

Factors Influencing Staff Morale at a Mobile Network Operator in Bloemfontein

by

Tlhajwane Justice Molebatsi

2015064260

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Supervisor: Dr Masonette Du Toit

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Declaration

I, **Tlhajwane Justice Molebatsi**, student number 2015064260, declare that the field study hereby handed in for the qualification Master of Business Administration at the UFS Business School at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work, either as a whole or in part, for a qualification at/in another university or faculty.

I, furthermore, cede the copyright to the University of the Free State.



20 November 2024

Signed

Date

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List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
GHREC	General Human Research Ethics Committee
HR	Human Resources
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LDC	Limited Duration Contract
MBA	Master of Business Administration
SHRM	Society for Human Resource Management
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound
UFS	University of Free State
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WGU	Western Governors University

Abstract

Staff morale is a primary human resource (HR) element and a key driver of positive workplace culture and productivity. Although it is one of the most researched and explored subjects in workforce management, South African companies still struggle to motivate and engage employees. This study explores this practical gap in staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein. From his work experience in the organisation's workplace environment, the researcher developed the study from pragmatically identified staff morale issues. The study employed a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological study design to collate and analyse participants' perspectives, attitudes and feelings regarding the organisation's HR practices and general workplace environment. The researcher employed purposive sampling to select 15 respondents from a population of 87 employees to participate in semi-structured interviews, providing comprehensive data for objective and generalisable findings. The collected data were subjected to thematic analysis, generating trends and patterns and, ultimately, guaranteeing trustworthiness. The factors affecting staff morale in the mobile operator that emerged were perception of morale in the workplace, career advancement, managerial support, external influences on careers, performance management and work-life balance. The researcher recommends that the organisation foster an inclusive and supportive work environment that caters to staff needs and implements transparent and inclusive career development structures that allow all staff members to pursue growth opportunities. Most importantly, the organisation should promote leadership practices that promote empathy, transparency and trust. Managers should be trained to offer support while encouraging autonomy, innovation and open communication. The organisation should implement structured communication channels that ensure information flows seamlessly across all levels to foster a more inclusive and communicative workplace culture.

Keywords:

Staff morale, factors influencing staff morale, workplace conditions, managerial support, career advancement, performance management, communication, work-life balance, leadership.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Background

In today's fast-paced and interconnected world, the significance of maintaining staff morale cuts across geographical boundaries. While staff morale is universal, the factors influencing it vary significantly across different operational environments. Understanding the complexities and multifaceted layers of staff morale worldwide is essential for organisations striving to foster a positive work environment, promote staff well-being and maximise human capital.

Mallik et al. (2019) define staff morale as an intangible term that refers to how positive and supportive a group is towards the organisation to which it belongs. It also refers to the unique feelings, such as trust, self-worth, purpose, pride in one's accomplishment, faith in leadership and organisational success, that members of the group share with one another. Therefore, it is essential to understand the importance of staff morale as a critical component of any business.

Staff morale costs American companies billions in lost productivity, staff members disengagement and turnover (Bell, 2018). The primary factor influencing an organisation's decline in productivity, sustainability and profitability is low morale in the workplace (Street & Lacey, 2018). Low staff morale may damage the workplace structures and, ultimately, adversely affect the organisations. In South Africa, according to Mabindisa and Legoabe (2021), many organisations experience the same low staff morale, which affects staff performance at work, diminishes labour productivity and compromises the quality of life at work, ultimately jeopardising the success of organisations.

As South Africa faces challenging economic conditions, national, provincial and local government organisations and small businesses are expected to do more with fewer resources. This results in longer workdays, fewer opportunities to recharge and relax and increased responsibilities for staff members who remain behind. These workplace changes influence staff morale (Bennett, 2019).

Five years ago, the mobile network operator in this study embarked on a transformational journey to increase operational effectiveness and offer more

profound commercial knowledge and experience. A matrix reporting system was implemented and each region was assigned a general manager whose sole responsibility was to support the 'Ignite commercial performance' strategy in each area. The regional executive team comprises a general manager, senior managers, area managers, financial business partner and human resource (HR) partner. The researcher, who has been with the organisation for over 20 years, is the only senior manager in the regional executive team.

This study is a reaction to a series of meetings and discussions of the mobile network operator's regional executive committee, during which staff morale issues, workplace stability issues and supportive managers were discussed. Action plans had to be formulated to address the morale within the region.

Bolger (2023) highlights that sustainable engagement is one of the components of staff morale. As highlighted in some leadership meetings, a staff morale problem exists in the mobile network operator organisation. During performance reviews, it was also noted that staff morale was lower than it used to be. In 2019, the mobile network operator used the services of Willis Tower Watson (2019) – a company that uses multifaceted skills and knowledge of distinctive companies to understand the various behavioural trends and create specialised risk solutions.

Willis Tower Watson (2019) suggests that each functional area manager has to propose plans and initiatives to improve previous years' sustainable engagement results. For this reason, the researcher investigated the factors influencing staff morale, a contentious issue, at this mobile operator.

The importance of staff morale at this mobile network operator will help the organisation to achieve its strategic intent of leading digital solutions for Africa's progress, anchored in the belief that every citizen deserves the benefits of a modern connected life. According to Laoyan (2022), if staff morale is high, staff will be committed to the organisation's values and assist the organisation in delivering on its strategy. Low morale kills workplace performance and production. It has been linked to inadequate staffing, a high rate of verbal abuse, an increased risk of violence and staff feeling they have no voice in the workplace. High morale has been linked to

workplace stability, supportive management and clearly defined duties with expected outcomes.

Linezero (2021) notes that staff morale is elusive, vague and occasionally invisible. However, whether acknowledged or not, staff morale affects the workforce. High Fidelity (2019) endorses Linezero's (2021) point that occasionally, poor morale is expected in any work situation. However, if morale is continuously low, it may hurt the team's productivity.

Staff morale is linked to workplace happiness, engagements and leadership involvement in staff or organisational issues. As staff morale is also a component of morale, the survey conducted by Willis Towers Watson (2019) revealed lower staff engagement levels in the region, which could be attributed to other aspects that the researcher also investigated. According to Bolger (2023) which the study has also proven, because of the correlation between staff morale and staff engagement, those organisations that have invested in sustainable staff engagement have found tremendous success.

The literature has demonstrated a link between sustainable engagement and morale. The results consistently indicate that leadership, sustainable engagement and direct supervision must be improved to achieve the best results for the region. HR presented an overall picture, suggesting that more work is still needed concerning sustainable engagement in the area.

Root III (2022) affirms that, without high morale, there is no incentive for workers to succeed, no drive for productivity or innovation and no consideration for the organisation's future. Fostering positive confidence and balancing it with organisational success requires understanding that staff must be happy. This field study revealed the factors influencing staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein.

1.2 Problem Statement

The problem is the lack of knowledge about the factors influencing staff morale at the mobile network operator in Bloemfontein. The problem might have been due to recent changes implemented in the organisation. If the problem persists, it will lead to

disengaged staff members and encourage them to work as individuals rather than as a team, as evidenced by discussions at regional executive meetings and performance reviews.

Without proactive intervention, staff morale may continue to impact staff productivity and engagement, hindering organisational success and posing significant challenges to achieving the company's strategic objectives. Staff will do what they think is correct and not follow policies and procedures. A lack of knowledge about factors influencing staff morale will harm the organisation's functioning and productivity.

1.3 Research Questions

Three research questions were formulated:

- What factors affect staff morale in the workplace?
- How can the factors negatively affecting staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein be determined?
- How can the factors positively affecting staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein be determined?

1.4 Research Objectives

Both primary and secondary objectives were established.

1.4.1 Primary objective

- To explore staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein.

1.4.2 Secondary objectives

- To provide an overview of the factors affecting staff morale in the workplace.
- To determine the factors that negatively affect staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein.
- To determine the factors that positively affect staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein.

1.5 Research Methodology

Jansen and Warren (2020) define research methodology as the precise 'how' of a research undertaking. It focuses on the researcher's methodological approaches when creating a study to produce findings that meet the research goals and objectives. Knowing and measuring the truth demonstrate the assumption that knowledge can be measured using reliable tools. A decision on the methodology begins with choosing the research paradigm that informs the study. A constructivist methodology was used in this study.

1.6 Research Design

According to Busetto et al. (2020), a qualitative design studies phenomena, including their quality, manifestations, the context in which they appear or the perspectives from which they can be perceived. However, it excludes their range, frequency and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effect.

Qualitative research includes data in the form of words rather than numbers. Using qualitative design helps ask probing questions and provide a better context during data collection. Busetto et al. (2020) assert that qualitative design is differentiated by flexibility, openness and context responsiveness. Data collecting and analysis stages are not as sequential and discrete as in most quantitative research designs.

According to Bhandari (2020), non-numerical data are gathered and analysed in qualitative research to better comprehend ideas, viewpoints or experiences. It might discover intricate details about an issue or generate fresh study concepts. Qualitative research is done to comprehend how individuals see their surroundings. Although there are numerous ways to conduct qualitative research, most are adaptable and strongly emphasise preserving rich meaning when analysing data. One of the advantages of qualitative research is that when new research questions emerge, qualitative research can be modified to maintain the voice and perspective of participants.

This study used a case study methodology. McCombes (2019) defines a case study strategy as a qualitative design in which the researcher delves deeply into a programme, event, activity, process or one or more individuals. Cases are time- and

activity-bound; researchers gather thorough information over a long period using various data-gathering techniques.

Carlstrom (2022) defines a research paradigm as a philosophical framework that establishes a foundation of assumptions and comprehension on which the research study's theories and methods may be based. This research is based on constructivism, which focuses on what works and believes that a single reality needs to be interpreted.

1.7 Sampling Strategy

According to Gelston (2022), a sampling strategy determines how best to choose a sample from the population. A feasible approach is selected and its limitations are considered. According to Trochim (2000), sampling is the process or technique of selecting a suitable sample from a population of interest. The sampling strategy in this study considered non-probability and purposive sampling.

1.7.1 Non-probability sampling

According to Nikolopoulou (2022), non-probability sampling is a collection of non-probability sampling techniques where participants are chosen because they fit the criteria for the sample. Non-probability sampling is also called judgemental sampling, as the method relies on the researcher's judgement when deciding which people, situations or events will give the most information to help meet the study's goals.

1.7.2 Purposive sampling

Dudovskiy (2022) defines purposive sampling as a sampling strategy where the researcher selects participants from the population with discretion. As a non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling happens when a researcher's judgement is employed to select elements for the sample.

The researcher used purposive sampling, a non-random sampling method in this study. The recruitment strategy involved purposefully selecting participants from different departments at different organisational levels with more than five years of experience in business and supervisory skills or experience dealing with staff issues. The researcher obtained preliminary permission from the General Manager to collect

data from all these permanent staff members. HR was engaged to assist the researcher in distributing consent forms and facilitating further engagements with the selected and recruited participants

Bhandari (2020) defines population as the entire group the researcher wants to determine, whereas a sample is a specific group from which the researcher collects data. Bhandari points out that the sample size is always smaller than the population's. The researcher did not interview staff members directly reporting to him to avoid the power differential and conflict of interest. Staff on limited duration contracts (LDCs) were excluded as they do not enjoy company benefits other than the opportunity to share office space. The experiential students were also excluded as the duration of their contract with the company expires after 12 months.

The 87 staff members at the mobile network operator's Bloemfontein office are responsible for operational activities in the Free State, Northern Cape and part of Northwest Province. The population comprises different divisions (customer representatives, supervisors, line managers, HR and risk and compliance). A sample of 15 staff members was selected for the research because of their experience handling staff issues and end-to-end business knowledge.

HR was pivotal in ensuring that the chosen participants were free to participate and that the process was fair and transparent. The researcher interviewed all the selected participants to the point where data saturation was high and enough data had been collected to draw the necessary conclusions.

1.8 Data Collection Method

Bhandari (2020) asserts that data collection allows the researcher to gain first-hand knowledge and original perception of the individual's research and defines the data collection method as systematically collecting qualitative data. This process can be used to conduct research for business and academic purposes.

Magaldi and Berler (2020) highlight that a semi-structured interview is a form of exploration most frequently used in the social sciences to collect data for qualitative research. The semi-structured interview allows for discovery with room to pursue thematic trends as the conversation evolves, even though it often follows an outline

developed before the interview. It is centred on a core topic to provide a basic structure. As this was a case study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 questions but further probing questions were asked when necessary. The interviews lasted 45 minutes to an hour, depending on the engagement quality and the participants were open to probing questions.

Muscad (2022) defines a consent form as a document signed between two or more parties. It is used to get approval for specific actions or transactions. For transparency, the HR partner assisted the researcher by distributing the consent forms and requests via email to selected respondents to participate in the study as per the permission granted to conduct the research in the organisation. Even the name of the organisation was anonymised.

Preliminary permission was granted to conduct the study and use sources in the organisation to be part of the study. The researcher used a voice recorder with the participants' permission to listen to the recordings in his own time and made proper notes to analyse later.

1.9 Data Analysis

Stevens (2023) defines data analysis as analysing, filtering, adapting and modelling data to solve problems. Data analysis serves to discover what is and is not working, allowing the researcher to make the necessary changes to reach business objectives. It includes analysing qualitative and quantitative data to identify and make informed decisions.

Delve and Limpaecher (2020) define thematic analysis as a qualitative data analysis technique that includes reading over a data set and looking for patterns in the meaning of the data to generate themes. It is a strategy for detecting, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative data. With the assistance of thematic analysis, collected data is arranged and reviewed as themes. Crosley (2022) affirms that the trends in a dataset can be recognised as themes. The researcher categorised and summarised the data sets by grouping feedback into themes to address the research question(s) and fulfil the study aim and objectives.

1.10 Ethical Considerations

According to Bashin (2020), a set of ideals and principles known as ethical considerations should be upheld when conducting research. No participant directly reporting to the researcher was interviewed to avoid a conflict of interest and the possibility of a power differential. All staff members were informed that they could stop the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable at any stage. It was also explained that the interview would not influence their work as this was for studies and had no bearing on the workplace.

Moral standards ensure that no one acts in a harmful way to society or a particular person and prohibit rude behaviour by individuals and groups. The following ethical considerations were addressed.

1.10.1 Permission obtained

Toppr (2020) describes a formal letter requesting approval for a specific circumstance or a plan as a permission letter addressed to the appropriate authorities. The Regional General Manager at the mobile network operator in Bloemfontein was consulted in writing for consent. The approval letter was attached before data collection began.

1.10.2 Informed consent

Research Support (2021) defines informed consent as the guiding idea of scientific ethics. The goal would be for human volunteers to freely (voluntarily) participate in the research after receiving complete information regarding what it entails and giving their consent. The staff members were informed of the study's aim and objectives and any possible risks resulting from the investigation. A consent form, which had to be signed by participants, was used.

1.10.3 Voluntary participation

Bhandari (2020) confirms that no pressure or coercion should be placed on any research participants to participate. He further elaborates that every participant is free to stop participating in the study at any time without feeling obliged to do so. Therefore, participants should not be required to justify abandoning the research. Participants

were informed of every aspect of the research, especially its objectives, and a consent form document was used.

1.10.4 Confidentiality

Coffelt (2017) states that separating or altering any personally identifying data provided by participants is called confidentiality. Recognising the participants while excluding all critical data from the report demonstrates confidentiality (Bhandari, 2020). Participant data was kept private and confidential and treated accordingly. Participants' social, professional, personal and cultural values were not sacrificed to pursue knowledge.

1.10.5 No harm

Knight (2022) reaffirms that researchers have a variety of obligations, not the least of which is to ensure that participants are treated with respect and are fully heard. The interaction between researchers and participants has shifted significantly. In the past, study subjects were only considered objects of the study. However, the researchers should have contributed more to the conclusions. As a result, participants are increasingly viewed as collaborative collaborators and knowledge co-creators.

1.10.6 Obtain ethical clearance

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the General Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC) of the University of the Free State (Annexure A.2).

1.11 Conflict of Interest

Conflicts of interest in research occur when competing financial, personal or professional relationships, as well as individual views and positions, may affect or appear to compromise professional objectivity (Pubsure, 2021). The researcher heads up the technology department, which employs 26 permanent staff members with nine direct reports. To avoid a conflict of interest, all staff members from the technology department were excluded.

1.12 Demarcation of Study

This study investigates the factors influencing staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein. As this study focuses on staff welfare, HR management will be the area of investigation at the mobile network operator in Bloemfontein.

1.13 Conclusion

This study identified the factors influencing staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein. It adopted a qualitative approach, collecting staff members' feelings and perspectives towards the current organisational workplace conditions. The researcher used the findings to formulate suggestions for regional leadership on upholding and sustaining optimal workforce morale and building high-performance teams that put customers at the centre of every action.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a comprehensive, explorative synthesis and review of the existing literature regarding staff morale, specifically focusing on its practical implications in the mobile network industry. It offers an overview of staff morale as a research concept while highlighting knowledge gaps that justify this study's relevance.

According to Maggio et al. (2016), the literature review is the integral section of scientific research that guides researchers in contextualising the research subject, adopting the appropriate methodology and avoiding duplicative research. Saunders et al. (2019) note that an effective literature review must align the study by linking the specific objectives to conceptual and theoretical frameworks.

People often discuss the morale of individuals or groups in challenging situations and invariably describe that spirit as excellent or low. An excellent spirit is characterised by positive or high staff morale, where staff members display disciplinary compliance, optimal organisational, leadership loyalty, job interest and organisational pride (Huo, 2019).

Therefore, this chapter revises and explores existing studies on staff morale, its importance and the factors affecting it. Considering the study's rationale, the chapter significantly integrates the findings of previous studies on staff morale in the telecommunication sector to offer insights that can inform attaining the research objectives. The following section explores the definition and scope of staff morale.

2.2 Scope and Definition of Staff Morale

According to Khumalo (2021), morale is a motivation to keep the organisation expanding and accomplishing its goals or a feeling of well-being that accompanies self-assurance, usefulness and purpose. Additionally, Edwards (2022) defines morale as the level of individual psychological well-being based on a sense of purpose and confidence in the future and a person or group's mental and emotional condition. He further asserts that morale regularly shifts depending on the circumstances and factors of the moment, an especially challenging managerial aspect in dynamic operational

fields such as the telecommunications industry. Transcending social interactions and establishing confidence in an organisation and its processes, procedures and leadership primarily define staff morale.

Burtler (2022) defines employee morale as the overall perception of the workforce, which includes emotions, attitudes, outlook and level of satisfaction. He notes that working circumstances and perspectives define staff morale rather than causing it and that group and individual morale have a mutually causal relationship. Such presupposition implies that staff morale is the overall contention in the workplace and requires the strategic shaping of the organisational culture and structure to accommodate individual and team needs.

Haddock (2010) notes that staff morale is a factor of staff confidence in organisational leadership and management as it involves shared trust, pride in accomplishment, purpose and self-worth. Thus, staff morale is synonymous with staff satisfaction because it primarily focuses on how an individual feels and perceives the workplace environment. Teimouri et al. (2018) clarify the synonymy between staff morale and satisfaction by highlighting that both concepts regard an individual's psychological and social well-being in the workplace, which invokes pleasurable emotions and drives personal and organisational achievement.

Nur et al. (2021) define staff morale as an overarching subject that embodies job satisfaction, emotional connection to the job and overall work environment and feelings of well-being towards a company. Minor et al. (2014) add that staff morale has six facets: individual feelings and attitudes towards leadership, status, appraisal accomplishments and failures, outlook, belonging to the workplace and sacrificing in different work situations.

Coffey (2021) categorises staff morale into two facets depending on the situation in the work environment: high or low morale. Morale is high when staff members feel good about their work environment, achieve their goals and objectives and realise that the organisation treats them with respect and care. On the contrary, morale is low if staff members are unhappy or feel unappreciated, cannot meet their goals or clash with management or co-workers (Burtler, 2022).

Conversely, low staff morale describes an unproductive work environment where staff members display “apathy towards the company and customers, in-fighting, distrust, jealousy amongst staff members, disloyalty, and noncompliant actions towards the company and management” (Bhasin, 2018, p. 32). Therefore, high staff morale is evident in a productive work environment where staff members are engaged and motivated to achieve their performance targets while enhancing efficiency in operations for optimal organisational performance. On the other hand, organisations with low staff morale display weak and inefficient workplace cultures and structures where individuals need more drive to achieve personal and organisational performance targets.

While staff morale is imperative for organisational performance and operational sustainability, it remains a primary challenge in many workplaces globally. Pervaiz et al. (2021) assert that organisations are under immense pressure to keep their staff members motivated and productive amid the significant advancement in information technology, the proliferation of globalisation and stiff market competition. However, many corporates are struggling with achieving optimal staff morale.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) (2022), global research revealed that 81% of workers rate their organisational culture as poor, implying inefficiency in supporting productive workplace culture and low staff morale. A 2013 research study focusing on 142 countries indicated that 70% of American workers do not attain their maximum job potential in their workplaces (Sorenson & Garman, 2013).

In the United Kingdom (UK), 57% of staff members are not engaged at work and 26% are ‘actively disengaged’ at their workplace (Pindar, 2023). In the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, job satisfaction remains a primary challenge; in countries such as Thailand, 37% of staff members are likely to resign in pursuit of better work environments (Sengupta & Vardhan, 2017).

Such statistics from developed nations imply a critical gap in enforcing optimal staff members morale for organisational performance and productivity. In South Africa, racial disparity and the influence of the apartheid system have often attracted negative

connotations of racism and other social vices in workplaces, creating a challenge to staff morale (Omar, 2022).

Research on telecommunication has highlighted significantly lower staff morale than other industries. Sengupta and Vardhan (2017) highlight that Mumbai's telecommunication sector staff members display high job stress associated with inadequate work opportunities that result in lower satisfaction and high turnover. They also cite that Thailand's telecommunication sector has the highest number of unhappy staff members. Therefore, exploring factors affecting staff morale for mobile network operators in Bloemfontein is imperative.

2.3 Importance of Staff Morale

Staff morale is instrumental in the drive for proactiveness among an organisation's staff members. It drives motivation and engagement, resulting in a workplace mood where individuals collaborate with fellows to achieve an organisational purpose. The SHRM (2022) claims that one of the significant causes of job turnover is low morale. Thus, an organisation's ability to attract and retain top talent depends on its efficiency in enforcing and sustaining staff morale.

According to Pervaiz et al (2021), proactive staff members are an integral asset for organisations. This prompts management to continue the long-term vicious cycle of human capital development to guide acquiring and maintaining a highly competitive edge. Organisations that cannot develop objective and practical strategies to enhance and sustain staff morale struggle with low productivity, unstable operational sustainability and profitability, absenteeism, high turnover and operational losses (Coffey, 2021).

Furthermore, a lack of staff morale in an organisation destroys workplace culture and structures, causing adverse effects on operational stability and sustainability. Conversely, high staff morale helps organisational leaders build a healthy work environment and efficient management, where individuals are driven to meet their performance targets without coercion.

Companies worldwide realise a return on investment through improved morale and performance across business objectives by adopting strategic improvements within

departments of all sizes. The remarkable advantages of restructuring business are becoming increasingly apparent because a motivated and engaged workforce often drives organisational performance and productivity. According to Abbas (2022), organisational restructuring can be a successful method for taking any company from good to outstanding, resulting in decreased expenses from needless processes and operations to better staff member morale and productivity.

According to Sheetz (2020), high staff morale is critical to a business's overall success in several ways. Staff members who rank high in morale usually have positive attitudes, confidence, enthusiasm and loyalty, as this lessens staff turnover and allows staff to focus more on customers or outcomes. As a result, there is an overall low level of absenteeism and staff members endeavour to meet prescribed deadlines. Staff members pay increased attention to details as they synchronise with company objectives.

Ogbe et al. (2019) reveal that staff members with low morale towards the company will impair its function. Ultimately, they care less about the quality of the services they provide. Knowing what positively or negatively influences staff morale and basing changes on these factors is always helpful. Although the importance of staff morale is inarguable, it is often challenging to achieve holistic team motivation as morale triggers differ across personalities.

2.4 Factors Influencing Staff Morale

The broad scope of staff morale and its interconnectedness with job satisfaction, staff members' motivation and engagement and different organisational aspects, primarily structural, cultural and managerial aspects, affect an individual's drive to deliver optimally. Operating a company productively and sustainably is impractical when the staff is dissatisfied, uninspired and afflicted by low staff morale.

All factors contributing to a lack of job satisfaction result in low morale, making staff members lose connection to the organisation and trust in management (Stewart, 2019). Ogunmakin (2023) details inadequate pay, unfair or inadequate promotions, strict supervision, unfavourable workplace environment and lack of job security as the major factors contributing to low staff morale.

2.4.1 Leadership

Leadership is among the most widely debated and researched topics in academia. According to Memon (2014), leadership guides and motivates staff members towards achieving the organisation's goals. Akparep et al. (2019) identify leadership as one of the most critical factors in increasing company performance, emphasising its relationship with staff motivation, engagement and morale.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership (2022), a leader must face several obstacles, adopt staff member-sensitive evidence-based approaches and demonstrate the ability to manage multinational teams with cultural intelligence to fit the definition of an effective global leader. A leader's perceptions, knowledge, managerial style and other attributes profoundly influence staff morale within an organisation.

Effective leadership can boost morale and create a positive work environment, while poor leadership can lead to low morale and a hostile workplace atmosphere (Freire & Bettencourt, 2020; Guo, 2022). Sharifuddin et al. (2020) note that an organisation's leadership significantly influences how staff members feel about themselves and the organisation, considerably informing job morale and turnover retention.

The ethical leadership theory offers a theoretical basis for the relationship between effective leadership and the morale and performance of staff members by linking moral ethics with management literature. While embracing the principles of ethical leadership, a leader must prioritise moral conduct as a strategy for initiating a two-way relationship, communication and decision-making (Jameel & Ahmad, 2020). By embracing ethics, adopting appropriate ideas, behaviour and conduct is possible, allowing leaders to be morally responsible and empowering staff members' behaviour to influence their motivation and satisfaction.

According to Freire and Bettencourt (2020), ethical leadership has a holistic scope as it allows leaders to go beyond influencing staff members' behaviour to address their needs for optimal work satisfaction in a timely and efficient manner. It is also based on fairness in offering rewards and treating staff members appropriately, supporting a workplace culture where everyone feels appreciated and relevant in achieving the

organisation's purpose (Guo, 2022). Applying the theoretical concept of ethical leadership guides managers in developing the most feasible leadership strategy that is accommodative, inclusive and participatory to drive staff morale and satisfaction.

Mohiuddin (2017) justifies the importance of ethical leadership by noting that how leaders interact with their subordinates significantly impacts how well they perform, develop and have a positive attitude towards accomplishing corporate goals. Indeed Editorial Team (2021) demonstrated that a transformational leadership style has a better impact on staff morale than a transactional style because it narrows the gap between leaders and their subordinates.

According to Mohiuddin (2017), autocratic leadership is feasible when staff members are less knowledgeable and uninformed of the job description, noting the need to consider a democratic style in a work setting where staff members effectively understand their responsibilities to enhance creative problem-solving solutions and improve staff morale. Therefore, a leader must understand when to use leadership approaches with evidence-based backing to support their approaches to enhance and sustain staff morale.

Adequate and quality leadership requires individuals who can uphold positive values while demonstrating a strong sense of purpose that can positively impact organisational performance. According to Torres (2022), leadership is instrumental in enforcing optimal organisational performance because it facilitates or degrades work conditions that sustain work satisfaction. In a job environment where leadership allows participatory decision-making and autonomy in operations, staff are engaged and motivated to achieve optimal work quality and quantity.

Thus, Noor and Ampornstira (2019) have linked a transformational leadership style with job morale and satisfaction because managers adopting this style display outstanding inspiration, individual consideration and intellectual stimulation. According to De Vos et al. (2005), transformational leaders embrace seamless cooperation with staff members, developing a participatory operational structure that can uphold collaborative decision-making and exchange of ideas. Thus, leaders must deploy an informed approach to management as an intentional strategy to sustain staff morale for optimal organisational performance.

As many organisations, including mobile network operators, are now purpose- and value-driven, evidence-based leadership is imperative in enhancing the organisation's capacity to handle complex social needs (Siew et al., 2020). Staff members are more likely than ever to prefer working in environments that support work-life balance and various other initiatives that genuinely prioritise their interests and professional advancement.

Thomas (2019) highlights that future leaders must adopt a staff members-centred management style for their companies to productively and sustainably operate in the contemporary technologically advanced and competitive business world. With the unparalleled speed of change in an uncertain and dynamic operational environment, leaders in the telecommunication sector must adopt flexible managerial styles to attract a top-skilled workforce and boost staff morale (Siew et al., 2020). Such achievement is possible by consistently engaging in practices that enhance individual and team motivation and dedication to organisational goals.

Global leaders face a higher level of complexity than national and regional leaders. Although some mobile operators might consider their operational scope as local or regional to be effective outside of familiar settings, radical globalisation and uncertainties in the industry require leaders who can think and behave in novel ways while keeping aware of societal variations. Although leaders face myriad challenges, creating a favourable work environment that accommodates diversity and enhances staff members' motivation and engagement is imperative.

Leaders must embrace an appropriate tone by displaying the proper behaviour, attitude and actions embodied in positivity, enthusiasm and a strong work ethic. The Center for Creative Leadership (2022) emphasises that efficient leaders must instil trust among their subordinates, comprehend and value diverse points of view and foster alignment around the task at hand and the organisation's objective. An organisation seeking to build a resolute team of motivated staff members must have ethical leadership that treats its workforce humanely and prioritises setting the right workplace culture and structure for optimal individual performance and productivity.

2.4.2 Micromanagement

Micromanagement is a supervisory style in which a leader directly commands all operation specifics, limiting the subordinates' autonomy to exercise their critical thinking in problem-solving and decision-making (Ranji, 2014). Mookerjee et al. (2022) define the scope of micromanagement as comprising leaders who scrutinise every detail, excessively request updates, display unreasonable frustrations while assessing subordinates, are always unsatisfied with subordinates' results, insist on details and take pride in correction.

Micromanagers display insecurities, fear of failure, distrust or time limitations that force them to operate authoritatively (Wilkins, 2021). Besides, they mostly thrive in hierarchical workplace environments where the subordinate-leader boundary is significant, hindering vertical collaboration (Serrat, 2017). According to Solaja et al. (2022), micromanagers strive to build an error-free system that creates perfection and ensures the availability of information when needed. Generally, micromanagement involves a leader overdoing their managerial role to hinder the subordinates' ability to exercise their creativity and deliver optimally. Its dominance in an organisation is primarily a factor of a leader's personality or structure; its negative implications are inarguable.

According to Ashkenas (2011), managers micromanage because of the fear of disconnection and familiarity in operations. They note that as managers climb the corporate ladder, they frequently worry about disconnecting from the organisation's work. They begin to feel alone as they have less frequent contact with the work floor or customers. Consequently, they opt to seek information to minimise loneliness constantly. Although this approach might appear justifiable, the accompanying constant monitoring of staff members minimises leader-subordinate trust and derails their morale (Ranji, 2014).

Ashkenas (2011) also explains that many managers need help to relinquish their previous positions or working styles. A staff member's promotion to a manager often results from the ability to meet operational objectives, manage budgets, maintain control over their numbers and find solutions. However, managers need to be more strategic at higher levels than efficient in operational emphasis by prioritising their

subordinates' needs above their own and trusting them to manage day-to-day tasks rather than working on their behalf. The shift in focus is always challenging for managers who unconsciously remain stuck in their familiar operational environment. Consequently, such an approach derails staff morale as high-performing staff members prefer to avoid being shadowed (Shuford, 2019).

Peters (2019) has established that micromanagement significantly ruins staff morale by minimising their autonomy, distorting their general mood and hindering their innovativeness and inventiveness. Micromanagers often fail to provide team support and guidance and facilitate a healthy working environment where staff members can perform at their best because their leadership strategy is not staff members-centred (Allcorn, 2022). With their insecurities and inefficient attention to detail, they must provide staff members with autonomy to help them thrive to their full potential.

A micromanager deprives staff members of self-confidence and self-efficacy, turning them into robots who can do nothing without permission. By subjecting individuals to close scrutinization of thoughts, feelings and actions, micromanagement produces staff members with a collapsed interpersonal space and personal integrity, implying low morale, motivation and engagement (Allcorn, 2022).

Shuford (2019) asserts that micromanagement contributes significantly to low staff morale by creating and broadening a gap between the management and the workforce, making staff members resistant to organisational changes. A micromanaged staff member is highly likely to undermine authority, appear motivated and disengaged and fail to achieve their job potential. Brougham-Chandler (2022) identifies micromanagement as the poorest, most harmful and morale-depleting method of managing staff members, adversely impacting staff retention, productivity and people's health.

Although management's role might appear simple, leading individuals with diverse work rates and capabilities requires an informed approach to ensure that the adopted management level fits the operational environment and can support the development of staff members' skills (Allcorn, 2022). Although underperforming and new staff might require attention, overdoing supervision attracts more harm than good because it demotivates and disengages individuals, reducing their work morale.

Similarly, high-performing staff members may not want to be micromanaged as assigning tasks and checking them occasionally gives them the autonomy to exercise their creativity and operate productively without stressors (Solaja et al., 2022). Such staff members are output-driven, initiative-takers, task-oriented and capable of producing the desired results without close supervision or coercion. As staff morale relates to how the staff feel about themselves and behave towards an organisation, managers must avoid mismanagement to create a favourable workplace environment that supports high morale for optimal staff member performance and organisational productivity.

2.4.3 Working conditions

Ajala and Busayo (2017) define working conditions as the workplace environment and every aspect that affects labour, such as work hours, physical appearance, legal rights, corporate culture, workload, instructions and training. Work environment sums all organisational aspects that define the work environment, including managerial efficiency and such minor aspects as office structure (Vaid, 2023). Therefore, analysing staff morale only by exploring working conditions is possible as everyone prefers an immersive workplace environment where their involvement drives value while positively impacting them.

Tschohl (2022) has revealed that favourable work conditions enable staff members to work enthusiastically and enterprisingly because they are proud of their work and the organisation. These conditions are anchored in a productive workplace environment, where accountability, safety, equity, trust, collaboration and other vital elements of a favourable workplace culture are incorruptible (Michigan State University, 2023).

Organisations that maintain a positive workplace culture and structure value staff members as indispensable assets and engines of their operations. Their strategic planning enables holistic, effective alignment of the work environment to offer conditions that can sustain individual physical, psychological and emotional well-being in the organisation (Vaid, 2023). Such aspects drive staff engagement and morale, enhancing productivity and general organisational performance. According to Zhenjing et al (2022), a positive work environment also significantly improves and sustains staff

commitment levels and achievement-striving ability, significantly impacting staff morale.

Coffey (2021) asserts that the physical workplace might appear insignificant, including lighting, staff member friendliness, temperature, chair arrangement and other configurational aspects. However, it substantively impacts staff members' comfort, affecting morale, motivation and productivity. Ajalo and Busayo (2017) affirm that the physical perspective, including a clean, well-maintained environment, helps minimise work stress and discomfort, thus contributing to improved staff morale in the workplace.

Conversely, a hazardous and poorly maintained working environment reflects poor workplace culture and structure and adversely impacts staff morale (Michigan State University, 2023). The social aspect of working conditions regards the nature and efficiency of interpersonal interactions, which include peer relationships and staff member-leader interaction. It embodies management, leadership, communication and elements that support seamless and robust interactions in the workplace (Vaid, 2023). An organisation needs to holistically address all aspects of working conditions to achieve self-driven staff members with high morale.

2.4.4 Goal setting

Goal setting is an integral aspect of every organisation. It aligns staff members' activities with the organisation's purpose, ensuring that every individual's input substantially contributes to organisational performance. Establishing goals, individual or organisational, motivates workers and boosts their productivity (Wright et al., 1993).

Various studies have highlighted the intrinsic desire to reach some set goals as the key motivating agent that sustains an individual's morale at work (Gilliland & Landis, 1992; Shin et al., 2019). However, goal setting is a double-edged sword and can impact positively or negatively. Unrealistic goals, impractical timelines or insufficient funding affect staff morale as unrealistic expectations influence the company and its success (Schweitzer et al., 2004).

Goal setting theory and the path-goal model offer a theoretical background on the importance of objective and inclusive goal setting in an organisation. Goal setting

theory proponents emphasise that the difference in staff performance is primarily due to distinct performance goals, highlighting the need to ensure staff-centred, specific and challenging goals (Latham, 2012).

According to Shin et al. (2019), goal setting specificity requires internal referent words and clarity to enhance acceptable performance levels and minimise ambiguity. A supervisor should evaluate a staff member's skill level and capacity to set performance targets objectively (Latham, 2012). Such an approach ensures that the performance goals have a reasonable degree of difficulty, avoiding instances of too high or significantly low goals that may demotivate staff members. As Asmus et al. (2015) highlight, goals can only affect staff morale and performance if they meet a certain relative difficulty threshold. The principles of this theory generally assert that an individual's goals should be optimally challenging and specific to their job to increase staff member performance substantially.

The path-goal leadership theory emphasises inclusivity in goal setting, noting that performance targets are only realistic and achievable when staff members participate in goal setting (Beeler et al., 1997). In this goal setting approach, the supervisor actively engages the staff members in determining specific performance metrics and the goal implementation procedures. This theory requires that supervisors engage their subordinates as collaborators through participative, directive and supportive leadership styles rather than acting as masters.

The staff member-supervisor gap must be insignificant to allow collaborative goal setting and frequent assessments and feedback to ensure that individuals are on the proper action track and satisfied with their jobs (Gilliland & Landis, 1992). Consequently, managers have a participatory goal setting scheme, which improves staff morale and productivity.

Besides these theories, researchers agree that a practical goal must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). However, attaining these principles when assigning goals is complex because it requires objectively determining a staff member's capacity and balancing their skills with performance targets (Wright et al., 1993). Unobjectively defined goals harm staff morale as they may force individuals to multitask, take risks and engage unethically (Schweitzer et al., 2004).

Such performance targets also hinder team cooperation and collaboration as individuals focus on achieving their own goals. They might compete with one another, resulting in misplaced work morale. Goerg (2015) summarises the adverse implications of ineffective goal setting by noting that wrong performance targets may reflect positivity in staff productivity but result in detrimental behaviour that destroys the organisational culture.

According to Ndegwa (2019), setting unrealistic targets or goals is the most detrimental to staff morale. They explain that unspecific and unrealistic goals often breed a lack of enthusiasm, where staff members do not buy into the organisation's goals and aspirations, negatively affecting staff morale in the short and long term (Goerg, 2015). Therefore, organisations must adopt objective and inclusive goal setting procedures to enjoy the merits and avoid the negative implications.

According to Half (2022), even the most experienced managers can make blunders under pressure to make difficult decisions, especially when an organisation is underperforming. Besides, staff members may battle unrealistic and competing ambitions at work during periods of change if their leaders fail to offer practical guidance. Thus, balancing goals and staff member morale is a valuable challenge in the corporate environment.

Some studies recommend contacting staff and soliciting input to inquire whether they believe their goals are reasonable as primary approaches to avoiding unrealistic goals (Jameel & Ahmad, 2020; Shin et al., 2019; Wright et al., 1993). Half (2022) suggests that setting objectives encouraging staff members to exceed their average productivity is a reliable approach to supporting excellent outcomes.

Goerg (2015, p. 9) highlights that it is “prudent to set goals in simple work environments, where a single measurable input determines output and where chances for adverse behaviour are low”. He also recommends that setting goals in complex work environments must adhere to the SMART requirements to boost staff morale effectively. Overall, local network operators should develop a systematic goal setting procedure to realise the merits of staff motivation and morale.

2.4.5 Compensation and benefits

While staff compensation refers to any form of pay and rewards that an organisation offers to staff members according to the employment terms, staff benefits are the indirect financial and nonfinancial payments to staff members for their continued service (Kadir et al., 2019; Tumi et al., 2021). Generally, compensation and benefits refer to the valuable advantages staff members enjoy working in a particular organisation. Primary compensation types include remunerations, such as salary, wages and allowances (Thapa, 2023). Benefits can be promotions to higher-ranking positions or incentives where the organisation recognises the staff member's efforts through additional financial or nonfinancial offers such as gift cards and paid vacations.

Kadir et al. (2019) have established links between an organisation's compensation and benefits system and staff morale. Organisations that link compensation to performance enjoy high staff motivation, as individuals often strive to earn a higher salary and better benefits, thus effortlessly working to achieve the set performance targets (Ogunmakin, 2023). Casson (2014) establishes that staff members who feel that their performance is rewarded when they go 'above and beyond' are primarily satisfied with their jobs and the organisation and vice versa.

Hiam (2003) establishes that the assumption that financial rewards adequately reinforce staff morale is a misconception because they move individuals to achieve the set goals. They note that staff motivation has a broader scope than productivity because it regards an individual's ability, drive and comfort while working in a specific role.

Other studies' findings also have this viewpoint by noting that salaries and wages can only effectively reinforce staff morale and performance until they achieve financial stability and security (Thapa, 2023; Tumi et al., 2021). A financially driven staff member might not have the drive to work when they attain the anticipated monetary capacity. However, organisations with compelling and favourable salaries, health benefits and other monetary gains have a competitive edge in the labour market and often attract and maintain the most skilled workforce.

Staff members working in organisations that pay negligibly are more likely to be unsatisfied and demotivated as they usually seek better salary contracts (Ogunmakin, 2023). Research has identified that the public sector and private companies offering fewer financial returns have a shortage of top-skilled technical personnel as professionals in technological fields have a high affinity for better salaries (Tumi et al., 2021). Therefore, the mobile network operator in Bloemfontein should have better, more compelling salaries and wages that can effectively compete in the labour market in the industry to guarantee staff motivation, satisfaction and morale.

Organisational promotion has significant positive implications on staff morale because it motivates lower-level staff members to display substantive effort and drive, hoping to receive similar recognition. As Hussain (1993) highlights, organisations that fairly award promotions to staff members according to their performance achieve significant staff motivation, with individuals working for such nonfinancial benefits as recommendations, certifications and testimonials that can gradually guarantee a promotion.

An organisation must ensure that individuals have equal chances of promotion to avoid having a category of individuals who think they will never have a promotion, thus displaying low morale (Thapa, 2023). However, promoting individuals according to their knowledge and skills is imperative rather than just using them as part of the reward system, which may harm individual and organisational performance (Lai & Choong, 2010).

Other forms of staff member compensation, including recognition, fringe benefits and bonuses, significantly drive staff morale. As Wooll (2022) highlights, all forms of compensation and benefits boost staff morale in the workplace when effectively implemented. Organisations must adopt an objective approach that employs benefits and compensation to encourage hard work and dedication among staff.

When fairly and effectively implemented, benefits encourage average staff members to meet the organisation's goals optimally. A fair compensation and reward system assures the staff that the organisation understands their needs, enhancing job satisfaction and morale (Thapa, 2023). Whether financial or nonfinancial, an

organisation's need for compensation and benefits is inarguable in building and sustaining staff motivation and morale.

2.4.6 Communication

Curado et al. (2022) define communication as the process of mutual influence and reciprocity that leads to interdependent exchanges and contributes to feelings of satisfaction. Communication is the instrumental aspect of the organisational structure that drives interpersonal relationships and collaboration (Musheke & Phiri, 2021). It is the bridge between the organisational management and staff members. It also serves as the linking element that supports the seamless flow of information to ensure that staff members do what they are supposed to do at the right time and in the appropriate manner.

Communication is a subcomponent of organisational culture that embodies formal meetings, announcements and informal conversations. A productive workplace environment always has a sustainable culture of trust, where individuals can communicate transparently, honestly and timely across all ranks without critical impediments (Willman & Lucke-Wold, 2021). Leaders can only create and sustain a productive workplace culture by embracing primary principles of effective communication, such as active listening, clear and concise messaging and transparency. Consequently, communication is instrumental in enforcing and sustaining influential workplace culture and structure – vital elements of a favourable workplace environment.

Efficient organisational communication significantly affects staff engagement, satisfaction, morale and motivation. According to Kim et al. (2020), organisations with influential communication cultures and structures have committed staff members who display high morale because they understand what they do and feel valued. Thomas (2021) argues that natural leaders with good communication skills always maintain their values while living as an example for people to follow. They engage their subordinates in a manner that adds value and uplifts staff morale.

Ramirez-Lozano et al. (2023) add that managers can only embrace authentic leadership by promoting transparent communication and regular interaction between

staff and management, which often guarantees high workplace morale. They explain that failure to communicate with the staff members regarding organisational issues derails staff morale as it forces them to rely on rumours while obtaining information. Bowles and Cooper (2009) assert that managers can rely on communication to assess workforce morale by observing and analysing their body language and eye contact while engaging in a dialogue. Thus, only an efficient organisational communication structure can attain optimal staff member morale.

O'Malley (2017) emphasises that managers must be deliberate with their messaging to boost work morale. An influential communication culture allows staff members to offer input, ask questions and create a more inclusive and engaged workforce. They explain that intentional messaging implies that an organisation values the opinions and ideas of its staff members, contributing to higher morale.

Curado et al. (2022) add that effective communication is a cornerstone of positive staff morale. It establishes and sustains a sense of trust, belonging and engagement among staff members by making them feel valued and appreciated. Simonovic (2022) states that regular communication enhances a company's reputation and keeps staff happy, which improves morale. She notes that openness evokes a deep sense of trust, creating an environment where staff members are more likely to accept and cope with organisational change. Therefore, organisations should prioritise open, transparent and empathetic communication practices to foster a positive work environment and boost staff morale.

Although many organisational leaders understand the value of quality and a reliable communication structure and culture, enforcing its principles in the workplace is often challenging. According to the principles of social exchange theory, a primary philosophy in exploring the position of communication in the corporate environment, communication efficiency is holistic; it refers to the messaging and coordination at three levels: the organisation, leaders and peers (Curado et al., 2022). However, achieving such a level of synchronisation is demanding, considering contemporary rapid globalisation and its resulting workplace diversity (Musheke & Phiri, 2021).

People from different cultures have definitions of practical communication standards, posing a critical managerial challenge in organisations. Leaders should go beyond

displaying efficient communication styles to enacting a capacity to manage a diverse and intercultural workforce practically. Successful leaders of the 21st century must be able to manage individuals from different cultural backgrounds with insignificant communication barriers (Walancik, 2014; Willman & Lucke-Wold, 2021). Such presupposition implies that the complexity of capitalising on communication culture and structure for staff morale is increasing steadily and posing a puzzle to organisational leadership.

However, leaders and managers have no excuse because they must facilitate open communication to boost staff morale (DuBrin, 2013). Regardless of complexity, organisational leaders must take an objective and strategic approach to creating effective communication. This approach guarantees a positive work culture with utmost trust and transparency, where individuals and teams display high morale, ensuring increased productivity and profitability.

2.4.7 Staff member recognition

Staff member recognition is appreciating and acknowledging individuals' contributions to attaining organisational goals and objectives (Yang et al., 2022). It is holistic and may involve the organisation appreciating the staff through management, peers acknowledging an individual's commitment or customers recognising a staff member's service (Nayak et al., 2020). Staff member recognition is always non-monetary and may include word of mouth, a prize or any other form of acknowledgement.

An influential staff member recognition culture includes fair and just mechanisms that seek to appreciate and reward performance, creating an environment where individuals feel highly valued (Sklar, 2022). Thus, it is an elementary aspect of organisational operations as it defines staff members' attitudes towards the organisation and their jobs, affecting their engagement, morale and satisfaction. Not only does providing regular recognition improve morale but improved benefits and compensation usually accompany it.

Conversely, poor or unfair staff member recognition systems result in low employee engagement, reducing individual productivity and overall organisational performance.

Inadequate appreciation can also lead to negative behaviours and toxic work environments, which can lower morale and reduce job satisfaction (SHRM, 2022).

Staff disengagement occurs when they feel their efforts go unnoticed and wish for more words of gratitude (Sklar, 2022). Staff members who feel that their efforts are not recognised often mention phrases like favouritism, unfair treatment and popularity contests, clearly showing discontent and unhappiness (Hastwell, 2021). These are desperate staff members and they have the potential to derail and influence other staff members into doubting the established processes within the organisation.

Disengaged staff members are less dedicated to their jobs, less productive and more likely to leave the organisation (Yang et al., 2022). On the other hand, engaged staff members are more loyal to the company and more effective. According to a TINY pulse survey, lack of recognition is the third most important reason staff members leave their jobs (Yim, 2023). Lack of staff member appreciation may also harm workers' emotional and physical health. Poor acknowledgement, for instance, can cause hurt, disappointment and low self-worth feelings, which feeds disengagement, causing despair and anxiety and reducing staff performance.

Yang et al. (2022) have cited the importance of staff member recognition in achieving an energised and motivated workforce. Staff members working in organisations that conduct fair appreciation programmes are 2.7 times more likely to be engaged than those working in corporates without such programmes. A OnePoll survey indicates that 46% of the USA workforce left a job because of underappreciation, with 65% of respondents noting that they would work harder if management recognised their efforts (Sklar, 2022).

Castrillon (2022) highlights that establishing staff member recognition is more critical than ever, considering the contemporary corporate challenges that strain staff and make work burdensome. She cites the high burnout rate in many organisational settings as one of the key reasons employers must explore other approaches to staff member recognition besides salary and wages. According to Castrillon (2022), contemporary organisations cannot achieve optimal staff member engagement, minimise absenteeism or build a competitive advantage in the labour market without an efficient and reliable staff member recognition system.

Hastwell (2021) identifies that establishing appropriate recognition programmes is complex as it requires personalisation, which many organisations need help achieving. Novak (2016) terms this discrepancy recognition deficit, highlighting that it is common among staff members whose jobs are viewed as mundane, implying less probability of appreciation from customers or peers. However, they highlight that intentionally establishing recognition rituals such as onboarding and in boarding practices, service anniversaries and staff member appreciation celebrations simplifies the complexity, making it inexpensive and feasible.

Mugaa et al. (2018) assert that organisations should develop fair and compelling staff member recognition schemes to achieve an enormously enthusiastic team characterised by individual and group morale. They explain that linking continuous recognition to staff member accomplishment and growth creates a deep-rooted and long-term ownership among an organisation's staff members, which signifies a proactive and inspired workforce.

O'Malley (2017) notes that leaders must actively monitor and record staff accomplishments to capitalise on the benefits of acknowledgement. Whether a manager oversees a small staff or a sizeable team, monitoring what the team members are working on, their objectives and milestones are still essential (Sklar, 2022).

Depending on the company's finances and size, recognition can differ. Less formal acknowledgement is still essential but traditional recognition programmes give managers structure and know-how to make the process easier (Yang et al., 2022). Staff morale can be improved with as little as a thank you note. Generally, staff recognition significantly impacts staff member morale and every organisation must focus on optimising it to leverage staff member performance.

2.4.8 Organisational objectives

Organisational objectives are the specific goals that guide organisations to realising their operational purpose. Staff members are at the centre of transforming organisational objectives into action and ensuring that the organisation realises its performance targets in a timely and cost-effective manner (Gede & Huluka, 2023).

Therefore, it is imperative to have a workforce whose individual purpose and interests align with organisational objectives to realise energised teams with high morale.

According to Kim et al. (2020), aligning staff members' goals with organisational purpose is one of the most feasible approaches to achieving an engaged workforce with high morale. Bhat (2021) remarks that when an organisation's objectives align with the needs and expectations of its staff members, it can positively impact morale and vice versa. Clear and well-defined organisational objectives help staff members understand the direction the company is heading (Gede & Huluka, 2023). When staff members know that their work contributes to achieving these objectives, it can boost morale as they feel a sense of purpose and value in their roles.

According to Mallik et al. (2019), when staff members are solidly dedicated to their jobs, focused on achieving their personal goals and targets and aware of the organisation's objectives, they exhibit significant energy. One of the greatest and most important variables affecting staff morale is the organisation itself, and an employer impacts how staff members feel about their employment (Kim et al., 2020). Corporate reputation may develop positively or negatively depending on how people feel about an organisation.

According to Alagaraja and Shuck (2015), staff members have a sense of belonging when working in a company with which they can associate regarding values and purpose. Organisations that recognise the importance of attaining coherency between individual and organisational values are intentional in the hiring process and only consider individuals that fit their culture and structure perfectly. Although knowledge and skills are imperative in any hiring process, analysing who is coming into the organisation is imperative because staff members define every aspect of an organisation (Gede & Huluka, 2023). Therefore, establishing a workforce with individual values is indispensable for high staff morale.

Tjan (2014) recommends three steps in enforcing this crucial alignment: define and communicate operational focus, explore individual priorities when assigning responsibilities and enhance staff members' confidence. Organisational leadership must identify and clarify what the organisation seeks to achieve, both in the long and short term, to ensure clarity and avoid confusion. Such an approach ensures that

individuals understand what to do, why and how. The next step is to explore what is naturally and innately rewarding to individual staff members to capitalise on their self-drive for optimal and sustainable morale.

By understanding staff members' interests and capitalising on them when allocating duties, a manager achieves a frictionless output opportunity where individuals do not need an external push to stir action (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Continuous encouragement is also imperative to ensure that individuals have the confidence to deploy their strengths in the workplace.

Research indicates that employers who encourage their staff members to take risks and learn from their failures will likely have highly motivated staff members and teams (Gede & Huluka, 2023; Kim et al., 2020). Therefore, capitalising on organisational objectives to improve staff morale requires a strategic approach where workers and staff members work closely together to benefit the organisation.

2.4.9 Job satisfaction

Costen (2012) defines job satisfaction as the degree to which a person feels favourably or unfavourably about various parts of their employment and how they react to various work situations. Memon et al. (2023) emphasise that job satisfaction is the discrepancy between what staff members expect from a job and what the job offers in return. Job satisfaction is the collection of feelings that a staff member has towards their organisation and job. Therefore, whether an organisation is satisfied is a crucial driver of its morale.

Research has established a significant, positive and high correlation between job satisfaction and staff morale, considering that both are based on individual feelings and perspectives regarding the organisation and its work (Memon et al., 2023; Sabitova et al., 2020). Job satisfaction influences organisational commitment and affects turnover and staff members' intentions to stay with an organisation. Low turnover directly affects the organisation's morale because individuals stay there longer, understand the operational tenets and collaborate with peers to form organisational tribes. According to Popoola and Fagbola (2023), job satisfaction and staff morale often create a positive feedback loop because satisfied staff members

have a high work drive and high morale translates to job satisfaction because it gives contention. Ramage (2023) emphasises this relationship by highlighting job satisfaction as a crucial indicator of whether staff enjoy their jobs. When workers are content or satisfied, they are less likely to leave the company, which boosts morale and increases output for the entire business.

Popoola and Fagbola (2023) explain that every organisation is responsible for ensuring that its staff members are satisfied, primarily by addressing their needs. For instance, an organisation can achieve optimal staff member satisfaction by offering a compelling nature of work, work-life balance, compensation and perks, interpersonal interactions at work and prospects for professional advancement (Dartey-Baah & Harlley, 2010). This approach makes staff members feel that their organisation understands their situation, creating a win-win scenario.

Consequently, satisfied workers have high morale, often targeting to make an impact through the quality and quantity of their work. For instance, a satisfied staff member will go the extra mile for the customer or organisation, as association with the organisation is a compelling compensation. Overall, job satisfaction is indispensable for any organisation as it significantly drives staff morale by creating individuals devoted to the company and their work.

2.4.10 Career pathing and prospects

Career pathing and prospects refer to an individual having opportunities in a particular organisation and how they can effectively utilise them to realise their full potential. These two terminologies refer to career development and progression, which refers to the intentional, progressive approach to work that can go beyond social pressures and economic needs to improve well-being, staff morale and life satisfaction (Bossu & Brown, 2019). According to Al Balushi et al. (2022), career progression has four facets: career goal advancement, professional ability development, promotion speed and remuneration speed/growth.

Staff prefer working in organisations that guarantee an opportunity to upscale their knowledge and skills while awaiting better prospects to upscale vertically (Sturges et al., 2001). Organisations engage in career development programmes to ensure that

people with the requisite qualifications and experience are available when needed, enabling internal promotion to fill outgoing staff and positively impacting staff morale (Gibbons et al., 2019).

Organisations that invest in staff member training programmes and offer opportunities to grow careers vertically have a highly competitive edge in the labour market, enjoying high staff member retention and a skilful workforce. Therefore, establishing a compelling career path and prospects system helps companies establish a mutual relationship with their staff members, making individuals feel valued and trusted to achieve the set performance targets and boost productivity and profitability.

Research has demonstrated a compelling correlation between organisational career development programmes and staff members' work rate, morale, motivation and engagement (Weng et al., 2010). Organisations prioritising career development and growth prospects tend to have a more positive workplace structure, which lifts the morale as staff members feel they are part of the progressive working environment. As dissatisfied staff members are more likely to pursue career development to gain better skills and shift professions, career advancement programmes offer an opportunity for staff members with low morale to realise their potential and attain high morale in their workplaces (Sturges et al., 2001).

When staff members know that their current roles are a stepping stone to a more rewarding position in the future, their morale tends to improve. When one team member succeeds in advancing their career, it positively boosts the entire team's morale. Organisations can achieve compelling career paths and prospects by having a clear succession plan and promotion processes that are fair to anyone who wants to ascend the corporate ladder.

Uzialko (2023) asserts that prioritising internal hiring is a compelling approach to attaining optimal staff morale. Depending on the requirements and circumstances, the organisation should decide whether to promote internally or externally. Organisations should prioritise internal candidates for open positions and pay attention to staff retention and performance, encouraging other staff members to work hard. If selection is made on merit, this can improve organisational morale (Gibbons et al., 2019).

Uzialko (2023) explains that organisations must ensure that staff members' career paths and prospects are genuine and achievable. If staff members perceive that these opportunities are empty promises or that they are being unfairly overlooked for advancement, morale is compromised.

According to Ananthram (2008), an organisation must objectively decide when to use internal recruiting to affirm growth opportunities or externally to add fresh viewpoints that can enhance operations and positively impact staff morale. Either way, building staff morale through career paths and prospects is indispensable in any organisation, including the mobile network operator in Bloemfontein.

2.4.11 Career stagnation

Inefficient career paths and prospects often result in career stagnation and a lack of activity, growth or development (Boyce, 2023). Career stagnation is also called a career plateau and occurs when an individual remains in the same job position over a significant period (Yang et al., 2019). According to Zambas (2023), stagnation occurs when an individual is still employed in the same position because they have gradually become accustomed to it and there are only yearly bonuses or social benefits.

Although it is an individual's responsibility to embrace continuous learning and keep upskilling, organisations can also contribute to career stagnation by failing to offer advancement opportunities to their staff or leadership failing to offer constructive feedback (Ganagaluru, 2023). This forces staff members to remain in the same position for a long time and fails to recognise the need for upskilling. Consequently, it can derail staff loyalty to work and the organisation and negatively affect morale and satisfaction.

According to Kwon (2022), repetitive tasks induce boredom and burnout in the workplace, diminishing staff morale. Costill (2019) highlights a strong correlation between career stagnation and job stress, noting that individuals working in the same role over a substantive time without any change or increase in compensation suffer significant stress (Yang et al., 2019). Consequently, they endure poor psychological and physical health, resulting in insufficient job satisfaction and morale.

Zambas (2023) notes that career stagnation decreases staff morale as individuals focus primarily on compensation rather than driving impact through their involvement. Staff members who feel that their work is no longer challenging or meaningful are more likely to experience a decrease in job satisfaction (Yang et al., 2019). This can result in a negative attitude towards their work, the organisation and staff members who are not sympathetic to the impacted members. Consequently, it creates a poor workplace culture where staff members compete rather than collaborate to achieve the organisation's purpose. Therefore, it is imperative to avoid staff stagnation if a company seeks to achieve optimal staff morale.

2.4.12 Staff engagement

Staff engagement refers to involvement and enthusiasm in an individual's work and workplace (Sharma, 2022). It is a factor of the nature and simplicity of interpersonal interactions in the workplace and how an organisation manages staff members and responds to their needs (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Staff engagement refers to the level at which individuals feel they can derive purpose and meaning from their work, which depends on their managers' ability to support and advocate for them when necessary.

According to Gallup (2023), staff engagement has four levels: challenging individuals in a manner that helps them advance, establishing team collaboration to spur inclusivity and mutual trust, appreciating individual contribution and holistically addressing individual needs. All these aspects are subsidiaries of HR management, implying that staff engagement is generally a workforce governance issue. Staff disengagement results from inefficient workforce management, exposing individuals to work stressors and destabilising teamwork (Sypniewska et al., 2023). Therefore, staff engagement determines the workforce's emotional, physical and psychological well-being, significantly impacting staff performance.

Popoola and Fagbola (2023) have established a significant relationship between staff engagement and staff satisfaction and morale as it defines an individual's commitment to the workplace. Staff morale and work engagement have a mutual relationship because engaged staff members display high morale and job commitment and vice versa (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017).

Mohanty and Dash (2019) define staff engagement as a by-product of staff morale and a factor that primarily influences staff morale, respectively. Authentic organisational leadership drives regular staff engagement and transparent communication, enhancing morale. Macleod and Clarke (2009) define staff engagement as pertinent to staff morale as it enhances and sustains positive energy. Engaged staff members have a stronger sense of purpose in their work, especially when they know their contributions align with the organisation's goals and objectives. They are often optimistic about their role, stimulating and upholding their morale (Sharma, 2022). The link between engagement and job satisfaction is significant because engaged staff members understand what they need to do, how and why, enabling them to operate without coercion.

Macleod and Clarke (2009) assert that staff engagement plays a crucial role in shaping the general atmosphere in the workplace. They explain that evaluating staff behaviour through staff engagement rather than job satisfaction is highly reasonable as the latter reflects the commitment to the job and the organisation. Gallup (2023) supports this viewpoint by noting that engaged staff members feel more pride in their work, leading to greater creativity and a positive impact on morale, which reduces turnover.

Mohanty and Dash (2019) mention staff engagement as instrumental in supporting staff members who are always willing to go above and beyond for their company's success. They explain the adverse implications of disengaged staff by noting their unwillingness to be part of the workplace, limiting their joy in work, which implies the inability to realise the organisational objectives.

Simonovic (2022) establishes sustainable engagement as a critical driver of staff morale, ensuring seamless and robust staff motivation. They explain that an organisation can achieve such a level of engagement through three pillars: authentic leadership, transparent communication and work-life enrichment.

According to Wiley (2013), staff member engagement has three key drivers: leadership that can instil hope for the future, managers who value quality and improvement above all else while recognising that staff members require a chance to advance and develop and businesses that genuinely care about their workers and the communities within which they do business. Therefore, achieving optimal staff

engagement to enhance individual and team morale requires a holistic and strategic approach to building and sustaining a favourable workplace culture and structure.

Overall, staff engagement is instrumental in sustaining high staff morale in any organisation. Although its necessity is irrefutable for organisational performance and sustainability, many managers fail to offer effective leadership and communication that can support engaged staff (Gallup, 2023; Sypniewska et al., 2023). Only senior leaders who foster trust and confidence and direct line managers who show respect and appreciation achieve significant staff engagement.

Staff engagement is evident in organisations that offer fair opportunities for growth and development and maintain staff members' enthusiasm for their jobs (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017; Sharma, 2022). With optimal staff engagement, staff members enjoy a positive work environment that boosts staff morale.

2.4.13 Job security

Burchell (2014) defines job security as a staff member's perception that their job or an essential feature thereof is secure. It is the assurance that a current position will sustain an individual economically and assure opportunities for career advancement without the risk of unemployment. An organisation must uphold optimal job security to attract and retain top talent while sustaining high staff morale.

With high job security, organisations can attain a self-driven workforce where staff members are motivated and engaged to attain personal and organisational performance targets. Job security can significantly influence staff morale in the workplace because when staff members feel secure in their jobs, they are self-driven. Although it is impossible for companies to guarantee staff members sustainable jobs considering the possibility of losses and failure, leaders can enhance job security by enforcing trust through open and honest discussions regarding the organisation and their roles. With open discussions, staff members consider their jobs as secure as they feel their employer understands their concerns about uncertainties, fostering high morale. With the assurance that the employer cares, staff members are less likely to seek alternative employment and more likely to find meaning and purpose in their current roles.

While the role of job security in supporting and sustaining motivated and engaged staff members with high morale is indispensable, organisational managers struggle with this critical aspect. According to Hassard and Morris (2018), many workplaces reversely use job security by stoking fears of job loss as a mechanism for enhancing staff engagement, motivation and morale despite the overwhelming implication of the strategy's adverse implications. Although threatening workers may save resources by minimising chances of demanding a pay rise, it distorts workplace social connection by harming individuals' identity, self-confidence and physical and mental health.

Compelling scientific evidence on the counterproductive implications of job insecurity exists, with many researchers citing apparent resentment, frustration, stress and dissatisfaction as key demerits of staff morale. Ramage (2023) urges that staff member retention might suffer due to downsizing and layoffs, which can lower productivity and the delivery of services. Workers cannot concentrate on their tasks and feel driven to perform well when the possibility of another round of layoffs is present. Therefore, job security is indispensable in reinforcing staff morale and should be a key consideration among mobile network operators in Bloemfontein.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed and synthesised the existing literature to comprehensively overview the research subject. The literature highlights that staff morale is an instrumental aspect of every organisation as it enhances staff member retention and satisfaction and organisational performance. As a multilayered construct, it is influenced by a myriad of external and internal factors that shape the well-being and productivity of staff members.

The chapter demonstrated that staff morale is interconnected to job satisfaction and staff member motivation and engagement, giving it a broad scope. The key factors affecting staff morale include leadership, communication, lack of recognition, staff engagement, career path and prospects, micromanagement, job security, stagnation and job satisfaction. As such, continuous attention and effort are required for organisational leaders and managers to create and maintain a positive morale and conducive environment.

The research methodology and design used to evaluate these factors affecting staff morale are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Research methodology is the systematic framework of a study's execution. It includes the selection and justification of such critical research elements as the research design, paradigm, sampling methods, data collection process and data analysis approaches (Saunders et al., 2019). A researcher makes philosophical choices that align with their study's scope and purpose, guiding them in testing hypotheses or responding to research questions to achieve set objectives (Jansen & Warren, 2020). In this chapter, the researcher demonstrates how the selected techniques and procedures are the most appropriate for attaining the study's objectives and purpose. Therefore, the chapter covers all critical methodological justifications for the study's execution.

3.2 Research Design

A research design is a systemic approach through which a researcher logically and objectively employs empirical data to address the research topic (McCombes, 2021). According to McCombes (2021), a carefully thought-out research design makes using the appropriate data analysis type and matching one's methods to the research aims possible.

Qualitative research is an iterative process to enhance the scientific community's understanding of a phenomenon being studied. This formulation is created to improve research designs, emphasising that quantitative work also has a qualitative dimension (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The researcher used a case study as the qualitative research method.

Luthans (2011) outlines the essential characteristics of case studies. First, case studies examine a contemporary phenomenon extensively and within its real-life context, mainly when the boundaries separating the phenomenon and context are not identifiable. Second, case studies address the entire complexity of a research topic by incorporating many sources and different kinds of evidence. Several research themes and problems point to case studies as an effective technique; McCombes (2019)

endorses that case studies are useful for describing, contrasting, analysing and comprehending various elements of a study subject.

As the literature review in Chapter 2 demonstrated, numerous other researchers have identified and confirmed vital characteristics and themes related to staff morale. Sileyew (2019) points out that the research design offers a suitable framework for a study. The decision regarding the research approach is crucial as it affects how relevant data for a study will be gathered. However, the research design process comprises several interrelated considerations. A research paradigm offers a collection of ideas, knowledge and comprehension to support research study theories and procedures. The study employed a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological study design to compile and evaluate the opinions, attitudes, and sentiments of participants about the organisation's procedures and overall working conditions.

3.3 Research Paradigm

A researcher must choose the most admissible philosophical position for their research philosophy. Carlstrom (2022) defines a research paradigm as a philosophical framework that sets up a foundation of assumptions and comprehension on which the research study's theories and methods may be based.

This research is based on constructivism and founded on the notion that people create or actively construct their knowledge and that experiences shape their perception of the world. Students build on their prior knowledge with new information they learn by using it as a foundation. According to WGU (2020), constructivism has numerous unique elements and principles that influence how the theory functions and is applied to students. Some of the principles include the fact that knowledge is constructed and is an active process as it demands that students do something to learn.

Constructivism is the inverse of positivism because it explains reality from the perspective of those who live and experience it, suggesting that knowledge is socially

constructed rather than predetermined by natural order. The foundation and justification of this philosophical approach are evident across various philosophical and scientific fields, including anthropology and critical analysis (Slater, 2017). Its definition of the optimal approach to science, especially the affirmation of socially constructed knowledge, makes it the most appropriate for exploring the objectives of this research.

3.4 Population

In research, population refers to the people or things with similar characteristics or elementary units that interest a researcher in a specific study (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). This study's population comprises staff members of a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein. The network operator has 87 staff members in the Bloemfontein office, responsible for the Free State, Northern Cape and Northwest.

3.5 Sampling Strategy

Barratt and Shantikumar (2018) define sampling as a technique, method or procedure used to select a sample from a larger population for statistical analysis. The practical application of a sampling strategy enables researchers to conclude a population based on data from a sample of that group by providing a truly representative sample of the population.

Roland (2016) defines sample size as the number of subjects involved in a study. A suitable sample size must ensure the researcher has a timely and cost-effective data collection phase while guaranteeing quality and credible data. Sample size determination depends on the quality and completeness of the collected data to explore staff members' lived experiences in the company rather than the number of participants. A sample size of 15 staff members was deemed compelling for this research.

Thus, a sample size of 15 staff members from various divisions with diverse workplace responsibilities were selected to participate in the research as they fit the established inclusion criteria and were available during the study execution. The next section details the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

3.5.1 Inclusion and exclusion

The researcher employed inclusion and exclusion criteria, setting limits for research participants and establishing an eligibility framework for participant selection. As Nikolopoulo (2022) emphasises, reliable and authentic research must have a definitive criterion that identifies and justifies the participant recruitment process. Considering the focus on long-term staff members' experience, all the participants had to be permanently employed for five years at the organisation to be eligible for selection as research participants.

The researcher excluded LDCs because they only enjoyed the company benefits of sharing the office space. Experiential students were also excluded because their engagement with the company lasted only 12 months. As the researcher is a staff member in the technology department, considering the existing power relationship, staff working in the technology department were eliminated to safeguard research validity and reliability. Such specificity guided the researcher in objectively establishing the study's sample size.

3.5.2 Non-probability sampling method

Non-probability sampling is a non-randomised selection method that involves a researcher's judgement rather than random selection (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). According to Nikolopoulou (2022), non-probability sampling is a collection of non-probability sampling techniques where participants are chosen because they fit the criteria for the sample.

Non-probability sampling is also called judgemental sampling, as the method relies on the researcher's judgement when deciding which people, situations or events will give the most information to help meet the study's goals. It allows the investigation of specific occurrences that have the potential to yield insightful data through a selection of highly informed and reliable participants. A non-probability sample is reliable for studies seeking to establish research theoretical understandings or create new ones. It is less expensive, complicated, and more straightforward than probability sampling.

According to Fleetwood (2022), the non-probability sampling method selects the sample members depending on goals, expertise and experience. Consequently, it

eliminates the possibility of random selection, making it prone to biases. However, non-probability sampling offers researchers a starting point to determine or explore whether there is a problem within a particular audience group or target market, opening chances for additional investment or research. Thus, it is reliable for scholars interested in understanding niche opinions as it allows them to connect with under-represented, unknown or extreme groups. Therefore, non-probability sampling is highly reliable in qualitative studies that seek to explore the experience of a particular group, hence suitable for this research. The following section justifies the selection of purposive sampling to inform the study's methodology.

3.5.3 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher subjectively chooses the sample size and selects the participants without prioritising population representativeness. According to Showkat and Parveen (2017), a researcher uses their knowledge of the population and comprehension of the research's purpose to determine the sample.

Although a researcher has complete discretion in designing the model to meet the research requirements, there are apparent bias issues with this sample selection approach. Thus, purposive sampling is recommended as often reliable when the audience is focused and limited to enable the concepts' growth and gain a deeper understanding (Saunders et al., 2019). The chosen participants had compelling knowledge of the organisation's operational culture and structure; thus, they could define its staff member morale. The following section details how the recruitment process was conducted.

3.5.4 Recruitment process

Ahmad (2018) explains that recruitment is obtaining relevant information about job-related tasks and the human qualities needed to execute the work to help managers decide the credentials and types of abilities required in the recruiting process. While recruiting the research participants, the researcher observed all the vital requirements, including the organisational policies and legal and ethical considerations to safeguard

participant safety and interests. The researcher submitted the study's concept paper to the organisation's management and sought permission to conduct research.

Cooke (2023) confirms that one of an organisation's essential HR functions is to foster a safe working environment. With permission from the organisation and requisite legal and ethical authorities to collect the data, the HR department contacted the identified individuals who met the inclusion criteria. Upon their receipt of the invitation, the researcher explained to them the purpose and potential benefits of the study. Individuals were assured of their confidentiality and informed that their participation was voluntary.

3.5.5 Data saturation

Faulkner and Trotter (2017) define data saturation as the point where a researcher cannot obtain new information from the data collection and analysis processes. When data collection reaches saturation, the researcher is relatively confident that additional data gathering will not generate new insights or support emerging themes and conclusions. Researchers should describe how, when and to what extent they reached data saturation before claiming to have gathered enough data to carry out their intended research.

3.6 Data Collection Method

Bhat (2021) defines qualitative data collection as understanding people's attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and motives in a particular setting by obtaining non-numerical information such as words, images and observations. It aims to comprehend social processes through the in-depth investigation and analysis of people's viewpoints, experiences and narratives.

Tracy (2019) asserts that qualitative data must effectively reveal respondents' beliefs, motives, experiences and opinions. Standard qualitative data collection methods include interviews, surveys and observations because they guarantee identifying and exploring individual attitudes and behaviours (Saunders et al., 2019).

This case study used semi-structured interviews to collect data from the research participants. Semi-structured interviews allow systemic data collection with

unrestricted researcher-respondent interactions, equipping phenomenological studies to deliver crucial contextual exploration. The researcher can inquire for clarifications and further explanations from the respondents.

According to Brett and Wheeler (2019), semi-structured interviews are highly flexible and support the development of valuable data aligned with the research purpose. George (2022) highlights the ability to pose questions within a preset concept framework as the primary advantage of a semi-structured interview.

Bird (2016) asserts that an interview guide is just a list of the high-level subjects a researcher plans to cover in an interview and the high-level questions they wish to answer under each topic. The researcher developed an interview guide comprising 12 questions, each covering a thematic aspect discussed in the literature review. The questions outlined the areas to be investigated and allowed the interviewer to gather meaningful and comprehensive data to attain the research objectives.

During the actual data collection, the researcher scheduled physical meetings with the participants for face-to-face interaction, allowing the researcher to look for fresh viewpoints and pose elaborative questions to get more information from different perspectives. Consequently, it was possible to understand the complex influences and effects of the current workplace environment on staff morale. The interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed by the researcher into text, building efficiency in data handling, storage and analysis.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis is modifying, processing and cleaning raw data to obtain valuable, pertinent information to answer research questions or test hypotheses. Qualitative studies are based on inductive reasoning, positing the reliability of thematic analysis in identifying patterns and deriving meaning from the collected data (Kelley, 2023). As with quantitative research, thematic analysis involves deriving meaningfulness from observations, recordings, symbols and visuals rather than employing statistical tools. Crosley (2022) posits that considering its focus is on trends and patterns, thematic analysis can assist in separating and arranging vast volumes of data.

Although different studies approach thematic analyses distinctively, researchers have agreed that a practical thematic analysis must involve familiarisation with data, thematic coding, theme generation, reviewing themes, defining themes and compiling the analyses in a report (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher followed these systemic processes to analyse the thematic data of this study.

According to Edgar and Manz (2017), data familiarisation involves repetitively and comprehensively reading through complex and unstructured raw information to identify patterns and meanings of the collected data in the current study context. This step is pivotal in building a researcher's knowledge and understanding of the data before proceeding with the analysis. As participants share unique feelings and perceptions, a researcher reads and rereads the transcripts to become familiar with the content. By comparing the transcripts, similar concepts are grouped to form initial labels and codes.

In thematic analysis, a theme is an identifiable pattern across different transcripts that significantly relates to a specific study objective but is indefinite in arriving at a research inference without further analysis. According to Crosley (2022), if a trend is shown many times in the data, it can be classified as a theme. In this phase of thematic analysis, a researcher explores the identified themes and effectively names and defines them to relate to the research objectives or questions. Braun and Clarke (2019) posit that thematic analysis aims to summarise the data material and discover and interpret essential aspects of the data led by the research topic.

In this study, the researcher made a final list of themes, ensuring they did not overlap or occur more than once. After defining and exploring the themes emerging from the collected data, the researcher synthesised, summarised and described the findings in line with this study's objectives. The thematic analysis findings were logically interpreted to respond to specific research objectives, guaranteeing that the data collected is credible and trustworthy, which are imperative in qualitative studies to proceed with the report-writing phase of the research (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations refer to a set of established rules and principles that guide the research process to safeguard the interests of individual participants and society. Ethical considerations play an instrumental role in qualitative studies, where researcher-participant interaction is face-to-face and focuses on discovering behaviours and assessing the effects of various phenomena on a target population.

Gordon (2020) affirms that the theoretical foundation and practical implementation of ethics in human subjects research are built around vulnerability. Human study participants must be protected from dangers by assuming minimal risks. The standard rule identifies several vulnerable populations, including children, criminals, expectant mothers, fetuses, people with mental disabilities and those who are economically and educationally disadvantaged. Although this study did not include vulnerable participants, the researcher adhered to key ethical considerations to safeguard participants' welfare.

Any scientific study should be based on norms, standards or ideals, which researchers meet by obtaining an ethical clearance certificate from responsible authorities. Ayenew (2021) defines ethical clearance as the rules and ideals researchers must follow when conducting their studies. In this research, the university assessed the research proposal. It established that the proposal met the critical moral standards, ascertaining that the study does not harm society or a particular person or support poor behaviour.

Before the research could commence, the participants had to provide informed consent, which stipulated the following:

- The study forms part of the requirement for the researcher to finish a mini dissertation towards obtaining a Master in Business Administration (MBA) degree through the University of Free State.
- Confidentiality will always be ensured.
- The final report will not reveal names or identities.
- The company has asked that it not be published for public consumption.

The following ethical considerations were addressed during the study.

3.8.1 Permission obtained

Toppr (2020) describes a formal letter requesting approval for a specific circumstance or a plan as a permission letter addressed to the appropriate authorities. The Regional General Manager of a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein gave preliminary approval to collect data on the condition that the organisation's name be withheld. The researcher was allowed access to all permanent staff members to collect the data. The data collected cannot be used for future conference proceedings or article publication.

3.8.2 Informed consent

Research Support (2021) defines informed consent as a guiding idea of scientific ethics that ensures that participants engage in research after receiving complete information on its purpose and agreeing to engage freely without coercion. Participants were informed of the purpose of this study and all questions and uncertainties were addressed. The participants understood the study's scope, rationale and role, as well as how the findings would be published and disseminated. The researcher clarified the type of data that would be collected and its usefulness for the benefit of individuals, the organisation and the academic community. Every participant engaged in the study with the understanding that their participation attracted no rewards

3.8.3 Voluntary participation

Bhandari (2020) confirms that no pressure or coercion may be placed on any research participant to participate. He further elaborates that every participant is free to stop participating in a study at any time without feeling obliged to do so. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from participation if they felt uncomfortable with the research. The participant's right to privacy was explored to see how it affected their willingness to participate. The participants were informed of every aspect of the research, particularly its objectives and conclusions.

3.8.4 Confidentiality

Lee (2021) clarifies that confidentiality is a set of guidelines restricting access to or using a particular kind of information. Indeed Editorial Team (2023) confirms that

confidentiality is essential in many professional contexts. Confidentiality is an increasingly valuable soft talent across businesses and fields as it safeguards people, provides business security and protects private data. Participant data are kept private and confidential and treated as such. The participant's social, professional, personal and cultural values are not sacrificed to pursue knowledge. The participants' private and sensitive information is not requested in the interviews.

3.8.5 No harm

Knight (2022) emphasises that researchers have several responsibilities before they start research, including ensuring that participants are treated with respect and given due attention. In the past, study subjects were only considered objects of a study. Participants in this study were informed that they would not suffer physical or emotional harm. They were free to leave at any point if they felt anxious or uncomfortable due to the delicate nature of the study's subject matter.

3.8.6 Conflict of interest

Conflicts of interest occur in research when competing personal or professional relationships, as well as personal views and positions, may affect or appear to compromise professional objectivity. Conflicts of interest are widespread in academic publishing and research (Pubsure, 2021). Researchers must manage any actual, hypothetical or apparent conflicts of interest. Recognising potential, perceived or actual conflicts of research interest is crucial. Researchers should be aware that a potential conflict of interest can be just as significant as an actual conflict (University of South Australia, 2020).

As the researcher heads up the technology section, the HR partner was consulted to monitor the process, facilitate impartiality and confirm with the selected individuals whether they were comfortable proceeding with the interviews. The researcher also used HR to send consent forms to the selected individuals on behalf of the researcher; the interviews were conducted only when the signed forms had been received through HR. The researcher avoided making the participants feel forced or obliged to participate.

3.8.7 Risk-benefit ratio

An assessment of a situation's possible hazards and advantages is known as a risk-benefit analysis. The outcomes may favour the risks or benefits depending on the circumstances. Leung (2022) points out that every unfavourable result can be deemed a risk; it does not have to be catastrophic. When experimenting in the research field, weighing the benefits and risks is crucial to ensure that the future benefits outweigh the risks, another vital requirement for a study project to qualify as ethical.

Loss of work time was identified as a possible risk in this study and mitigated. To mitigate the loss of production and staff members taking time to complete the survey during office hours, written permission was obtained from the General Manager for each participant to take an hour off at any time to engage in the interview when convenient. The research was not conducted after hours and, where possible, Microsoft Teams was used as the organisation has adopted a hybrid working model.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter outlined and explored this study's methodological choice, which guided the researcher in obtaining the requisite data to achieve the specific objectives. It started by justifying the reliability of the qualitative research design and proceeded to define the rationale of data collection and analysis, including sampling and actual data collection activities.

The chapter also addressed the ethical considerations underpinning the research. The philosophy underpinning this phenomenological research was discussed in detail, emphasising the qualitative research attributes and how they impact the research process. This chapter detailed the methodological elements the researcher adopted to explore the factors affecting staff morale at the mobile network operator.

The next chapter thoroughly examines the results of the processes outlined above.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the researcher's practical approach to implementing the methodology while aligning with the research objectives to respond to the research questions effectively. Generally, it reflects the actual research methodology and the study outcomes, including exploring themes emanating from the interview-guide questions. Specifically, the chapter details the data collection process and the approaches to data analysis. It also includes interpreting the study findings, with a detailed discussion of the meanings of the participants' responses.

4.2 Data Collection

The researcher employed semi-structured interviews conducted in English to collate data from 15 participants. As it was impractical to hold face-to-face interviews with all the respondents because of the hybrid work policy of the organisation, the researcher had one-on-one interviews with the physically accessible nine participants and team interviews with the other persons. The data collection process occurred in 11 days, from 24 July 2024 to 11 August 2024. On average, each interview lasted 50 minutes. The data were audio recorded during the interview sessions and later transcribed to text to provide easily analysable information.

4.3 Sample and Data Saturation

The researcher employed a purposeful sampling technique of the 87 staff members in the Bloemfontein office, selecting 15 study participants based on their in-depth knowledge of the business and diverse roles across different divisions. Such an approach aligns with Showkat and Parveen's (2017) suggestion that a sample depends on the researcher's understanding of the study's goal and their knowledge of the population. The sample was adequate to address the research problem.

While conducting the semi-structured interviews, the researcher sought to establish research trustworthiness and validity by ensuring that the data collection process reached data saturation. After 13 interviews, data saturation was evident because trends across interviews became repetitive, with participants adding no new

information. By the time the 15 interviews had been conducted, it was confirmed that further extending the data collection would not add new insights to the research subject. The researcher ascertained this by comparing the themes and patterns that emerged from the diverse group of participants, showing that no new insights arose from the last two interviews. Such thorough execution of the data saturation ensured enough data were gathered for a comprehensive analysis.

4.4 Analysis

As a qualitative approach was employed in this study and participants' insights needed to be uncovered, the researcher employed thematic analysis to determine the study findings. Thematic analysis guides researchers in summarising participants' views and perceptions by discovering and interpreting collated raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Therefore, by employing thematic analysis, the researcher wanted to make meaning of the collected raw data and respond to the research questions.

In the coding step, the researcher first coded the participants to enhance confidentiality; Participant 1 had the code P1 and the same trend was maintained among the 15 participants. While coding the content, the researcher employed a hybrid approach that integrated examining and directly analysing the data to address specific research questions based on the findings of the literature review. The researcher further allowed the discovery of unexpected patterns and insights from the raw data.

The researcher conducted a line-by-line analysis during the initial coding to capture granular details. After identifying all the codes, the researcher grouped related codes to form broader patterns through code categorisation. These steps informed the objective identification of themes for credible study findings.

At the theme identification and definition stage, the researcher identified the patterns and trends of specific codes. In thematic analysis, a repetitive trend always determines a theme (Crosley, 2022). With the coded participant responses to the interview-guide questions, it was possible to establish and define trends in the data, identifying specific and unreplicative themes. The researcher identified seven overarching themes: Perception of morale in the workplace, career advancement, managerial support,

external influences on career, working conditions, work-life balance and performance management. Figure 4.1 shows the themes identified in the study and how they are connected to their codes. The numbers accompanying the codes indicate the frequency with which the participants mentioned each code.

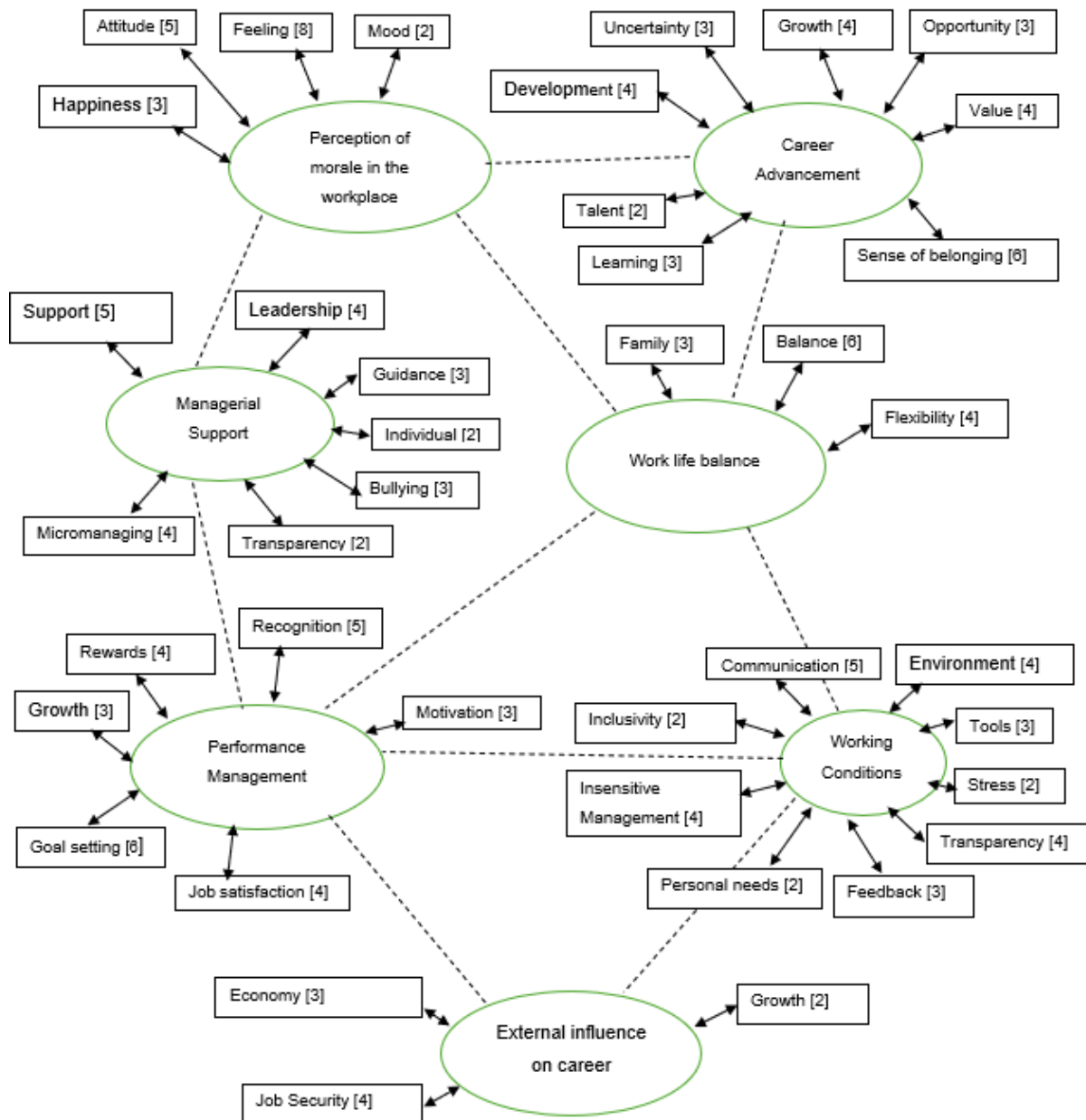


Figure 4.1: Illustration of themes and codes source

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the thematic analysis process.

Table 4.1: Summary of codes and themes

Research Question	Identified Codes	Emerging Themes	Theme Definition
1. What is your understanding of staff morale?	Feeling (8) Attitude (5) Happiness (3) Mood (2)	Perception of morale in the workplace	This theme refers to the collective attitude, feelings and satisfaction of staff members regarding staff morale in the workplace, which directly influences work morale.
2. How do career paths and prospects in the organisation influence staff morale?	Opportunity (3) Growth (4) Uncertainty (3) Talent (2)	Career advancement	This theme addresses the available opportunities to grow to management roles and generally advance the employee's career, positively impacting staff morale. Clear paths for advancement, whether through promotions, skills development or even leadership opportunities, tend to influence staff morale positively.
3. What is the influence of leadership in your workplace on staff morale?	Support (5) Leadership (4) Guidance (3)	Managerial support	This theme describes management support and a leadership style that guarantees that every staff member operates optimally to achieve the set objectives; the support directly influences staff morale, as it helps to address challenges, build trust and improve overall job satisfaction.
4. Tell me about the influence of the working conditions at your workplace on staff morale.	Balance (6) Family (3) Flexibility (4)	Work-life balance	This theme highlights the fact that maintaining a work-life balance is crucial for staff morale. A workplace culture that supports work-life balance creates bonds between staff members and mutual respect. This, in turn, contributes to improved morale as staff members are happier and more involved with one another.
5. How do the benefits and compensation in the workplace influence staff morale?	Rewards (4) Recognition (5) Motivation (3)	Performance management	This theme centres around the idea that management provides the right environment to achieve performance targets, followed by fair performance appraisal for recognition, rewards and compensation, assuring optimal work morale.

Research Question	Identified Codes	Emerging Themes	Theme Definition
6. How do the organisational objectives influence staff morale in your organisation?	Sense of belonging (6) Development (4) Learning (3) Valued (4)	Career advancement	This theme addresses the available opportunities to grow to management roles and generally advance the employee's career, positively impacting staff morale. Clear paths for advancement, whether through promotions, skills development or even leadership opportunities, tend to influence staff morale positively.
7. Tell me about the influence of job satisfaction on staff morale at your workplace.	Environment (4) Tools (3) Stress (2)	Working conditions	This theme highlights the way an organisation does things and the nature of the systems that facilitate staff activities and thus influence staff morale.
8. How do goals set in your workplace influence staff morale?	Goal setting (6) Job satisfaction (4) Growth (3)	Performance management	This theme centres around the idea that management provides the right environment to achieve performance targets, followed by fair performance appraisal for recognition, rewards and compensation, assuring optimal work morale.
9. How does communication in your workplace influence staff morale?	Communication (5) Transparency (4) Feedback (3)	Working conditions	This theme highlights the way an organisation does things and the nature of the systems that facilitate staff activities and thus influence staff morale.
10. Tell me about the influence of how you are managed on staff morale.	Micromanaging (4) Bullying (3) Transparency (2)	Managerial support	This theme describes management support and the leadership style that guarantees that every staff member operates optimally to achieve the set objectives; the support directly influences staff morale, as it helps to address challenges, build trust and improve overall job satisfaction.
11. Tell me about staff engagement's	Insensitive management (4)	Working conditions	This theme highlights the way of doing things in an organisation and the nature of the

Research Question	Identified Codes	Emerging Themes	Theme Definition
influence on staff morale in your workplace.	Inclusivity (2) Personal needs (2)		systems that facilitate staff activities and thus influence staff morale.
12 How does job security influence staff morale in your workplace?	Economy (3) Job security (4) Growth (2)	External influences on career	This theme describes elements outside the local workplace or organisation that influence both an individual's career advancement and overall morale at work. Career growth, job security and productivity can be positively or negatively influenced by these factors.

After identifying and defining the themes, the next step is results interpretation to enable an understanding of the meaning of the findings. It involves analysing the data patterns, trends and correlations to draw relevant conclusions. The interpretation is based on the identified themes while aligning with the research objectives, ensuring that the study achieves its purpose.

4.5 Interpretation of Results

4.5.1 Theme 1: Perception of morale in the workplace

First interview question: *What is your understanding of staff morale?*

In response, many participants defined morale as their general workplace perception. The overall individual feeling and attitude and how this informs their general satisfaction and emotional well-being emerged in the participants' responses. As an individual's experience of a subject emanates from their reasoning, it was evident that the staff workplace perception of whether it made them happy or sad is the central driver of staff morale in the organisation. From the P10's perspective, the following:

Staff morale deals with people's attitudes and feelings towards an institution. It can be either positive or negative, depending on the culture, personal development, motivation and ambitions of the staff.

Further, P12 emphasised the same aspect, noting the following:

Staff morale is people's attitudes, feelings, behaviours and satisfaction in the workplace. It is how people perceive their overall working environment.

Individuals internalise experiences and conditions differently; many participants emphasised that the same organisational aspects would have differing implications at the personal level. Consequently, staff morale is about how an individual feels about work, colleagues and managers. It is not a group aspect but a personal standing. P2 made this clarification by noting the following:

As we all have different types of personalities, we all will see and experience the same thing, but it will mean different things to us, so things like pressure in the workplace will have a different effect on every individual and it will affect their morale in the sense of, it will either make them excited, committed, driven or it can cause the opposite effect and it will make them feel disengaged and not being part of the team.

For some participants, staff morale is connected to the staff members' emotional state in the workplace. From this perspective, the degree of individual staff happiness is the actual reflection of staff morale. A happy staff member will be optimally productive and vice versa. P11 emphasised this aspect by noting that staff morale extends to staff members:

Being happy, doing what they love and expressing themselves freely without fear.

Nur et al. (2021) define staff morale as an overarching subject that embodies job satisfaction, emotional connection to the job and overall work environment and feelings of well-being towards a company. Staff workplace perception refers to how they view the general work environment, including their attitudes, feelings and happiness levels. This study established that staff morale significantly affects the staff members' happiness, mood and attitude. Ahmad (2018) notes that staff welfare is paramount in fostering a harmonious work environment.

According to Al Balushi et al. (2022), when workers are encouraged, they feel motivated to work harder and issues such as absenteeism are reduced. Abbas (2022) further supports this by stating that organisational restructuring could create an

inclusive and engaging working atmosphere. Abbas (2022) asserts that organisational commitment and carefully considering staff members' requirements create a favourable working environment.

4.5.2 Theme 2: Career advancement

Career advancement emerged as a critical theme as the participants responded to the questions on the impact of training and development, job retention and career paths on staff morale. All the participants agreed that they could feel motivated to deliver optimally when the organisation provides opportunities to upskill and acquire knowledge that equips them with the capacity to take advanced managerial roles. For many of the participants, the organisation needs to offer training opportunities to staff members and fairly reward the efforts to enhance staff morale.

Notably, the participants indicated that career advancement depends on individual effort and willingness to learn through the programmes offered by the organisation. P8 made this comment:

The growth prospects are available in the organisation for as long as you are willing to take up the opportunities and if you are willing to learn and are not scared of change.

P7 also noted that the organisation's programmes have intentionally supported talent development but only for the hard-working staff ready to take on challenges:

If somebody is ambitious and wants to climb the corporate ladder, it is important that we have clear career paths. I think we have what we call talent segmentations and succession planning that gets done once a year. Those people are then identified as successors for the different roles within the organisation.

Although many participants noted that the organisation's current effort towards career development was substantive, a few noted unfairness in the approach, requiring a better system. According to P5, "the current operational model introduced uncertainty on talent growth, which could negatively affect staff morale". P15 also had a similar

opinion, noting that the organisation's HR policies are harming career advancement, considering the following requirement:

Once someone leaves, the position will not be filled unless it is critical.

P9 also noted that an inefficient hiring model significantly degrades staff morale:

Hiring former colleagues and friends while overlooking internal talent has led to frustration and resentment among long-serving staff members, further lowering morale.

Career advancement was a significant factor that emerged in the study, highlighting the importance of opportunities for growth and recognition within the organisation. Al Balushi et al. (2022) state that staff members who feel supported by their organisation in advancing their careers will most likely be optimally utilised. Such staff members do not seek other job opportunities because they are content, hence a low turnover rate.

Although, as some participants claimed, career progression is significantly attached to individual efforts, with proper structure to build inclusivity and support everyone's growth, organisational efforts might have positive implications on staff morale. Aguilar and Kosheleva (2021) note that such a structure lacks the prospect of promotion, resulting in stress and job dissatisfaction. Therefore, organisations must define career ladders and offer staff development programmes to improve workers' morale.

4.5.3 Theme 3: Managerial support

Managerial support emerged as the primary theme as the participants answered questions regarding the implications of leadership and management for staff morale. The participants significantly linked leadership to overall job satisfaction. P9 emphasised these elements in the following:

Transparent and clear direction from leaders keep the staff morale high and be valued for the contribution one makes. If leadership values people, job satisfaction will naturally follow suit.

Although the data presented mixed reactions on how staff members rated their managers in supporting them towards achieving their goals, all the respondents

agreed that leadership is a primary driver of staff morale. P12 emphasised the following:

Leadership is about creating an open and interactive environment where staff members can express their needs, deploy their creativity and innovativeness in solving issues and remain highly motivated and productive.

P7 added:

I have been lucky to have line managers who have encouraged me a lot to upskill myself and ensure that I do not stay too much in my comfort zone. I do different things at different times.

P9 acknowledged a supportive leader and further emphasised that management should all support staff:

I have a supportive, approachable and transparent leader who allows me full autonomy over tasks and projects with little interference.

Acknowledgement and appreciation of staff members' contributions while leading by example and encouraging collaboration, inclusivity and respect.

Many participants emphasised that helpful and empathic leaders should listen to their staff members' issues, provide advice and genuinely care about their well-being. P7 noted:

We need to manage productivity and that productivity is meant to be delivered by human beings, so we will need to understand human beings and be empathetic to their situations.

Although some participants rated the organisation's leadership positively in supporting staff morale, some highlighted critical inefficiencies in management, citing inadequate support and an ineffective managerial approach. Some participants felt neglected and directionless without proper advice and tools, which can harm morale. P9 cited:

The executive team's lack of transparency and the presence of rude managers who bully staff and abuse their positions are detrimental to staff morale.

Micromanagement also emerged as a critical leadership and managerial gap that distorts organisational staff morale. According to P11:

If a leader is micromanaging or leading by threatening people or not being supportive, that obviously alters the perception of the individual towards that leader and with that being, there is anxiety, there is also fear and anybody who is fearful will be on guard and they will not be able to come up with new ideas or be innovative, so the morale then goes down.

With inappropriate leadership and management, the situation triggers uncertainty and absence of direction, causing irritation and disengagement. Consequently, the staff may struggle with inspiration and morale when unclear about their job or the organisation's goals. P11 noted the following:

I am frustrated and must justify why I did that and not follow the instructions. I have two bosses that I must report to and at some point, there is no alignment between them.

Most participants expressed that leaders' support, which was characterised by advice and allowed for room to make their own decisions, satisfied staff members in the company. Effective leadership practices positively impact staff job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Akpapere et al., 2019). Akpapere et al. (2019) state that the leadership pattern shapes organisational performance. More specifically, transformational leadership entails staff autonomy and delegating duties to staff members and is associated with excellent morale and performance results.

Mohiuddin (2017) justifies the importance of ethical leadership by noting that how a leader interacts with their subordinates significantly impacts how well they perform, develop and have a positive attitude about accomplishing corporate goals. As Aguilar and Kosheleva (2021) indicate, micromanagement hinders creativity and demotivates staff from performing at their full potential. Micromanagement conveys a lack of trust in staff members, which can demoralise them and hamper productivity.

4.5.4 Theme 4: External influences on career

While responding to the question on job security, the participants noted that staff morale emanates from significant external influences, including economic status and how they impact career growth. P12 noted:

Job security allows staff members to be more productive and it encourages loyalty among staff members.

All the participants agreed that, with fluctuating economic conditions, staff members need the assurance that they will have their jobs for years and need not worry about job losses, retrenchments or other forms of forced unemployment.

Many participants noted that with industry dynamics and organisational restructuring to align with the current business environment, worry about individual current positions is inevitable. P10 noted:

This is Africa; it is tough here and with the high unemployment rate that we have got right now and organisations always transform, ours went through a recent transformation and it is still going through a transformation; I think many people are scared, many people are a bit nervous.

These participants highlighted that their fear and distrust, especially because of the lack of transparency from the HR management department, impacts their overall job satisfaction. P13 mentioned the following:

There has been restructuring upon restructuring and that on its own introduced so much anxiety. I am talking for myself. At a point, I said, you know what? Whatever happens must happen. So, I think transparency does matter, no matter how bad the outcome can be. At least you know what is happening and coming your way.

Although many staff members highlighted the void in managing the current transition in a manner that removes the worry of job loss, which induces stress and anxiety and hinders staff morale, a few participants have a contrasting view. P3 stated:

The organisation has set programmes to manage the change, including wellness initiatives.

P12 added:

The company was setting infrastructure to provide job security, allowing staff members to be more productive in their roles and it encourages loyalty among staff members.

External influences on careers, such as job security and the broader economic environment, play a role in influencing staff morale. This theme relates to the evidence in the literature; Ajala and Busayo (2017) point out that job security and working conditions are essential predictors of labour turnover. When staff members are assured of their employment security, they work harder as their focus is improved and sharpened. However, when the forces of the external macroeconomic environment cause fluctuations in employment security, the motivation of staff members can be affected negatively.

4.5.5 Theme 5: Work-life balance

While responding to the question on work conditions, the participants mentioned work-life balance as critical in the work environment and a primary driver of work morale. Many respondents applauded the hybrid working environment, where they can come into the office on certain days and work from home on others. For them, it was easier to coordinate and balance their personal lives while delivering optimally in the workspace. P9 noted that the organisation was moving towards and appreciated the following:

Safe working environment and ensuring a healthy work-life balance, adoption of hybrid working model to enable staff to structure their workload and most importantly support for family and personal responsibilities.

P5 noted:

Our organisation has implemented initiatives like culture surveys and hybrid work models to enhance staff engagement, which builds a positive workplace culture.

Generally, all the participants agreed that staff morale would be optimal if the organisation appreciated everyone, focused on individual needs and responded accordingly, including ensuring that participants could serve their family duties while still working at the organisation. This emphasises the importance of flexibility in maintaining high morale.

As Ajala and Busayo (2017) have identified, balancing work and life leads to better performance and commitment to the job. Therefore, organisations that offer flexible working conditions will likely have a contented and motivated workforce.

4.5.6 Theme 6: Workplace culture and structure

While responding to the questions on workplace conditions, staff member engagement and communication, staff members emphasised the need for a productive workplace culture and structure. Many participants agreed that building a collaborative work environment, where individuals work together to achieve the organisation's purpose, is instrumental in fostering staff morale. Many believed the company should be building a reliable system that appreciates and includes everyone in operations. P5 mentioned the following:

The atmosphere at our workplace is building social cohesion, which focuses on common grounds so that we, as the staff members, can relate to each other regardless of position. In that way, all staff members are treated equally and fairly.

The participants agreed that staff should feel safe in the workplace with a culture supporting open vertical and horizontal communication. P9 noted:

The environment needs to be safe so people can have candid conversations without feeling prejudged or condemned.

P10 emphasised that horizontal communication, which the company continuously overlooks, is indispensable in enhancing a positive workplace culture:

Peer-to-peer engagement can also influence staff, which is one thing we always overlook. We always look at top-down but we do not look at linear; it is very demanding for high-performance organisations that we work for.

Many participants believed a productive workplace culture thrives where leaders and staff members support a friendly work environment to achieve optimal employee engagement. P5 noted:

The counterparts and colleagues also affect the staff morale incorrectly because negativity rubs off.

P2 also emphasised a similar aspect, noting that everyone, regardless of their job level or position, contributes significantly to building a productive work environment. Although most participants highlighted room for improvement in communication within the organisation, they agree that clear communication enables staff members to understand their responsibilities and how their work relates to company goals. P7 noted:

The company needs to improve on addressing specific aspects, ensuring that timely information flows to the right persons and through the proper channels for a better workplace culture.

P10 emphasised the same point:

Communication needs to be clear, direct and fair for everyone. If you do not communicate clearly with the entire team, you create confusion. You cannot communicate with one staff member about what you expect and communicate differently to other team members. Communication must be clear for everyone and frequent to foster staff morale.

Some participants noted that despite the company operating in the telecommunications sector, the current organisational culture and structure did not foster a seamless flow of communication where active listening and sympathetic interactions are paramount. According to P14:

Sometimes, the organisation also lacks communication. We have significant gaps in age and knowledge and communication gets lost in translation. It depends on the level of the organisation, how you feel about it and how you think about it. There must be consistent communication irrespective of who you are and what level in the organisation.

P13 supported a similar assumption, noting the following:

Certain communication that was key to people does not reach them and that takes us back to who should do.

For many participants, the organisation and the region have not attained the desired target of staff engagement. P5 noted that the organisation needed “*to enforce more staff engagement*”. P8 said:

Staff engagement directly correlates with morale; engaged staff members are more likely to be motivated, productive and satisfied. Although the organisation has implemented initiatives like culture surveys and hybrid work models to enhance staff engagement, the recent high turnover and feelings of being undervalued suggest that engagement efforts might need to be strengthened, especially in the context of the ongoing organisational changes.

However, some participants consider that the organisation is making substantive progress towards optimal staff engagement to enhance staff morale. For P3, the organisation is *slowly getting there. It is not something you can fix overnight.*

Generally, the participants agreed that the organisation needed to grow a positive workplace culture and structure to support effective communication and optimal staff engagement to achieve robust staff morale.

The lack of communication has created uncertainty and negatively affected participants' job confidence. The finding aligns with the literature that acknowledges timely and effective communication with the staff members is essential for keeping staff members interested and committed (Fisher et al., 2021). Organisations encouraging open communication will likely sustain staff satisfaction and morale. Communication helps build trust; hence, staff members have directed input on some crucial processes to improve their performance, as noted by Ahmad (2018).

According to Kim et al. (2020), organisations with influential communication cultures and structures have committed staff members who display high morale because they understand what they do and feel valued. Thomas (2021) argues that natural leaders

with good communication skills always maintain their values while living as an example for people to follow.

4.5.7 Theme 7: Performance management

While responding to questions on organisational objectives, recognition and benefits and staff satisfaction, performance management emerged as a critical theme from the participants. Regarding performance management, the participants described that the process should start by setting performance targets for individual staff members to align with organisational objectives. Immediately after that, management should provide a structure to objectively review the performance and offer fitting recognition through benefits and compensation.

All participants agreed that performance management must occur systematically and objectively while seeking optimal staff morale where individual responsibility effectively aligns with organisational strategic purpose. P1 noted that the organisation's objectives in the company should be as follows:

Adequately defined and properly measured and communicated, ensuring staff morale is not impacted. However, sometimes, it feels like people are just implementing changes. Although I am not against them, changes are good for growth but let us discuss them. Sometimes, it will be a directive that these are new changes and that is it. There is no way you cannot ask questions about it. It is just a new way of working and if you have a discussion and more details about why the change is happening, it will improve morale.

All the participants noted that staff members are motivated and engaged when goals are well-defined, continually operating with a sense of purpose and direction. P2 mentioned the following:

You cannot work without knowing where the finishing line is or what you are trying to reach, so our goals are critical and a company cannot grow and be sustainable if we do not have goals. Certain people do not understand it as I do in that type of picture. In my view, goals are necessary to lead us in the

right way so the company can achieve them. If goals are communicated to the staff, we know what is expected of us and where we are going.

Besides setting and communicating the goals, most participants highlighted that goals must be realistic and measurable. P8 explained:

Goals need to be SMART. If you do not tell people what they are supposed to be doing specifically and put on the measurements that are supposed to track the performance of those goals, you are bound to fail.

From the interviews, there is a general feeling that goals must reflect staff members' beliefs and professional aspirations to enhance individual work morale and satisfaction. P5 elaborated on this aspect by noting the following:

Goals provide direction and purpose, enhancing morale when achievable and aligned with staff members' abilities and resources. In our workplace, the constant evolution of goals due to organisational changes has been challenging for some staff members, affecting their morale. Setting clear and realistic goals during this transition period is essential for maintaining morale.

From the data, the general view is that there is a disconnect in how management sets and enforces staff members' goals. P10 shared this sentiment:

This is a funny one. Every time we see our targets, I think we all think it is impossible; every time the demand is given to us, we see it as a mountain. I think when you explain, as a leader in a workplace, the outcome of the vision or the strategic intent for that objective, it kind of makes the task more manageable. However, if it is just demand and command without amplifying the benefits for the individual doing the task as well as for the greater organisation, then it becomes a mammoth task.

From the participants' perspectives, they must understand their workplace contribution per key performance indicators (KPIs), which drive fulfilment and job satisfaction and enforce optimal staff morale. P7 asserted:

When the organisation ensures that everyone understands how what they do affects the ultimate goal, they feel that whatever they do adds value to the

bigger scheme. Once you know that you add value and matter within an organisation, job satisfaction and morale will naturally come.

Although the participants have been with the organisation for many years and understand its operational purpose and objectives, they do not understand how their individual duties and responsibilities contribute to the company's operational efficiency. With these gaps, the participants' inputs suggest a need to improve the current approach to performance management by first correcting the goal setting and evaluation methods. P9 asserted this perspective:

Setting realistic yet challenging objectives can boost staff morale. Providing a sense of belonging and involving staff in decision-making can also improve their chances of ownership.

Regarding benefits and compensation, many staff members agreed that the mobile network operator's reward system is better than that of other industry players, positively impacting staff morale. P13 noted that the "organisation offers the best packages". P7 supported this assertion by highlighting the following:

I think the benefits are quite nice, to be honest, compared to other industries I have been through.

The participants appreciated the company's efforts to maintain a favourable reward and compensation system, considering the harsh economic conditions in the country. P3 had this to say:

Looking at the current unfavourable economic challenges that the country and the world are facing, one can be thankful to say we are working for a company that can still commit to paying out bonuses and even commit to paying the salary increases. Some of our counterparts when we declared bonuses and salary increments, they were cutting jobs. It can guarantee us as a staff member that if we say we have a job, we will declare the bonus. You will also have a salary increment that positively impacts the staff morale.

However, a few staff members highlighted inadequacies in the current reward and compensation system, citing miscommunication and commission loopholes.

According to P3, although the company has a compelling reward system, the following is true:

The compensation and benefits are under-communicated; therefore, people do not understand the total package system.

Besides, commission-earning participants highlighted continuous changes in the commission structure, noting that staff members were becoming uncertain about their total monthly payments. P7 elaborated on this aspect:

The commission structure is the only one that is questionable and never makes people happy based on how they have changed.

Generally, there is a feeling that general performance management needs adjustments to foster optimal staff morale. Critical issues exist with goal setting processes, implementation and appraisal approaches. Also, although the reward system is compelling, there are issues with commissioning and communication.

Performance management was highlighted as a critical theme, with participants noting the importance of goal setting, recognition and rewards in maintaining high morale. This revelation confirms Ahmad's (2018) work, which asserts that high morale and better results in performance management activities are achieved when an organisation involves staff members. The participants praised recognition and reward as part of the motivation to boost staff morale.

This finding aligns with Abbas's (2022) recommendation that adequate work reorganisation that promotes equally adequate performance management systems will help enhance staff motivation levels. However, some staff members perceived they were being paid less than they should be or felt they were given unfair performance appraisals. In that case, morale will likely be affected, leading to disengagement and high turnover intentions.

Macleod and Clarke (2009) assert that staff engagement plays a crucial role in shaping the general atmosphere in the workplace. They explain that evaluating staff behaviour through staff engagement rather than job satisfaction is highly reasonable as the latter reflects the commitment to the job and the organisation. Gallup (2023) supports this

viewpoint by noting that engaged staff members feel more pride in their work, leading to greater creativity and a positive impact on morale, which reduces turnover.

Additionally, clear and well-defined organisational objectives help staff members understand the direction in which the company is heading (Gede & Huluka, 2023). When staff members know that their work contributes to achieving these objectives, it can boost morale, as they feel a sense of purpose and value in their roles. Analysing how objectives set in the workplace influence staff morale requires understanding the relationship between goal setting procedures and staff attitudes, motivation and overall satisfaction.

Most participants agreed that setting individual or team goals is the most crucial part of life. The goals must be balanced and SMART. According to Ndegwa (2019), setting unrealistic targets or goals is most detrimental to staff morale. They explain that unspecific and unrealistic goals often breed a lack of enthusiasm; when staff members do not buy into the goals and aspirations of the organisation, staff morale is negatively affected in the short and long term (Goerg, 2015). Therefore, organisations must adopt objective and inclusive goal setting procedures to enjoy the merits and avoid the negative implications.

4.6 Conclusion

This study has established that several areas, such as staff workplace perception, career advancement, managerial support, external influences on careers, performance management, work-life balance, workplace culture and internal communication, are crucial influencers of staff morale. These findings were consistent throughout the interviewing process, elaborating on the role of supportive leadership and communication, career mobility and flexible working conditions for high morale among staff members. However, some disparities were observed, such as the influence of micromanagement and external economic factors that may cause demotivating effects.

The study results indicate that organisational practices should be identified and understood to address staff and job satisfaction levels. These factors must be

prioritised within the organisation and staff members must be motivated and made to feel that they are an essential part of the organisation.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This study identified the factors influencing staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein. The researcher achieved the study's purpose by exploring the factors that negatively affect staff morale at the organisation and determining the elements that enhance it. Comprehensive information on participants' feelings, attitudes and perceptions of the research subject was collected through qualitative research interviews.

The study identified significant aspects, including staff workplace perception, career advancement, managerial support, external forces influencing careers, performance management, work-life balance, workplace culture and internal communication. This chapter summarises the study findings and offers actionable recommendations to address the identified issues negatively impacting staff morale.

5.2 Summary of the Research

The overarching objective of the study was to explore staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein.

This study answered the following research questions:

- What factors affect staff morale in the workplace?
- How can the factors negatively affecting staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein be determined?
- How can the factors positively affecting staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein be determined?

These research questions led to the development of secondary research objectives to support the study's overarching aim.

The first secondary objective related to the literature review was to provide an overview of the factors affecting staff morale in the workplace. Several factors described in the literature review were identified as influencing staff morale in the workplace.

Leadership, micromanagement, working conditions, goal setting, compensation and benefits, communication, staff recognition, organisational objectives, job satisfaction, career pathing and prospects, career stagnation, staff engagement and job security are the topics covered in the literature. The literature emphasises that meeting optimal staff morale results in a motivated and high-performing workforce. Satisfied and inspired staff members are essential for running successful and sustainable businesses. More companies are realising a return on investment through better morale and performance across corporate objectives by implementing strategic enhancements inside departments.

The second secondary objective was to determine the factors that negatively affect staff morale at the mobile network operator in Bloemfontein. Thematic analysis identified seven primary themes – perception of morale in the workplace, career advancement, managerial support, external influences on career, working conditions, work-life balance and performance management. Staff members complain if they are unhappy with certain aspects of their working conditions and those who constantly complain tend to drag others along, causing unnecessary tensions and unhappiness in the workplace.

When staff have little say in decision-making or feel micromanaged, their morale suffers because they feel undervalued and constrained. Leaders and managers must examine how various leadership techniques and behaviours influence motivation, satisfaction and overall job engagement. Furthermore, they must implement changes to communication techniques based on feedback and observations to increase staff morale consistently.

Inefficient organisational communication significantly affects staff engagement, satisfaction, morale and motivation. Understanding and enhancing communication strategies can dramatically boost staff morale, creating a more pleasant and productive workplace.

A semi-structured interview questionnaire was used to determine the third secondary objective – the factors that positively affect staff morale at the mobile network operator in Bloemfontein. The main contributors to positive staff morale were career development, staff workplace perception and work-life balance. Organisations must

be open to changing goals based on feedback and performance to keep them motivating and attainable. Leaders in organisations must be careful when managing goal setting processes and consider their effect on staff morale. In doing so, they can foster a more pleasant, engaged and productive workplace.

5.3 Research Conclusions

This study comprehensively explored the factors influencing staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein by addressing the four research questions and identifying seven primary themes through thematic analysis. The conclusions drawn from each theme provided information about the factors influencing staff morale.

- **Perception of morale in the workplace:** Individual perceptions of the workplace environment significantly impact staff morale. Individual feelings, attitudes and emotional well-being, which vary based on personal experiences and how individuals internalise workplace factors, are critical determinants of staff morale. Staff morale is not a collective sentiment but an individual emotional state driven by happiness, motivation and the quality of interactions with colleagues and managers.
- **Career advancement:** Career advancement plays a pivotal role in enhancing staff morale, as employees feel more motivated when they see clear growth opportunities and receive training and development support. While many participants recognised the organisation's efforts to promote talent development, unfairness and inefficiency in the hiring and promotion processes negatively impacted morale for some.
- **Managerial support:** Managerial support is a critical factor influencing staff morale and overall job satisfaction. Transparency and empathetic and supportive leaders help foster a positive work environment, allowing employees to feel valued and motivated. However, ineffective leadership, such as micromanagement and lack of transparency, can cause disengagement, anxiety and low morale. Positive leadership practices, such as providing autonomy, offering guidance and encouraging creativity, are vital to maintaining high morale and productivity.

- **External influences on career:** External factors, such as economic conditions and job security, significantly impact staff morale. In uncertain environments with fluctuating economic stability and organisational restructuring, employees may experience anxiety and fear about job loss. This uncertainty, particularly when paired with a lack of transparency from management, can lead to diminished job satisfaction. However, companies that address these concerns by offering transparent communication and job security initiatives can reduce stress and foster loyalty among staff.
- **Work-life balance:** Work-life balance emerged as a crucial factor influencing staff morale. Introducing hybrid work models and flexible working conditions has enabled employees to manage their personal and professional responsibilities better, leading to improved job satisfaction and productivity. Participants agreed that flexibility in the workplace is critical to maintaining high morale and supporting employee well-being.
- **Working conditions:** A productive workplace culture, characterised by open communication and inclusivity, fosters staff morale and engagement. A strong workplace culture enhances horizontal and vertical communication and makes staff members feel valued, engaged and included. However, notable gaps in communication hinder full engagement and job satisfaction. Effective communication practices and an inclusive structure allow staff to feel part of the organisation, contributing to their overall job confidence and morale.
- **Performance management:** Performance management emerged as a critical determinant of staff morale, mainly through goal setting, recognition and rewards. The findings suggest that while the company has a favourable reward system, the approach to setting and communicating goals is often unclear, leading to disengagement. Staff morale is negatively impacted when performance targets are seen as unrealistic or poorly communicated. The organisation's recognition and compensation practices boost morale but require more transparency and consistency.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the study's conclusions, several recommendations are made regarding factors influencing organisational employee morale. Recommendations and ways in

which they can guide the organisation in improving specific areas were developed from the emerging themes:

- The organisation should foster an inclusive and supportive work environment that caters to individual employee needs. Such an approach should include regularly evaluating staff perceptions and promoting open communication, personal development and emotional support. Creating personalised engagement strategies based on employee feedback can significantly enhance and sustain staff morale.
- The organisation should implement transparent and inclusive career development structures that allow all employees to pursue growth opportunities. Establishing clear career paths, providing consistent training and ensuring fairness in promotion and hiring practices can significantly boost morale. Addressing concerns about perceived favouritism or inefficiencies in talent management will foster a more motivated and contented workforce, thereby reducing turnover and improving productivity.
- The organisation should promote leadership practices emphasising empathy, transparency and trust. Managers should be trained to offer support while encouraging autonomy, innovation and open communication. Avoiding micromanagement and fostering a culture of collaboration and respect will enhance staff morale and productivity.

Regular leadership assessments and employee feedback can help identify areas for improvement and ensure a more supportive and motivating work environment. The ingrained bureaucratic culture, in which staff members are perceived to lack emotional intelligence, requires managers to attend training to enhance their understanding of emotions and how they affect decisions and interactions within the organisation (Bennett, 2019).

- The organisation should provide transparent communication during times of change and restructuring. Implementing programmes that ensure job security or assist employees through transitional phases can alleviate anxiety and improve morale. Regular updates about organisational changes, the economic environment and wellness programmes to support mental health can also enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover.

- The organisation should continue to offer and expand flexible working arrangements, such as hybrid models, to support work-life balance. Companies can enhance employee morale and engagement by implementing policies that allow employees to manage personal responsibilities while meeting work commitments. Regular feedback through culture surveys and ongoing adjustments to these models will also ensure that employees remain satisfied and motivated.
- To foster a more inclusive and communicative workplace culture, the organisation should implement structured communication channels that ensure information flows seamlessly across all levels. Encouraging peer-to-peer communication and addressing the gaps in the current structure will help build more robust engagement. Introducing regular feedback loops, where employees can express concerns and suggestions, will also aid in nurturing a collaborative and cohesive work environment.
- The organisation should refine its performance management approach by establishing clear, measurable and achievable goals aligned with individual roles and organisational objectives. Regular performance reviews should include open discussions about expectations and progress. Improving communication around rewards and commissions and ensuring transparency in performance evaluations will further strengthen staff morale and motivation.

5.5 Limitations of Study

While this study was instrumental in collecting diverse viewpoints to add to the existing body of knowledge, it experienced some limitations:

- The qualitative study was conducted at the office of a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein. It may only be a practical reflection of some specific regional and national offices.
- The sample size of 15 participants was relatively small. Even though the researcher focused on collecting comprehensive data, the results only reflect the views and experiences of a smaller population.

- Furthermore, methodological gaps, such as subjectivity in exploring the research findings and the inability to engage top management in the study, might limit the trustworthiness and reliability of the study.

However, besides these weaknesses, this study holds significant weight in building sustainable, productive work environments.

5.6 Conclusion

Staff morale is crucial for every organisation because it can influence performance and productivity. The study results show that most participants were positively influenced by the factors identified in the literature. A few participants felt that regional leadership could play a crucial role in enhancing the morale of the staff members and that there was room for improvement. Additionally, offering opportunities for skills improvement and career progression boosts commitment to the company and improves job satisfaction. By prioritising these factors, businesses can create a productive workplace that boosts morale and increases staff retention, efficiency and overall business success.

The researcher intends to share these results on improving and exceeding staff members' expectations with the Regional General Manager and Executive Team. Although this study was only conducted in Bloemfontein, the researcher believes the situation is relatively similar to other places and such problems could occur throughout the organisation. Subsequent research might include conducting this survey across all Regional Offices and at the Head Office. Given that each Regional General Manager has limited jurisdiction, the CEO may make necessary modifications if the study is conducted across the entire organisation.

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Annexures

A.1 Annexure A: Theoretical Questions

Please consider what influences staff morale in the workplace when answering the following questions.	Literature Review Section
1. What is your understanding of staff morale?	2.4.7
2. How do career paths and prospects in the organisation influence staff morale?	2.4.10
3. What is the influence of leadership in your workplace on staff morale?	2.4.1
4. Tell me about the influence of the working conditions at your workplace on staff morale	2.4.3
5. How do the benefits and compensation in the workplace influence staff morale?	2.4.5
6. How do organisational objectives influence staff morale in your workplace?	2.4.8
7. Tell me about the influence of job satisfaction on staff morale in your workplace.	2.4.9
8. How do goals set in your workplace influence staff morale?	2.4.4
9. How does communication in your workplace influence staff morale?	2.4.6
10. Tell me about the influence of how you are managed on staff morale	2.4.2
11. Tell me about staff engagement's influence on staff morale in your workplace.	2.4.12
12. How does job security influence staff morale in your workplace?	2.4.13

A.2 Annexure B: Ethical Clearance Certificate



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

Registration Number: REC-112922-058

11-Jul-2024

Dear Mr Tlhajwane Molebatsi

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

Factors influencing staff morale at a mobile network operator in Bloemfontein

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2024/0527

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted via an Amendment on RIMS to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit a Final Report on RIMS for your study/research project to the ethics office once the project has concluded. Should you require more time than the allotted 12 months to complete this research, please apply for an extension by submitting a Continuation/Report on RIMS. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Adri Du Plessis

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

**Dr Adri
du
Plessis**

Digitally signed by Dr
Adri du Plessis
Date:
2024.07.12
17:23:25
+02'00'

205 Nelson Mandela P.O. Box 339
Drive Bloemfontein 9300
Park West Tel: +27 (0) 5140 19337
Bloemfontein 9301 aduplessis@ufs.ac.za
South Africa www.ufs.ac.za

