

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In contemporary organisational discourse, the manufacturing industry occupies a central role as a driver of economic advancement and employment creation, particularly within the Zimbabwean context. Within this sector, leadership assumes critical importance, with transformational leadership increasingly recognised as a decisive paradigm in shaping organisational outcomes. The manufacturing industry in Zimbabwe epitomises the nation's economic dynamism, defined by its complexity and constant evolution. In recent years, the role of leadership style has gained prominence, with transformational leadership emerging as a potentially decisive factor influencing employee retention across this industry. This chapter engages in a systematic examination of the development of a framework designed to enhance the efficacy of transformational leadership as a strategic mechanism for workforce retention within Zimbabwe's manufacturing sector. The study focuses specifically on the bakery industry in the Harare Metropolitan Area, offering contextual insights into leadership practices within this distinctive subsector.

Situated within the broader ambit of manufacturing, the bakery industry provides a distinctive lens for this investigation. Its operational challenges, coupled with its unique workforce dynamics, render it an ideal context for exploring the ways in which transformational leadership can affect employee retention. Transformational leadership (TL), as conceptualised by Gilbert et al. (2016), extends beyond conventional managerial practices. It inspires change, cultivates trust, stimulates innovation, and invests in the holistic development of employees. It is characterised by a leader's capacity to raise performance expectations, empower individuals to transcend personal barriers such as stress or burnout, and strengthen resilience through enhanced communication and proactive support (Jensen & Bro, 2018). In the 21st-century business environment,

leadership paradigms have experienced a decisive shift, with organisations increasingly embracing transformational leadership as a people-centred strategy to drive productivity (Khattak, Zolin & Muhammad, 2020). This shift underscores the recognition that leadership fundamentally shapes organisational culture, workplace climate, and overall employee satisfaction.

Organisational sustainability and competitiveness rest upon a committed and engaged workforce. Employees who feel valued not only find fulfilment in their roles but also align their efforts with organisational goals. Optimising workforce potential necessitates the application of human-centred strategies, a principle embodied by transformational leadership (Mosadeghrad, 2013). In highly competitive industries, retaining skilled employees constitutes a strategic necessity (Teimouri *et al.*, 2019). Stability in the workforce is integral to organisational effectiveness, and transformational leadership has been identified as a crucial factor in achieving this objective.

Leadership that prioritises transformation also plays an instrumental role in fostering organisational learning and professional development. Such leadership supports employee advancement through mechanisms of selection, promotion, and capacity building (Kanter, 2017). By cultivating favourable working conditions, leaders stimulate creativity, commitment, and motivation (Cummings *et al.*, 2010). Understanding the intersection between transformational leadership and social mobilisation is particularly pertinent in navigating the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment in which modern organisations operate.

From a workforce perspective, perceived organisational support is vital in aligning individual aspirations with collective objectives. It strengthens employee commitment by demonstrating the

organisation's investment in their well-being (Dhar, 2012; Chew & Wong, 2018). Motivated employees tend to exhibit greater loyalty, higher productivity, and improved output quality (Sharma & Dhar, 2015). Employee motivation is intrinsically linked to shared beliefs regarding how an organisation values and responds to employee interests and expectations (Allen *et al.*, 2018).

Despite overall growth in Zimbabwe's manufacturing sector, the bakery industry has experienced acute challenges of workforce instability, particularly in the aftermath of leadership transitions since 2015, which witnessed over 20 executive-level changes across firms (Mutandi, 2020). Current retention levels in the bakery industry are at 47.5 per cent—substantially below the benchmark standard of 80 per cent (Zimbabwe Bakery Product Market Outlook, 2022). This investigation interrogates whether attrition is primarily driven by unfavourable working conditions, external labour market opportunities, or other underlying organisational dynamics, with a particular emphasis on the mediating role of transformational leadership in sustaining workforce engagement.

The persistence of high turnover rates within Zimbabwe's bakery industry has become a pressing concern. This research thus interrogates the potential of transformational leadership to counteract attrition by situating the issue within frameworks such as the VUCA paradigm and the PESTELG model (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, Legal, and Governance factors). In doing so, the study offers a comprehensive perspective on the ways transformational leadership can be leveraged to enhance retention in an environment characterised by complexity and uncertainty.

A recurrent challenge within manufacturing organisations lies in the prevalence of high turnover, despite deliberate investments in human

capital strategies. This phenomenon undermines both immediate operational efficiency and long-term strategic goals, while simultaneously inflating recruitment costs and eroding institutional memory. Although the transformative potential of leadership has been widely acknowledged (Bass & Riggio, 2006), evidence suggests that in Zimbabwe's bakery industry, transformational leadership practices are either inconsistently applied or insufficiently embedded to resolve this enduring challenge. Accordingly, this study seeks to interrogate the ways in which transformational leadership might be optimally harnessed to address attrition and strengthen retention outcomes within this subsector.

The main objective of the study is:

To develop a framework to enhance the effectiveness of transformational leadership as a catalyst for employee retention in Zimbabwe's manufacturing industry.

The secondary objectives of the study are to:

- Assess the prevalence of transformational leadership practices within the bakery industry.
- Analyse the influence of transformational leadership on employee retention levels.
- Identify variables that act as mediators or moderators in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention.

The research was guided by the following questions:

- a) How can a framework be developed to enhance the effectiveness of transformational leadership as a catalyst for employee retention in Zimbabwe's manufacturing sector?
- b) What is the extent of transformational leadership practices within the Zimbabwean bakery industry?

- c) How does transformational leadership affect employee retention in the bakery industry in Zimbabwe?
- d) What moderating or mediating factors shape the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention?

The study hypotheses are as follows:

H0: Transformational leadership has no significant relationship with employee retention in Zimbabwe's bakery industry.

H1: Transformational leadership has a positive relationship with employee retention in Zimbabwe's bakery industry.

This research is motivated by the need to close a significant gap in understanding the contextual application of transformational leadership within Zimbabwe's manufacturing industry, particularly its bakery subsector. By developing a bespoke framework tailored to this environment, the study seeks to contribute insights of both academic and practical significance.

The study holds relevance for multiple stakeholders. For the researcher, it represents an opportunity to engage critically with the interplay between leadership and retention, thereby contributing to both academic advancement and professional competence. For the academic community, it generates knowledge on the contextual application of transformational leadership, offering a framework that may serve as a foundation for further scholarly inquiry. For the university, it enhances the institution's scholarly reputation by producing research with practical value. For the bakery sector, the study provides actionable strategies to mitigate attrition and foster workforce stability. Finally, at the policy level, it offers insights that may inform labour and leadership policy, supporting Zimbabwe's broader socio-economic objectives.

The scope of the study is:

- *Contextual scope*: Transformational leadership in Zimbabwe's manufacturing industry, with emphasis on the bakery subsector in the Harare Metropolitan Area.
- *Theoretical scope*: Leadership theories, with a central focus on transformational leadership as articulated by Bass and Riggio (2006), and literature on employee retention.
- *Geographical scope*: Harare Metropolitan Area, with analysis confined to bakeries operating within this region.
- *Temporal scope*: The period 2018–2022, providing a temporal frame for data collection and analysis.

The structure of the study is as follows:

- *Chapter 1*: Introduction and Background – outlining the context, problem statement, objectives, questions, hypotheses, scope, and dissertation structure.
- *Chapter 2*: Literature Review – examining theoretical and empirical perspectives on transformational leadership and employee retention.
- *Chapter 3*: Methodology – detailing the research design, strategy, population, sampling, data collection, and analytical approaches.
- *Chapter 4*: Results – presenting descriptive, correlation, regression, and inferential analyses.
- *Chapter 5*: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations – offering recommendations, a synthesis of findings, and proposals for future research.