The influence of supervisor/subordinate social support on employee performance in the South African retail sector

Abe Isaac Idowu
Abe Ethel Ndidiamaka
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Westville, Durban, South Africa

Abstract

Interpersonal relationships among employees in the global workplace are facing challenges that could adversely affect employee performance. The retail sector of the South African economy is one of the largest employer of labour in the country. Employees in the South African retail sector found in a 'rainbow' environment are not excused from arduous interpersonal relationships, which positions them to be in need of social support. Although organizations realise that employees need social support, few studies have examined the role that supervisor/subordinate social support plays on an employee's performance in the South African retail sector.

This article investigates the presence or otherwise of interpersonal relationships through available support among categorized employees and its effect on their performance at work. A non-experimental research design was adopted and concurrent transformative mixed method research approach was used to examine bivariate connections among the variables. 163 supervisors and 147 subordinate employees in 4retail companies in South Africa were sampled. The findings of the quantitative data revealed that there was no significant connection between social support and employee performance, but the qualitative data findings unveiled the reasons for the dissociation between support and performance.

The findings further indicated that supervisors' and subordinate workers' relationships were at low levels of relational attachment and social interaction. This validates the position of previous studies on social support. Participants purported that communication, training, teamwork, friendliness, respect for individuals, and information sharing were important factors that should assist employees to improve interpersonal relationships at work. The understanding of the knowledge of social support has been deepened by this study as it points to the possibility of mediation in future studies.

Introduction

Scientific studies on employee wellbeing and the positive aspects of their mental health have been on the increase (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Keyes, 2005, 2007; Seligman, 2008; Feeney & Collins, 2015). While attention of scholars hasbeen on the close relationships of individuals and the benefits or reward that support offers in lowering morbidity and mortality (Cohen, 2004; Lakey & Cronin, 2008; Holt-Lunstad & Smith, 2012), little or no attention has been given to exploring the medium and processes through which the social exchanges occur. The need to look in a different direction has become imperative given that employees interact at work and spend quality time with each other.Therefore, it isessential to examine the response of employees (supervisor and subordinate workers) to available support and to determine whether the support received will affect their performance at work.

Scholars of social support agreed that the concept is a positive tool to enhance interpersonal relationships among cadres of employees (Chipeta, Bradley, Chimwaza-Manda & McAuliffe, 2016). The general concern is whether all employees have uniform perception towards helpful assistance available from the organisation through supervisors and colleagues, or not (Diestel, Wegge & Schmidt, 2014). If

employees do not perceive social support uniformly, it is important to find out the extent to which available support to employees can affect their performance at work. The main aim of this article is to investigate the existence of interpersonal relationship between supervisors and subordinate workers, by using relational attachment and social integration as measuring instruments. Additionally, the article investigates social support and the extent to which it affects employee performance at work.

The last decade saw South African retail organisations expanding their operations to the rest of Africa. This geographic expansion became attractive to the retail operators because of the growth they sought in order to improve their performance (Das, Nair & Dube, 2016). These journeys to the rest of Africa may not have been without attendant interpersonal problems among employees. Miller (2005) observed that variations and dissimilarities are rampant in the employment conditions of employees in the African retail sector. Moreover, employees of the retail companies based in the Sub-Saharan African region were of the view that with respect to the notions of fairness and justice, their South African counterparts were better remunerated. Additionally, subordinate employees claimed that their supervisors offered no support to them in any way thereby limiting interpersonal relationships between supervisors and subordinates (Boren, 2014). The forgoing challenges could negatively influence employee performance at work. The scholars are of the view that developing interpersonal relationships and making social support available could assist in removing some of the challenges at work and conversely improve employee work performance in the South African retail sector.

Literature Review

The perspectives of various scholars on the subjects under discussion are covered in this section, namely social support, interpersonal relationships and employee performance.

Scholars have examined previous research work on social support relationships from the perspective of social attachment and social bonds (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Weiss, 1973, 1974; Henderson, 1977, 1981; Henderson, Byrne, Jones, Scott & Adcork, 1981). Weiss (1974) identified six positive outcomes of interpersonal relationships namely: attachment, integration, nurturance, reassurance of worth, reliable alliance and receiving help and guidance. Weiss (1974) defined integration as a network concept, as stated in Henderson's (1977) availability of social attachment (Chung, 2014).

Relational attachment and social integration measures are used in this article to determine whether interpersonal relationship exists between supervisors and subordinates (Methot & Melwani, 2017).

Workplace Social Support

Nan Lin (2013) defined social support as perceived or actual instrumental or expressive provisions made available by the community, social networks and confiding partners. An individual, a group of persons or community may be the recipient of support each of these could be a unit of analysis. The unit of analysis in this article is individual employees in the retail sector of the South African economy. Earlier researchers measured support from interpersonal relationships through frequent contact (Sarason, Pierce & Sarason, 1990). Subsequent development indicated that social support is a personality variable (Pierce, Lakey & Sarason, 2013).

Workplace social support is the extent to which individuals perceived that their wellbeing is valued by their workplace sources, for example, supervisors and their employers (Li, Shaffer & Bagger, 2015), and the perception that the sources that are identified will provide help to support this wellbeing (Trudel-Fitzgerald, Kubzansky, Poole, Ichiro& Tworoger, 2015). An examination of supervisor/subordinate support should bring clarity to the discussion of workplace social support.

Supervisor/subordinate Support

Tepper (2007), being specific about the relationship between supervisors and their subordinates in his argument, reported that supervisors who perceived that they were being fairly treated by the organisation reciprocated by treating subordinates more favourably. According to him, supervisors' perception that they received fair treatment from the organisation was positively related to their subordinates' ratings of supportive behaviours exhibited by their supervisors, even when difficult assignments were added. This indicates that support built respect and assisted subordinates in skill building.

Scholars reported that the perceptions of organisational support among supervisors and subordinates has been on the increase (Scott, Zagenczyk, Schippers, Purvis & Cruz, 2014). Siddiqi and Ahmed (2016) also reported that a positive relationship was found between perceived organisational support and extra-role behaviour among employees of a post office. By assisting other employees to perform their duties effectively, support was found to influence a greater level of productivity in an organisation (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 2013). Additionally, it fostered a positive relationship between perceived organisational support and extra-role behaviour for supervisors and subordinates.

Theory and Concept of Social Support

Social support is viewed from three perspectives (Sarason, Sarason & Pierce, 1990), namely:(1) the assessment of social support and its connection to important outcomes,(2) relationship of assessed social support to behaviour in social interactions, and (3) the relative contributions to various general outcomes and linkage to specific support (Spielberger, 2013).

Social support is operationalized by examining its functions, the difference between perception of social support available and actual received social support, and the types of interpersonal relationships that provide support. Bowlby (1980) proposed a theory of social support, where he referred to individuals who are always available, trusted and responsive as attachment figures. Attachment figures expressly provide social support through behavioural manifestations such as affection, love, care and offering instrumental assistance like help and money. In the workplace, attachment employees provide a base for personal development ability, which could have evolved from their infancy, teaching them to accept help from others. When there are no attachment figures, the tendency of psychopathology increases. Individuals that have attachment figures in their lives are helped to stand up against and easily overcome frustrations and challenges (Spielberger & Sarason, 2013). This could reduce time wasted in managing challenges and conversely enhance an employee's performance.

Major issues raised on the measurement of social support included whether social support should be treated as a unitary concept or multi-related concept (Stroebe, Stroebe, Abakoumkin & Schut, 1996). Unitary concept is the designation of all elements in a measurement to a unit. Sarason et al. (1983) reported that if social support was a unitary concept, the number of scores in the SSQ should be higher. Gleason & Masumi (2015) documented that since the 1980s, researchers have conceptualized social support not as a unitary concept.

Another salient issue raised in measuring social support was the dichotomous nature of the variables used to judge the presence of relationships in the independent variable (Pierce et al., 1997). Dichotomous variables are categorical variables with two sides. In the specific case of social support, the number of scores of persons willing to support others and the satisfaction derived from such support are termed dichotomous (Youyou, Kosinski & Stillwell, 2015).

Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationship is a strong, deep, or close association or acquaintance between two or more people that may range in duration from brief to enduring. This association may be based on inference, love, solidarity, regular business interactions, or some other type of social commitment (Berscheid, 1999). Extensive studies carried out on interpersonal relationship suggested that it influences mental health, physical and long life. Individuals who have strong connections to the community, social institutions and supportive networks of family, friends and interactive colleagues at work, have the tendencies to show better health and less risk of mortality or morbidity than those with low levels of integration (Berscheid & Regan, 2016).

Scholars have reiterated that the way individuals in relationship integrate socially is not yet clear, but many studies are of the view that social support is a mediating factor (Eagly, 2013; Street, 2014; Baumeister, Ainsworth & Vohs, 2016). Employees who are socially involved with others are believed to have more access to social support, which leads to better-perceived social support. This also affects the health of those who benefit from the social support. Attention of studies on social support is turning to support received or offered on a daily basis between employees (Frey, 2016).

Supervisor-Subordinate Exchange and Job Performance

Generally, scholars of the supervisor-subordinate interaction literature are of the view that there is a positive relationship with job satisfaction (Loi, Chan & Lam, 2014). The assumption was that high quality of relationships between the classed employees make available tangible and intangible benefits to members. The tangible benefits are decision influence (Ko& Hur, 2014), empowerment (Loi, Lam & Ngo, 2015), career advancement (Zhang, Li & Harris, 2015), and salary progress (Sheldon & Li, 2013). The intangible benefits are communication with leaders (Lloyd, Bilous, Clark, Hammersley, Baker, Coffey& Rawlings-Sanaei, 2017) and having a trust-based relationship (Frazier, Tupper & Fainshmidt, 2016).

Both the tangible and intangible benefits that create a positive environment for members, leading to higher job satisfaction (Cheng, Chang & Li, 2013), foster improved performance. From the social exchange theory, the observation of the members that receive support, trust and benefits from their leaders is that they develop obligation to reciprocate with their leaders by the demonstration of high performance (Chen, Eberly, Chiang & Farh, 2014).

Measures

This study adopted a non-experimental research design. The adoption was backed by an observational approach using explanatory design, because of the need to collect data during the study (Morse, 2016) from employees of retail companies through the use of multiple variables to be able to validate the direction of the influence between variables (Walker & Greene, 2009). The nature of the study demanded the use of a concurrent transformative mixed method in order to access information from diverse views. The approach gives the opportunities to make inferences through framework, correlation regression and variances.

Social Support Scale: Sarason, Levine, Basham and Sarason (1983) developed the social support scale (SSS) used in this study. It is a 4-point Likert scale, measuring the presence of interpersonal relationships. One of the items on this scale is: "How many people can you rely on to help you when you are in danger at work". The social support scale was designed to ascertain the presence of relationship between supervisors and the workers. If the exchange between supervisors and subordinates is high, it involves mutual influence and respect. If the exchange relationships are low in quality, it involves contract exchanges and a one-way downward effect (Restubog, Bordia & Tang, 2010).

Employee Performance: Tsui, Pearce, Porter and Tripoli (1997) developed the employee Basic Task Performance Scale (EBTPS) measuring quantity, quality and efficiency. This scale (EBTPS) is a 4-point Likert scale and is adopted in this study. Other items were adopted from research by Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Wormley (1990). These items measure employee total ability, judgment, job knowledge, accuracy and creativity.

Qualitative data: Four structured open-ended questions were formulated to validate the non-numerical data. This qualitative information was simultaneously collected with the quantitative data. The participants' comments on the connection between an employee's interpersonal relationships and their basic work performance in the retail sector clarified the outcome of the quantitative data.

Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using the statistical software package IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 22). Inferential and descriptive statistics were engaged in making inferences about the population sampled and determining the characteristics of the variables. The statistical reliability of the instruments used are as follows: EBTPS .76 resulting from 11 items and SSS was .96 for 12 items. A total of 310 participants were sampled, out of which were163 supervisors and 147 subordinates. The response rate was 75%. Gender, Age, Department, Qualification, Number of years in present position, and Job title were among the demographic data collected. Bivariate analysis was used to analyse the objective of the study.

Results

In analysing social support, it is important to note that social support assessment takes into consideration dichotomous judgment of two factors :(1) the availability of perceived support at 40%, and (2) the degree of satisfaction that the respondent receives from support available at 40% (Sarason et al., 1983, 1990, 2013). It measures the attachment of employees and their relationships to each other.

Table 1: Measurement of Employee Relational Attachment

Supervisor:	Mean	Standard deviation
Relational attachment score	2.74	1.45
Relational attachment satisfaction	1.87	1.14
Subordinate:		
Relational attachment score	2.14	1.25
Relational attachment satisfaction	2.13	1.32
Sense of judgment of employee performance	3.20	0.710

Descriptive statistics of relational attachment and sense of judgment

Table 1 above represents the description of the mean for employees' relational attachment for both supervisors and subordinates. The item on employee performance that relates to relational attachment is employee sense of judgment. From the statistics above, employee performance has a higher sense of judgment (3.20) than their relational attachment. The assumption was that when an employee finds someone to listen to him or her, the person listening uses their sense of judgment to know when and what to reply to the employee speaking. This will either prolong the interaction or terminate it. From the result above, when using employee sense of judgment to measure relational attachment, the following interpretation was tenable. The level of subordinate employees' relational attachment is low for both supervisors (2.74 score and 1.87 satisfaction level) and subordinate workers (2.14 score and 2.13 satisfaction level). It means that the employees have a higher degree of performing on the job (3.20) than to attach themselves relationally. According to Tsui et al. (1997), employee sense of judgment relates to the employees' core task on the job. Hence, this study found that employees seemed to judge their core task higher than relational attachment. This implies that employees do not feel secure enough to attach relationally to one another at work. As seen above, the behavioural effect of such insecure attachment is that it affects subordinates' coping skills and their feelings of personal effectiveness or self-efficacy (Sarason et al., 2013). Although employee performance may be within reasonable levels, in this case, the benefits of relational attachments may not be derived in this workplace.

Measurement of Social Integrations among Employees

This examines the existence, structure and function of social relationships. The social integration of employees measures certain aspects of respondents' social network index. It assesses the presence of social ties among employees and the extent of these relationships at work (Methot, Lepine, Podsakoff & Christian, 2015).

Table 2 Measurement of Social Integration

Supervisor:	Mean	Standard deviation
Social integration score	2.37	1.29
Social integration satisfaction	1.74	1.04
Subordinate:		
Social integration score	2.18	1.26
Social integration satisfaction	2.01	1.27
Sense of judgment of employee performance	3.25	0.75

Descriptive statistics of social integration and employee ability

Table 2 above describes the mean and standard deviation of employee social integration levels. For the subordinate workers, social integration score mean was 2.18 and standard deviation was 1.259, and social integration satisfaction mean was 2.01 and standard deviation was 1.269. For the supervisors, social integration score was mean 2.37 and standard deviation was 1.29, and social integration satisfaction was mean 1.74, and standard deviation was 1.04. Measure of employee ability was most suitable to answer this question. The mean and standard deviation of employee ability was 3.25 and 0.710 respectively. Note that employee ability is one of the items included in considering employee performance. It means that the level of employees' ability to perform tasks was higher than the social integration of the employees. Social integration is proof that relationship exists between employees, but

does not mean that the relationship will be supported (Coyne & DeLongis, 1986). The result above shows that employees' ability to perform assigned tasks and to delegate and use power, takes up their attention much more than the existence of relationship.

Correlation between Social Support and Employee Performance (Subordinates)
The correlation matrix below explains the result of the connection between social support and employee performance for all the subordinate workers that participated in the study.

Table 3

	Mean	Standard deviation	R	P
Total social support	25.62	8.29	-	0.00
Total employee performance	33.40	5.91	-.032	-

N = 144   significant at 0.05 (2 Tailed)

Correlation matrix for subordinate social support and employee performance
The SPSS (version 22) provided a bivariate result in Table 3 above, on the correlation coefficient between social support and employee performance among subordinate workers. Out of the 147 sampled, 144 responses were used meaning that there were three missing samples, which is considered negligible (Pallant, 2015). The Pearson correlation coefficient between social support and employee performance indicates -.032, for subordinate social support, when the significant level is 0.05 that is ($r = -.032$, $P > 0.05$). It shows clearly that there is no significant connection, which means that there is no relationship between social support and employee performance. However, there might be a causal connection, intervening or suppressing the observed zero-order association between social support and employee performance (Treiman, 2014).

Correlation between Social Support and Employee Performance (Supervisors)
The table below describes the link between social support and employee performance as follows:

Table 4

	Mean	Standard deviation	R	P
Total social support	25.79	7.56	-	0.00
Total employee performance	33.57	6.26	-.028	-

N = 163   significant at 0.05 (2 Tailed)

Correlation matrix for supervisors' social support and employee performance
Table 4 above presents the association between social support and employee performance for supervisors. There were 163 samples used for the analysis, implying that there was no missing sample. The correlation coefficient for supervisor social support was -.028, and the employee performance was .078, when the significant level was 0.05, that is ($r = -.028$, $P > 0.05$). From the coefficient correlation of the two variables, social support is low, and employee performance is low, which means there is no relationship (Pallant, 2015) between the two variables. Note that the negative sign on the correlation coefficient of supervisors is an indication that there is a negative correlation between the two variables. Therefore, the bivariate result for both the subordinates and the supervisors in terms of assessment showed that there is no statistical significance between social support and employee performance in the South African retail sector. The result obtained above indicates that there might be variables that are missing in the equation between social support and employee performance, such that could change the result observed in this construct (Treiman, 2014).

Discussions
Below are detailed explanations on the results of the association between social support and employee performance.

Quantitative Analysis Result: Subordinate

The coefficient of correlation between social support and employee performance for the subordinate employees indicated that there is an inverse relationship. While social support is low with the correlation level at -.32, which is negative, the employee performance level is .709, which is high and positive. The result indicated that there is no direct relationship between social support and employee performance for the subordinate employees.

The result indicates a low level of employee relational attachment. When employee relational attachment support is low, it signifies that the number of persons available to give support to one subordinate is less than aggregate of available persons willing to offer support, even when (five) supervisors at maximum are an option to offer support. The satisfaction level of that one is 44.9% (from the descriptive statistics), which is less than the satisfaction that five supervisors will offer in terms of support (Tsui, Egan & O'Reilley, 1992).

The fundamental reason why a study of this nature may come up with such quantitative results could be the unitary concept of social support. The findings of this study are justified by the unitary nature of social support, the concept is complete in itself (Pierce et al., 1991). Sarason et al. (2013) gave a strong distinction between personal-versus-environmental resources, and this is a pointer to the reason for questions in social support: *"When the assessment of support is by self-report or experiment, the result scores may reflect trait-like personal perceptions to a greater or lesser degree (depending on the question's wording).Once a given measure pertains to perceived social support, it confuses personal with social resources, which in turn compromises the chance that research will generate an unclouded picture of the independent or interactive effects of the two classes of variables"* (Sarason et al., 2013). This explains the non-relational outcome of the quantitative inference obtained from the subordinate data. Relating this to the result obtained, the benefit or cost of social support is personal to an employee, and work performance is an environmental/organisational resource. So then, the virtue of social support and employee work performance in an objective like this case may not be conceded.

The logic foraying emphasis on the dissociation of the variables in this study is to suggest the consideration of intervening variables that could mediate the association completely or partially (Treiman, 2014). Some of these variables include, but are not limited to, communication, respect, training, teamwork and a friendly work environment. These intervening variables could serve as strategic interventions to enhance support.

Quantitative Analysis Result: Supervisor

The correlation coefficient of the construct for the supervisor respondents in the quantitative analysis indicated that there was low relationship. The social support and employee performance correlation level is low at -.028 clearly shows that there is no significant relationship between social support and employee performance for supervisors. The explanation of Pierce et al. (1991) supports the low association between social support and employee work performance obtained in this study with respect to the supervisors. The dichotomous judgment involved in the assessment of social support could cause a variation in the association of variables as obtained in the quantitative outcome in this study. Dichotomous judgment refers to the assessment of the patterns of social support, that is, assessing the number of available scores and the degree of satisfaction derived from an available person willing to give support. This judgment on its own is complicated and demands a careful examination; adding another variable to it could further complicate the result (Spielberger, 2013).

In measuring the result obtained to the question on employee relational attachment, Sarason et al. (2013) argued that employee relational attachment is based on a self-concept (self-image), which suggests that people who differ in social support will also differ in self-image and how they believe others perceive them. The result obtained in this study corroborates with Sarason et al. (2013), that the employee relational attachment hinges on self-concept by reporting that relational attachment among employees is low. According to Sarason et al. (2013), low social support is associated with excessive worry, self-preoccupation and relative difficulty in focusing attention on a particular task. Low social support may cause maladjustment in adulthood because of childhood stress (Sarason et al., 2013). Additionally, Sarason

et al. (2013) validates the result of the state of social support among supervisors in the South African retail industry.

The qualitative content analysis explained the findings of the quantitative data and supports Sarason et al. (2013) by clarifying the negative association between social support and employee performance. It also revealed the concepts employees thought could assist them in accessing, giving and receiving support.

Interestingly, some of the responses received from the subordinate's show that supervisors do not listen to them. However, over forty percent of the supervisors that participated in this study were of the view that employees need to communicate more. This little or absence of communication among employees may be a strong indication that most of the employees in the South African retail sector are introverted. This can affect their relational attachment, as observed by Sarason et al. (1990). Relational attachment is the available, trusted and responsive others that an employee can count on to listen when the employee needs to talk. Employees' relational attachment in social support is the basis for expressive behaviour and personal development (Bowlby, 1988). Spielberger et al. (2013) documented that social support is often communicated through specific behaviours such as money loans, advice, and willingness to listen uncritically to another's concern.

Where superior employees are not listening to subordinates, communication will be hampered and the subordinates may not be in a position to receive support. Irrespective of the number of superior officers willing to offer support to an employee, once communication is hindered, the employee may not be satisfied with the support level. In a study, Erdogan and Enders (2007) observed that the connection between LMX and performance would be more positive for employees that report to high supervisor perceived organisational support (POS).

The opinion of the scholars on social support was that social support as a unitary concept is good. As a resource, employees should take advantage of the support available in their organisation. The assumption is that social support should enhance the best in any employee (Sarason et al., 1983; Sarason et al., 1990, Spielberger et al., 2013). With respect to the results obtained through this objective, the study found that social support did not influence employee performance, as reported by scholars. Although there is likely to be a missing factor or variable, if the factor is added, it may mediate and affect the result of the association between social support and employee performance (Treiman, 2014).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are proffered to managers and practitioners in the South African retail sector.

Recommendation One: Strengthening Relationships

Strengthening the relational mutuality between the supervisors and the subordinates in the retail industry in South Africa is of paramount urgency in order to derive the benefits associated therewith. Additionally, there is a need to enhance efforts in relationship building among supervisors and subordinates. The studies into LMX relationships between supervisor and subordinate twenty years ago (Graen et al., 1995) supported the supervisor as the leader and agent of the relational process (Uhl-Bien, Graen & Scandura, 2000). In 2015, attention of relational scholars shifted to the subordinate as follower through followership theory (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe & Carsten, 2014). Balancing the relationship between supervisor and subordinate demands the mutual involvement of the two. It takes the two to create, maintain and transform the relationships to maturity. Some scholars have suggested the need for supervisors to lead the relational process (Graen et al., 1995; Uhl-Bien et al., 2000), while others (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014) proposed that relational attachment could be enhanced through the followership theory. Whichever perspective is adopted, it is important to balance the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. Isaac& Roger (2016) recommended that in seeking relational development, it is better to involve both supervisors and subordinates in order to avoid confusion and misunderstanding about the followership constructs and relationship with leadership. They further recommended that constructive relationship between supervisor and subordinate could emerge when a supervisor rewards a subordinate based on performance thereby stimulating them to perform beyond expectation.

Recommendation Two: Friendly Climate

The organisational climate or workplace environment should be friendly. It is not the organisation that will create friendliness in the workplace, but the supervisor. As long as the supervisor and subordinate work together, there will always be work-related tasks that capture the connections built between them (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer & Ferris, 2012). Personal friendships have been advocated between supervisors and subordinates, especially when the subordinates are to perform extra tasks, or the supervisor expects extra-role behaviours from their subordinates (Zhang, Li & Harris, 2015). Supervisors should be realistic with subordinates in such cases where friendship exists between them. Friendship should not influence the administrative decisions of the supervisors (Zhang et al., 2015).

Recommendation Three: Improving Work Environment

The study would like to take up one of the respondent's suggestions, that is, improving work environment. The suggestion involves improving on the psychosocial working condition of both supervisors and subordinates, whereby the job demand, job control and job support needs to be balanced to avoid employees strain and illnesses (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). The demand, control and support model predicted psychological strain and illness for individuals faced with high job demands and little control or no support for balancing the demands (Wong & Laschinger, 2015).

Recommendation Four: Other Minor Recommendations
- Creation of consistent human resource policies that strengthen leader-member exchange and employee job performance.
- Improve supervisor/subordinate interactional capacities, understanding, and communication.
- Encourage employees that are engaged in tasks that relate to performance processes.

Conclusions

The outcome of this study revealed that consideration should be given to the suggestions of respondents in the content analysis, to examine the effect of communication, listening, training, teamwork, uniform treatment of employees, and improving work environment. This will help in deepening empirical knowledge in this field of study, and to advise the human resource management of the respective retail organisations of the need to incorporate the findings.

This study contributes to the expansion of knowledge in the field of human resource management and organisational behaviour. The results obtained in this study met the objective of the study, and this was achieved by the respondents' suggestions on how employees' social support can affect their performance in the South African retail sector; the need to widen the constructs have become inevitable for the future.

Limitations and Further Studies

This article concentrated on investigating the effect that social support has on employee performance, using social support as a predictor of performance. There are other predictors of interpersonal relationship that can be used to measure the existence of relationship. The investigation was carried out among the middle level staffers of the South African retail industry; the result may have been different if the same investigation was conducted among the middle level managers and the C-suit managers. This study adopted a concurrent transformative mixed method that includes a cross sectional technique to data collection, because of employees' busy schedules at work and the nature of operations in the retail stores.

This study described the connection between individual social support and work performance, with suggestions of variables that may affect the employees' social support. Respondents suggested these variables as possible factors that are able to influence interpersonal relationships positively. The factors are communication, training, teamwork, friendly work environment, fairness at work and listening (or being heard). In the future, these variables may be mediated with present variables, and perhaps a different result may emerge.

Reference

Baumeister, R.F., Ainsworth, S.E. and Vohs, K.D. (2016). Are groups more or less than the sum of their members? The moderating role of individual identification. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 39*.

Berscheid, E. (1999). The greening of relationship science. *American Psychologist*, *54*(4), p.260.

Berscheid, E.S. and Regan, P.C. (2016). *Psychology of interpersonal relationships*. Psychology Press.

Boren, J.P. (2014). The relationships between co-rumination, social support, stress, and burnout among working adults. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *28*(1), pp.3-25.

Bowlby, J. (1969). Attachment and loss v. 3 (Vol. 1). Random House. Furman, W. & Buhrmester, D. (2009). *Methods and measures: The network of relationships inventory: Behavioural systems version. International Journal of Behavioural Development*, *33*, pp.470-478.

Bowlby, J. (1973). Attachment and loss: Separation (vol. 2).

Bowlby, J. (1988). Attachment, communication, and the therapeutic process. *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*, pp.137-157.

Chen, X.-P., Eberly, M. B., Chiang, T. J., Farh, J. L. & Cheng, B. S. (2014). Affective trust in Chinese leaders linking paternalistic leadership to employee performance. Journal of Management, 40, 796–819.

Cheng, C.F., Chang, M.L. and Li, C.S. (2013). Configural paths to successful product innovation. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(12), pp.2561-2573.

Chipeta, E., Bradley, S., Chimwaza-Manda, W. and McAuliffe, E. (2016). Working relationships between obstetric care staff and their managers: Acritical incident analysis. *BMC health services research*, *16*(1), p.441.

Chung, J.E. (2014). Social networking in online support groups for health: How online social networking benefits patients. *Journal of health communication*, *19*(6), pp.639-659.

Cohen, S. (2004). Social relationships and health. *American psychologist*, *59*(8), p.676.

Das Nair, R. and Dube, S.C. (2016). The Expansion of Regional Supermarket Chains and Implications for Local Suppliers: A Comparison of Findings from South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Coyne, J.C. and DeLongis, A. (1986). Going beyond social support: The role of social relationships in adaptation. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, *54*(4), p.454.

Deci E.L. and Ryan, R.M. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American psychologist*, *55*(1), p.68.

Diestel, S., Wegge, J. and Schmidt, K.H. (2014). The impact of social context on the relationship between individual job satisfaction and absenteeism: The roles of different foci of job satisfaction and work-unit absenteeism. *Academy of Management Journal*, *57*(2), pp.353-382.

Eagly, A.H. (2013). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation*. Psychology Press.

Erdogan, B. and Enders, J. (2007). Support from the top: Supervisors' perceived organisational support as a moderator of leader-member exchange to satisfaction and performance relationships. *Journal of applied psychology*, *92*(2), p.321.

Feeney, B.C. and Collins, N.L. (2015). A new look at social support: A theoretical perspective on thriving through relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *19*(2), pp.113-147.

Frazier, M.L., Tupper, C. and Fainshmidt, S. (2016). The path (s) to employee trust in direct supervisor in nascent and established relationships: A fuzzy set analysis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*.

Frey, M.J. (2016). *An Investigation of the Importance of Health Locus of Control as a Mediator between Social Support and Health Status: AComparison of Latino vs. Non-Latino Populations* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati).

Gleason, M.E. and Masumi, L. (Ed), (2015). Social Support.in Mikulincer, Mario (Ed); Shaver, Phillip R. (Ed); Simpson, Jeffry A. (Ed); Dovidio, John F. (Ed). APA Handbook of personality and social psychology. Interpersonal relations. Washington DC. US, vol.3 pp. 351-370.

Graen, G.B. and Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *Leadership Quarterly*, *6*(2), pp.219-247.

Greenhaus, J.H., Parasuraman, S. and Wormley, W.M. (1990). Effects of race on organisational experiences, job performance evaluations, and career outcomes. *Academy of management Journal*, *33*(1), pp.64-86.

Henderson, S. (1977). The social network, support and neurosis. The function of attachment in adult life. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, *131*(2), pp.185-191.

Henderson, S. (1981). Social relationships, adversity and neurosis: An analysis of prospective observations. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, *138*(5), pp.391-398.

Henderson, S., Byrne, D.G. and Duncan-Jones, P. (1981). *Neurosis and the social environment* (Vol. 27). Academic Press.

Holt-Lunstad, J. and Smith, T.B. (2012). Social relationships and mortality. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *6*(1), pp.41-53.

Isaac, I.A. and Roger, B.M. (2016). The role of individual interpersonal relationships on work performance in the South African retail sector.

Keyes, C.L. (2005). Mental illness and/or mental health? Investigating axioms of the complete state model of health. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, *73*(3), p.539.

Keyes, C.L. (2007). Promoting and protecting mental health as flourishing: Acomplementary strategy for improving national mental health. *American Psychologist*, *62*(2), p.95.

Ko, J. and Hur, S. (2014). The impacts of employee benefits, procedural justice, and managerial trustworthiness on work attitudes: Integrated understanding based on social exchange theory. *Public Administration Review*, *74*(2), pp.176-187.

Lakey, B. and Cronin, A. (2008). Low social support and major depression: Research, theory and methodological issues. *Risk factors for depression*, pp.385-408.

Li, A., Shaffer, J. and Bagger, J. (2015). The psychological well-being of disability caregivers: Examining the roles of family strain, family-to-work conflict, and perceived supervisor support. *Journal of occupational health psychology*, *20*(1), p.40

Lin, N., Dean, A. and Ensel, W. M. (Eds.). (2013). *Social support, life events, and depression*. Academic Press.

Lloyd, K., Bilous, R., Clark, L., Hammersley, L., Baker, M., Coffey, E. and Rawlings-Sanaei, F. (2017). Exploring the reciprocal benefits of community-university engagement through PACE. In *Learning through Community Engagement* Springer (pp. 245-261)..

Loi, R., Chan, K.W. and Lam, L.W. (2014). Leader–member exchange, organizational identification, and job satisfaction: A social identity perspective. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational psychology*, *87*(1), pp.42-61.

Loi, R., Lam, L.W., Ngo, H.Y. and Cheong, S.I. (2015). Exchange mechanisms between ethical leadership and affective commitment. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *30*(6), pp.645-658.

Methot, J.R., Lepine, J.A., Podsakoff, N.P. and Christian, J.S. (2016). Are workplace friendships a mixed blessing? Exploring tradeoffs of multiplex relationships and their associations with job performance. *Personnel Psychology*, *69*(2), pp.311-355.

Methot, J.R., Melwani, S. and Rothman, N.B. (2017). The Space between Us: A Social-Functional Emotions View of Ambivalent and Indifferent Workplace Relationships. *Journal of Management*, p.0149206316685853.

Miller, D. (2005). New regional imaginaries in post-apartheid Southern Africa–Retail workers at a shopping mall in Zambia. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, *31*(1), pp.117-145.

Morse, J.M. (2016). *Mixed method design: Principles and procedures*. Routledge.

Ostroff, C. and Bowen, D.E. (2016). Reflections on the 2014-decade award: Is there strength in the construct of HR system strength? *Academy of Management Review*, *41*(2), pp.196-214.

Mowday, R. T., Porter, L. W. and Steers, R. M. (2013). *Employee-organization linkages: The psychology of commitment, absenteeism, and turnover*. Academic Press.

Pallant, J. (2015). *SPSS survival manual*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Pierce G.R., Sarason, I.G., Sarason, B.R., Solky-Butzel, J.A. and Nagle, L.C. (1997). Assessing the quality of personal relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *14*(3), pp.339-356.

Pierce, G. R., Lakey, B. and Sarason, I. G. (Eds.). (2013). *Sourcebook of social support and personality*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Sarason, I. G., Levine, H. M., Basham, R. B. and Sarason, B. R. (1983). Assessing social support: The social support questionnaire. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *44*(1), 127.

Sarason, B. R., Sarason, I. G. and Pierce, G. R. (1990). *Social support: An interactional view*. Oxford England: John Wiley & Sons.

Sarason, I. G. (Ed.). (2013). *Social support: Theory, research and applications* (Vol. 24). Springer Science & Business Media.

Scott, K.L., Zagenczyk, T.J., Schippers, M., Purvis, R.L. and Cruz, K.S. (2014). Coworker exclusion and employee outcomes: An investigation of the moderating roles of perceived organizational and social support. *Journal of Management Studies*, *51*(8), pp.1235-1256.

Seligman, M.E. (2008). Positive health. *Applied psychology*, *57*(s1), pp. 3-18.

Sheldon, P. and Li, Y. (2013). Localized poaching and skills shortages of manufacturing employees among MNEs in China. *Journal of world Business*, *48*(2), pp.186-195.

Siddiqi, M.A. and Ahmed, O. (2016). Perceived Organizational Support and Employee Citizenship Behaviors an Intermediating Variable between LMX and Service Performance. *Asian Journal of Management*, *7*(1), pp.27-35.

Sonnentag, S. and Fritz, C. (2015). Recovery from job stress: The stressor detachment model as an integrative framework. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *36*(S1), pp.S72-S103.

Spielberger, C. D. (Ed.). (2013). *Anxiety and behavior*. New York & London: Academic Press.

Spielberger, C. D. and Sarason, I. G. (Eds.). (2013). *Stress and emotion: Anxiety, anger, & curiosity*. Washinton D.C.: Taylor & Francis. Publishers, Washinton DC, US, vol. 16, pp 3-22

Street, B.V. (2014). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education*. Routledge.

Stroebe, W., Stroebe, M., Abakoumkin, G. and Schut, H. (1996). The role of loneliness and social support in adjustment to loss: Atest of attachment versus stress theory. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *70*(6), p.1241.

Tepper, B.J. (2007). Abusive supervision in work organizations: Review, synthesis, and research agenda. *Journal of management*, *33*(3), pp.261-289.

Treiman, D.J. (2014). *Quantitative data analysis: Doing social research to test ideas*. John Wiley & Sons.

Trudel-Fitzgerald, C., Kubzansky, L.D., Poole, E.M., Ichiro, K. and Tworoger, S.S. (2015). Demand, control, and social support in the workplace: The role of job strain on ovarian cancer risk. *Psychotherapy & Psychosomatics*, *84*, p.74.

Tsui, A, Egan, T and O'Reilley C. A. (1992). Being different: Relational demography and organizational attachment. Administrative Science Quarterly 37 (4): 549-79.

Tsui, A.S., Pearce, J.L., Porter, L.W. and Tripoli, A.M. (1997). Alternative approaches to the employee-organization relationship: Does investment in employees pay off? *Academy of Management journal*, *40*(5), pp.1089-1121.

Uhl-Bien, M., Graen, G.B. and Scandura, T.A. (2000). Implications of leader-member exchange (LMX) for strategic human resource management systems: Relationships as social capital for competitive advantage. *Research in personnel and human resources management*, *18*, pp.137-186.

Uhl-Bien, M., Riggio, R.E., Lowe, K.B. and Carsten, M.K. (2014). Followership theory: A review and research agenda. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *25*(1), pp.83-104.

Walker, C.O. and Greene, B.A. (2009). The relations between student motivational beliefs and cognitive engagement in high school. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *102*(6), pp.463-472.

Weiss, R.S. (1973). Loneliness: The experience of emotional and social isolation.

Weiss, R. S. (1974). The provisions of social relationships. In Rubin, Z. (Ed.).*Doing Unto Others*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

Wong, C.A. and Laschinger, H.K.S. (2015). The influence of frontline manager job strain on burnout, commitment and turnover intention: A cross-sectional study. *International journal of nursing studies*, *52*(12), pp.1824-1833.

Youyou, W., Kosinski, M. and Stillwell, D. (2015). Computer-based personality judgments are more accurate than those made by humans. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *112*(4), pp.1036-1040.

Zhang, X.A., Li, N. and Harris, T.B. (2015). Putting non-work ties to work: The case of guanxi in supervisor–subordinate relationships. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *26*(1), pp.37-54.