpha was used to test for internal consistency.

Pearson's chi-square test was used to test for associations between two categorical variables (Babbie 2013). The probability value (p-value) measured statistical significance, which automatically incorporated the chi-square values. The results were considered significant if the p-value was below 0.05 as this value is acceptable at a ninety-five percent confidence interval ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are discussed against the background from the literature and information gathered in the course of the empirical investigation. Pertinent questions from the questionnaire are repeated. The discussion corresponds with key success factors listed in the

literature review that are relevant to managing morale in the workplace (that is, job satisfaction, performance appraisals, leadership styles and work stress).

### *Question 7: In which sector are you employed?*

A total of fifty-four percent of the respondents were employed in local government, and forty-six percent were employed in the private sector. This represented a fairly equal distribution of respondents in terms of their places of work.

### *Question 8: How would you rate the morale of employees at your place of work?*

A significant 64.04 percent of the respondents indicated that employee morale was low due to negative attitudes to and dissatisfaction with the workplace. A minority of 35.96 percent reported a high morale coupled with positive experiences and enthusiasm. These results are serious because employee morale plays a vital role in any organization's success and low employee morale affects productivity and commitment.

### *Question 9: Private sector versus local government and employee morale*

A majority of eighty percent of private sector respondents reported a high morale. On the other hand, 71.12 percent of the respondents in local government experienced a low morale. The proportion of private sector to local government is significantly different ( $p\text{-value} = 0.001$ ). A very high percentage of local government respondents reported low morale. This situation should be of serious concern for local government management.

### *Question 10: I am satisfied with my organization as a place of work (job satisfaction)*

Only 36.99 percent of the respondents selected "Sometimes", 33.9 percent selected "Often", and 18.15 percent of the respondents chose "Very often". These percentages are very small. Job satisfaction is crucial because satisfied employees are more efficient and committed to their organizations. On the other hand, absenteeism and high employee turnover are consequences of poor morale among workers.

***Question 11: Private sector versus local government and job satisfaction***

It is evident from the results that few respondents in local government experienced job satisfaction. Respondents in the private sector were more satisfied (p-value = 0.001). A majority of 61.62 percent of private sector respondents selected "Often" in reply to Question 11, whereas 65.74 percent in local government selected "Sometimes". This reflects a significant difference between private and public sector employees and their job satisfaction. Research has shown that organizations are social systems in which human resources is the most important factor in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. Dissatisfied employees in the South African metropolitan municipalities indicate an enormous challenge that should be of serious concern to government managers.

***Question 12: Employee morale versus job satisfaction***

The aim of this cross-tabulation question was to determine whether morale was associated with employee job satisfaction. It is evident from the results that respondents who were "Very often" satisfied with their organization as a place of work, had a high morale (43.81%), whereas those who were "Sometimes" satisfied experienced a low morale (50.80%). There is a significant difference between job satisfaction and morale (p-value = 0.001), and job satisfaction has an impact on the morale of employees.

***Question 15: The relationship between managers and employees and job satisfaction***

A significant eighty-eight percent of the respondents, "Strongly agreed" and "Agreed" that their relationships with their managers contributed to their job satisfaction. Employees who enjoyed a supportive relationship with their immediate supervisors experienced greater job satisfaction than those who did not.

***Question 16: Private sector versus public sector and performance appraisals***

The results indicate that 48.2 percent employees from the private sector and 51.8 percent from

local government agreed that their organizations used performance appraisals for evaluation purposes. These results indicate no significant difference (p-value = 0.536) between utilizing performance appraisals in the private versus the public sectors. A clear concern, however, is that only about half of the organizations in both sectors measure the productivity of their employees.

***Question 17: Did your manager talk to you about your progress on the job during the past six months?***

A significant 52.05 percent of the respondents said that their managers never talked to them about progress. Research has found that employees prefer individual, instant recognition of and credit from their direct supervisors and that such recognition contributed significantly to their job satisfaction. Most employees value day-to-day recognition by their supervisors, peers and team members.

***Question 18: Private sector versus local government and discussing work progress during the past six months***

A majority of 60.58 percent of the respondents in the private sector had been interviewed about their work progress during the past six months. However, 64.47 percent in local government did not report any form of communication about their work progress. This raises a serious concern. It is evident from the results that there is a significant difference (p-value = 0.001) between respondents in the private sector and those in the public sector in terms of communication with management about work progress.

***Question 20: I regularly receive recognition or praise for doing my job efficiently***

The respondents had to select between "Yes" or "No" to indicate whether they were recognized or praised for working efficiently. A significant 54.79 percent indicated that they received no recognition or praise for working efficiently. This is a serious concern. It reflects negative attitudes that would encourage unsatisfactory work and produce unintended and frequently negative organizational outcomes.



***Question 22: Leadership style affects an employee's job satisfaction, commitment and productivity***

A very high percentage of the respondents, 97.95 percent, indicated that leadership style affects an employee's job satisfaction, commitment and productivity. The relationship between an organization's leadership style and its employees' performance is important. Different leadership styles may correlate either positively or negatively with employee morale.

***Question 23: My manager's leadership style meets my expectations***

The results indicate that 43.5 percent of the respondents were "Very often" and "Often" satisfied, and that 33.9 percent were "Sometimes" satisfied with their manager's leadership styles. These results confirm that training sessions (communication skills, listening skills, motivation, and employee support) play an important role in improving the performance of organizational managers.

***Question 24: Indicate to what extent you experience work stress***

The distribution between "Very often" (24.32%), "Often" (28.08%) and "Sometimes" (36.64%) is fairly equal. This means that a majority of 89.04 of the respondents experienced work stress. Organizations should be concerned, because prolonged work stress could cause health and wellness problems that are debilitating for individuals with serious morale consequences in the workplace.

***Question 25: Gender versus work stress***

A majority of 64.79 percent of the female respondents said they "Very often" experience work stress compared to 35.12 percent of the male respondents. The reason for this finding might be that women are under more pressure to balance a career and family, and therefore likely to experience more work stress than their male counterparts. In the modern culture, women are still expected to take care of young children and to manage their households. Although attitudes are changing, women still bear most of the household responsibilities. In view of complexities in

the modern working environment, stress release programs should be considered for both male and female employees. There is no significant difference (p-value = 0.199) between gender and work stress.

***Question 26: The most common causes of work stress***

The respondents had to "mark all applicable boxes", so that more than one option could be selected. Note that numerous answers could be given, each with its own variable. The results indicate that 25.62 percent of the respondents find insufficient participation in decision-making stressful. Another 24.54 percent indicated that an unpleasant working environment was a concern. Insufficient support from co-workers (2.69%), conflict with other employees (6.51%), and the threat of redundancy (10.65%) were other common causes of work stress. These results clearly indicate that work stress is caused by several factors, some of which are elements of a particular situation, whereas others are individual characteristics in reaction to stressful situations.

***Question 28: Does your organization offer initiatives like stress management and programs to reduce work stress?***

A significant 65.75 percent of the respondents indicated that their organizations offered no initiatives to reduce work stress. This outcome strengthens the notion that support is a crucial determinant of work stress and morale.

***Question 29: Private sector versus local government and stress management training***

A significant 53.63 percent of the respondents from local government and 46.35 percent in the private sector indicated that their organizations did not offer initiatives for stress management. Although there is no significant difference between the two variables (p-value = 0.667), it is important to note that demands on employees are increasingly harsh. Organizations should consider their employees' well-being and offer stress management training.

## CONCLUSION

This study concluded that managing morale in both the private sector and metropolitan municipalities poses a challenge to South African

managers that cannot be ignored. Based on the findings of the quantitative questionnaire and backed by a thorough review of the relevant literature, the researcher clearly identified primary success factors (job satisfaction, performance appraisals, leadership style and work stress) related to managing morale.

Employee morale determines their productivity. Enthusiastic and motivated employees are committed to doing a job well. Understanding what matters to employees and ascertaining key aspects that affect the acceptability of their working environment improves morale.

It was evident from the results that a very small percentage of the respondents were satisfied with their organizations as places of work. Organizational success depends on efficient and effective performance of the organization's employees. A contented workforce is therefore indispensable for purposes of enhancing motivation and morale. An environment in which employees feel valued and respected is a bold step in terms of appropriate morale management and adaptation to change.

An essential tool in addressing the morale of employees is appraisal systems that reinforce excellence. Performance appraisals are frequently considered obstacles to effective performance management, especially when employees are not motivated by the feedback they receive. Constructive feedback will increase employee morale and improve individual and thus organizational performance.

The study results and the literature review indicated that leadership style affects employee morale, workplace cohesion, job satisfaction, commitment and productivity. Numerous ways are available to create an inclusive environment in which managers inspire their subordinates, create learning opportunities, and stimulate problem solving. Employees need the most effective blend of management, leadership skills and abilities to enhance their performance. The relationship between an organization's leadership style and its employee performance is a significant contributor to employee morale.

Stress is associated with pressure, tension and frustration. The majority of the respondents in this study experienced stress in their working environment. Stress gives rise to unwanted behavior changes (reduced effectiveness and inadequate achievement). Employees experience stress in situations that are subjectively per-

ceived as out of control, and their stress is characterized by feelings of powerlessness and an inability to cope. Peer support and supportive leadership are very important. In addition to the fact that most of the respondents experienced stress at work, their organizations also failed to offer training initiatives to reduce work stress. These findings support views that stress is a highly subjective phenomenon to the detriment of an organization.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are suggested to improve the morale of employees. Management should provide the necessary support and cooperation to enable employees to be satisfied with their places of work. Organizations should become more concerned about the contentment of their employees since satisfied employees are more productive. Employee performance should be recognized by formal appraisal systems. Managers should plan their business strategies based on recognizing the value of individual accomplishment. Employee morale is dependent on realistic expectations and a professional orientation to work. Different leadership styles can therefore improve job performance.

Appropriate training and development should be offered to managers to equip them with different leadership skills. Organizations and their managers should create a culture of trust. Managers earn trust and improve employee morale by being accessible. Stress management courses and training programs should be made available, aiming to reduce work stress among employees. The quality of an organization's performance would improve if managers remained on the alert for warning signs of poor morale. Timely recognition of such signs would prevent the deterioration of a healthy organization. Managers should be well informed about the importance of employee morale. An inadequate understanding of the concept, its importance and measurement could pose a threat to the organization's success and survival.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study included only metropolitan municipalities in the public sector. The results of the survey therefore cannot be generalized to the whole of the South African public sector.

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