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# THE MODERATING ROLE OF JOB SATISFACTION AND GENDER ON THE EFFECTS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN A MUNICIPALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## Abstract

This study examined the moderating role of job satisfaction and gender on the relationship between leadership development and service delivery in a municipality in South Africa. A quantitative research approach was adopted, and data were collected from participants using a structured questionnaire. From a target population of 797 employees, 260 respondents were considered into the sample using systematic sampling. Collected data were analysed using SPSS Version 31.0. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse demographic data, while regression analysis, chi-square tests, and the Andrew F. Hayes moderation test were used to test the hypotheses of the study. Findings from the study revealed that leadership development has a positive effect on service delivery, while job satisfaction, too, has a significant and stronger positive effect on service delivery. Also, leadership development was found to have a significant impact on job satisfaction, which suggests that opportunities for leadership growth and professional development leads to higher levels of employee satisfaction. The moderation analysis further confirmed that job satisfaction reinforces the relationship between leadership development and service delivery, hence suggesting that leadership development initiatives are more effective when employees experience higher levels of job satisfaction. However, the results revealed that gender has no significant effect on service delivery, leadership development, or job satisfaction, and does not moderate the relationship between leadership development and service delivery. The study concludes that leadership

development and job satisfaction are key factors which drive improved municipal service delivery. The study recommends that municipal managers should invest in leadership development programmes while creating supportive workplace environments that enhance employee job satisfaction to achieve better service delivery.

**Keywords:** Job satisfaction, Gender, Leadership development, Service delivery.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of poor service delivery amongst municipalities in South Africa has been problematic for a long time. Some of the service delivery problems experienced by South African communities are water cuts and unreliable supply, massive water losses, raw sewage spills, refuse collection backlogs, electricity interruptions, and governance failures (Ngobese, 2017). Political solutions such as forming political coalitions at the municipality level have not yielded results, as service delivery continues to deteriorate (Mwita, 2018). Similarly, solutions such as injecting funding and new resources have not changed the status quo (Nama et al., 2022). There is a growing realization that there is a need for human resources-driven solutions, such as providing leadership development opportunities to employees, to enhance job satisfaction and ultimately improve service delivery (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013). However, despite this realization, limited studies have focused on improving service delivery using human resources strategies. Municipalities have continued to invest in political solutions, draining taxpayers' money.

Research traditions have shown the relevance of leadership development to performance in other contexts. For example, studies on providing leadership development opportunities have been conducted in countries other than South Africa (Olrich et al., 2019). Second, research has shown that leadership development opportunities are relevant to employee performance in other sectors, such as mining in South Africa (Ngobese, 2017). This has resulted in a knowledge gap on using leadership development to drive service delivery in municipalities. Therefore, this research provides insights into human resources-driven strategies to resolve service delivery problems by investigating the effects of leadership development on service delivery in a municipality in South Africa, using gender and job satisfaction as moderating variables.

Leadership development refers to the equipping of employees with skills to be able to influence others in the achievement of organisational goals (Olrich et al., 2019). Service delivery is the level of quality and quantity of services offered to the organisation's clients (Raharja et al., 2019). Job satisfaction is the extent

to which employees are happy about their jobs (Armstrong, 2016). The paper comprises a literature review, method, results, discussion, and conclusions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical framework

This study was grounded in the Feminist Theory. According to Eagly & Carli (2007), this theory provides a significant framework for examining gender dynamics, power relations, and structural variations in organisations. The theory critiques patriarchal social structures, and seeks to understand how gender impacts opportunities, roles, and outcomes in social and professional environments (Acker, 1990; Tong, 2018). It highlights how leadership practices, organisational structures and cultures, often reproduce gender disparities that affect women's experiences, participation, and development in leadership roles. In this study, the Feminist Theory assisted in explaining how gender may moderate the relationship between leadership development and service delivery in a municipal setup.

One fundamental assumption of the Feminist Theory is that organizations are not gender-neutral establishments; but are shaped by past and cultural norms that favour male leadership styles and career paths (Acker, 1990). Traditional leadership models have often been associated with characteristics such as authority, competitiveness, and assertiveness, traditionally linked with masculinity. As a result, women in leadership positions face structural barriers, stereotypes, and unequal access to leadership development opportunities (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Feminist theorists argue that these differences influence both the effectiveness of leadership initiatives and what these leaders produce in organizations.

Leadership development programs are intended to enhance workers' leadership skills, competencies, and organizational effectiveness. According to Ely et al., (2011), the Feminist Theory submits that the impact of such programs may vary between men and women because of gendered organizational cultures and expectations. For example, women may experience additional challenges such as restricted mentorship, exclusion from informal links, and bias in performance evaluation. All these factors influence how women benefit from leadership development initiatives and how their leadership contributions result into enhanced service delivery. Therefore, understanding gender dynamics becomes vital when evaluating the effectiveness of leadership development in organizations such as municipalities.

Another critical assumption of the Feminist Theory is the appreciation of gender as a socially constructed variable that shapes workplace experiences and perceptions (Lorber, 2010). Thus, gender norms influence how workers interact with their leaders, view authority, and respond to organizational initiatives. In municipalities, where hierarchical structures and bureaucratic processes often dominate, gendered

expectations influence leadership effectiveness and worker engagement. Therefore, this Theory provides a lens for analysing how male and female employees may respond differently to leadership development programs and how these responses may impact service delivery.

The Feminist Theory also recognises the significance of workplace situations and employee well-being in shaping organizational performance. Spector (1997) views job satisfaction as a key aspect that can impact workers' motivation, commitment, and productivity. Feminist theorists argue that job satisfaction may also be shaped by gendered organisational experiences, including access to career opportunities, recognition, work-life balance, and organizational support (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Thus, women who experience organisational discrimination or restricted developmental opportunities may report lower job satisfaction; hence this can weaken the positive effects of leadership development on service delivery.

The Feminist Theory also emphasises the significance of inclusive leadership practices that recognise and value diversity in leadership styles. Eagly & Carli (2007) suggests that leadership styles often linked with women, including collaboration, communication, and participatory decision-making, can impact service delivery positively. In municipalities, these leadership styles may boost teamwork, responsiveness, and accountability in service delivery. Therefore, leadership development programs that encourage gender inclusivity and address structural limitations may contribute to enhanced service delivery.

In this study, the Feminist Theory offers a theoretical underpinning for understanding how gender can moderate the relationship between leadership development and service delivery in a municipality. The theory also helps explain how job satisfaction relates with gendered organisational experiences to influence workers' ability to translate leadership development into improved service delivery. The Feminist Theory was adopted on the basis that the study recognises the fact that leadership effectiveness is not solely determined by training or skill acquisition, but is also shaped by broader social and organizational factors related to gender equality. The theory highlights the significance of addressing gender differences in leadership development and workplace settings in municipalities. Therefore, this study sought to contribute a clearer understanding of how leadership development initiatives can be designed and implemented to enhance service delivery while promoting gender equity in municipalities.

## **2.2 Leadership development and service delivery**

Research investigating leadership development and service delivery has been scant (Nkuna, 2015). Most researchers have shown the relationship between leadership development and employee performance. This is because most researchers focus on profit-making organisations. There have been mixed reactions to the effects of leadership development and service delivery (Putzier, 2017). Prior research has shown that leadership development enhances service delivery (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). This is supported by

Orsborne (2017), who demonstrates that employees offered leadership development opportunities tend to have high performance levels. However, other researchers such as Orazi et al. (2013) show that it is not always given that leadership development opportunities yield a high level of service delivery. For example, Seidle et al. (2016) show that other employees are only interested in salaries, not leadership positions. Other researchers claim that the relationship between leadership and service delivery is not linear, as it can be moderated by other factors and provision of other opportunities, such as promotion (Seidle et al., 2016). Research traditions on leadership development have some fundamental knowledge gaps. First, the focus has been on nations such as France and India, other than South Africa, which has a different environment. Second, there is a tendency to investigate leadership development with employee performance as its dependent variable, while this study focuses on service delivery. Furthermore, there has been a tendency to research leadership development in other profit-making sectors, while overlooking local government authorities such as municipalities. Thus, this research adds knowledge on leadership development and service delivery in a municipality in South Africa.

### **2.3 Job satisfaction and service delivery**

Most research traditions on job satisfaction have focused on its impact on employee performance, slightly different from service delivery (Ortas et al., 2015; Akram et al., 2012). Prior research on job satisfaction has shown mixed results (Glamuzina, 2015). Other researchers have shown that job satisfaction positively affects organizational outcomes (Nkuna, 2015; De Waele et al., 2021). This is substantiated by Amoako-Asiedu and Obuobisa-Darko (2017), who show that the higher the job satisfaction, the more the organization attains its objectives. However, other researchers have shown that the effects of job satisfaction on organisational outcomes are not always positive (Tamba & Riyanto, 2020). This relationship depends on other factors such as clarity of organisational objectives and employee skills (Muchhal, 2014). Thus, research on job satisfaction is diverging, paving the way for more research to conclude the relationship between job satisfaction and service delivery. There are some knowledge gaps since prior research elucidates job satisfaction and its outcomes. First, research on job satisfaction has focused on outcomes, such as employee and organizational performance, other than service delivery. Second, studies on job satisfaction have been conducted in other countries. Finally, research on job satisfaction has been conducted in other sectors, such as the manufacturing sector, resulting in knowledge gaps on job satisfaction in the manufacturing sector.

## 2.4 Gender and service delivery

Existing research has advanced knowledge on the relationship between gender and organisational outcomes other than service delivery (Aldulaimi, 2018). This has been a subject of debate for a long time (Davidescu, et al., 2020). Other researchers have shown that there are no differences in terms of performance amongst the genders (Muhamanan et al., 2021). This is substantiated by Urban (2019), who shows that gender does not significantly affect performance. In other words, there is no difference in performance based on gender. However, some studies show that women perform more than men (Mwita, 2018). On the other hand, other studies show that this depends on the workplace environment (Nkuna, 2015). In male-dominated environments, men tend to outperform women (Abbas & Yaqoob, 2009). In a nutshell, there is an unending debate on the effects of gender on organisational outcomes. However, there has been limited research on gender and service delivery in local authorities such as municipalities.

## 2.5 Leadership development and job satisfaction

Prior research has produced mixed findings on the effects of leadership development on job satisfaction (Birasnav et al., 2012). For example, other investigators have shown that offering employees leadership development opportunities increases job satisfaction (Ngobese, 2017). This is supported by Coughlan and Coughlan (2015), who show that employees given leadership opportunities have high job satisfaction. However, other researchers dispute this by showing that job satisfaction is predicted by factors other than leadership development (Nama et al., 2022). For example, Armstrong (2016) demonstrates that salaries, job autonomy, enrichment, and enlargement are good predictors of job satisfaction. The divergences in prior research on leadership development and job satisfaction make it essential to develop new knowledge on leadership development and job satisfaction. This is also more important given that there are scant studies on leadership development and job satisfaction in local authorities such as municipalities.

## 2.6 Gender and job satisfaction

Prior research has shown the effects of gender and job satisfaction in different settings, and conclusions have been drawn (Wajdi & Barid, 2020). Some prior studies have shown no differences in job satisfaction between women and men (Raineri & Paillé, 2016). However, other researchers have shown that women have more job satisfaction than men (Oluwatayo & Adetoro, 2020). This demonstrates divergences from prior research on gender and job satisfaction, which became the basis for this research. Moreover, there are limited studies on gender and job satisfaction among local authorities in South Africa, and this research intends to fill this knowledge gap.

### 2.7 Gender and leadership development

Few studies address the relationship between gender and leadership development (Trinsawati et al., 2018). However, some studies have indirectly shown the nature of the relationship between gender and leadership development (Elkington et al., 2017). Prior research shows that men have more leadership opportunities than women (Sheeba & Christopher, 2019). Ngobese (2017) also substantiates this, showing that most men are given leadership opportunities in organizations. However, other studies show that their gender does not significantly affect leadership development (Orazi et al., 2013). This is consistent with Trisnawati et al. (2018), who show that both females and males now have leadership development opportunities. This signifies divergences in prior research on gender and leadership development. Furthermore, scant studies have been conducted on gender and leadership development in local authorities. Hence, this research advances knowledge on gender and leadership development in municipalities in South Africa.

### 2.8 Conceptual framework and hypotheses development

Figure 1 below shows the conceptual framework and hypotheses developed.

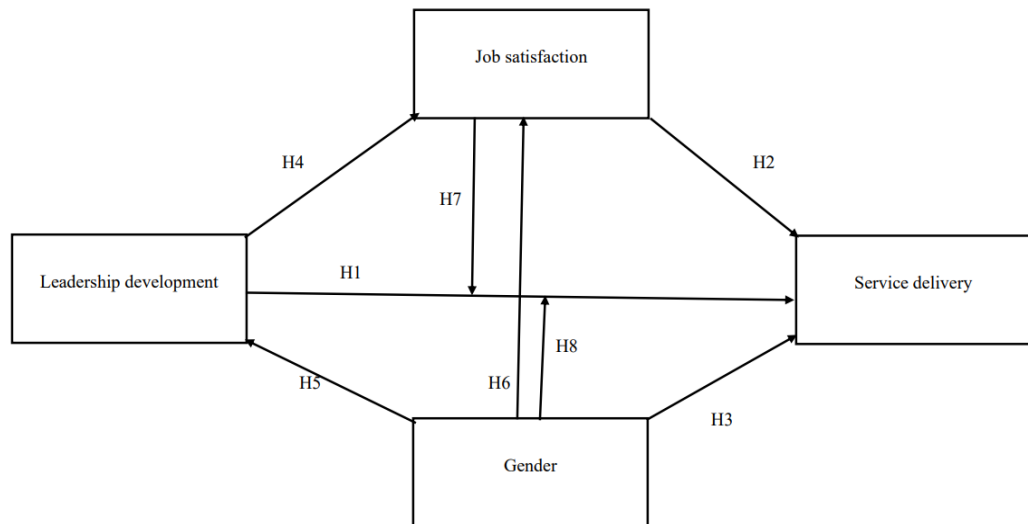


FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK  
Source: Researchers' own elaboration, 2026

The conceptual framework shows that the independent variable is leadership development, measured by initiatives to offer leadership development. The mediating variables of the study are job satisfaction and gender. The dependent variable of the study is service delivery. Eight hypotheses were tested in this study, as shown below:

- H1: Leadership development has significant effects on service delivery.
- H2: Job satisfaction has a significant effect on service delivery.

- H3: Gender has significant effects on service delivery.  
 H4: Leadership development has significant effects on job satisfaction.  
 H5: Gender has significant effects on Leadership development.  
 H6: Gender has a significant effect on job satisfaction.  
 H7: Job satisfaction moderates the effects of leadership development on service delivery.  
 H8: Gender moderates the effects of leadership development on service delivery.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was quantitative because it tested variables' moderating roles and effects on other variables. The study's target population was 797 employees at Ugu District Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The sample size was 260 employees, as derived from Sekaran and Bougie's (2014) sample size table. Systematic sampling was employed, whereby every second element of the sample was chosen until the number 260 was reached. Data was collected through a self-administered closed-ended questionnaire for a period of one month, from 1 October 2025 to 31 October 2025. The closed-ended questionnaire had four sections. The first section was on sample demographics. The second section measured leadership development, the third measured job satisfaction, and the final measured service delivery. These final three sections had five items each, and were on a five-point Likert Scale. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS for Windows version 31.0. Descriptive statistics were used for demographic data, chi-square and regression analysis were used to determine the effects, and the Andrew F. Hayes test was used for moderation effects.

#### 3.1 Sample demographics

The response rate for this research was 78% which is adequate for generalisability. Table 1 below shows the sample demographics.

TABLE 1. SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic	Frequency (%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	36
Female	64
<b>Age</b>	
20 – 25	12
26 - 30	14
31 – 35	34
36 – 40	20
41 – 50	13
51 or older	7
<b>Length of Service</b>	

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1 – 5	43
6 – 10	19
11 – 15	24
16 – 20	6
21 – 25	7
26 or more	1
<b>Education levels</b>	
Matric	1
Higher Certificate	9
N4, N5, N6	14
Diploma/ bachelor's degree	61
Honours Degree / B. Tech	13
Master's degree	2
<b>Type of Contract</b>	
Permanent	72
Contract	18
Other	10

Source: Authors' research

Table 1 above shows the sample demographics. Most respondents were female (64%), and most were between 31 and 35 years old (34%). Most study respondents had 1-5 years of experience, and most had a diploma or a bachelor's degree (61%). Most of the respondents were permanently employed (72%).

### 3.2 Reliability analysis

**TABLE 2. RELIABILITY ANALYSIS**

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items</b>	<b>No of items</b>
Leadership development	.841	.840	5
Job satisfaction	.838	.838	5
Service delivery	.812	.815	5

Source: Authors' research

Table 2 above shows results from Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which was used to compute the reliability of the study. Leadership development, job satisfaction, and service delivery scored above the minimum threshold of 0.7. Therefore, the research had no reliability issues.

### 3.3 Sample adequacy and factor analysis

**TABLE 3. SAMPLE ADEQUACY AND RELIABILITY ANALYSIS**

	<b>KMO test</b>	<b>Bartlett's test</b>
Leadership development	.845	<.005
Job satisfaction	.824	<.005
Service delivery	.807	<.005

Source: Authors' research

Table 3 above illustrates results from KMO and Bartlett's tests used to determine sample adequacy and factor analysis for the study. Leadership development, job satisfaction, and service delivery had good

KMO results above 0.8, signifying good sample adequacy. This was substantiated by Bartlett test results, which were below 0.05, indicating no issues with factor analysis.

### 3.4 Data normality tests

Table 4 shows the results for Skewness, Kurtosis, Kolmogorov-Smirnov, and Shapiro-Wilk tests conducted to test data normality. All three dimensions used in the study scored within the acceptable Skewness and Kurtosis range between -2 and +2. This was substantiated by Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests for the three dimensions above 0.05, signifying that the data were normal.

TABLE 4. DATA NORMALITY TESTS

Dimension	Skewness	Kurtosis	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Shapiro-Wilk
Leadership development	-1.015	-1.788	>0.05	>0.05
Job satisfaction	-.902	-1.457	>0.05	>0.05
Service delivery	-.761	-1.109	>0.05	>0.05

Source: Authors' research

### 3.5 Model fitness

TABLE 5. GOODNESS OF FIT INDICES

Fit index	Value	Comment
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.046	satisfactory
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	1.018	satisfactory
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	1.145	satisfactory
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.977	satisfactory
Relative Fit Index (RFI)	1.023	satisfactory
Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)	0.969	satisfactory
Standardised (GFI)	0.877	satisfactory

Source: Authors' research

Table 5 above shows results from goodness-of-fit indices tests used to determine model fitness. NFI, CFI, IFI, RFI, TLI, and GFI were all closer to one, demonstrating a good model fit.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Regression analysis

TABLE 6. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Hypothesis	Variables	R	R Square	Sig.
H1	Leadership development × service delivery	.593	.352	<0.05
H2	Job satisfaction × service delivery	.698	.487	<0.05
H4	Leadership development × job satisfaction	.663	.440	<0.05

Source: Authors' research

Table 6 above shows the regression analysis results. H1 assumed that leadership development --has significant effects on service delivery. H1 is supported as it attained a p-value less than 0.05. The

regression and the squared show that leadership development positively affects service delivery ( $r = 0.593$ ,  $r^2 = 0.352$ ). The more employees are given leadership opportunities, the more they are likely to contribute to high-level service delivery. H2 stated that job satisfaction has a significant effect on service delivery. H2 was also supported as it achieved a p-value less than 0.05. In addition, the regression and the regression squared indicate that job satisfaction positively affects service delivery ( $r = 0.698$ ,  $r^2 = 0.487$ ). These effects are superior to the effects of leadership development on service delivery. H4 indicated that leadership development has significant effects on job satisfaction. This hypothesis was supported because the p-value attained was less than 0.05. This was substantiated by the regression and regression squared, which highlight that leadership development positively affects job satisfaction ( $r = 0.663$ ,  $r^2 = 0.440$ ).

#### 4.2 Chi-square tests

TABLE 7. CHI-SQUARE TESTS

Hypothesis	Variable	Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ )	Degrees of Freedom (df)	p-value
H3	Gender × service delivery	864.77	12	>0.05
H5	Gender × leadership development	908.34	12	>0.05
H6	Gender × job satisfaction	875.58	12	>0.05

Source: Authors' research

Table 7 above shows the results from chi-square tests. H3 stated that gender has significant effects on service delivery. This attained a p-value above 0.05, signifying that this hypothesis is invalid. Thus, service delivery is not influenced by gender, and there are no differences in service delivery between men and women. H5 assumed that gender has effects on leadership development. The p-value achieved was above 0.05, and H5 was therefore not supported. The study found no significant effects of gender on leadership development. H6 stated that gender has significant effects on job satisfaction. The p-value, which was derived, was above 0.05, indicating that gender has no significant effect on job satisfaction. Thus, there are no differences in job satisfaction between men and women.

#### 4.3 Andrew F. Hayes test

TABLE 8. ANDREW F. HAYES TEST

Hypothesis	Path	Effect	p-value
H7	Leadership development × job satisfaction → service delivery	0.852	<0.05
H8	Leadership development × gender → service delivery	0.239	>0.05

Source: Authors' research

Table 8 above shows the results from Andrew F. Hayes' tests used for moderation analysis. H7 stated that job satisfaction moderates the effects of leadership development on service delivery. The results show that job satisfaction moderates the effects of leadership development on service delivery. The p-value is less than 0.05, making H7 acceptable. The effect is 0.852, signifying that leadership development has a strong positive effect on service delivery where job satisfaction is present. H8 indicated that gender moderates

the effects of leadership development on service delivery. The results show that gender does not play a moderating role in the effects of leadership development on service delivery.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Discussion of findings

Results of the regression analysis shows that leadership development has a significant positive effect on service delivery ( $r=0.593$ ;  $r^2=0.352$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). This suggests that when employees are provided with leadership development opportunities, they are able to contribute to effective service delivery. This result indicate that leadership development plays a vital role in enhancing service delivery in organisations such as municipalities. These findings were also echoed by Arnaboldi et al. (2015) who found that leadership development programmes equip workers with the necessary capabilities and skills that help enhance organisational effectiveness. Also, Orsborne (2017) notes that employees who receive leadership development opportunities often show higher levels of performance and commitment to organisational objectives. These results also contribute to addressing the knowledge gap acknowledged by Nkuna (2015), who noted that research on leadership development and service delivery in the public sector is limited. Thus, most of the existing studies has focused on profit-making organisations and employee performance rather than service delivery outcomes. Therefore, this study expands the literature by showing that leadership development can significantly influence the quality of services delivered to citizens in local authorities. However, these findings partially differ with other studies that question the direct influence of leadership development on service delivery. For instance, Orazi et al. (2015) argue that leadership development does not always result in enhanced service delivery. In the same vein, Seidle et al. (2016) submit that some employees may prefer financial rewards over leadership opportunities, which may weaken the relationship between leadership development and service delivery. Despite these conflicting views, this study provides empirical evidence that leadership development is an important driver of service delivery in municipalities. Furthermore, Seidle et al. (2016) argue that the relationship between leadership development and service delivery may be influenced by other moderating factors. This perspective is supported by this study, which found that job satisfaction plays a moderating role in this relationship; hence highlighting the significance of considering additional organisational variables when evaluating the effectiveness of leadership development programmes.

Findings also revealed that job satisfaction has a significant positive effect on service delivery ( $r=0.698$ ;  $r^2=0.487$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). This result suggests that employees who are content with their jobs are more likely to deliver high-quality services. The relatively higher correlation coefficient compared to leadership

development shows that job satisfaction has a stronger influence on service delivery in organisations such as municipalities. These findings are in line with De Waele et al. (2021) who noted that employees who are content with their jobs tend to be more motivated and committed to organisational goals, hence this improves service delivery. Amoako-Asiedu and Obuobisa-Darko (2017) also reported that high levels of job satisfaction allow organisations to achieve their objectives effectively. These findings support the argument that employee well-being and motivation are vital factors in enhancing public sector performance. In municipalities, for example, employees who are satisfied are likely to show greater dedication to meeting the needs of citizens, which improves quality of service delivery. However, these results differ with Tamba & Riyanto (2020) who argued that job satisfaction does not always guarantee enhanced organisational performance. According to Muchhal (2014), the effectiveness of job satisfaction relies on other factors such as employee competencies, organisational culture, and clear organizational objectives. Despite these conflicting views, results from this study shows that job satisfaction plays a vital role in improving service delivery in municipalities. Therefore, this study contributes to the body of knowledge by addressing the research gap identified in the literature, where most researchers focused on employee performance rather than service delivery (Ortas et al., 2015; Akram et al., 2012); hence the study offers new evidence that job satisfaction is a key determinant of service delivery.

In addition to that, results from the study revealed that leadership development has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction ( $r=0.663$ ;  $r^2=0.440$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). This shows that providing workers with leadership development opportunities boosts their job satisfaction. These findings support the argument that opportunities for professional development and career advancement contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction. For example, Ngobese (2017) found that workers who are provided with leadership development opportunities tend to feel valued and recognised by their organisations. This sense of recognition often leads to higher levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Also, Coughlan and Coughlan (2015) highlight that leadership development programmes equip employees with the skills and confidence required to take on leadership roles. This empowerment increases employees' sense of achievement and personal growth, which then enhances their overall job satisfaction. However, these results differ with Nama et al. (2022) who argue that job satisfaction is influenced by a wide range of factors, including organisational culture and interpersonal relationships. Armstrong (2016) also suggests that factors such as salary, job autonomy, and job enrichment play a significant role in determining job satisfaction than leadership development opportunities. However, despite these divergent perspectives, results from this study suggests that leadership development contributes significantly to job satisfaction in the municipal context. Therefore, this finding is very significant given the limited research on leadership development and job satisfaction in local authorities.

Apart from that, results from the study revealed that gender does not have a significant effect on service delivery ( $p>0.05$ ). This shows that service delivery performance does not significantly differ between male and female personnel in municipalities. These results support the findings of Muhamanan et al. (2021) who argued that both male and female employees are capable of performing equally well when provided with similar opportunities and resources. Also, Urban (2019) found that gender does not significantly influence employee performance. Therefore, these findings challenge the assumption that gender differences may influence organisational results, including service delivery. Instead, results from this study suggest that factors such as organisational support, leadership practices, and employee motivation may play a more significant role in determining service delivery performance. However, these results vary with those of Mwita (2018) who found that at times women perform better than men in certain workplace setups. Also, Nkuna (2015) notes that the effects of gender may depend on the organisational environment, mainly in male-dominated workplaces. Despite these distinct findings, this study suggests that gender does not significantly influence service delivery in municipalities. This may suggest that the municipality should provide relatively equal opportunities for both male and female employees to contribute towards service delivery.

Results further show that gender does not significantly affect leadership development opportunities ( $p>0.05$ ). This suggests that both male and female employees have equal access to leadership development opportunities in municipalities. These results are in support of previous studies that indicate that gender is no longer a significant barrier to leadership development in many organisations. According to Orazi et al. (2013), leadership development programmes are increasingly designed to be inclusive and accessible to employees regardless of gender. Trisnawati et al. (2018) also established that both male and female employees are now being given equal opportunities for leadership training and development in organisations. However, these findings vary from prior studies which argued that men often receive more leadership development opportunities than women. For example, Sheeba and Christopher (2019) argued that organisational leadership positions are still mostly occupied by men. Ngobese (2017) also notes that many organisations continue to offer more leadership opportunities to male employees than female employees. Therefore, results from this study suggest that the municipality may be making progress on gender equality, particularly in leadership development. This is a significant development in the public sector, as equal access to leadership development can boost organisational performance and employee motivation.

Findings of the study also confirm that gender does not have a significant effect on job satisfaction ( $p>0.05$ ), hence a rejection of Hypothesis 6. This suggests that both male and female employees in the municipality experience similar levels of job satisfaction. This result supports previous research that

indicate there are no significant differences in job satisfaction between men and women. For example, Ranineri and Paillé (2016) notes that gender does not significantly influence workers' insights of job satisfaction. This finding suggest that job satisfaction is further influenced by organisational factors such as working conditions, leadership support, and career opportunities than by gender. However, the findings differ with earlier studies that suggest women may enjoy higher levels of job satisfaction than men. Thus, Oluwatayo and Adetoro (2020) found that female employees occasionally report higher job satisfaction due to diverse workplace expectations and experiences. Despite these divergent perceptions, results from this study show that gender does not significantly influence job satisfaction in the municipality, hence this suggest that workers experience similar workplace conditions and opportunities regardless of gender.

Finally, results of the Andrew F. Hayes moderation test indicate that job satisfaction significantly moderates the relationship between leadership development and service delivery (effect=0.852;  $p < 0.05$ ). This result supports Hypothesis 7 and shows that leadership development is more effective in enhancing service delivery when employees are content with their jobs. This result supports the argument that leadership development initiatives must be accompanied by positive workplace conditions to accomplish best organisational outcomes. Thus, if employees are content with their jobs, they are likely to apply the skills and knowledge gained from leadership development programmes effectively. On the other hand, the results show that gender does not moderate the relationship between leadership development and service delivery ( $p > 0.05$ ), hence Hypothesis 8 was not supported. Therefore, this suggests that the effectiveness of leadership development in enhancing service delivery does not vary between male and female employees. Broadly, these findings highlight the significance of focusing on employee satisfaction and organisational support when employing leadership development programmes in municipalities. Therefore, by creating supportive work environments that boost job satisfaction, municipalities can maximise the positive effects of leadership development on service delivery.

## 5.2 Theoretical implications

This study has a number of important contributions to theory, especially in the fields of leadership development, public sector performance, and gender studies grounded in Feminist Theory. Firstly, the study contributes to the existing body of literature on leadership development by shifting focus from traditional organisational results such as employee performance to service delivery, which is an important outcome in the public sector. Earlier studies has largely focused on profit-oriented settings and performance metrics (Arnaboldi et al., 2015; Nkuna, 2015), hence leaving a gap in understanding how leadership development influences service delivery in municipalities. Therefore, this study widens theoretical applications of leadership development to public administration environments by proving a significant positive relationship between leadership development and service delivery. This shows that

leadership development is not only relevant for internal organisational efficiency but also for external service delivery that directly affect citizens.

Secondly, this study contributes to the body of literature that already exist by empirically confirming job satisfaction as a key variable moderating the relationship between leadership development and service delivery. Thus, while prior studies have acknowledged the significance of job satisfaction in influencing organisational outcomes (De Waele et al., 2021; Amoako-Asiedu & Obuobisa-Darko, 2017), very few scholars has explored its relationship with leadership development. Therefore, the finding that job satisfaction reinforces the positive effects of leadership development supports the argument that organisational interventions do not operate in isolation, but are dependent upon employee attitudes and well-being. This is in line with Spector (1997) who asserts that job satisfaction significantly shapes employee motivation and productivity. In this regard, this study advances theory by incorporating leadership development and job satisfaction into a contingency-based framework, where employees' psychological states determine the effectiveness of organisational initiatives.

Thirdly, this study provides nuanced insights into Feminist Theory by empirically testing the role of gender in organisational outcomes in a municipal setting. Thus, Feminist Theory posits that organisational structures are inherently gendered and may produce unequal outcomes (Acker, 1990; Tong, 2018). However, results from this study contradicts some of these assumptions by showing that gender does not significantly influence service delivery, leadership development, or job satisfaction. Also, the study revealed that gender does not moderate the relationship between leadership development and service delivery. This imply that, at least in the studied municipality, organisational practices may be evolving toward greater gender neutrality. These results contribute to the ongoing debate in the literature, where some scholars argue for persistent gender disparities (Eagly & Carli, 2007), while others have reported diminishing differences (Urban, 2019). Therefore, this research refines the Feminist Theory by suggesting that context matters, and that gender effects may be less pronounced in settings where equal opportunities and inclusive policies are implemented.

Fourthly, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of non-linear relationships in organisational behaviour. Earlier studies suggests that the relationship between leadership development and organisational results may be complex and influenced by moderating variables (Seidle et al., 2016). The validation that job satisfaction moderates this relationship supports this viewpoint and highlights the significance of multi-variable models in organisational research. This strengthens the need for future theoretical frameworks to integrate mediating and moderating variables when examining leadership effectiveness.

Finally, the study contributes to the limited body of knowledge on public sector human resource strategies in developing settings, particularly South Africa. Thus, much of the existing literature has focused on developed countries and private sector organisations (Olrich et al., 2019). Therefore, by providing practical evidence from a South African municipality, this study enhances the relevance of leadership and organisational theories and encourages further research in similar settings.

### 5.3 Practical implications

Results from this study offers a number of actionable insights for municipal managers, policymakers, and human resource practitioners among others. Thus, municipalities should prioritise leadership development programmes as a strategic tool for enhancing service delivery. Findings from this study clearly show that when workers are equipped with leadership skills, they are better able to contribute to efficient and effective service provision. This means that leadership development should not be restricted to senior management only but should also be extended across different levels of the organisation.

In addition to that, organisations should take note that leadership development alone is not sufficient. The strong moderating role of job satisfaction suggests that municipalities should create supportive work environments where workers feel motivated, satisfied and valued. This can be achieved through fair compensation, recognition, opportunities for career growth, and improved working conditions. If workers are content, they are more likely to apply the skills gained from leadership development in ways that boost service delivery.

Another significant implication is that municipalities should adopt a holistic human resource strategy. Instead of depending heavily on political or financial interventions to resolve service delivery problems, there must be a stronger focus on internal organisational factors including employee development, motivation, and well-being; hence this can lead to more sustainable improvements in service delivery.

Findings from the study also suggest that gender equality initiatives in the municipality may already be effective, as no major differences were established between male and female employees. Nevertheless, this does not mean that gender issues should be disregarded. Thus, municipalities should continue supporting equal opportunities and inclusive practices to maintain and reinforce this balance.

Managers should also prioritise focusing on enhancing job satisfaction, given its stronger effect on service delivery compared to leadership development. This should include improving communication, adopting positive leadership styles, ensuring fair workload distribution, and creating a caring organisational culture.

Finally, policymakers should consider incorporating worker-focused interventions into service delivery strategies. Rather than purely viewing service delivery as an operational issue, it must be viewed as an outcome influenced by employee attitudes, skills, and organisational support systems. Therefore, this

study highlights that improving service delivery in municipalities requires not only structural or political changes, but investing in people, their development, and their workplace experience.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The research found that leadership development has a significant positive effect on service delivery. Results suggests that when employees are given opportunities to develop leadership skills, they contribute to enhanced service delivery. Thus, leadership development programmes play a vital role in enhancing worker skills, decision-making abilities, and organisational effectiveness. The study also found that job satisfaction has a significant positive effect on service delivery, and that its effect is stronger than that of leadership development. This justifies the need to ensure that workforces are satisfied with their work environment, responsibilities, and organisational support systems. Employees who are content with their jobs are more motivated, committed, and willing to apply their skills to enhance service delivery. Also, results shows that leadership development significantly impacts job satisfaction. Thus, employees who are given opportunities for professional growth, leadership training, and career development are more likely to experience higher levels of job satisfaction. Thus, leadership development initiatives not only enhance organisational capabilities but also contribute to positive worker attitudes.

The moderation analysis showed that job satisfaction reinforces the relationship between leadership development and service delivery. Thus, leadership development initiatives are more effective in improving service delivery once employees are content with their jobs. This shows the significance of creating supportive workplace environments that promote employee well-being together with leadership development programmes. However, the study found that gender does not significantly affect service delivery, leadership development, or job satisfaction. Further, the study found that gender does not moderate the relationship between leadership development and service delivery. Results suggest that both male and female employees have similar chances and capacities to enhance service delivery in the municipality. Thus, the study concludes that leadership development and job satisfaction are key to improving service delivery, while gender does not significantly influence these relationships.

### 6.1 Limitations of the study

A key limitation of this research is that data were collected from one municipality. While results provide valuable insights, the use of a single organisation limits the generalizability of findings to other municipalities in South Africa or beyond. Municipalities differ in terms of resources, governance structures, organisational culture, and service delivery challenges, which may influence the relationships observed in

this study. Therefore, future studies should include several municipalities across provinces or countries in order to enhance external validity and allow researchers to determine whether the observed relationships hold across diverse municipal settings.

This study also relied entirely on self-administered questionnaires, which may introduce response bias such as social desirability bias. Thus, employees may have overemphasised their views of leadership development, job satisfaction, or service delivery to present themselves or their organisation in a favourable light. This could affect the accuracy of the results. Therefore, future studies should adopt multiple data sources and methods, including supervisor evaluations, objective service delivery performance indicators, or qualitative interviews. A mixed-methods approach would enhance the robustness of the results and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships among the variables.

Finally, the study engaged a cross-sectional research design, allowing researchers to collect data at a single point in time. This limits the capacity to establish causal relationships between leadership development, job satisfaction, and service delivery. While significant relationships were identified, it cannot be conclusively determined whether leadership development leads to improved service delivery or whether other unobserved factors influence these relationships. Therefore, future studies should consider using longitudinal research designs to track changes over time. This would provide deeper insights into causality and allow for the examination of how leadership development initiatives influence job satisfaction and service delivery in the long term.

#### **DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

#### **DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS**

The authors declare that they have not used any Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies during the preparation of this work.

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