



**Exploring Project Leadership Through Team Engagement and Cohesion at
Hillside Smelter**

By

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DECLARATION

I declare that the Field Study hereby submitted for the Masters in Business Administration at the UFS Business School, University of the Free State is my independent work and that I have not previously submitted this work, either as whole or in part, for a qualification at another university or at another faculty at this university.

I also hereby cede the copyright of this work to the University of the Free State.

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to identify leadership behaviours that enable project leaders to foster team cohesion and engagement among project teams. At Hillside, project leaders are expected to be knowledgeable about technical processes and skilled in their applications to achieve demanding deadlines, anticipate restrictions, overcome financial constraints, and ensure quality requirements.

A qualitative case study research design was therefore used, and structured interviews with current project leaders were conducted to learn more about their leadership behaviours that are critical for team performance, team cohesiveness, and team engagement. Participants in this study were project representatives from different departments that enabled project execution at the Hillside plant in Richards Bay, KwaZulu-Natal across various levels of leadership. The inquiry engaged 10 project team members through structured interviews. Key findings showed that planning and coordination, building a collaborative and supportive work environment, diversity management and interpersonal sensitivity were enablers of team cohesion and engagement in Hillside project teams. In contrast, limited resources and working in silos were identified as potential pitfalls to team cohesion and engagement. The adoption of practicable tools and procedures that improve the efficiency of the planning and coordination of teams was recommended. The second recommendation was for the organisation to cultivate a culture in which project team members actively acknowledge not only each other's contributions and needs but also those of their leaders and managers. The last recommendation is that project leaders prioritise effective communication strategy that promotes both personal and business interactions to facilitate ongoing cohesion and engagement efforts in Hillside smelter project teams.

Keywords: project team performance, team cohesion, engagement, leadership

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ABBREVIATIONS

CFT Cross-functional teams

PMI Project Management Institute

EI Emotional Intelligence

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the introduction of the study, the research aim, the research questions and objectives and the significance of the study.

Background of the Study

Aluminium smelters in the southern hemisphere play a significant role in regional economic development and global aluminium production. These facilities leverage the abundant availability of bauxite resources in countries such as Australia, Brazil, and New Zealand to extract aluminium through electrolysis processes (Gladman, 2019). As crucial components of the global aluminium supply chain, southern hemisphere smelters contribute to both local economies and international trade networks, meeting the demands of various industries worldwide (Wang & Chen, 2020). Moreover, these smelters often employ advanced technologies to enhance efficiency and minimise environmental impact, adhering to stringent regulatory standards (Norgate et al., 2019). Their strategic positioning in the southern hemisphere ensures proximity to bauxite sources and facilitates efficient distribution to global markets, particularly in Asia, further solidifying the region's significance in the aluminium industry (Humphreys et al., 2018).

Hillside aluminium smelter is an industrial complex that produces aluminium. It is among the largest producers of aluminium, with a production capacity of 720,000 tons of aluminium every year (Hillside Aluminium, 2023). The smelter was set up in the 90s to expand the production of aluminium to meet the growing global demand. The smelter operates smoothly with high performance, which can be attributed to the dedication and expertise of project teams. Project teams in the smelter comprise engineers, technicians, and specialists from different fields who collaborate to ensure the seamless production of aluminium in the smelter. These project teams are headed by project leaders who oversee the completion of the projects within specified times and ensure that deliverables align with the objective of the project teams.

However, some of the challenges that hinder project team success include lack of cohesion and low team engagement. Project teams are diverse and contain individuals

with different beliefs, communication styles, and work ethics, which creates conflicts among the team members. Another challenge that project teams face is the lack of effective project leadership. Project leaders at the smelter have demonstrated incompetence in promoting team engagement and team cohesion, which has significantly impacted the performance of the teams.

Most projects implemented at Hillside are of a manufacturing nature. The Hillside smelter is therefore a rather technical plant that requires the execution of various projects to maintain and sustain production. This requires highly technical personnel to lead such projects. Some of the tasks that make Hillside a technical smelter include potline operation and alumina handling (Hillside Aluminium, 2023). In potline operation, molten alumina is transformed into aluminium through electrolysis. Ensuring that optimal conditions are maintained throughout requires extensive understanding of the furnace technology and the electrochemical process. Similarly, alumina handling requires knowledge of handling the machinery to facilitate the transportation and storage of alumina and an understanding of the primary feedstock to facilitate uninterrupted operations.

The smelter handles complex aluminium smelting processes with complex machinery that requires a high level of technical expertise. Adherence to environmental regulations is a technical task that requires constant monitoring and optimisation of emission levels and waste management practices. Some of the technical expertise that project leaders are required to have include electrical engineering. The machinery at the smelter has a complex electrical infrastructure, such as power distribution, control systems, and automation (Hillside Aluminium, 2023). This demands expertise in electrical engineering to ensure safe and efficient operations. Mechanical equipment such as cranes and alumina handling machines require project leaders with a strong foundation in mechanical engineering.

Project-based work has become more prevalent in the 21st century, especially in industries such as construction, information technology, and biotechnology (Taherdoost & Kersharvasaleh, 2016). The use of project teams has become common in organisations, since team outcomes often outweigh total individual output (Schmidt, 2009). More complex and high-volume work requires teams to work collectively to ensure that project deliverables are met. Project teams are required to

complete the project within the correct timeframes, share responsibility, and bring different sets of complementary skills and talents together to achieve the objectives of the project (Schmidt, 2009). A project refers to a series of activities aimed at creating a unique product or service to be completed within specifications such as a starting date, closure dates, funding limits, and resources (Kerzner, 2015). Projects are unique and more organisations are using project teams to overcome problems on challenging tasks and to deliver their products and services (Schwalbe, 2009).

Project teams provide organisations with a more flexible and adaptive structure that can swiftly respond to the changing demands of the business landscape (Wu, 2022). Changes in technology affect how an organisation runs its operations; therefore, having project teams can enable organisations to navigate uncertainties and adapt to changes. Similarly, project teams comprise individuals with different skills and expertise, and this provides teams with a holistic approach to problem-solving (Carmeli et al., 2021). This dynamic environment encourages knowledge sharing and cross-functional learning, enhancing the overall skill set of the workforce. Organisations prefer to use project teams because they provide adaptability, agility, and a holistic approach to problem-solving, which improves the ability of the organisation to navigate challenges.

This accountability relationship lies in the fact that some team members are there only to provide specialist services, whereas others work on instructions provided to complete the project (Burke & Barron, 2007). The temporary nature of teams and the complex nature of these relationships owing to accountability, power, and responsiveness impose uncertainty on the project, making managing project teams more complicated. This requires influential project leaders who can manage, motivate, negotiate, network, and foster cohesion and engagement while ensuring that team members work towards a common goal and achieve the project's objectives.

For projects to succeed, meet their objectives and deliver both tangible and intangible benefits, there is a need for effective project leaders. Project leadership is a process by which a project leader directs, guides, and influences the behaviour and work of the project team towards accomplishing the project objectives (Kloppenborg, Shriberg, & Venkatraman, 2003). A large part of project leadership involves dealing with people relationships. As such, project leaders require skills to influence the team and have

vision, strategy, and determination to drive the project (Burke & Barron, 2007). Project leaders play a key role in unlocking the potential of project team members by empowering them during team projects and encouraging them to complete their tasks even when they are challenging. Similarly, project leaders can support team members by fostering networking among the team and by ensuring team members collaborate and exchange knowledge and ideas (Bhola, 2017). Team leaders play a critical role in enhancing effective communication in a project team to ensure the team performs better during the project life cycle by making sound, quality decisions (Bhola, 2017).

Project leaders however do not operate in isolation but rather depend on various team members to turn the goals of the project into reality (Ahmed et al., 2013). Since project teams have multiple members with different skills, knowledge and expertise, this requires project leaders to facilitate team efforts, to achieve project objectives (DiTullio, 2010). Project leaders are required to match project team skills with specific roles, motivate team members, and foster cohesion and engagement (Burke & Barron, 2007). Okoronkwo (2017) verified that team cohesion and engagement among team members are central to the success of the project team.

Team cohesiveness refers to the degree to which team members are attracted to the team and the extent of their motivation to remain with the team for an extended period (Sarratt & Chadwick, 2020). Team cohesion is central to the success of the team project, since the better the cohesiveness, the greater the conformity of members to the norms and standards of the team. It furthermore leads to problem awareness, sound decision-making, and effective change management (Carron, 2000). Cohesive teams are more likely to share information and perspectives, which can help a team identify problems more quickly and effectively. Cohesive teams are able to come up with different ideas and solutions to problems, since they are comfortable sharing opinions and suggestions. Because of mutual trust in cohesive teams, they are likely to make sound decisions because they trust their judgements. Cohesive teams are more likely to be supportive of change because they are able to adapt to changes effectively and can work together to overcome challenges.

Communication plays a vital role in fostering team cohesion because it allows for cohesive bonds to form as team members get to know one another through interaction, ultimately enabling the team to function effectively (Gutterman, 2019). Project leaders

play a pivotal role in fostering cohesion and increase the team's functionality. Although team cohesion is critical to the success of the project team, as the team grows closer together, the need evolves for influential leaders who inspire the team to make sound informed decisions (Burke & Barron, 2007). Teams that lack cohesiveness undermine the success of the project, since members might ignore directives and lack commitment, all of which require influential leaders.

In addition to team cohesion, team engagement is also critical to the success of a project team. Team engagement is the commitment and connection of the team members to the project team (Imam & Zaheer, 2021). Team engagement is essential for enhancing the motivation and morale of the project team, which helps team members contribute more towards their team and remain committed to their work. The role of project leaders to drive team performance by ensuring team cohesion and engagement is critical to the success of the project. However, few qualitative studies have been conducted on exploring exactly how project leaders go about fostering team cohesion and engagement within their project teams, which is what formed the motivation for this study. This study, therefore, aimed to identify leadership behaviours that facilitate team performance with specific emphasis on team cohesion and team engagement.

1.2 Research Problem Statement

The majority of projects implemented at Hillside are of a manufacturing plant or a working facility. Projects are comprised of revamping, retrofitting, technology upgrades, replacement, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and modernisation. According to Harris et al. (2021), most manufacturing projects aim to improve key performance areas, such as modernisation or partial renovation projects, including minimising disruption to production operations due to plant shutdowns and supply disruptions, achieving successful new construction, minimising disruption to existing installations, and ensuring reliable and high-quality integration and tie-in of new and existing facilities.

The efficiency in productivity of project delivery can be linked to competing plant priorities such as safety, production, and maintenance requirements crucial to the facility's continuing operation. In the face of competing priorities, plant access to

execute projects becomes a challenge, necessitating the development of a project manager's leadership skills to ensure that plant-critical activities are completed within budget, time, quality, and schedule.

The most frequent concern in project execution is the management and coordination of the project (Mir & Pinnington, 2014). Because each project is unique, its success cannot be generalised across all initiatives (Muller & Turner, 2007). Some of the aspects that make project management challenging include uncertainty and change. Projects are often subject to unexpected changes and uncertainties, which can make it difficult to plan and execute effectively. Stakeholder management can also be challenging because of the diverse interests and expectations of management, which can lead to conflict and make it challenging to achieve consensus. Projects are often constrained by limited resources, such as time and people, which can make it difficult to achieve all project objectives.

The aforementioned sentiment is shared by Alias et al. (2014), who highlighted the many complexities of project management. On the other hand, Alias et al. (2014) claimed that prior research has demonstrated that the project team members' engagement, communication, skills, drive, and dedication are the most crucial success factors. To possibly understand greater prospects for project success, one needs to consider project team engagement and cohesion within an organisation that uses project team strategy. It is vital to explore how project leadership in Hillside fosters team engagement and cohesion in managing projects. The authors furthermore emphasised the importance of ongoing support, clear communication within the team, and continuous dedication of the team members. As such, one should consider project team members' involvement as a key determinant of project success. Currently, at Hillside, project leaders need to be well-versed in technical procedures and proficient in their applications in order to meet strict deadlines, scope constraints, budgetary constraints, and quality standards.

1.3 Research Aim of the Study

This study aims to identify leadership behaviours that are critical for team performance and enable project leaders to foster team cohesion and team engagement among project teams.

1.4 Research Questions

This research study was guided by the following research questions:

- What leadership behaviours promote team performance at the Hillside smelter?
- How do project leaders go about fostering team engagement at the Hillside smelter?
- How do project leaders go about fostering team cohesion at the Hillside smelter?
- What are some of the challenges of implementing team cohesion and team engagement at the Hillside smelter?
- What are the perceptions of project leaders and those of team members on leadership responsibilities?

1.5 Research Objectives

To achieve the aim of the study, the following objectives were set to be achieved:

- Identify leadership behaviours that promote team performance at the Hillside smelter;
- Identify how project team leaders go about fostering team engagement at the Hillside smelter;
- Identify how project team leaders go about fostering team cohesion at the Hillside smelter;
- Identify challenges of implementing team cohesion and team engagement at the Hillside smelter; and
- Explore perceptions of project leaders and those of team members on leadership responsibilities.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Preliminary research has not adequately explored project leadership through team engagement and cohesion. Many studies have examined how team cohesion and team engagement contribute to the success of an organisation (Gupta et al., 2022).

However, the role of a project leader in fostering team cohesion and engagement has not been explored (Ali et al., 2021). This study sought to bridge this gap by exploring how project leadership can enhance team cohesion and engagement through a case study of Hillside smelter. This study will contribute to the existing literature on how project leadership can enhance team performance and provide a deeper understanding of the strategies to improve team cohesion and team engagement. The study also enhances an understanding of the challenges that project leaders face while implementing team cohesion and team engagement.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that when project leaders are recruited, not only technical expectations and experience should be considered but also interpersonal skills and their ability to foster team cohesion and engagement. Exploring these behaviours will help to identify project leadership characteristics, while the research findings will contribute to the growing body of project management at Hillside. Thus, the project leaders must manage their team members effectively to ensure that their creativity and innovation are realised and to help the project teams earn their objectives for the betterment of the project portfolio at Hillside.

The study will also be beneficial to project managers to identify what behaviours are critical for fostering team cohesion and engagement because they play a significant role in project success. The study also highlights critical skills and behaviours that can be developed through appropriate training and development bodies to equip project team leaders to manage their teams effectively. The findings of this study can be utilised by organisations that adopt project teams as an operational strategy. It will provide insight into the challenges that project leaders face, and these organisations can use information from this study to develop strategies to support project leaders and teams.

1.7 Format of the Study

The dissertation is presented in five chapters; the purpose is discussed briefly in this section.

Chapter One: Introduction

This part of the study provides an introduction to the topic being studied and a brief background of the dissertation to the problem. It also presents the aims, objectives, and questions of the study. Therefore, this chapter sets the tone of the research and offers an understanding of what the study aims to attain.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This part of the study provides an in-depth review of the literature on project leadership, team cohesion, and team engagement. The leadership behaviours that project managers are likely to express are also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter describes how the research process was carried out and the methodology that was applied. This chapter explains the philosophies of the research, design, processes, and procedures applied in gathering, analysing, and presenting results in this research.

Chapter Four: Results, Discussion, and Interpretation of Findings

The research findings obtained from the primary data are discussed in this part of the study.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

This is the last part of the study, where the research summary is presented. Major conclusions on the findings of research from the literature review and primary study are discussed in this chapter. Also, recommendations based on the research findings are provided.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the introduction and background of the study, emphasising project team leadership, and fostering team cohesion and engagement. Managing project teams remains complex and often difficult; however, in the past there was an over-emphasis on technical expertise while insufficient attention was given to the softer skills that fostered cohesion and engagement among team members. Research

has highlighted that these two components are critical for any team's success; therefore, the study aims to identify the behaviours of project leaders that can facilitate team cohesion and engagement.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an introduction and background to this study. This chapter introduces the literature related to the study. To start this chapter, a discussion is presented on the nature and scope of project leadership, highlighting its importance and where it differs from project management. Then, a discussion follows on the roles and responsibilities of project leaders, after which there will be a discussion on the critical importance of team cohesion and engagement in facilitating project success. Finally, required leadership behaviours are discussed, as well as how they can foster team cohesion and engagement.

2.2 Nature of the Project Teams at Hillside

Project teams in the smelter comprise engineers, technicians, and specialists from different fields who collaborate to ensure the seamless production of aluminium (Hillside Aluminium, 2023). The teams are headed by project leaders who oversee the completion of the projects within the specified time and ensure that deliverables align with the objective. Project teams are diverse and contain individuals with different beliefs, communication styles, and work ethics. The company has skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled labour in different projects that help the company achieve quality objectives. A metal manufacturing industry, such as Hillside Aluminium Smelter, uses effective project teams to carry out engineering projects in its operations. In other words, the smelter consists of project leaders who ensure that project activities are effectively coordinated in a way that ensures operations continuity, employee and visitor safety, productivity, and acceptable returns, all while avoiding environmental damage.

2.3 Nature and Scope of Project Leadership

Project leadership is the art and science of driving a team towards the successful delivery of the project (McManus, 2006). Gido and Clements (2012) posit that project leadership focuses on the human management side of the project and the leadership skills that project leaders require to manage the project team and the stakeholders involved. Project leadership is the ability of the project leaders to lead the team

members effectively (Ahmed, 2013). It also involves ensuring that the team accomplishes its objectives more effectively compared to what they can achieve as individuals (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009). Project leadership brings different individuals in the project together to achieve the same common goal. It is central to the success of the project since, without effective leadership, it becomes challenging to bring the best out of the involved teams (Madsen, 2015).

Project leadership differs from project management because it is more focused on leading the people to perform their best effort within the project, whereas management is concerned with managing the workflow of the project. Bhola (2017) agrees that project leadership is about the people, whereas management is concerned with tasks. This implies that management involves planning and controlling, whereas leadership involves strategy, vision and determination to accomplish the tasks (Bhola, 2017).

Project leaders cope with change, set directives, inspire and encourage people, whereas managers focus on planning, budgeting, problem-solving, staffing and organisation (Botha, 2021). It is worth noting that these roles and responsibilities of project leaders and managers are not fixed. Depending on the organisational structure and the project to be completed, these roles may overlap. Leaders are needed in the business environment as managers limit themselves owing to bureaucratisation (Ahmed et al., 2013). This implies that leaders challenge the status quo in the workplace environment, whereas managers maintain the status quo.

Project leaders encounter several challenges, such as bureaucratisation and administrative challenges, which require strong leadership capabilities to overcome them (Batchelor, 2010). Over the past decades, much attention has been focused on the competencies that project leaders require to manage successfully, with little attention directed to the behaviours they need to show when leading the project team, especially regarding how they inspire others (Schmidt, 2009). Project leaders need to show strong leadership skills and behaviours because their role is focused on driving the human resources part of the project. Strong leadership skills are critical to the success of project teams. Even though they do not guarantee project success, they help leaders to motivate and communicate with their team. Project leadership and

behaviours are central to why some project teams outperform other project teams. These strong leadership skills are required to perform different roles and responsibilities of project leaders, unpacked in the next section (Bhatt & Singhal, 2017).

Roles are the duties the project leaders must perform, whereas responsibility refers to the work the project leaders are expected to perform (Smit, Vrba, & Botha, 2017). Projects may be temporary or of long duration, subject to uncertainty, rapid changes and unanticipated risks. Projects come in different forms and shapes, including complexity, time and scope, which also lead to a difference in the roles of project managers. For these reasons, the roles of the project leaders become central to the success of the project. The skills and competencies of the leaders are also critical to their success in executing their roles and responsibilities. The key responsibilities of project leaders are leading the people towards the vision, planning for future changes, anticipating problems, identifying opportunities and inspiring others (Bhatt & Singhal, 2017).

2.4 Differences Between Project Leadership and Project Management

Project management focuses on planning, controlling, and organising project activities and resources to achieve project objectives. It entails managing budgets, coordinating tasks, and making sure the project has been completed within the specified time. Project leadership targets inspiring and guiding the team to achieve a common goal (Imam & Zaheer, 2021). It entails motivating members of teams, fostering collaboration, and offering strategic direction for the project. Project management involves short- to medium-term time horizons, focusing on immediate tasks, schedules, and milestones needed to complete the project. Project leadership involves a longer-term viewpoint, looking beyond the current goals to the broader vision and strategic direction.

Project management has to do with ensuring efficiency, minimising risks, ensuring efficiency, and adhering to established processes. Project managers target control and predictability. Project leaders target adapting to change and supporting creative problem-solving (Zare et al., 2020). Project management is involved in organising and coordinating teams to accomplish certain tasks. Project management focuses on

efficiency and task completion. Project leadership places its emphasis on building a cohesive and strong team. Leaders aim to create a positive team culture, inspiring team members to contribute their best and foster collaboration. Figure 2.1 shows the differences between the project leader and the project manager (Forbes Business Council, 2021).

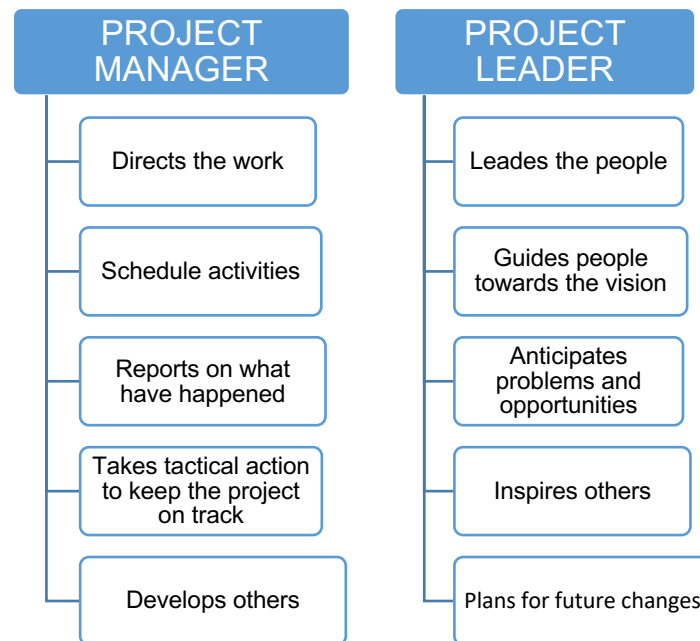


Figure 2.1: Differences between the project leader and the project manager

Source: Forbes Business Council (2021)

Figure 2.1 indicates the project manager and project leader, showing that the roles of a project manager include directing work, scheduling work, reporting on activities and developing others. Madsen (2015) agrees that managers' positions are focused on tasks such as budgeting, planning, maintaining the status quo, controlling and problem-solving (Madsen, 2015). Figure 2.1 also indicates that the roles of project leaders involve leading people, aligning them towards a vision, planning for future changes, anticipating problems, identifying opportunities and inspiring others. This is consistent with McKinsey & Company (2017) who indicate that leading is a central role comprising working with and through other people to achieve the objectives of the project (McKinsey & Company, 2017).

2.5 The Importance of Team Cohesion and Team Engagement Towards Project Success

It is important for team members to work well with one another. Cohesive teams involve everyone understanding their roles, embracing their strengths, and being committed to the overall goals of the company (Buthelezi & Zondo, 2022). When teams are able to work well, they are able to achieve good results as they are able to consult well. In a business where employees are not able to coexist well, they are still able to understand what is expected of them. How employees interact with one another plays a significant role in ensuring they achieve the goals of the company. It is very important to ensure teams are able to communicate effectively and motivate one another. This improves the momentum of the work and ensures they are able to achieve common goals.

How team members interact with tasks and colleagues determines the success of their work. Organisations have failed to identify their full potential because of not ensuring their teams coexist and engage well. The project takes longer than expected when team members are not able to read from the page when handling tasks. It is important for leaders to ensure they communicate well with the team members to ensure they minimise mistakes that could hinder the completion of a project at the right time. Ensuring team members have a positive emotional and mental connection towards their teams and work is very important. This ensures they are motivated and they offer one another a good working environment. This is achieved by ensuring the organisation has good team engagement and team cohesion.

2.6 Concept of Team Cohesion

Team cohesion refers to the degree to which a team is united to achieve its goals and objectives in a shared manner (Riisla, Wendt, Babalola, & Euwema, 2021). Team cohesion can also be defined as how close the team is and the extent to which team members value their relationships with one another (Markova & Perry, 2014). It can be viewed as the extent to which the team members are attracted and motivated to remain part of the team (Khoshsoroor, Liang, Salami, & Chitsaz, 2020). Team cohesion is the shared connection that drives members of a team to stay together and willing to collaborate (Grossman, 2015).

2.7 Importance of Team Cohesion

Building team cohesiveness is quite challenging and it is a skill expected of project leaders to increase the performance of the team. It has been a challenging factor impacting project success (Akaplan, 2019). Thus, it is important that project leaders understand how their team functions and aim to improve the bond between the team members (Kamsaris & Kougoulos, 2012). A project team often comprises individuals with different backgrounds, skills, work cultures and ethics and this explains why team cohesiveness is key to ensuring that the project execution runs smoothly (Özer & Karabulut, 2019). Project leaders must be aware of the relationships that need to be developed between team members during all of the development phases to ensure that they guide them through the various stages (Burke & Barron, 2007). Understanding the need for relationships helps to increase the effectiveness of project leaders and helps to protect them from interpersonal conflict that can impact the team.

According to Akaplan (2019), identifying that each team goes through different stages starting with forming, then norming, storming and finally, performing. During these stages, cohesiveness is required to ensure that the team works together effectively (Akaplan, 2019). It focuses on understanding the abilities of each individual and links them to team connectivity for success (Park, 2020). A cohesive team directs its focus on processes that enable it to achieve the result rather than focusing on the individual. In a cohesive team, members respect each other, every member feels important, relaxed and committed and they follow team decisions and strategies (Markova &

Perry, 2014). A cohesive team is accountable and keeps lines of communication open. These features are all key for the team to succeed and for the project at large.

Several projects fail to achieve the team objectives, owing to a lack of cohesiveness (Akaplan, 2019). Team cohesiveness is key because members support each other and strive to achieve the tasks at hand, which increases the chances of achieving the project objectives. Team cohesiveness depends on the willingness of the team members to work together and this is influenced by task cohesion, group pride and interpersonal attraction. Effective teams do not happen suddenly, as they require commitment from the project leader who binds the team together (Wendt, Euwena, & Van Emmerik, 2009). Schuster (2020) concurs that team cohesion is key to the success of the team as it increases productivity, reduces absenteeism at meetings and improves the morale and satisfaction of the team. However, the benefits of team cohesion are only realised when individuals start to express the desire to remain with the group. It becomes visible when individuals start to form relationships with the team, resisting the pressures to be separated from other team members (Horan, Chory, Craw, & Jones, 2021).

The advantages of team cohesion are many; however, without communication, the chances of having team cohesion are lessened. Team cohesion increases with communication and interaction among the members (Schuster, 2020). Cohesive teams create more attempts to reach agreement, solve pending issues and improve coordination (Wendt et al., 2009). These advantages are realised because team members will be more concerned with team performance rather than with individual efforts (Burke & Barron, 2007). Cohesive teams are needed in projects as they bring consensus and coordination to the project. Within teams, liking each other does not lead to task completion, but friendship within the team and workplace friendships are essential (Markova & Perry, 2014). They help to develop team dynamism and rapport within the team. Relationships are key to developing trust among the members.

Even though the advantages of team cohesion outweigh its disadvantages, the latter can be disastrous to the project team if they are not identified and managed (Schuster, 2020). For instance, through high cohesion, project team members can be involved in wrongdoing (Wendt et al., 2009). Highly cohesive teams are not free from bad influencers, who can facilitate wrongdoing, such as the misuse of resources, which

challenges project success. Upholding corrupt relationships and covering up for corrupt transactions are some of challenges to the success of the project because resources will be diverted.

2.7.1 Dimensions of Cohesion

Cohesion has been discussed primarily in quantitative studies, with the majority of studies focusing on this dimension. However, few qualitative studies have explored cohesion from the perspectives of team members. Quantitative studies have focused on task cohesion, project group pride and sense of belonging (Grossman, 2015).

2.7.1.1 Task Cohesion

Task cohesion refers to the level of bonding between the team members in line with the commitment to achieve the goals of the (Thrift, 2021). It is the shared commitment of the team and the efforts of the team members towards the task. This indicates that when the team members find the task rewarding, or that it has meaning and value for them, the cohesion will be greater (Salas, Grossman, Hughes, & Coultas, 2015). On task cohesion, the project team members will be focused on being united and on trying to achieve their goals. Özer and Karabulut (2019) report that task cohesion has an influence on overall team performance. Hirunyawipada, Paswan, and Blankson (2015) agree that task cohesion has a positive impact on team performance. This points to the need for project leaders to allocate tasks to members based on their skills and expertise because it increases the chances of project success.

2.7.1.2 Group Pride

According to Lu and Roto (2016), one of the most meaningful feelings in an employee's life is pride. Further emphasis on self-oriented and event-based accomplishments as the primary sources of pride (Lu & Roto, 2016). The dimension of group pride involves the degree to which group members like the status of being part of the group, showing their support for the ideologies of the group and the extent to which they value being part of the group (Alvas, Dimas, & Lourenco, 2020). Group pride is developed through giving team members tasks that are challenging but which allow them to use their skills and expertise.

2.7.1.3 Sense of Belongingness

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), the want to belong in a team is characterised by a demand for routine contact and the belief that the interpersonal relationship is continuing, stable and provides affective care. There is a need for satisfying and beneficial team interactions when the goal is to build relationships with people other than strangers. In other words, a relationship with someone that has “stability, affective concern and continuity into the foreseeable future” satisfies the urge to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). So, a sense of belonging on a team keeps people from feeling like they are on the outside and brings everyone together. Offering benefits and initiatives that recognise team members’ unique contributions to the organisation demonstrates that business success is directly related to whether or not team members feel accepted and belong.

2.8 Factors that Influence Team Cohesion

For teams to have a high sense of cohesion, they need to understand the leader’s vision and the reason for the existence of the team (Khoshsoroor et al., 2020). A clear project vision influences cohesion. The greater the importance of the team, the more satisfied team members will be to be a part of the project vision (Markova & Perry, 2014). The smaller the team, the higher the cohesion, while the larger the team; for instance, with more than 50 members, so the sense of cohesion decreases (Han, Kim, & Jeong, 2016). The size of the team is critical in fostering collaboration and interaction. The larger the size, the less likely the leader will be to listen to team members’ suggestions, causing other team members to reduce their attraction (Han et al., 2016). Large teams also pose opportunities for conflict and reduce the effectiveness of the team.

Diversity within the team is also critical to cohesion because people tend to form bonds quickly with people to whom they are similar (Hayes, 2014). When team members have similar beliefs, attitudes or values, they are more cohesive (Markova & Perry, 2014). However, having homogeneous groups is no longer effective in the current business environment owing to globalisation facilitating the mixing of ethnicities, religions and values. Homogenous groups tend to limit creativity as individuals will possess the same attitudes, values, skills and knowledge (Afritopic, 2015). However,

project leaders must manage heterogeneous groups effectively as there might be confusion and differences regarding how certain things are done.

The nature of the project and its success also influence team cohesion (Han et al., 2016). The more team members achieve their goals, the more they are motivated to be part of the group. In contrast, the more team members find it challenging to achieve their targets, the more they feel disconnected from their teams. The project leader must motivate the team in times of difficulties to ensure that they do not take their eyes off the target.

2.8.1 Fostering Cohesion

Team cohesion is critical to project success and it is the leader's responsibility to ensure that team members are connected and working together towards a common goal (Riisla et al., 2021). Having a shared goal is vital in fostering cohesion. Team members must have an idea of their intended purpose. Goals must be established by the team; they must be modifiable and must be reviewed at regular intervals to check whether they align with the intended purpose (Hayes, 2014). Feedback from the project leader is also important to team cohesion as it shows the team how well it is progressing. Appreciating and acknowledging the team is critical to cohesion, because when people feel valued and involved, they are likely to increase their engagement (Schuster, 2020).

Effective communication, conflict resolution, problem-solving, allowing team creativity, trusting team members and reaching consensus in decision-making all affect team cohesion (Markova & Perry, 2014). From these strategies, it can be noted that the first step in team cohesion is the project leader's ability to lead and direct people. Project leaders with inadequate leadership skills find it difficult to foster cohesion in order to bring the best out of the teams; consequently, they fail to achieve the project deliverables.

2.9 Concept of Team Engagement

Team engagement needs to be fostered by project leaders. The project leaders need to have ideas about where to show high directive behaviour and where to support, coach and motivate the team to foster engagement (Burke & Barron, 2007). Project leaders can engage the team members personally and encourage them, empower them and inspire them to participate in the project. To improve team engagement, project leaders must involve the team in decision-making and in the development of the team charter.

Successful teams comprise highly motivated; engaged team members committed to their jobs and creativity. However, Iddagoda (2017) reports that highly engaged teams are rare because few individuals are engaged, with the majority not engaged but others who are disengaged (Iddagoda, 2017). The team needs to comprise individuals who are passionate about their job, committed to the project's purpose and willing to go beyond the duty of call. Project leaders must ensure that their teams are engaged (DiTullio, 2010). These involve understanding, developing and ensuring that team members are involved in making decisions and are inspired and rewarded accordingly. Improving team management also includes building a project culture where the team understands how things are done within the project (Harrin, 2013).

2.10 Leadership Skills for Improving Cohesion and Engagement in the Project Team

Project leaders need to ensure that they possess leadership skills and have the competencies required to foster cohesion and engagement in project teams.

Improving cohesion and engagement within a project team necessitates adept leadership skills that foster collaboration, trust, and motivation among team members. Effective communication stands as a cornerstone skill for project leaders, facilitating the exchange of ideas, clarifying expectations, and ensuring alignment towards common objectives (Mumford et al., 2021). Leaders who communicate transparently and empathetically create an inclusive environment where team members feel valued and understood, thereby enhancing cohesion within the team. Moreover, leaders skilled in conflict resolution can address disagreements constructively, turning them

into opportunities for learning and strengthening team relationships. By fostering open dialogue and resolving conflicts promptly, project leaders can cultivate a cohesive team culture grounded in mutual respect and understanding.

In addition to communication and conflict resolution, motivational leadership plays a pivotal role in driving engagement and commitment within project teams. Motivated by intrinsic factors such as recognition, autonomy, and a sense of purpose, team members are more likely to invest their energy and talents in achieving project goals (Zhu et al., 2019). Project leaders who inspire and empower their teams through effective goal-setting, feedback, and recognition cultivate a positive work environment where individuals are motivated to excel. Furthermore, leaders who demonstrate adaptability and resilience in the face of challenges inspire confidence and trust among team members, fostering a culture of perseverance and collaboration (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2020). By embodying motivational leadership traits, project leaders can galvanize their teams to overcome obstacles and achieve collective success, thus enhancing cohesion and engagement within the project team.

2.11 Leadership Behaviours of Project Leaders

The way project leaders behave influences the way the project team behaves. Lack of consistency between what is expected from the leader and the behaviour of the leader influences the way the project team views the project leader (Burke & Barron, 2007). For instance, if the project leader is not committed to the vision of the project, the commitment of the project team towards the vision also decreases, which will also reduce the team's performance. If the behaviour of project leaders is not in line with the roles agreed upon in the team charter, it demotivates the team (McManus, 2006).

In situations where the project leader demonstrates passion towards achieving the vision and targets of the project, it increases the commitment of the project team. The commitment of the project team is critical in achieving the project objectives. When the team is committed it can bounce from setbacks and share responsibility, which increase its chances of meeting the objectives of the project (Schwalbe, 2009). The behaviour of project leaders in meetings, acknowledging the team, planning, questioning, problem-solving and admitting mistakes, has an influence on the project team performance (Stratton, 2014). Project leaders who empower their teams, giving them autonomy and authority, increase the chance of the team achieving the objectives of the project (Hyatt, 2020).

Project leaders must be able to work with the project team. They must show interest in understanding the needs of the project team, respect the team and involve the project team in decision-making. Accepting input from the project team motivates the team as they feel involved and valued (Schwalbe, 2009). Project leaders must review the performance of the team based on the objectives agreed to in the team charter and not through human judgement. Project leaders must empower team members to ensure that they are given authority to use their own methods and decisions and to use the resources of the organisation with minimum consultation from different hierarchies. In cases where the project leader does not clarify the objectives of the project team and does not involve them in decision-making, there is a chance that the commitment of the team will decrease, which affects team performance (Peszko, 2021). Project leaders who tolerate poor performance and deviations from the agreed standards risk the challenge of failing to meet the project objectives.

Project leaders need to be leaders, facilitators, motivators, role models, coaches, mentors and integrators in order to achieve project success (Gonzalez, 2020). From this perspective, their behaviour will have a great influence on project teams. Behavioural skills refer to the skills of working with other people, motivating them and building relationships with them (Flannes & Levin, 2005). Behavioural skills are imperative for project success because projects involve different stakeholders and diverse teams which must all work together to achieve the shared common goal (Flannes & Levin, 2005).

Operto (2010) outlines the attributes of project leaders such that they are described as mostly conflicting demand from either sponsors, team members and clients. Finding the ideal balance between the team's motivation and the necessity of realising the project's objectives is challenging. It is crucial and necessary to listen to the team members and this listening must be paired with strict discipline in the completion of duties and the hitting of project goals (Operto, 2010). Project leaders therefore must maintain a balanced approach in their leadership style, switching to whatever is the appropriate leadership style for the situation (Burke & Barron, 2007). The concept of leadership behaviour, like leadership itself, is marred by diverse definitions and dimensions and a lack of consistency exists in understanding the behaviour of leaders (Yulk, 2012).

The behaviour of leaders is linked to leadership theories such as the goal-path theory, the managerial grid and the situational leadership theory. According to the goal-path theory, effective leaders can change their style as situations need them to because they are flexible. This theory was chosen to help understand how the challenges of implementing team cohesion and team engagement can make them change how they do things. Situation leadership theory holds that effective leadership style changes from situation to situation. This theory aims at helping to understand how leaders use different styles to foster team cohesion and team engagement in different situations. The managerial grid determines the leader's behavioural style, identifying their concern for individuals versus their need for task production. This theory was adopted to help understand the perceptions of project leaders and team members on leadership responsibilities. The common thread running through these three

leadership theories is their emphasis on task-oriented behaviour and relationship-oriented behaviour.

The goal-path theory developed by Robert House posits that leaders must help employees to attain their goals by motivating them (Smit et al., 2017). Leaders are more likely to show supportive, directive, achievement-oriented and participative behaviour depending on the task structure. Leadership typologies theorise that leaders are concerned with people and results and that their behaviour changes in line with the concern (Northouse, 2017). Lastly, situational leadership suggests that the position power of leaders, their task structure and their relationship with members all have an influence on leadership (Stowell & Mead, 2016). Leaders who focus on tasks are likely to be autocratic, initiating, production-centred and concerned with results, whereas leaders who focus on employees are likely to be democratic, considerate, employee-centred and concerned with people (Pandit, 2015).

The behaviour of leaders, such as their commitment to work, the way they act, talk, dress, express themselves and model different behaviours has an effect on the tone of the organisation. Leadership behaviour must not only be limited to attitudes, skills and capabilities, but leaders must also display behaviours that connect with their skills and capabilities in a turbulent work environment (Larsson & Vinberg, 2010). The behaviour of leaders plays a significant role in the success of the organisation and that of the project (Yulk, 2012).

The behaviour of leaders has an effect on their followers, both formally and informally, particularly on their actions and attitudes (Wang, Chen, Wang, Lin, & Tseng, 2022). In a formal way, the behaviour of leaders has an influence on promotions, communication channels, workflow and how rules are enforced (Mehdinezhad & Sardarzahi, 2016). This has an influence because effective workflow systems, effective communication channels and the enforcement of rules help the followers to survive and contribute to the organisation's effectiveness. Informally, leadership behaviours such as their commitment to work, the way they act, talk, dress, express themselves and model different behaviours have an effect on the tone of the organisation (Bouck, 2013). Successful project leaders must be capable of both management and effective leadership (Project Management Institution, 2017). In project leadership, project leaders are expected to produce the deliverables of the project basing on their

experience, skills and knowledge. Thus, to reach their targets along the project course they must use different combinations of skills in leading their teams to deliver and meet the objectives of the project.

2.12 Leadership Behaviours, Team Cohesion and Engagement

Leadership behaviours are critical in fostering team cohesion (Picardi, 2021). They ensure members are focused on completing essential tasks and attaining required outcomes. To foster team cohesion, project leaders must maintain an unbiased approach in dealing with issues that affect the team members (Burke & Barron, 2007). Changes in approach to some problems bring divisions in the project team, which reduces cohesion. Project leaders must have open minds that will help them to solve problems after having evaluated the available information (Fung, Jugdev, & Mathur, 2014). Being temperamental, emotional and irrational, towards the project team, rushing to conclusions and blaming others without enough information reduces team cohesion (Burke & Barron, 2007). Team cohesion can be fostered through commitment from the project leader. If the leader shows commitment to the vision of the project, contagious passion and motivates the team, it will help team members to act in the same way (Nootjarat, Chantatub, & Chongstitvatana, 2015). If the project leaders allow sensitive issues to pile up in the project, they reduce team cohesion since the conflicts and tensions in the team continue to escalate.

Project leaders who respect their members, help to find solutions to the problems and foster cohesion within the team. Team cohesion can also be fostered through effective communication, which improves the interaction of team members (Fung et al., 2014). Giving clear messages and using active listening are also key for team cohesion. So too, is scheduling meetings, being present at meetings, not cancelling meetings at the last minute. Accepting the input of project team members improves the way team members view their leader (Smit et al., 2017). Aligning words and deeds is critical for team cohesion and engagement. If the project leaders match what they say with what they do, there is a high chance that team members will feel secure working with the leader and with others. Project leaders should plan what to do together with their project team as this is another critical behaviour in role clarification (Burke & Barron, 2007). It helps to reduce role conflict within the team. If the project leaders trust the

team members and if trust is developed between team members, they can collaborate and interact with each other, which helps to develop closeness, increasing cohesion.

Leaders in some cases are directive, telling team members what to do. This is critical in team cohesion as it reduces ambiguity and the employees understand their roles better (Smit et al., 2017). Being directive can include giving guidance to ensure that team members are able to execute their duties in the absence of the leader (Yulk, 2012). It also involves requesting team members to follow the agreed-upon rules and schedules when executing their duties. This is critical for team cohesion and also for meeting the objectives of the project. Project leaders must be supportive of their team members (Yulk, 2012). This is essential for project leaders because they need the team members to support the vision of the project (Khoshsoroor et al., 2020). Being supportive involves understanding and addressing the needs of the team members and motivating them in difficult times (Association for Project Management 2018). It includes showing concern for the welfare of team members and the need to balance their work life. Being supportive incorporates creating an environment that is conducive to teamwork. This is critical to fostering cohesion as team members may increase their efforts, have more self-confidence, feel valued and this can reduce conflicts in teams (Sarratt & Chadwick, 2020).

Project leaders must show participative behaviour (Smit et al., 2017). They must be present and be approachable. This also points to the need for project leaders to have technical skills, which are crucial for the knowledge and technical aspects of the project. An effective project leader consults with team members, seeks their suggestions and opinions and incorporates them in final decisions (Ahmed et al., 2013). This is critical for fostering team cohesion and engagement because employees feel involved, they are motivated and their job satisfaction increases (Smit et al., 2017). If the project leader is present and helps in the execution of the tasks, role clarity becomes evident to other members. Giving team members room to contribute increases their bonding with the team. Project leaders must also be achievement-oriented (Riisla et al., 2021). This involves setting challenging goals, trying to increase the performance of team members. Being achievement-oriented is key to excellence and shows trust and confidence in team members that they will be able to deliver.

2.13 Challenges That Hinder Team Engagement and Team Cohesion

For teams to work together on a project, they are required to communicate effectively to enhance team cohesion. When a leader fails to communicate with team players, it causes cohesion and friction between people in an organisation (Shahzad, Shahzad, Dilanchiev, & Irfan, 2022). One of the challenges that hinders team cohesion is poor communication. A breakdown in communication in a team is associated with shortcomings such as conflicts, low morale, tension and lack of clarity. When working on team projects, a lack of clarity around projects and tasks contributes to regular and consistent misunderstandings (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Consequently, this undermines team spirit and members cannot be able to work as a unit to complete allocated tasks. Similarly, ineffective communication impacts the morale of employees; when employees lack the information they need to complete their jobs, often, they get frustrated and stressed. Team members can disengage when critical information required to complete tasks is not communicated. This can arise due to missed deadlines and deliverables, which can subject team members to constant ridicule. Schuster (2020) argues that ineffective communication contributes to an increase in friction between stakeholders and leads to bad interpersonal relationships that affect team engagement and cohesion.

Additionally, poor leadership is another factor that undermines team cohesion. Team leaders play a significant role in fostering collaboration among team members and guiding a team towards achieving objectives. Kim, Waldman, Balthazard, and Ames (2023) discuss that when leaders fail to have a clear direction and vision for the team, the team members can feel unmotivated to participate in group activities. Similarly, team leaders might treat members unfairly, which can cause conflict and resentment. When it is perceived that some team members are treated favourably over others, some members may feel unappreciated. Leaders have the responsibility of ensuring that team members are treated equally in the distribution of tasks and how they are addressed. Favouritism has negative implications on team engagement and cohesion. During projects, employees require support such as resources, training and feedback; lack of such support makes them feel undervalued and unappreciated (Busch & Barkema, 2021). This often derails the progress of projects because it leads to low motivation and members may avoid getting engaged in team activities.

Conflicts are prevalent when working in teams because individuals have different personalities and personality traits. Lack of effective conflict resolution methods contributes to a lack of cooperation and decreased morale (Adham, 2023). In some organisations, confrontation is highly condemned, which leads to avoidance of constructive confrontation. Such a culture of conflict avoidance fosters negative emotions, which can affect how team members work together. Difficult conversations during conflict resolution are inevitable, but when employees do not have the ability to handle such conversations, it might cause more friction between people (Raines, 2023).

Lack of clear conflict resolution methods, such as mediation or dialogues, causes team members to hold personal grudges against their colleagues; therefore, they cannot be able to collaborate. Conflicts are a key challenge that hinders team engagement and team cohesion. In production factories, a lack of necessary resources can also hinder team engagement. Most of the tasks in such factories require equipment and tools to execute projects; if all team members do not have access to these resources, they may be left out in team activities (Piwovar-Sulej, 2021). Budget constraints may limit organisations from availing all the required materials to employees to allow them to do their tasks efficiently.

2.14 Theoretical Review

This section focuses on the theoretical review of the study.

2.14.1 Transformation Theory

According to the transformational leadership theory, leaders are responsible for motivating and inspiring their team members to achieve good results. Leaders are viewed as role models and guide by example. According to the transformational leadership theory, leaders are supposed to foster a sense of collective responsibility among team members (Asbari, 2020). Transformational leadership theory emphasises motivating team members and creating a vision for them (Hassan, Jati, Majid, & Ahman, 2019). Leaders support team members by guiding them and inspiring them to work well and stay loyal to the group. The role of transformational leadership theory is to instil confidence, inspire growth, and promote loyalty among team

members. It is important for leaders to ensure they offer good examples to team members as they respect and trust what they do. Transformational leadership is very good for guiding teams as they are motivated to do their work and guided on what is expected of them.

Transformational leadership theory is applied to help understand the roles and responsibilities of project leaders. According to the transformational leadership theory, leaders are supposed to offer direction to employees by guiding them (Mansoor, Farrukh, Lee, & Jahan, 2021). It is the responsibility of leaders to ensure they are motivated to achieve good results. Leaders foster a good working environment by fostering team engagement and team cohesion. Leaders foster team engagement and cohesion by showing by example. When leaders are able to guide employees on how to engage with one another, team members will emulate them and implement what they have seen. It is the behaviours that leaders portray that team members show towards their colleagues.

2.14.2 Behavioural Theory

Behavioural theory holds the success of a leader, which is determined by their behaviour, where their actions and behaviours are observed and evaluated when responding to certain situations. According to the behavioural theory, successful leaders can gain skills by being taught rather than being born with them (Uslu, 2019). This is in contrast to the trait theory. This study holds that successful leaders gain skills by learning because the current working environment requires them to understand situations and know the best strategy to deal with them. Observing the behaviour of leaders is the best way to understand how their leadership is likely to be. Any team member can be trained and emerge as an effective leader (Henkel, Marion Jr, & Bourdeau, 2019). According to the behavioural theory, the actual behaviour and actions of leaders are what define their success (Alvesson, 2020). Leaders are able to be the kind of leaders they want to be based on the actions they implement. People-oriented leaders will engage team members directly in case there is an issue. There are many leadership styles but there is no one style that is right for every situation.

The behaviours and actions of leaders determine how they foster team engagement and cohesion. Team members can learn leadership skills that help them to engage

and coexist with others from their leaders. The leaders set an example for team members to follow and they learn and implement based on the actions leaders implement. The leadership style of a leader indicates whether it promotes engagement and cohesion. Projects are different and all require different approaches to achieve engagement and cohesion (Islam, Abd Wahab, & ak Anggum, 2020). The different situations within different projects require leaders to apply a leadership style that is suitable in that situation to ensure there is cohesion and engagement among team members (Mulyana, Ridaryanthi, Faridah, Umarella, & Endri, 2022).

2.15 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of project leadership, indicating where it differs from project management and showing the differences between a project manager and the project leader. The discussion revealed that project leadership had received little research attention compared to project management. From the discussion, it was noted that project leaders are primarily responsible for establishing team cohesion and engagement, a topic that has received limited exposure in qualitative studies so far. Team cohesion is a multidimensional construct that has been quantified into various sub-dimensions, yet little attention has been given to how leaders go about fostering these various components of team cohesion and engagement. As such, certain themes were identified that will form the foundation of the interview questions.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study explored leadership behaviours that help project leaders to foster team cohesion and engagement at the Hillside smelter in Richards Bay in KwaZulu-Natal. In this chapter, an overview of the approaches and techniques used to conduct the research study will be presented. The research design, philosophy, methodology, and strategies to be adopted in this study are discussed in this chapter. This is followed by how the study sample will be selected. The target population, sampling strategies and techniques and the sample size will be determined. After that, a discussion is presented of how data was collected, emphasising the research instrument, pilot study, administration of the research instrument and data collection and storage. Thereafter, there is a discussion of how data was analysed, followed by the trustworthiness of the research findings and how bias will be eliminated in the study. The concluding sections of the chapter will discuss the limitations of this research study and explore the ethical considerations that were adhered to before data collection.

3.2 Research Design

According to Salkind (2017), research design refers to the strategy that researchers use to conduct their research study to achieve the research aim, which entails answering the identified research questions. Research design is defined as the framework or blueprint that shows how the study must be conducted, presenting the necessary procedures required to answer the study's research question (Babbie & Mouton, 2016). A good research design must outline the researcher's plans to conduct the study; thus, it must ensure that all the components work together efficiently to convince the readers that approved methods have been applied. The research design is central to the completion of the study as it entails the procedures for collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting the research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Choosing the research design is guided by research questions, the allocated time and the available resources. This study adopted the exploratory research design.

3.2.1 Exploratory Research Design

An exploratory research design is applied to exploring an area or subject that has been studied to a limited extent (Babbie & Mouton, 2016). It is a valuable way to find out what is happening in areas that have not been explored actively. Bryman and Bell (2016) add that the role of exploratory research design is not only limited to the exploration of limited areas but also involves obtaining new insight or assessing phenomena in a new light. The experimental research design is applied in fields where limited studies have been conducted and inferences can be made (Saldaña, 2016). Explanatory research design is characterised by flexibility and is predominantly applied in qualitative studies and it also produces new knowledge. It can be conducted in natural settings (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). In this study, the exploratory research design was adopted.

The concept of project leadership and team cohesion has been well-researched, but how project leaders foster team cohesion has not received equal attention. This study aims to provide new insights into how project leaders view and understand project leadership and how they foster cohesion in a team within a highly dynamic environment.

3.3 Research Philosophy

Aliyu (2015) indicates that research philosophy combines the outlooks, beliefs and conventions which people hold on how the data to answer the research questions must be collected and analysed. These assumptions shape the perspectives of individuals on the ways they think things work in the world and how the world operates. Prelevic (2019) claims that these assumptions are divided into three categories: ontological beliefs, epistemological assumptions and methodological assumptions. In brief, ontology focuses on the form and nature of reality and there are two ontological assumptions. The first is objectivism, where researchers believe that natural unchangeable cause-effect laws govern validity and that reality is stable, consisting of patterns that can be discovered (Trochim & Donnelly, 2014).

Conversely, subjectivist ontological assumptions entail a reality that is dynamic and complex and people construct it, subjectively (Trochim & Donnelly, 2014). People's

experiences shape reality based on interactions with each other and with social systems at large. In this study, the subjective ontological assumption was adopted that the world is complex and that people have a role in constructing a reality that is personal. People have different views on how project leaders foster team cohesion through leadership behaviours. In this study, an interpretivist philosophy will be adopted.

3.3.1 Interpretivism

Interpretivism means that knowledge is based on subjective beliefs, values, reasons and understanding of the social actors and is not limited to observable phenomena (Saunders et al., 2016). Interpretivists claim that social actors construct knowledge and it is the way they make sense of their lives, through the understandings and meanings they make (Maree, 2016). In addition, interpretivists argue that the role of research is to study different phenomena such as mental, social and cultural factors to understand why people behave in a specific way (Aliyu, 2015). The role of research is limited to studying the phenomena and grasping their meaning (Aliyu, 2015). Interpretivism differs from positivism in the sense that the former argues that every research involves human sense-making and that no study can be conducted in a value-free manner. Stated simply, interpretivists do not distance themselves from what is being researched. They are concerned with establishing a relationship with participants to ensure that they obtain the truth from them (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). Interpretivists are co-creators of meaning and they are interested in collecting data from participants in their natural environment.

Interpretivism will be adopted in this study owing to its stance that knowledge is constructed by the people experiencing the phenomena. In this way, new knowledge can add to the growing body of the phenomena under study. In this study, the research problem highlighted a knowledge gap, indicating the need for new knowledge on leadership behaviours displayed by project leaders in fostering team cohesion and engagement, which will help to reduce the knowledge gap.

3.4 Research Approach

The research approach refers to the overall approaches and perspectives of the entire research process and it is used to structure the study systematically from start to end (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Research methodology involves showing the 'what', 'where', 'whom' and 'how' to answer the research questions that will be collected and analysed (Flick, 2017). This indicates that the research methodology involves a series of steps to answer the study's research questions. Van Zyl (2014) reports that research methodology consists of various activities such as sampling strategies and techniques, determining the sample size, the data collection instrument, data collection, storage and analysis. In this study, qualitative research methodology will be used.

3.4.1 Qualitative Research Methodology

Qualitative research methodology is a method that aims to provide information regarding the research problem from the perspectives of the population from which the problem originates (Creswell & Poth, 2017). It focuses on the meanings, sense or understandings that social actors attach to the challenges of humans as they try to make sense of their world. Qualitative research aims to offer and generate new information from individuals in their natural environment to come up with findings that were not predetermined previously (Mitchell, Namey, & Guest, 2012). A qualitative study focuses on the idea that the way individuals think, experience and see a phenomenon is different. Understanding the truth from the point of view of a person is critical (Aliyu, 2015). The opinions and perceptions of people are attached to how they behave and respond.

Qualitative research focuses on the interaction with participants in their natural environment; thus, methods such as interviews and participant observations allow intense researcher involvement (Salkind, 2017). The researcher is critical and a co-creator of meaning in qualitative research. The characteristics of a qualitative research study involve a deeper understanding of the world from the perceptions and experiences of the participants. It also includes developing a relationship with the participants to ensure that they feel comfortable sharing their experiences and that the researcher has intense involvement. In this research, the qualitative research study was adopted to produce new knowledge and insights on project leadership and team cohesion to understand the experiences of project leaders in fostering team cohesion and engagement.

3.5 Phenomenological Research Strategy

Phenomenological research strategy refers to a qualitative research approach that aims to understand everyday experiences without considering the preconceived assumptions of the researcher. This research strategy focuses on gaining deeper insight into how people perceive their daily experiences. Researchers using this strategy interpret the feelings, perceptions and beliefs of participants. Data collected through this method is deduced to identify patterns and similarities that can be used to create a new theory (Salkind, 2017). Similarly, this research design is descriptive and it aims to describe the phenomenon under study as accurately as possible. When conducting the study, the researcher sets aside any prior assumptions or bias and focuses on learning how other people perceive a specific phenomenon.

3.5.1 Case Study

A case study describes an empirical inquiry that investigates a concept in a real-life context (Saunders et al., 2016). A case study strategy is focused on exploring the effect of certain circumstances on an individual or a group. Case studies are utilised when the researcher wants to gain a deeper understanding of a concept in certain settings (Gabriel, 2022). Case studies are characterised under phenomenological research strategies. Case study research is conducted through an in-depth investigation of a real-life setting through methods such as observation and interviews. Saunders et al. (2016) outline that for the case study to be successful, the researcher needs to identify and access the organisation in question. The case study strategy was regarded as the most suitable for a deeper and more contextual exploration. The Hillside smelter was used as the case study for the research study since the company relies primarily on project teams coordinated by project leaders.

A case study approach was adopted to provide rich qualitative data about the relationship between project team leaders and team engagement and team cohesion. It was used to develop new concepts and to explore the relationship between various aspects in the teamwork setting. It allowed the researcher to form conclusions and formulate theories in the context of group settings.

3.6 Target Population

A population is the entire group of individuals with whom the researcher is concerned and to whom the research findings can be applied (Flick, 2017). A target population comprises elements from the entire population that have similar characteristics or attributes from which generalisations of the whole population can be made (Kothari, 2014). The target population in this study includes the project leaders and team members at the Hillside smelter in Richards Bay in KwaZulu-Natal.

3.6.1 Non-Probability Sampling

In purposive sampling, participants sought by researchers are hand-picked to be included in the research based on their judgement or on the features the participants have. Convenience sampling was chosen in this research and the sample was chosen on the basis of the traits they exhibit, such as experience in dealing with individuals with disabilities (Bryman & Bell, 2016). Convenience sampling was chosen as it allows for the saving of money and time. As this study focuses on exploring team engagement and cohesion in projects, a deliberate effort was made to select participants based on their likelihood of providing insights into questions being asked in the study. Carefully selecting participants limits rates of non-response. In this study, the possibility of some of the participants not being available owing to situations such as travel, work, and study was considered.

3.6.1.1 Convenience Sampling

In convenience sampling, researchers hand-pick the participants they want to be included in the study based on their judgement or on the characteristics the participants possess. As this study focuses on exploring team engagement and cohesion in projects, deliberation with participants based on their likelihood of providing the insights into questions being asked in the study. The careful selection of respondents limits non-response rates. In this research, the possibility of some of the respondents not being available owing to circumstances such as work, travel, and study was considered.

3.6.1.2 Sampling Criteria for Project Leaders

The following are the sampling criteria that will be used in this study. The candidate must:

- be 18 years of age or above;
- have experience of more than two years in project leadership at Hillside;
- be involved in more than one completed project; and
- be accessible and prepared to participate in the study.

3.6.1.3 Sampling Criteria for Project Members

The following are the sampling criteria that will be used in this study. The candidate must:

- be 18 years of age or above;
- have been involved as a project team member in more than one completed project in Hillside; and
- be accessible and prepared to participate in the study.

3.6.2 Sample and Size

A sample is a set of units from a population from which inferences can be made (Flick, 2017). The selection of a sample depends on three decisions which include who (participants), where (organisation) and what (processes) (Bryman & Bell, 2016). Purposive sampling and voluntary sampling were employed by the researcher in determining the number of participants in this study. In the first place, this is a purposeful sample because the researchers chose the individuals. The size of this sample will be a total of 10 participants, which includes both project leaders and team members at Hillside, selected using the sampling criteria.

3.6.3 Recruitment Approach

This research targeted interviewing project team members and leaders. This was done based on the minimum requirements indicated in the research population and sampling sections. Ethical clearance was obtained from University of Free State, which guided the research on data collection, storage of data, and use of data (Ethics no. UFS-HSD2022/1439/22). There were three steps in the recruitment process. Potential participants were approached in person or over the phone. The researcher proposed their participation in the research. Study brochures that described the research experiment, including the researcher's contact details and information regarding the ethical approval from the university and the company, were distributed. This interaction is targeted at increasing interest in the study and encouraging participation. A consent form and letter of engagement were distributed to interested participants. The last step was where participants were excused from their regular workdays to participate in one-on-one interviews via Microsoft Teams.

The researcher ensured that each participant had signed and returned the consent form before conducting interviews. This was done either electronically or by having it brought to them in person. A suitable time for the interviews was then suggested to the participants. A Microsoft Teams appointment was scheduled for every interview. This ensured that the recruitment of participants was conducted efficiently and ethically.

3.7 Data Collection

Data collection refers to the series of interrelated tasks applied to collect data to answer the study's research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017). It involves the systematic and precise acquisition of data relevant to the research problem, objectives, and questions (Babbie & Mouton, 2016). Data collection can be conducted from two stances, which include the primary data stance and the secondary data stance. The primary data stance entails collecting data from the source to solve the investigated problem (Bryman & Bell, 2016). It is collected verbally or in written form through data collection instruments such as questionnaires, participant observations, field notes, and interviews. Primary data involves going into the field and making physical contact with the participants. In this study, preliminary data will be collected

using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are purposeful discussions between the interviewer and the interviewee (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Semi-structured interviews are a combination of structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews are planned, involving common questions where interviewers use an interview guide and do not involve follow-up questions. Unstructured interviews are not prepared and the questions asked are based on the responses given. Thus, semi-structured interviews combine the strengths of structured and unstructured interviews.

The positive aspect of semi-structured interviews is that they enable participants to express their perceptions freely and provide reliable data, answers and reasons for the answers (Netshitangani, 2014). However, the challenge of semi-structured interviews is that the presence of the researcher may cause participants to beautify the situation, which results in the collection of unreliable data (Zikmund, 2019). In addition to this, interviews require interviewing skills to control the discussion ensuring that participants do not dominate the discussion. They consume time and are generally applied to smaller samples (Creswell & Poth, 2017), indicating that the collected data cannot be generalised to the entire study population. To overcome the collection of unreliable data, the participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality.

Semi-structured interviews will be used in this study as they allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions that will enable participants to explain their answers (Netshitangani, 2014). Semi-structured were also chosen as they allow the participants to express their opinions, perceptions and experiences freely without being limited to 'yes' or 'no' answers. Sensitive issues can be discussed during semi-structured interviews as there is room for participants to express their emotions and how they are experiencing the phenomena. Semi-structured interviews will be used as they do not limit the researcher only to collecting answers for the research problem. The researcher can also collect reasons for the answers and solutions to the problem from the participants through the use of follow-up questions.

Secondary data refers to the data already collected in literature, published and unpublished documents, government reports and journals, among others, for different purposes (Bryman & Bell, 2016). Secondary data is critical in any research study as it forms the basis of the survey by providing what is already known about the research

problem, the constructs of the study and the knowledge gap and may include the nature of the recommendations. Secondary data acquired from textbooks, journals, published theses and project reports were used in this study. They were also used in designing the interview guide for the semi-structured interviews.

3.7.1 Interview Design

This study will collect data using semi-structured interviews with an interview guide designed using the available literature on project leadership, team cohesion and engagement and leadership behaviours. The interview guide will be used to ensure flexibility, smooth flow and fluidity to ensure that the participants are not confused with the questions being asked (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interview guide contains a list of open-ended questions to ensure that rich data will be collected from the participants. The open-ended questions include structural questions that test how the participants understand their experiences, descriptive questions to guide the participants and evaluative questions to have participants thinking about the phenomena (Cornish & Skovdal, 2015). These questions were designed so that all the study constructs, namely, project leadership, team cohesion and engagement and leadership behaviours, were included in line with the research questions.

3.8 Interview Delivery

The interview will be delivered face-to-face with the participants at the Hillside smelter premises. Before the interviews, the researcher will send an email inviting the project managers to participate in the study. Those project managers who initially agree to be part of the study will be asked to attend a meeting. During the meeting, the researcher will brief them about the research study and the time, place and date will be planned. Those who agree to participate will sign an informed consent form. Participants' consent forms will be obtained to record their responses, which will help with transcription. On the agreed day of the interview, the researcher will secure a clean and quiet room for the interview to ensure minimum distractions such as noise and interruptions. The interviews will be transcribed and coded using a digital recorder and the researcher's field notes to ensure that all essential points are covered. After the interviews, a letter of appreciation will be sent to each participant, thanking them for

their time and cooperation in participating in the study and informing them that the findings can be made available to them after the completion of the study.

3.9 Data Storage

After the interview, the recorded audio will be uploaded onto Google Drive. The research will be protected by an encrypted password to which only the researcher will have access. After transcribing the data, the anonymised interview transcripts will be converted into PDFs and uploaded onto Google Drive for security reasons, awaiting analysis of the data.

3.10 Data Analysis

According to Creswell and Poth (2017), data analysis generates the meaning of the data collected. It is a process of filtering, interpreting and presenting data to uncover pertinent information to form conclusions. It involves the reduction of large volumes of data into small manageable units that are easy to analyse and look for patterns and summaries (Saunders et al., 2016). Thus, data analytics is critical in the research process as it creates order, structure and meaning in data (Salkind, 2017). This study analysed data collected from the semi-structured interviews using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing and reporting themes found within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis applies to large datasets and generates pieces used to interpret the research findings. It involves extracting the main ideas, both apparent and hidden in the transcripts, using codes, sub-themes and themes (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). In this study, thematic analysis was conducted using six steps: familiarising with data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming pieces and producing the report. These processes are discussed in the next section.

3.10.1 Step 1: Becoming Familiar with Data

In this step, the researcher will get to know the data to understand it (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). Data collected using the interviews and field notes will be combined. The researcher will repeatedly read the data to develop preliminary ideas.

3.10.2 Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

Coding is a systematic condensing of large datasets into smaller, manageable analytical units (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). The main aim of coding is to describe the idea in the data, making it easy for researchers to organise the database in terms of the ideas they are presenting. Codes range from unique names to phrases or words (Maree, 2016). This study will use phrases of not more than four words. The codes will be generated by sequentially reading each line of the interview transcripts until all the opinions are coded. The process will be repeated until all the identified ideas are coded (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). The coding process is repeated to ensure that similar codes are collated and that no critical idea from the interview transcripts or the field notes is left out. The codes developed during the familiarising stage will be triangulated to establish consistency.

3.10.3 Step 3: Searching for Themes

After generating the codes, those with similar meanings will be combined into sub-themes and this process will be repeated until all codes are grouped into themes (Maree, 2016). Themes are used to interpret the data where codes that describe the idea are collated to present the bigger idea. Themes are formed in different ways, ranging from simple tables, mind maps or word trees to complex web-like networks that show the link between the codes. In this study, tables will be used to list themes where codes are collated to form sub-emergent themes and collated to form emergent themes. This process will be repeated until all the codes are themed. The tables used will be presented in the final report.

3.10.4 Step 4: Reviewing Themes

This step involves reviewing and refining the developed themes. Reviewing themes entails checking whether the themes are close to explaining the general ideas presented in the data (Maree, 2016). This step involves repeatedly reading the themes and checking whether each theme presents a different idea. In this process, other themes are collapsed if they present similar ideas to others. In this study, the developed themes will be vetted to check whether each theme is different and communicates a different idea.

3.10.5 Step 5: Naming Themes

Themes aim to describe the ideas in the data; therefore, the names of the themes are essential to ensure that what is contained in the data is consistent with the name of the theme (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). This indicates that the themes must be descriptive. In this study, the developed themes will be reviewed by an external expert to improve the wording of themes to ensure that they communicate the ideas in the study. After naming the themes, a final data analysis report will be done.

3.10.6 Step 6: Producing a Final Report

Nowell et al. (2017) identify this as the last step in thematic analysis. During this stage, the research findings were presented. The transcripts from the interview were analysed and direct quotes and extracts from the data were presented in the next chapter to establish the credibility of the research findings. The research findings were divided based on the concepts presented in the literature review to confirm or challenge the research findings.

3.10.7 Quality and Rigour of the Study

Korstjens and Moser (2018) posit that when carrying out a research study, researchers need to document all the protocols and procedures they follow to ensure that the research findings are worthy of being considered by other readers. In a qualitative research study, the researcher is required to demonstrate the quality and rigour of the research study to improve the credibility of the study. This is demonstrated through trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Salkind (2017) posits that there are agreed-upon ethical considerations such as ensuring that participants sign the informed consent agreeing to participate in the study, ensuring that no harm must befall the participants, reassuring participants of their confidentiality and anonymity and obtaining permission from the organisation being investigated. These ethical considerations are discussed next.

3.10.8 Ensuring that Participants Have Given Informed Consent

In research, informed consent is essential because it involves informing participants about the study, the purpose of the study, the methods of analysis, the risks associated with participating in the research and any other pertinent information that helped participants decide whether they can participate or not (Bryman & Bell, 2016). Before the individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews began, an informed consent letter was drafted and emailed to the participants. Participants were requested to sign an informed consent form that guarantees confidentiality and anonymity. An informed consent form also stated that participants had the option to withdraw from the study or skip any questions which were uncomfortable. Also, the informed consent form was written in easy-to-understand English so that everyone could understand it.

3.10.9 Ensuring that No Harm Comes to Participants

The researcher must take into account all potential sources of harm, including psychological, social, physical and legal harm (Zikmund, 2019). Asking sensitive questions that can evoke unpleasant emotions in the participants, such as shame and anxiety, can cause psychological harm. To prevent psychological injury to participants, the interview guide questions were given to the supervisor for wording and phrasing corrections. The social harm that happens when people are exposed to embarrassment and stigma is also discussed. To safeguard participants from social harm, face-to-face interviews were conducted in a private room on the premises of the participants. In this situation, the participants were not exposed to public humiliation or any physical harm caused by injury or pain. To safeguard participants from legal liability, no participant data was published without their approval, as doing so would constitute an invasion of privacy.

3.10.10 Ensuring Confidentiality and Anonymity

Anonymity implies that the participants are unidentified and that no one can trace or correlate the responses to particular participants (Zikmund, 2019). No identifying information, such as names, addresses, or phone numbers, will be gathered for this study. In lieu of the individuals' actual names, pseudonyms will be utilised. The recordings in this study will be digital audio recordings, not video recordings.

Confidentiality refers to the situation in which the researcher is familiar with the participants but removes identifying information. The consent forms, audio recordings and file notes will be saved on a password-protected computer.

3.10.11 Ensuring that Permission is Obtained

To begin with the study, the researcher must first seek approval. A letter requesting authorisation to perform the study was written to the company's administration. Permission was granted. (See Appendix A).

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the research design and methodology of the study. This study will adopt an exploratory research design owing to the knowledge gap in project leadership and the need to obtain new insights into team cohesion. An interpretivist research philosophy will be adopted along with the qualitative research methodology to understand the phenomena of participants in their natural environment. The case study research strategy will be adopted, with the Hillside smelter being the case study. A selection of 10 participants using purposive sampling with the help of designed sampling criteria. Semi-structured interviews will be piloted using two participants from the Hillside smelter and, to avoid data contamination, the results obtained will not be part of the main study. The chapter also discussed how bias would be eliminated in the study, the limitations of the research and the ethical considerations followed in the study. The study findings will be discussed and interpreted in the next chapter, once the study has been completed.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This study's research design and methodology were outlined in the preceding chapter. This chapter provides a report on the outcomes of 10 interviews that were conducted with project team members and leaders from Hillside smelter. The initial part of this chapter provides a summary of the themes and their interdependence, followed by an explanation of each theme through paraphrased data comments and direct data quotations.

4.2 Thematic Analysis Approach

The data was meticulously investigated by the researcher through the process of reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to gain familiarity with the content. Subsequently, the data was coded by identifying and labelling significant units of information. These codes were then categorised into themes, which represent extensive concepts that capture the essence of the data. To ensure the accuracy of the themes, they were reviewed and further refined. The themes were formulated from the findings utilised to construct a narrative that summarises the findings of the analysis.

4.3 Themes and Sub-themes

The thematic analysis outlined above resulted in the identification of various themes and sub-themes that aided in answering the research question. The classification of the themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Themes and sub-themes

RESEARCH QUESTION	THEMES	SUB-THEMES
RQ 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning and coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Setting goals• Operational plan• Assigning responsibilities• Monitoring progress

RESEARCH QUESTION	THEMES	SUB-THEMES
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating effectively
RQ 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a collaborative and supportive work environment 	
RQ 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity management and interpersonal sensitivity • Recognition and appreciation 	
RQ 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited resources • Team fragmentation • Conflict Management 	
RQ 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team leader – team member alignment 	

An extensive excerpt from interviews conducted that produced themes and sub-themes is provided in the next subsection.

4.4 Leadership Behaviours That Promote Team Performance

One of the primary objectives of this study was to unveil the leadership behaviours of smelters that facilitate team performance at the Hillside smelter. To achieve this objective, the following interview questions were formulated: What are the principal factors that influence a project team's performance? How should project leaders modify their leadership traits to meet the team's needs? The thematic analysis uncovered the findings that follow.

4.4.1 Planning and Coordination

The participants presented a variety of responses when asked about the crucial factors that project leaders at the Hillside smelter must consider to guarantee team performance. Most of these responses concerned the planning and coordination of the project, and the sub-themes that follow emerged.

4.4.1.1 Setting Goals

The responses from the participants indicated that there is a perception that a leader should be able to set clear and measurable goals for their team. This involves understanding the objectives of the organisation and how they can be achieved through the efforts of the team. According to Bhatt and Singhal (2017), project leaders are responsible for outlining a clear direction for the team that aligns with the organisation's vision. By communicating the desired goals, leaders ensure a clear direction, purpose, and alignment of the team's efforts. Well-defined goals enable team members to understand what tasks should be prioritised to ensure a project's success. Goal setting under the guidance of the leader therefore not only improves the productivity of the team but also creates a sense of shared accountability and commitment.

The following were responses from the participants under this sub-theme:

P1 *"It should be where the whole team works together for a common goal, so, try and build that".*

P2 *“So it is his duty to enforce the requirements and the rules and to make sure that we do not deviate from what we agreed to do”.*

P4 *“Also, just to reiterate on the vision of the team, of where we want to be as a team”.*

P8 *“I think having clear goals and objectives”.* **P8** further indicate that *“Setting your goals and objectives”.*

4.4.1.2 Operational Plan

According to the responses of the participants, a leader should develop a plan of action that outlines the steps required to achieve those goals. Timelines, resources required, and specific tasks to be completed should all be included in the plan. As identified in Chapter 2 (Bhatt & Singhal, 2017), it is the responsibility of a leader to conduct planning for a project team to guide the team towards achieving its goals and objectives. A leader can guide the project team towards achieving the goals and objectives by creating an operational plan. A clear operational plan helps the project team to align their actionable steps with the broader vision of the organisation. An operational plan also allows a project team to optimise available resources by having a clear allocation plan to minimise wastage and maximise available resources. Operational planning under the project leader allows a team to develop a risk management strategy to minimise the impacts of unprecedented events.

The following were the participants' responses under this sub-theme:

P1 *“Planning skills”.* **P1** further indicates that *“You look at your schedule and you must obviously manage your project to be complete, the milestones are as per schedule”.*

P5 *“Doing proper planning upfront”, including scheduling the project and developing a project plan for its execution”.*

P6 *“Creating a project plan and timeline is essential, with the project leader responsible for developing a detailed project plan that outlines the scope, schedule and budget for the project”.*

P7 *“Additionally, having a contingency plan in place to address unexpected delays or obstacles was emphasised. Time management was identified as a valuable resource for staying on track and successfully completing projects”.*

P8 *“Ensuring that they have the correct resources to be able to do what is required”.*

P10 *“And of course, the project must start on the correct time and end on the correct time because it impacts on production”.*

4.4.1.3 Assigning Responsibilities

According to the participants, a leader should assign specific responsibilities to team members based on their skills and strengths. This ensures that everyone understands their role in the plan and can contribute effectively to the team’s goals. As discussed by Smit et al. (2016), project leaders have a duty to delegate duties to project team members. Team leaders should be able to identify the strengths of each member of the team and allocate them responsibilities that align with their strengths. By aligning tasks with individual strengths, leaders can maximise team productivity and efficiency. When team members are working in areas where they excel, they are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and satisfied with their work. This can lead to a more positive and productive work environment overall. On the other hand, when team members are assigned tasks that do not align with their strengths, it can lead to disengagement, frustration, and a decrease in overall productivity.

The following were the participants’ responses under this sub-theme:

P2 *“It is the project leader’s responsibility to ensure that team members possess the required resources and skills to complete their tasks”.*

P3 *“The complexity of projects as a contributing factor, as each project manager may be given too many tasks or too many complex projects to execute at the same time”.*

P5 *“Evaluating individuals to ensure that they fit within the department or on the specific team. Adequate staffing was also deemed essential to reduce unnecessary pressure on employees and allow them to complete necessary tasks within their daily schedules”.*

P8 *“Maybe team members are not there, or maybe you have the wrong team members and you may not have the correct technical expertise within your team”.*

4.4.1.4 Monitoring Progress

The participants expressed that a leader should regularly monitor the progress of the team towards its goals and provide regular feedback to the members. Regular feedback and oversight of the project allow the leader to ensure that the team is aligned with the goals of the project team. This allows for adjustments to be made to the plan, if necessary, and ensures that everyone is aware of their progress. Through observing the progress of the team, leaders can identify potential challenges, such as resource constraints or opportunities for improvement. Identifying these challenges earlier allows for proactive problem-solving and strategic adjustments to the plan. Regular feedback sessions provide team members with valuable insights into their performance, areas for improvement, and recognition for their achievements. This helps maintain motivation and engagement among team members. Similarly, due to the volatility and uncertainty of the industry, project teams may be forced to change plans due to shifts in priorities. Having a leader who closely oversees the project team and provides feedback will enhance the adaptability of a team to unprecedented changes.

The following were the participants' responses under this sub-theme:

P2 *“Project leaders need to manage these tasks and ensure that resources are acquired or made available”.*

P2 *“It is having the formal engagement, having the emails to say to people: “This is where we are. We are doing great on this project”.*

P4 *“For me, I would say overall performance of a team, if everybody is able to deliver on the tasks at hand, then you can. We can determine the performance of the team, in that everybody is able to meet their task”.*

P5 *“Regular meetings and progress updates were also seen as essential to ensure that everyone is aligned and that issues are promptly addressed”.*

P6 *“It provides the guidance and governance that keep the team on track”.*

P7 *“Regularly engaging the team throughout the project stages to keep everyone committed and disciplined”.*

4.4.1.5 Communicating Effectively

According to the responses of the participants, a leader should communicate effectively to ensure effective project planning and coordination. Communication that is effective ensures that everyone understands their role in the plan and is aware of any changes or updates. Feedback also seems to form part of this communication role, as team members need to be kept up to date with the overall progress and quality of the project. Communication is an integral factor in the success of a project team; it promotes effective planning, coordination, and collaboration. The participants emphasised the importance of a leader’s ability to communicate effectively to ensure project success. Effective communication plays a crucial role in each of the four sub-themes identified in the study, which includes clear communication of project goals to ensure that everyone is aligned with the overall objectives and understands their contributions.

A well-defined operational plan communicated effectively to team members provides a roadmap for project execution, ensuring that everyone knows their responsibilities and timelines. Regular communication of project progress keeps everyone informed about the team’s achievements, challenges, and areas for improvement. Effective feedback facilitates continuous learning and improvement, ensuring that team members are aware of their strengths and areas for development. The industrial landscape is characterised by constant change, such as technological advancements, market fluctuations, and evolving customer demands. In this dynamic environment, effective communication becomes even more crucial as it enables teams to adapt quickly and respond effectively to changes.

The following were the participants’ responses under this sub-theme:

P1 *“communication skills are key”.*

P3 *“A person should be a very approachable one where he is able to communicate with people”.*

P8 *“I would say, communication”.*

4.5 How Project Team Leaders Foster Team Engagement

The second research objective of this study was to determine how project leaders at the Hillside smelter can foster team engagement. To achieve this objective, interview questions were formulated, such as “In your opinion, how should project leaders encourage team engagement?” The thematic analysis of the data obtained through the interviews yielded the findings that follow.

4.5.1 Building a Collaborative and Supportive Work Environment

Participants in this study revealed that in order to foster team engagement, it was important for project leaders to foster a collaborative and supportive working environment. A collaborative working environment is a workspace that provides support to employees both in their group and individual work (Patel, Pettitt, & Wilson, 2012). Building a supportive work environment entails developing a space in which team members feel safe to express their opinions, concerns, and suggestions. This allows them to feel appreciated and their contribution valued by the project team and the organisation. According to Anitha (2014), a supportive work environment enhances team engagement; when members feel safe to contribute, they are more likely to actively engage in their group projects. One of the participants expressed that having informal sessions to raise concerns about their issues is paramount to minimising conflicts and creating a conducive work environment.

Project leaders have an integral part to play in building a collaborative environment. One of the hindrances of team engagement is conflicts. Project leaders who are proactive in resolving conflicts and minimising tension among the team members promote collaboration (Adham, 2023). Leaders also guide team members, which enables them to work as a team. One participant expressed that project leaders can bring together team members and other stakeholders to promote unity and collaboration. Another way that a supportive and collaborative environment can be

built is by supporting employees through initiatives that improve the workplace and increase efficiency. Overall, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment is a collective responsibility for both the team leader and other stakeholders in the organisation.

The following are participants' responses under this theme:

P6 *"I say, creating those informal sessions where the team can have discussions and just get to know each other and vent any issues that they have got before they become big problems."*

P3 *"Guys let us reset, let us have a discussion. Let us involve other project members or even stakeholders to get engaged into the team to see how we can move forward together."*

P10 *"You know like simple things like opening badges, or if you run short of space or someone is sick, and you do not have a person to fill in or vendor is not available, or vendor is delayed, those kinds of things."*

P10 *"Some get intimidated as in their space being infiltrated on. Some think "You know what in the future I may not have a job." So, some people do feel threatened"*

P10 *"And also want to be appreciative of the crew or should I say the people that are doing the job or the team that is conducting his project for him on his behalf."*

4.6 How Project Team Leaders Foster Team Cohesion

The third research objective of this study was to determine the measures adopted by project team leaders in order to enhance team cohesion at the Hillside smelter. To address this objective, the following research question was formulated: What initiatives should project leaders undertake to establish and encourage team cohesion? The thematic analysis of the responses yielded the findings that follow.

4.6.1 Diversity Management and Interpersonal Sensitivity

The primary topic of concern is diversity management and interpersonal sensitivity with regard to the ability of leaders to promote team cohesion. The views expressed by the participants highlighted the importance of diversity management and

interpersonal sensitivity in promoting team cohesion. It was identified that dealing with different personality types and people with different communication styles and work ethics can result in obstacles in team dynamics. Differences in personality types and communication styles can be a leading cause of interpersonal conflicts and communication breakdowns. Conflicts within a project team can undermine team cohesion and team engagement. Project leaders must be able to understand these differences and find ways to integrate them effectively to create a harmonious work environment. Effective project leaders develop strategies to foster mutual respect and appreciation for diversity to enable the project team to overcome conflicts.

It was further noted that some team members may be more analytically inclined, reserved, outgoing, or loud, thus creating a diverse mix of personalities. Additionally, inherited biases and preconceived notions about individuals or groups based on their work ethic, values, or other factors can hinder team cohesion. It is important for team leaders to act as liaisons between departments, promoting collaboration and integration in project management. Leaders hold the project together and should respect the opinions of others, striving to maintain a neutral stance even in the presence of difficult team members. Building familiarity with team members and understanding their roles and expectations can contribute to successful project outcomes (Thrift, 2021). Leaders model desired behaviours in project team members when they demonstrate tolerance towards diversity. If leaders show appreciation and tolerance towards diversity, team members are more likely to follow suit, which can create an inclusive working environment.

The following were the participants' responses under this theme:

P1 *"I think the biggest obstacle is dealing with the different types of personalities. So, you have people that are more analytically inclined; some are more reserved; some are more outgoing; and some are loud".*

P2 *"I want to say diversity, but diversity might not be the right word or diversity of opinion".*

P2 *"Inherit bias. That is for me the most difficult. I know your kind. This kind is like that. Or I already have in the back of my head a stamp for this person, or that person, or that group of people, or that, of your work ethic. I have heard things about your values*

morals, values, etc. It is those inherited biases that are the biggest hurdle for team cohesion”.

P4 *“They also act as a liaison between their department and the project team”. P4 highlights that “This approach allows for a more collaborative and integrated approach to project management and can help ensure that all departments are working towards the same goals”.*

P7 *“Enforce discipline, but in a more respectful manner, enforce the compliance, enforce the commitment to work”. P7 further indicates that “Ensure that he does respect the opinion of other people as well”.*

P7 *“So that is why, as a team leader, I think it becomes very important to be as neutral as possible. Yes, there will be one or two bad apples in a team, but the leader should try to be always neutral”.*

P9 *“So, I think one needs to become very familiar with their team members, understand what you are looking for out of them in terms of what the project is going to do and what they can expect from you”.*

P10 *“The project manager also has got to have a good relationship with the vendor who is providing services like materials, labour and stuff like that, hired labour”.*

4.6.2 Recognition and Appreciation

The second theme that emerged was the recognition and appreciation of employee contribution, through which leaders can promote a sense of cohesion within the team. Recognising the distinct contributions of various people can have a significant impact on team dynamics (Salas et al., 2015). When team members feel valued and appreciated for their contribution, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and committed to the success of a project. Recognition offers positive reinforcement, assuring individuals that their contributions are noticed and appreciated, which in turn boosts their morale and encourages them to continue performing at their best. Recognition and appreciation have a profound impact on team cohesion. When the efforts of team members are acknowledged, they are more likely to appreciate other people’s contributions, which encourages team members to work together more

effectively, sharing knowledge and supporting one another's efforts. Recognition reinforces a sense of belonging and connection to the team, fostering a shared sense of purpose and commitment.

The following were the participants' responses under this theme:

P1 "Feeling valued through recognition boosts morale and motivation."

P2 "When you acknowledge our efforts, it drives us to achieve more."

P8 "It is very important, is your recognition, to show appreciation."

4.7 Challenges in Implementing Team Engagement

The fourth research objective of this study was to identify the obstacles encountered by project leaders when implementing team engagement at the Hillside smelter. To achieve this objective, the following research questions were formulated: What are the common challenges faced by project leaders when attempting to enhance team engagement? An analysis of the interviews conducted with the participants yielded the findings that follow.

4.7.1 Limited Resources

Limited resources have been identified as obstacles to team engagement implementation. The participants provided statements that revolved around the importance of resources and equipment in project execution. This includes obtaining necessary resources from suppliers, dealing with multi-disciplinary contractors, and ensuring that the team has the required tools and equipment to successfully carry out the project. In a project team, ensuring that project teams have access to the necessary equipment and that this equipment is in good working condition is essential for efficient task completion, cost-effectiveness, and stakeholder satisfaction.

The availability and good working condition of equipment are crucial for completing tasks efficiently and meeting the needs of the end-user or project stakeholders (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). Additionally, the use of audio-visual aids is highlighted as a helpful tool for communication and ease of identification. Overall, these themes

emphasise the significance of resource management and the role it plays in team engagement.

Complexities in resource management while working in a project-based team include having interdependence of resources, volatility of requirements, and competing priorities. Group projects involve a diverse range of resources such as equipment and materials, and the resources may have interdependence, which requires to be well planned to ensure smooth execution. Projects are dynamic and volatile, which may lead to changes in requirements and resources, making resource management more challenging. In group projects, resources are limited, requiring team members to allocate them according to priority. However, team members can have competing priorities, and project leaders must carefully consider project goals, stakeholder expectations, and resource availability.

Project leaders play a role in ensuring effective resource management through proactive resource planning, flexible resource allocation, transparent communication, and resource optimisation. Project leaders should anticipate the resources that will be required for task completion, and this allows the leader to procure and allocate these resources in good time to avoid disruptions and delays in the completion of the project. Project leaders should adapt flexible resource allocation as the project progresses, considering changing requirements, team dynamics, and individual performance. This flexibility ensures that resources are used most effectively and that team members are appropriately matched to tasks. Sharing resources within a team requires open and transparent communication. Leaders can ensure that open communication is maintained with team members about resource availability and utilisation. They also encourage collaboration and feedback to identify optimal resource allocation strategies.

The following were the participants' responses under this theme:

P5 *"You also need to deal with those people, the suppliers, to obtain the resources that you need from purchases".*

P5 *"So, because mainly it is resources, people who execute the project, various, maybe sometimes multi-discipline contractors executing the project together".*

P8 *“Giving the team the resources it needs to carry out the plan successfully is essential. Without the necessary tools and equipment, tasks cannot be completed quickly or up to the expected standards”.*

P10 *“It should mostly meet the needs of the end-user or the person who asked for the upgrade or project as a whole. Therefore, ensuring that all required equipment and tools are available and in good working condition before the project starts is critical”.*

P10 also pointed out the significance of audio-visual aids, saying, *“When someone is clocking at the turnstile, they can see it. When someone is walking to their section, those are rolling pictures. With audio-visual aids, people generally identify much more easily. This may necessitate the purchase or rental of new equipment or tools”.*

4.7.2 Operating in Silos

Participants identified that operating in silos could pose significant challenges in enabling team engagement. The themes in the provided statements revolve around alignment and understanding in project management. Aligning tasks with the personalities of team members is highlighted as crucial, as assigning the wrong task to the wrong personality can lead to consequential issues. Misalignment of expertise with tasks allocated contributes to resource wastage and inefficiency. Assigning tasks to individuals who lack the necessary skills and temperament can lead to inefficiency and wasted resources. Individuals who are not well-suited to their tasks may feel disengaged, unmotivated, and unchallenged. This can lead to decreased productivity, poor morale, and a lack of commitment to the project. When team members are not effectively utilised, it can jeopardise the achievement of project goals. Misaligned tasks can lead to missed deadlines and poor-quality outcomes.

Lack of continuous feedback and updates, as well as a lack of alignment with project objectives, are recognised as barriers to successful project execution. Overall, these themes highlight the importance of aligning tasks, understanding project outcomes, addressing team dynamics, and ensuring alignment with all team members throughout the project life cycle. Team fragmentation thus leads to decreased engagement within the team. The theme emphasises the importance of establishing alignment between team members and the team leader, synchronising professionalism, promoting effective communication, addressing constraints, and unlocking potential.

The following were the participants' responses under this theme:

P1 *"So, I think aligning the tasks to the personalities presents some obstacles because if you give the wrong task to the wrong personality, you're going to have issues there".*

P3 *"That for me, will be again the understanding of the outcome of the project".* **P3** further indicates that *"The project itself was not well thought out in terms of what the outcomes were supposed to be or going to be".*

P7 *"The one that stands out the most for me is that sometimes it happens that the team members themselves are competing and if the members really sense favouritism, or bias, so that becomes a challenge".*

P8 *"Lack of continuous feedback, just getting updates from the team members, in terms of where they are and if there are any obstacles, how can that be unlocked".*

P8 *"Again, lack of alignment, if you do not understand what you are solving for, what is your objective, that could be a barrier".*

4.8 Challenges in Implementing Team Cohesion

The fourth research objective of this study was to identify the obstacles encountered by project leaders when implementing team cohesion at the Hillside smelter. To achieve this objective, the following research questions were formulated: What are the common challenges faced by project leaders when attempting to enhance team cohesion?

An analysis of the interviews conducted with the participants produced the findings that follow.

4.8.1 Absence of a Sense of Belonging

The primary theme that emerged was the absence of a sense of belonging. Team member competition and the potential for favouritism or bias are identified as challenges that undermine a sense of belonging in a team. Intense team competition in a team creates a sense of isolation and hinders collaboration. When team members focus on individual achievement rather than teamwork, some members may feel left out and lack a sense of belonging. Engaging members in team discussions and group decision-making promotes a sense of belonging; when some members are not consulted or involved in group discussion, they feel excluded or undervalued, which can lead to a sense of isolation and disengagement. When team members perceive favouritism or bias in the treatment of others, it creates a sense of unfairness. This awareness can lead to resentment, disengagement, and a feeling of exclusion among those who feel overlooked or undervalued.

As discussed by Markova and Perry (2014), in workplaces where team members have different values, beliefs, and expectations, leaders have the responsibility of bridging the differences to foster a sense of belonging. Project leaders can enhance a sense of belonging by being fair and transparent and by treating all members with impartiality, which will allow team members to feel like they are part of the group. Conflicts that arise as a result of bias and team competition can erode team cohesion. Teams are more likely to be cohesive and committed to working together towards achieving common goals when every member feels valued by their leader and other team members.

The following were the participants' responses in this regard:

P3 *"Let us involve other project members or even stakeholders to get engaged into the team to see how we can move forward together."*

P10 *"It is also nice if they had relationships with the people other than just on the project day as such".*

P6 *"so the team see kind of one version of the leader and there is no favouritism in the team."*

P4 *"And that way you are able to create a unified team there that people know*

that they can come to you with any issues that they have”.

A summary of the overall findings of the research is provided.

4.8.2 Managing Conflicts

The second element highlighted as contributing to the difficulty in implementing team cohesion in Hillside is the management of conflict. Participants in this study highlighted that managing conflict in a team requires a leader to consider and address various factors. One key aspect is understanding the team dynamics, and acknowledging that each member has individual goals, aspirations, and preferred approaches to tasks. It was further identified that timely delivery and a sense of responsibility are crucial, as some team members may not prioritise these, leading to dissatisfaction. Selection of the project team is important, considering members' diverse personality traits in order to avoid clashes. Maintaining discipline and enforcing compliance and commitment should be done respectfully. Managing conflicts and other hindrances that disrupt the team's progress is vital. As stated earlier by Adham (2023), lack of effective conflict resolution methods contributes to poor team performance. Conflicts create a tense environment in which team members cannot be able to communicate openly or collaborate on projects. This hinders the completion of team projects due to a lack of cohesion and ability to focus on goals of the group.

Unresolved conflicts have a significant impact on team performance. According to Choi, Delise, Lee, and Neely (2021), teams with multiple conflicts create distractions that require time and effort to resolve, and this may hinder the completion of the projects as required. As discussed by Chiu, Lin, and Ostroff (2021), communication suffers in a team where conflicts are prevalent, and group members withdraw their participation or attention, which leads to poor coordination of interdependent tasks. Conflicts are a major contributor to effective communication and feedback. Project leaders have the responsibility of providing clear communication channels and provide regular feedback to team members, ensuring that everyone is on the same page and that concerns are addressed. By maintaining open communication, leaders can prevent misunderstandings and foster a sense of unity.

The following were the participants' responses under this theme:

P1 *"I think it will be and it comes down to the soft side of things which is team dynamics, each member will have their goals and their aspirations and their way of wanting to do tasks in a specific way".*

P5 *"They just do not deliver on time and do not feel obliged to deliver because they just do not care".*

P6 *"The selection of the project team, the different personality traits of the different team members need to be considered".* **P6** further indicates that *"Some of the biggest obstacles will be personality clashes amongst team members, project team members tend to have very strong personalities".*

P8 *"If there is any conflict, removing of the conflict, or any other sort of interference, that is interfering with the team, in other words, removing of obstacles".*

P10 *"So, I would say the first one is common resistance to change because sometimes projects are not explained to people; people do not know why, for example, projects are being done. Some get intimidated as in their space being infiltrated."*

P10 further indicates that *"So, some people do feel threatened, I would say".*

4.9 Perceptions of Project Leaders and Team Members on Leadership Responsibilities

Team leaders are an integral part of the success of a project team. Participants expressed that team leaders have an impact on the performance of the team. Team leaders have the ability to promote team cohesion and team engagement in a team through promoting team cohesion. The participants also identified that there are leadership qualities that project leaders must have in order to lead effectively. Team leaders must have effective communication skills to be able to communicate the vision of the group as well as provide guidance to team members and steer the group towards achieving the objectives (Maisyura, Aisyah, & Ilham, 2022). Team leaders are also expected to possess organisational skills to be able to plan resources and delegate duties to enhance the achievement of set goals and completion of group projects. Team members expect team leaders to provide them with support and guidance when it comes to completing their tasks.

Project leaders are perceived by group members as having vast experience and expertise in a particular field. Team members rely on the leader to give them direction on completing their tasks. They expect their leaders to give them support and constructive feedback, which would equip them to complete tasks allocated in the project. Leaders should also be able to anticipate challenges that may arise in the course of the completion of the project and develop solutions to mitigate the impact of the risks on the project (Sithambaram, Nasir, & Ahmad, 2021). Similarly, project leaders are responsible for ensuring that the project team has all the resources required to complete the project. They have to ensure that the resources available are allocated effectively to sustain the project team until the completion of the project. Leaders believe that it is their role to assign responsibilities to team members and ensure that tasks align with the strengths of the individuals for high team performance.

The following were the participants' responses under this theme:

P5 *“So, yes, it is very important that this ... the project leader must have good leadership capabilities, and be able to influence people to get the best out of them.”* **P5** *“He must be able to persuade people to see whatever he wants to achieve, and by doing that he can have people working together with him.”*

P1 *“I think the responsibility will be to always be open for offer support, guidance, and clear direction.”*

P3 *“The project leader should have experience, or be experienced enough to understand that if there are any issues arising from any type of project, he or her is in a position to understand and give proper directions and proper solutions.”*

P3 *“He is also very approachable to people. So, having those characteristics will label a good to and fro for communication, which means the project leaders and the project itself.”*

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented the primary findings of the study, which highlighted the critical role of leaders in promoting team performance by ensuring adequate planning and coordination through making important decisions, developing operational plans,

setting goals and assigning roles and responsibilities to team members. It was further identified that building a collaborative and supportive team fosters team engagement, while diversity management and interpersonal sensitivity foster team cohesion. Challenges in implementing team engagement include limited resources, team fragmentation and effective management of conflicts, while challenges to implementing team cohesion are identified as team-leader-team-member alignment.

The next chapter will conclude the study's findings, followed by recommendations for future research and practical implications for project leaders and team leaders.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, conclusions are presented, guided by the case study's goals and outcomes. In light of the findings, suggestions will be made and the researcher will highlight any limitations of this study. The importance of the study is then discussed within the project teams and suggestions for additional research on the subject are then given.

5.2 Conclusion

Ten members of a project team were interviewed, to determine the leadership behaviours that are essential for team performance. From the results, the importance of fostering team engagement and cohesion is emphasised. The following is a discussion of the study's findings:

The first objective of this study was to identify leadership behaviours that promote team performance at the Hillside smelter. The study explored this through a focus on identifying prominent factors that influence a project team's performance. The participants were also integral in indicating leadership traits that allow a team to meet their needs and achieve their goals and objectives. The leadership behaviours identified include planning and coordination to promote project team performance, particularly within the team's and division's specific projects. Project leaders should have the ability to plan, delegate, oversee and coordinate team activities to ensure they align with the objectives of the team (Amoah & Marimon, 2021). Planning and coordination are the backbone of team cohesion in project teams because they provide integrated planning and ensure that all project objectives, milestones and tasks are clearly defined, allowing teams to have a comprehensive roadmap to follow.

Project leaders should also possess the ability to set clear goals and expectations while allowing team members to have a say in defining these objectives, which can further enhance engagement (Holmes et al., 2019). During decision-making, the leader should ensure the involvement of team members in activities such as assigning duties. This fosters collaboration between team members and creates a conducive

environment for teams to work together and for members to be actively involved in activities. Furthermore, recognising and appreciating the unique strengths and contributions of each team member adds to a sense of belonging and motivates individuals to invest themselves fully in their work (Roberson & Perry, 2022). Project leaders should be able to empower and mentor team members to achieve and surpass their targets.

Similarly, other leadership behaviours critical for team success are the ability to assign duties and monitor progress. Participants indicated that project leaders in a group setting delegate responsibilities based on the strengths and skills of each member. Therefore, leaders should be able to identify the key abilities of each member to ensure they are assigned duties in their area of expertise. In instances where tasks in a project are complex, the leader should be able to identify how members can work together to provide solutions. As discussed by Van Knippenberg, Nishii, and Dwertmann (2020), team leaders should be able to implement progress-monitoring strategies and leaders should be accountable for the achievement of team objectives. Leaders should be able to track the progress of projects and of each team member through various ways, such as regular meetings, progress reports, and performance evaluations.

The second objective of this study was to identify how project team leaders foster team engagement. Team engagement entails being committed and enthusiastic about achieving the goals of a team. Team leaders play a critical role in promoting team engagement to create a collaborative and supportive environment for team members to actively participate in projects. The study established that effective communication within project teams encourages discussions and establishes open channels of communication. It also allows the teams to share information, ideas and feedback openly, leading to improved decision-making and problem-solving. Quick progress meetings are identified as another element of effective communication that stimulates alignment and addresses any issues or concerns. Team leaders who are approachable and have strong communication skills can connect with team members more easily to promote engagement. It was identified that leaders who prioritise transparency and authenticity in their interactions with team members create an environment where individuals feel safe to voice their opinions and ideas, further promoting effective communication and engagement.

The third objective of the study was to identify how project team leaders go about fostering team cohesion. The findings highlighted the critical role of project team leaders in creating an environment in which diverse individuals work together to achieve a common goal. Diversity management in project teams recognises and embraces differences among team members, such as their cultural backgrounds, gender, age, race, abilities and more. It further aims to create an inclusive culture where everyone feels respected, heard and valued. By effectively managing diversity, project teams can harness the power of varied perspectives and skills to enhance problem-solving, creativity and innovation (Kumar & Gupta, 2023.) Interpersonal sensitivity in project teams allows for the ability to understand and respond to the emotions and perspectives of others effectively. In project teams, interpersonal sensitivity is vital for building strong relationships among team members and promoting positive interactions. Project team leaders can model such behaviours by recognising individual differences and encouraging respectful interactions.

Such recognition and appreciation of project team members can foster team cohesion. Recognising the distinct contributions of various personalities whether analytical, reserved, outgoing, or assertive can have a significant impact on team dynamics. It was discovered that inherent biases or preconceived notions about an individual's work ethic, values, or other characteristics can harm team unity if not countered with genuine appreciation.

The fourth objective of this study was to identify the challenges of implementing team cohesion and team engagement. The findings revealed challenges within Hillside project teams that hinder project teams' ability to foster team cohesion and engagement. These include limited resources, operating in silos, and managing conflicts.

Limited resources have been identified as the first obstacle to team engagement and cohesion implementation in Hillside project teams. Limited resources in project teams might include inadequate resources for a project or insufficient equipment allocation during project execution. The extent of resources that constrain team engagement and cohesion in a project includes suppliers and ensuring that the team has the required tools and equipment to successfully carry out the project. The availability and good working conditions of equipment are crucial for completing tasks efficiently and

meeting the needs of the end-user or project stakeholders. Similarly, dealing with dealing with multi-disciplinary contractors can be challenging due to diverse expertise required. Multi-disciplinary contractors refer to individuals who offer a broad range of expertise by assembling a team with professionals from different disciplines.

Another prominent challenge was the tendency of members to operate in silos. The extent of isolation in project teams distracts from alignment and understanding in project management (Bhatt & Singhal, 2017). Aligning tasks with the personalities and skills of team members is highlighted as crucial, as assigning the wrong task to the wrong personality can lead to issues. Team member competition and the potential for favouritism or bias are identified as challenges that can hinder project progress. Favouritism and bias when operating in silos can create a dysfunctional project team. Favouritism can be manifested through unequal access to resources and information. Some team members might have access to resources while others do not, which can create a sense of unfairness and breed conflict. Unequal allocation of workload and responsibilities is another way bias and favouritism can occur in silos. Team members who are assigned more demanding tasks might feel overwhelmed and isolated, which can affect team engagement and cohesion.

Lack of alignment with project objectives is recognised as a barrier to successful project execution. Team members may become frustrated or disengaged when they perceive that their work is isolated and disconnected from the larger project goals. This can lead to reduced morale and productivity. When issues or challenges arise in a project, resolving them can be more challenging in an isolated environment. Team members may lack the necessary context or information to address complex problems effectively (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). This re-emphasises the importance of establishing alignment between team members and the team leader, synchronising professionalism, promoting effective communication, addressing constraints and unlocking potential. It also addresses challenges such as incomplete process delivery, a lack of clear direction and feelings of threat and insecurity. Intense team competition can divert the priority of team members from collaborating to individual achievement. Team members can be focused on outperforming one another, which undermines the goal of the project and can hinder the completion of the project.

Finally, managing conflict remains a key challenge for project teams, as it requires a leader to consider and address various factors. One key aspect is understanding the team dynamics and acknowledging that each member has individual goals, aspirations and preferred approaches to tasks. It was further identified that conflicts distract the project team from focusing on delivering the project. The selection of the project team is important, considering members' diverse personality traits are important in creating project teams whose members complement one another. In project teams where members are diverse, developing clear communication guidelines can help reduce clashes between the members.

Additionally, having clear conflict resolution strategies is essential in managing conflict in a project team. Handling conflict promptly allows a team to ensure that all issues are dealt with and the members can work collaboratively. Project leaders are responsible for mediating between conflicting parties and facilitating the establishment of common ground for constructive problem-solving. Conflict can be avoided in a project by fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding in which every team member's perspectives and experiences are respected (Imam & Zaheer, 2021). Maintaining discipline and enforcing compliance and commitment should be done respectfully. PR managing conflicts and other hindrances that disrupt the team's progress is essential.

The fifth objective of the study was to explore the perceptions of project leaders and those of team members on leadership responsibilities. Through the participants' responses, the study established that team leaders believe it is their responsibility to ensure that team members possess the required resources and skills to complete their tasks. Before the commencement of team projects, team leaders are responsible for evaluating the skills of team members to ensure they are well-suited to perform various tasks. Leaders also believe that they have a responsibility to ensure they have adequate resources and human resources to foster the smooth execution of projects. Leaders have the responsibility of giving directions to members and ensuring they are followed. Team members perceive leaders have the responsibility of setting goals and enforcing rules to ensure everyone is reading from the same page. Team members perceive that leaders are responsible for ensuring there is a good environment that promotes cohesion and engagement. Team members perceive that it is the

responsibility of leaders to ensure there is good flow of communication between the leader and members.

5.3 Study Recommendations and Practical Implications

This section provides recommendations from the interaction of research themes and participant contributions. After conducting the investigation, three significant recommendations emerged. These recommendations aim to support cohesion, team engagement and supportive relationships among employees and between leaders and employees. They also seek to provide recommendations for continual communication between project teams and leaders to ensure ongoing focus on and responsiveness to initiatives to promote cohesiveness and involvement.

Hillside can utilise project management software and tools that will assist project leaders during planning, task distribution and real-time progress monitoring. Team leaders can use technology to organise tasks and set deliverables for each team member. For instance, Trello is a web-based project management and collaboration tool that uses a card-based system to help individuals and teams organise tasks and projects (Friedman et al., 2023). Such a tool can be useful for a team to visually organise tasks, set deadlines and track progress at various stages (Northouse, 2018). Similarly, Asana (a web-based project management and collaboration tool designed to help teams and individuals organise and manage tasks, projects and workflows) helps with detailed project planning (Gujar & Shafighi, 2023).

Project management tools can also be used to promote team engagement. Allocating tasks to each member will ensure that they understand their roles in the success of team projects. This will reduce conflicts that may arise due to the ambiguity of the responsibilities of each member. Project leaders at Hillside can adopt these tools to coordinate the execution of tasks and to promote communication among team members. This can allow leaders to have more oversight of group activities which can inform the decisions they make to steer the groups. Hillside can provide training to project leaders to provide them with the necessary skills to integrate software tools in their daily activities to streamline team management.

Additionally, Hillside smelter should ensure that they provide the necessary resources and tools required to execute projects. When working in teams, it is necessary for each member to be actively involved. Inadequate resources such as tools can hinder some employees from participating in group activities. The organisation can provide feedback channels through which employees can request the tools required to do their job. As indicated in the findings, Hillside should ensure that the tools provided are in good working condition before the commencement of projects. This can be achieved through periodic inspection and audit of tools and equipment to ensure that team members can participate fully in group projects. Some of the resources required in the smelter include audio-visual aids such as diagrams, videos, and simulations which improve performance and communication.

Project leaders are critical in promoting team cohesion, engagement strengthening team performance and ensuring successful results. These leaders should prioritise aligning team members, optimising resources, addressing potential risks and guaranteeing timely actions which can elevate productivity and lead to the achievement of desired goals (Northouse, 2018). This can be achieved through communicating the goals of a project to ensure that every member is directed towards a unified objective. Similarly, promoting consistent and transparent communication reduces ambiguities and fosters mutual understanding. Project leaders can ensure they hold periodic briefings and meetings. Technology such as project management tools and software can be utilised to ensure that team members keep in touch and are constantly empowered to instil a sense of ownership which can motivate them to be more proactive. Hillside should also embrace employee motivation and recognition. This entails acknowledging the contributions of project leaders and team members and appreciating them. Overall, this improves the performance of the stakeholders in a project which can improve their engagement and participation.

Organisations such as the Hillside smelter should cultivate a culture in which project team members actively acknowledge not only one another's contributions and needs but also those of their leaders and managers. Embracing a recognition culture entails valuing the team's diverse backgrounds, perspectives, skills and experiences. Individuals can improve their connections, streamline resource sharing and gain a better understanding of one another's roles and strengths by doing so. A culture like

this not only reduces workplace stress but also strengthens employee collaboration (Creative Gifts Studio, 2020). Hillside can achieve this by implementing peer recognition programmes, holding regular team-building activities that emphasise mutual appreciation, implementing diversity and inclusion training sessions and establishing open communication channels where achievements and contributions are highlighted and celebrated.

Project managers of companies such as the Hillside smelter should prioritise the development of an effective communication strategy that encourages both friendly and professional interactions. Anchoring the team around shared values, goals and expectations is one practical approach. Organising workshops to collaboratively draft a team charter, scheduling regular check-ins to ensure alignment on project milestones and hosting celebrations to honour team achievements or milestones reached are some specific measures to achieve this. Employees are more likely to contribute meaningfully when they have a clear sense of purpose, which is communicated through this strategy. According to Binder (2016), a clear communication framework is critical to achieving the project community's goal of cultivating solid, collegial relationships. Project team members are more likely to stay involved and maintain momentum when leaders consistently promote activities that strengthen team unity and foster active participation.

5.4 Research Strengths and Limitations

The research had several strengths that were relevant to its objectives. First, it facilitated the acquisition of comprehensive and detailed information. Secondly, it provided a suitable framework for conducting scientific experiments within the context of a case study. Lastly, the case study approach allowed for the formulation of innovative hypotheses that could potentially be applied in future research endeavours.

This study had the following limitations:

The scope of this study was limited to project teams at Hillside Aluminium Smelter located in Richards Bay, South Africa, thus limiting the generalisability of the findings. Therefore, this study might not be able to capture how project leadership impacts team engagement and cohesion for all teams. Similarly, the data collected from interviews

may not entirely reflect the experience of working in a project team; the interviews focused on personal experiences which can be different for different participants. The interpretation of the findings was subjective and was shaped by the perspective, bias, and interpretation of the researcher. Team cohesion and team engagement is a broad topic; therefore, more research needs to be conducted to enhance understanding of the topic.

The study exclusively examined team cohesion and engagement within projects, without considering the project's scale. Project scale can make team engagement and cohesion complex or simple. Small-scale project teams might have fewer team members, which would affect the dynamics of their team cohesion and engagement. In smaller teams, communication can be informal, and they might not experience the same challenges as large-scale projects. Some of the challenges large-scale projects can face are conflicts, allocation of tasks, and conflicting personalities that affect team collaboration. In future research, project scale should be considered because as project scale increases, the team dynamics, such as communication channels and conflict resolution, become complex.

5.5 Further Research

This study advances the understanding of the fundamental elements of cohesiveness and engagement in Hillside projects, including the impact of team member connection and feelings of value, well-being and human functioning. Potential areas for future research include:

- Investigating the leadership gaps of technical project leaders
- Conducting research on the project management knowledge of project production team members
- Assessing the effectiveness of project management methodologies and approaches on team performance

5.6 Summary

This final chapter presented research findings and recommendations based on project team interviews conducted at the Hillside smelter to identify essential leadership behaviours for project leaders to build team cohesiveness and team engagement

among project teams. This study examined leadership behaviours, the role of project leaders in fostering team cohesion and engagement, challenges leaders face when fostering cohesion and engagement in teams, and the perception of the project leader. Examining these aspects contributed to the discovery of opportunities for supporting the project team's continuous development.

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APPENDIX

A1. Request for Permission to Conduct Research

From: Zintle Ndandani – Engineering Manager Hillside Aluminium	To: Lead Human Resources The Vice President Operations Hillside Aluminium
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29 September 2022

RE: Request conduct academic research in Hillside Aluminium

Title of the research project:

Exploring project leadership through team engagement and cohesion at Hillside production plant

Principle researcher name, student number and contact number(s):

Zintle Ndandani 2020119422 0722334054

Faculty and Department

Name of Faculty: Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

Name of Department: Business School

Name of Study Leader (UFS staff member): Mr Marthinus M Delport

Contact number: 058 718 5050

My name is Zintle Ndandani, I work for Hillside Aluminium Smelter in Richards Bay as an Engineering Manager. I am at the final stage of my studies towards a Master's in Business Administration at the University of Free State. For my dissertation, I have elected to conduct qualitative research, which includes a semi-structured interview on the research topic above. The significance of this study lies in the fact that when project leaders are recruited, not only technical expectations and experience are considered, but also interpersonal skills and the ability to foster team cohesion and engagement. Exploring these behaviors will help close the knowledge gap, and the results of the research will add to Hillside's growing body of project management knowledge.



The goal of the study is to find out which leadership behaviors are most important for team performance and to help project leaders encourage team cohesion and team engagement on project teams.

This study has been further approved by the University Ethics Committee.

In this study, purposive sampling will be used to select the project leaders and team members as participants. Participants in the delivery of a project are chosen as such because project delivery entails a project leader and team members to produce a desired product. Participants will be identified from previous completed projects.

With the approval of Human Resources Management and Hillside President Operations, I will rely on the company's outlook contact library of employees to obtain research participants contact details.

Below is the candidate selection criteria of project leaders:

- have experience of more than two years in project leadership at Hillside;
- be involved in more than one completed project; and
- be accessible and prepared to participate in the study.

Below is the candidate selection criteria of project team members:

- have been involved as a project team member in more than one completed project in Hillside; and be accessible and prepared to participate in the study.

The size of this sample will be 10 project leaders at Hillside selected using the sampling criteria

Nature of participation in this study

This study will collect data using semi-structured interviews with an interview guide designed using the available literature on project leadership, team cohesion, engagement, and leadership behaviors. The interview guide will be used to ensure flexibility, smooth flow, and fluidity to ensure that the participants are not confused with the questions being asked. These questions were designed so that all the study constructs, namely project leadership, team cohesion and engagement, and leadership behaviors, were included in line with the research questions. Thus,

the project leaders must manage their team members effectively to ensure that their creativity and innovation are realised and to help the project teams to earn their objectives for the betterment of the project portfolio at Hillside.

Below are interview questionnaire:

RQ1: What are some of the most important factors that determine a project team's performance?

Probe: To what extent does the project leader determine the overall performance of the team?

RQ2: In your view what are the most important roles and responsibilities of a project leader?

Probe: What specific responsibilities does the project leader have towards his/her team members?

RQ3: In your opinion how can project leaders go about fostering team engagement?

Probe: What specific behaviors do project leaders need to demonstrate in order to foster engagement within their team?

RQ4: What are some of the most common challenges that prevent project leaders from fostering team engagement?

Probe: How can these challenges be overcome?

RQ5: In your opinion how can project leaders go about fostering team cohesion?

Probe: What specific behaviors do project leaders need to demonstrate in order to foster cohesion within their team?

RQ6: What are some of the most common challenges project leaders face that prevent them from fostering team cohesion?

Probe: How can these challenges be overcome?

RQ7: How should project leaders go about altering their behavior to match the requirements of the team?

Probe: What behaviors are more important early on?

Probe: What behaviors are more important later on?

The duration of interview is approximately 1 hour per participant.

Can the participant withdraw from the study?

Before the individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews begin, an informed consent letter will be drafted and emailed to the participants. Participants in this study will be asked to sign an informed consent form that guarantees confidentiality and anonymity. An informed consent form will also state that participants have the option to withdraw from the study or skip any questions with which they are uncomfortable. Also, the informed consent form will be written in easy-to-understand English so that everyone can understand it.

Potential benefits and impact of candidates taking part in this study

To prevent psychological injury to participants, the interview guide questions were given to the supervisor for wording and phrasing corrections. The social harm that happens when people are exposed to embarrassment and stigma is also discussed. To safeguard participants from social harm, face-to-face interviews will be conducted in a private room on the premises of the participants. In this situation, the participants will not be exposed to public humiliation, or any physical harm caused by injury or pain. To safeguard participants from legal liability, no participant data will be published without their approval, as doing so would constitute an invasion of privacy.

There is further no potential inconvenience anticipated for taking part in this study. No identifying information, such as names, addresses, or phone numbers, will be gathered for this study. In lieu of the individuals' actual names, pseudonyms will be utilized. In this study, the developed themes will be reviewed by an external expert, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Committee to improve the wording of themes to ensure that they communicate the ideas in the study. No records of interview will be shared unless participant give permission for other people disclosed to the participant to see the records.

The recordings in this study will be digital audio recordings, not video recordings. The consent forms, audio recordings, and file notes will be saved on a password-protected computer and anonymous data may be used for other purposes, e.g., research report, journal articles, conference presentation, etc.

How will the information be stored and ultimately destroyed?

After the interview, the recorded audio will be uploaded onto Google Drive. The research will be protected by an encrypted password to which only the researcher will have access. After transcribing the data, the anonymised interview transcripts will be converted into PDFs and uploaded onto Google Drive for security reasons, awaiting analysis of the data. This data will be kept for a period of five years. The data that is stored on paper will be shredded.

Participation on this research is voluntary. Subsequently the research results will also be confidential into responses and the reporting of findings. The researcher is also obliged to inform the respondents how the results are intended to be used, and who will have access to the data. The research will be conducted purely for the academic purposes of obtaining my Master's degree (MBA). No information will be made available for public scrutiny nor risk to compromise the image of the company. The final research will be available for verification of content prior submission.

Regards



Zintle Ndandani

Approval Signatures:

A2. Engagement Letter

Ndandani, Zintle

From: Ndandani, Zintle
Sent: 04 December 2022 07:01 PM
To: zintlendandani@icloud.com
Subject: Master's Research interview request - December 2022
Attachments: Zintle Ndandani_Research Consent December 2022.pdf; Zintle Ndandani_2020119442_Study Leaflet December 2022.pdf

Good day Colleague,

I hope all is well with you. I am developing the abilities needed to conduct qualitative research interviews in order to effectively complete my Master's degree. As a result, I cordially invite you to take part in a research course interview. This interview research and content has been further approved by the Hillside HR Manager and Vice President Operations.

I would like to do a brief, audio-recorded interview with you. The analysis of the transcriptions will be used in the grading process.

I asked whether we could schedule the interview for any day between November 05 and November 08, 2022, because this course has deadlines.

Further on this email attached approved study leaflet of the research with a consent form. If you willing to participate, kindly sign the consent form attached and email back to me.

Regards
Zintle Ndandani
0722334054

A3. Editing Certificate

LET'S EDIT

EDITING CERTIFICATE

30 November 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

DECLARATION: Editing of Field Study

I hereby declare that the Master's in Business Administration field study of **Zintle Ndandani** entitled "**EXPLORING PROJECT LEADERSHIP THROUGH TEAM ENGAGEMENT AND COHESION AT HILLSIDE SMELTER**" has been edited. It is the responsibility of the student to address any comments from the editor or supervisor. The editor shall not be responsible for any subsequent additions or deletions made by the student in their document. Additionally, it is the final responsibility of the student to make sure of the correctness of the field study.



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