The nexus between Level 5 Leadership, Employee Innovation and Employee Voice

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Abstract

Employee innovation plays a vital role in enhancing the competitiveness of manufacturing organisations in South Africa, within the challenges of a turbulent global business landscape. It is essential to identify the factors influencing employee innovation. This study, guided by social exchange theory, examines two perspectives. Firstly, it seeks to analyse the direct relationship between level 5 leadership and employee innovation. Secondly, it aims to investigate whether employee voice acts as a mediating path through which level 5 leadership influences employee innovation. Survey data based on an online questionnaire was collected from 177 employees in the South African manufacturing industry. The proposed hypotheses were assessed by applying partial least squares structural equation modelling. The findings verify that level 5 leadership positively influences employee innovation. Furthermore, the authors argue that employee voice mediates this relationship. The relationship between level 5 leadership and employee innovation and the position of employee voice in mediating this link has not been studied until now. By adopting leadership behaviour based on personal humility and professional will and facilitating an environment that promotes employee voice, management and human resource practitioners can enhance employee innovation and, in turn, organisational innovation and success in the South African manufacturing industry.

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1. Introduction

In a turbulent global business environment, this study is necessitated by an urgent need for leadership that fosters innovation among employees in South African manufacturing organisations. It serves as a foundation for a rigorous examination, poised to uncover nuanced dynamics and pave the way for future advancements in leadership practices within the South African manufacturing industry and for all organisations globally aiming to develop innovative practices.

1.1. Background

Businesses currently operate in a dynamic context, characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Troise et al., 2022; Zhang-Zhang et al., 2022). This contemporary environment includes disruptive technological advancement, climate change and war, global pandemics, and economic crises (Taskan et al., 2022; Zhang-Zhang et al., 2022). Successful organisational responses to fast-changing environments can be best realised through innovation (Arranz et al., 2019). In this dynamic setting, the position of employee innovation (EI), creativity and ingenuity as a contributor to organisational success is significant (Zhang-Zhang et al., 2022).

Collins (2001a) introduced the construct of the level 5 leader, characterised by the dimensions of personal humility (PH) and professional will (PW). Collins argued that level 5 leadership (L5L) can result in exceptional company performance during steady and turbulent states, contradicting the conventional view that charismatic leaders and big personality leaders are needed during transitional periods. Apple Inc. provides the contrast of these views as the company's early success was largely believed to be driven by Steve Jobs's charismatic and transformational leadership style and his ability to inspire and motivate employees to innovate (Umoh, 2023). Post Jobs' passing, Tim Cook assumed the role of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Apple Inc. and is believed to lead with a mixture of humility and ambition while being inclined to shun the limelight (Aziz, 2019; Maldonado et al., 2022). These are fundamental traits of a level 5 leader (Collins, 2001a). Despite the contrasting leadership styles, under Cook's leadership, the company remains the global leader in innovation (Boston Consulting Group, 2023). While the necessity for EI in organisations and the appropriateness of L5L in dynamic business environments has been noted, the relationship between the two constructs has never been empirically tested.

The importance of leadership that inspires innovation has been noted, however, there are various boundary conditions and mediating factors that can influence this relationship. Effective communication between leaders and employees is critical to creating an environment where an employee can communicate ideas and thoughts, and research on EI should include employee voice (EV) as they are related concepts (Carnevale et al., 2017). Consequently, this research also intends to understand whether EV mediates the relationship between L5L and EI.

1.2. Problem Statement

In a period of accelerated world economic and technological change, innovation is a crucial element that contributes to an organisation's competitive advantage, organisational success, and long-term survival (Ferreira et al., 2020; Jiang & Chen, 2018; Khosravi et al., 2019; Mascareño et al., 2021; Ortiz-Villajos & Sotoca, 2018; Škerlavaj et al., 2019). Globally, science, technology and innovation are considered enablers that drive social and economic enhancement (Heredia et al., 2017; Lazzarotti et al., 2018; Ullah et al., 2020). Yet the South African context and its manufacturing sector lag behind the rest of the world in innovation (World Intellectual Property Organisation, 2022).

The world is segmented into two categories: countries that have prioritised education, science and technology, thereby enhancing innovation and those nations trapped in an economy with limited manufacturing value-add (Ullah et al., 2020). The manufacturing sector is generally more productive than other sectors and is a driver of job creation, and economic growth and can play a role in reducing poverty levels in developing nations (Kreuser & Newman, 2018; Rodrik, 2016; Sichoongwe, 2023). In the previous two decades, manufacturing contribution to gross domestic product in South Africa (SA) has been declining, with a rate of decline faster than other BRICS founding nations (Kreuser & Newman, 2018). As a country experiencing premature industrialisation, it is likely to have harsher consequences than deindustrialisation in developed countries (Rodrik, 2016). Contributing to the nation's manufacturing crisis are obstacles such as the rapid advancement of technology, limited resources and globalisation, which means that manufacturing organisations are faced with a need to adapt and redefine the industry to enhance global competitiveness (Zangiacomi et al., 2020). In this turbulent business setting, innovation is required for organisations to develop their manufacturing execution to surpass their competitors (Do et al., 2018).

Businesses require leaders who can inspire motivation that drives organisations towards innovation. In a study on the role of the leader in fostering innovation in organisations, Naqshbandi et al. (2019) indicated that leaders are a central component in influencing the innovative attitudes of followers and should be open to new ideas and innovation from employees, as EI is critical to overall firm innovation performance. In a study of South African small and medium enterprises, it was found that weak leadership is a direct deterrent to innovation in manufacturing organisations (Ngibe & Lekhanya, 2019).

Simply stating the research problem: in a period of accelerated technological and economic change, South African manufacturing organisations without leadership that inspires innovation face the risk of being unproductive, uncompetitive and unsustainable, which can detrimentally impact economic growth, job creation and poverty levels.

1.3. Research Objectives

In the context of the research problem, global manufactured brands that were significantly hampered due to the failure of their leaders to innovate include General Motors, Hitachi, Blackberry and Kodak, to name a few (Lagerstedt, 2018). The objective of this research is to:

- understand whether L5L can have a positive influence on EI.

- understand whether EV mediates the relationship between L5L and EI.

The focus of this study is to offer a theoretical model for increasing EI and to determine the significance of the proposed model. Consequently, the objective of this study is to add to existing theoretical research on the leadership and EI constructs. It also aims to provide practical direction to the South African manufacturing industry and to organisations that have substantial innovation aspirations.

The next section consists of a review of existing literature to build an argument for the requirement for this study.

2. Literature Review

Considering the research problem and objectives, this chapter offers a critical review of the pertinent academic studies, to develop an argument for the need for this research. Firstly, the theoretical model underpinning this research is introduced, namely social exchange theory (SET). The suggested linkages between SET and the key constructs of L5L, EI and EV are then identified.

2.1. Theoretical Model

Social exchange theory, first posited by George Homans (1958), explains collective behaviours and engagement among individuals as a result of an exchange process where past events' costs and rewards shape future behaviour. Individuals provide favours to others from whom they expect benefits (Ullah et al., 2020). Meng et al. (2019) defined social exchange as, "an open-ended stream of transactions, with both exchange partners making contributions and receiving benefits" (Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007, pp. 1288–1289). The researchers noted five variables in social exchange studies, namely perceived support, exchange quality, affective commitment, trust, and psychological contract fulfilment.

A relationship where a leader and follower trust one another influences the search and affiliation behavioural systems that enhance the followers' inclination to participate in extra-role and riskier behaviour (Bharanitharan et al., 2019). Research has identified EI and EV as specific extra-role behaviours (Zare & Flinchbaugh, 2019). In the context of this study, when leaders build this trust with employees it can result in an atmosphere of innovation in organisations (Xie et al., 2018). When

followers trust their leaders, it can positively influence employee creativity, innovation and voice (Carnevale et al., 2017; Ullah et al., 2020).

Level 5 leaders, characterised by humility and extreme will influence followers positively, encouraging them to commit extra effort for organisational outcomes (Sarfraz et al., 2022). These leaders prioritise their employees and the organisation's needs over their own (Collins, 2001a; Reid et al., 2014) and develop successors for future success (Collins, 2001a). It is argued that by placing followers' needs above their own, level 5 leaders gain their trust (Do et al., 2018), making employees more likely to take risks and innovate. Leaders with PH, a key trait of Level 5 leaders, learn from employees, place them in the spotlight, and acknowledge their own limitations and mistakes, creating a perception of trust and support through a perception of leader-follower reversal (Wang et al., 2018). Caldwell et al. (2017) supported this view, noting that Level 5 leaders foster trust and commitment from followers. Thus, the theory suggests three potential links between L5L and the social exchange variables, namely, trust, affective commitment, and perceived support (Meng et al., 2019).

Level 5 leaders are however also highly ambitious, with a strong professional will, and fanatically driven to produce sustained results, regardless of the difficulty or magnitude of decisions (Collins, 2001b). While Collins emphasised the positive characteristics of PH and PW, the traits of Level 5 leaders can also have a negative effect on followers (Reid et al., 2014).

Considering these theoretical underpinnings, this study aims to understand whether through SET, leaders by way of their behaviour and actions as level 5 leaders, can influence EI and whether EV can serve as a mediator in this relationship.

2.2. Defining Innovation

Since Schumpeter's (1934) concept, premising continuous innovation as a critical aspect for lasting organisational success, the construct of innovation has subsequently concerned the interest of scholars (Ramadani et al., 2019). The construct of innovation has a lengthy history in scientific literature with varying interpretations, but is often poorly defined (Guzman & Espejo, 2019). The use of the construct for this study, therefore, requires clarification. Granstrand and Holgersson (2020) define innovation based on two features, namely, "a degree of newness of a change and a degree of usefulness or success in the application of something new" (p. 2). Dziallas and Blind (2019), premised that the concept of innovation refers to both innovative ideas with the intent to be put into commercial use and ideas that have already successfully been implemented. Closely linked to innovation is creativity and the concepts have regularly been used interchangeably in academic research. Lee et al. (2020) argued against this stance, indicating that creativity relates to new ideas and innovation relates to the implementation of these ideas.

For this paper, creativity and innovation will be viewed as interrelated concepts and will be combined as a single construct. This is consistent with previous studies where creativity was seen as part of

innovative behaviour and both were included under a single construct (Caniëls & Veld, 2019; Newman et al., 2018). In recent research on leadership and EI, the researchers defined innovation as consisting of three fundamental phases: idea generation, idea promotion and idea implementation (Janssen, 2000; Ullah et al., 2020). Mascareño et al. (2021) noted that these three stages of innovation are highly interdependent, creativity is of small value to organisations should ideas not be executed, and innovation as defined is dependent on the availability of creative ideas. The role of employees in driving innovation is next explored.

2.3. Employee Innovation

Employee innovation has attained the interest of scholars and practitioners for years and is considered a basic component of a successful organisation (Grošelj et al., 2021). In this regard, as a critical source of organisational innovation, individual EI comprises a micro-foundation of firm innovation (Felin et al., 2015; Lukes & Stephan, 2017; Mokhber et al., 2018). Firm innovation originates from new ideas that are created, supported and executed by its people (Coetzer et al., 2018). Of the factors driving innovation, people are considered one of the primary drivers of organisational success (Do et al., 2018). Furthermore, EI is not a vital component of an employee's job description, and it is not factored into their performance and reward system (Amankwaa et al., 2019; Janssen, 2000). This may be because EI is a discretionary extra-role behaviour, which exceeds the employee's formal job requirements (Coetzer et al., 2018). Leadership is therefore an important determinant for employees to engage in this extra-role behaviour (Hackett et al., 2018).

2.4. Level 5 Leadership

Level 5 leadership is one such leadership style that can lead to exceptional organisational performance (Collins, 2001a, 2001b). L5L is characterised by PH and PW, and this leads to high-performing companies (Collins, 2001a). In his book "Good to Great," Collins noted that PH is categorised by level 5 leaders that "channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company," (Collins, 2001a, p. 21). They embody the traits of being "modest, humble, quiet, understated, mild-mannered and self-effacing," (Collins, 2001a, p. 27). The direction is on the importance of others, including employees, in building a successful organisation. The second aspect that makes up the duality of L5L is PW, which was described by Collins as unwavering resolve, high ambition and perseverance. The focus is on an obsessive desire to make the company a success, putting the company first at the leader's own personal cost (Collins, 2001a). Much has been documented about other aspects of Collins' work, however minimal is documented in the academic literature on L5L (Caldwell et al., 2017; Zhou & Wu, 2018).

2.5. Level 5 Leadership and Innovation

Leadership has been identified as one of the most critical predictors of innovation (Grošelj et al., 2021). The history of leadership research reveals that the construct of leadership is multifaceted and ever-changing, however, this hinders the mastery and progression of the concept (Clark & Harrison, 2018).

Over the last decade, a vast amount of research has been done on leadership as a predictor of EI (Hughes et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020). A systematic analysis by Hughes et al. (2018) covered the effects of transformational, transactional, empowering, authentic and servant leadership on innovation concepts. Several gaps in the existing literature were noted by the authors. Firstly, a lack of theoretical clarity exists on which leadership styles have the greatest influence on innovation and consequently, the authors call for more focus on leadership traits as opposed to broader leadership styles. Secondly, the relationship between the two constructs is highly inconsistent and there is a need to emphasise under-researched mediating variables across leadership styles. This view is reinforced by Grošelj et al. (2021) and Mokhber et al. (2018) who all emphasised the inconsistency of findings in leadership and EI studies. The relationship between L5L and its relevant traits was notably missing from the analysis.

In a similar descriptive study by Alblooshi et al. (2021), the authors included several additional leadership styles in their analysis, however again the construct of L5L was missing. The importance of leadership for EI has been noted, however it is of vital importance to consider the most appropriate leadership style to enhance EI (Mokhber et al., 2018). Transformational leadership has undergone the most extensive examination in studies related to leadership and innovation (Kark et al., 2018). While studies on transformational leadership have yielded direct or indirect positive relationships with innovation concepts (Grošelj et al., 2021; Kark et al., 2018; Mokhber et al., 2018), a systematic analysis showed instances of insignificant and sometimes negative relationships in transformational leadership and creativity studies (Koh et al., 2019; Miao et al., 2012). Transformational leaders often impact others through their charismatic personalities and idealised influence (Raffo & Williams, 2018). However, there is a negative side to charisma, as some charismatic leaders are known to shout, ridicule and exploit employees, as evidenced by real business world examples including Steve Jobs and Jeff Bezos (Lee et al., 2018). Vergauwe et al. (2018) defined charisma using a rating scale. Depending on which point on the scale the leader is situated, it can lead to confidence, risk tolerance, vision and strong presence, but at elevated levels, it can show arrogance, recklessness, fantastical achievements and dramatic appeals for attention. Given the inconsistency of results of studies between transformational leadership and innovation concepts and the discussed dark side of charisma, there is a need to investigate other leadership styles as predictors of EI. Alblooshi et al. (2021) support this view given the wide spectrum of studies on transformational leadership and EI. In "Good to Great" the idea that leaders must be charismatic was brought into question (Collins, 2001a). The author revealed that the highest-performing organisations, with consistently positive outcomes, were

led by individuals with the traits of modesty, introversion, calmness and humility (Collins, 2001a; Raffo & Williams, 2018). Additionally, these level 5 leaders were extremely ambitious and set high standards. This perseverance and intense resolve helps them to achieve results and execute plans with "workmanlike diligence," (Collins, 2001a, p. 39), which contrasts with the leaders characterised by elevated levels of charisma defined by Vergauwe et al. (2018).

There is increasing focus amongst researchers and practitioners on the concept of leader-expressed humility and humble leadership (Kelemen et al., 2023). Studies have shown positive relationships between humility and innovation concepts (Lehmann et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2017; Ye et al., 2020; Zhou & Wu, 2018). Although previous research has shown that followers, teams and organisations benefit from leader-expressed humility, Zapata and Haynes-Jones (2019) argued that leader humility can have harmful consequences on leader effectiveness and leader-directed behaviour as humble leaders can be perceived as less agentic and hence less effective than their counterparts that do not possess the humility quality. Collins (2001a; 2001b) also emphasises that a true level 5 leader must have the combined traits of PH and PW in equal parts and humility alone can be perceived as weak.

With the need to counter the swift changes in the current global business context and be successful in a knowledge-based economy, with increased dependence on people, scholars have started to review a contemporary leadership style, namely servant leadership and its influence on organisational outcomes (Iqbal et al., 2020). Studies have found positive and significant relationships between servant leadership and EI and creativity (Iqbal et al., 2020; Karatepe et al., 2019; Zhu & Zhang, 2020). Some business leaders and academics have thus recommended that L5L and servant leadership may represent the same construct (Reid et al., 2014). The researchers, however, note that the fundamental attributes of servant leadership more closely align with the PH concept and do not include the trait of PW. This is therefore also inconsistent with the notion of a level 5 leader, which includes equal parts of PH and PW (Collins, 2001a). The author stated that L5L is not just about humility and modesty, but an equally fierce resolve that differentiates it from servant leadership.

Conceptually, the principles of L5L are closely connected to the fundamentals of the innovation process. Level 5 leaders can positively influence the behaviour of followers and can therefore engender their trust, support and commitment to providing additional effort to attain organisational outcomes (Caldwell et al., 2017; Sarfraz et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2018). EI is also a discretionary extra-role behaviour that requires extra effort beyond job specifications (Coetzer et al., 2018; Zare & Flinchbaugh, 2019). In an examination of SET, it is suggested that level 5 leaders, through their actions of treating their employees fairly and putting them first, can support their followers and gain their trust and commitment, thus influencing their followers to participate in EI.

In recent quantitative research, Sarfraz et al. (2022) identified a positive relationship between L5L and organisational citizenship behaviour. Zare and Flinchbaugh (2019) discussed that the broad concept of

organisational citizenship behaviour is well studied and there is limited research on specific types of organisational citizenship or discretionary extra-role behaviour such as EI and EV. Outside of this and the work of Jim Collins, very little empirical research has been done on the combined traits of L5L (Caldwell et al., 2017; Zhou & Wu, 2018). The following hypothesis is thus framed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between level 5 leadership and employee innovation.

While innovative leadership is imperative for promoting innovation, EV plays a crucial role in supporting leaders to foster innovation and creativity (Kremer et al., 2019).

2.6. Employee Voice

The first contributor to EV was Albert Hirschman (1970), in which he argued that employees as an alternative to withdrawal in time of frustration, can exhibit voice behaviour. In principle, he defined voice as the productive effort of employees to change an unsatisfactory work environment. Subsequent studies on voice have extended the concept from simply a response to unsatisfactory situations to that of extra-role behaviour, namely how EV may be used as a means whereby employees provide constructive suggestions intended to improve instead of criticising (Zare & Flinchbaugh, 2019).

As a type of discretionary employee extra-role behaviour, EV is different to other types due to its challenging nature. It can be disruptive and expensive to organisations as it is change-focused and challenges the status quo (Chou & Barron, 2016). An employee can also upset their relationship with others in an organisation by way of their voice (Ullah et al., 2020). In contrast, it can be of significant value to management as it benefits organisational performance (Wilkinson et al., 2020). EV supports continuous improvement in organisational processes, thus enhancing performance and outcomes (Chamberlin et al., 2017).

2.7. Level 5 Leadership and Employee Voice

There are two prominent research streams on EV, the first being that an employee's internal motivation enhances their inclination to speak up and the second that a leader's behaviour influences EV (Soomro et al., 2021). Studies have suggested that factors that facilitate EV include social exchange, employee personality traits, personal initiative, felt responsibility and engagement (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Chou & Barron, 2016).

In contrast, the second stream of research notes that leadership can promote voice behaviour. Employee voice is an extra-role behaviour that is indicative of employees going beyond their specific job roles to improve the organisation (Chen & Hou, 2016; Ullah et al., 2020; Zare & Flinchbaugh, 2019). Through the lens of SET, this study suggests that level 5 leaders can influence their followers to participate in voice behaviour. Previous research studies have found a positive relationship between various leadership styles, including transformational, servant and ethical leadership and EV (Chen &

Hou, 2016; Chen et al., 2018; Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018; Ullah et al., 2020). However, no research exists that evaluates the relationship between L5L and EV. Additionally, studies on humility and voice have yielded inconsistent results (Bharanitharan et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2019). This study aims to further investigate the concepts of PH and EV, through the duality of L5L. It is therefore hypothesised:

H2: There is a positive relationship between level 5 leadership and employee voice.

2.8. Employee Voice and Innovation

Employee voice is a means for driving employees to innovate (Ashiru et al., 2022). A study by Chen and Hou (2016) recognised that EV is an important mechanism for leadership activities to enhance creativity. The researchers noted that EV fosters favourable creativity reviews, as voice behaviours prompt creative ways of thinking. Employees who display a strong voice are generally considered creative, especially when those views generate positive organisational outcomes. When these employees feel that their opinions and suggestions are considered by managers and have an impact on the organisation, they are more likely to put in the extra effort by providing new innovative ideas or developing creative business resolutions. Ullah et al. (2020) highlighted that EV as an extra-role behaviour, goes beyond a supportive nature as it involves challenging the status quo or communicating new or novel ideas which others can debate. Past research has shown a positive relationship between EV and innovation (Ashiru et al., 2022; Selvaraj & Joseph, 2020; Shin et al., 2022). EV is, however, influenced by macro-factors or national cultural values (Kwon & Farndale, 2020), and studies in the developing world are infrequent (McKearney et al., 2023). Given that no research of this nature has taken place in the South African manufacturing context, the following is hypothesised:

H3: There is a positive relationship between employee voice and employee innovation.

2.9. Mediating Effects of Employee Voice

With an objective of understanding how to increase EI to mitigate the research problem, L5L was identified as a key predictor. However, Hughes et al. (2018) called for future research on leadership styles and EI to include more mediation variables that particularly break away from overemphasis on motivational process mediators and to focus on more understudied mechanisms. Critically, of the 76 research papers reviewed by Hughes et al. (2018) that included mediating variables, none included EV as a mediator. Subsequent studies have shown EV to mediate the relationship between ethical, transformational and paternalistic leadership and EI (Jin et al., 2022; Nazir et al., 2021; Rasheed et al., 2021; Ullah et al., 2020). However, EV as a mediator in the relationship between L5L and EI has not been studied previously. Given the recommendation by Carnevale et al. (2017) that studies on innovation should include EV It is therefore hypothesised:

H4: Employee voice mediates the relationship between level 5 leadership and employee innovation.

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical model defined considering the study's objective and the review of existing literature.
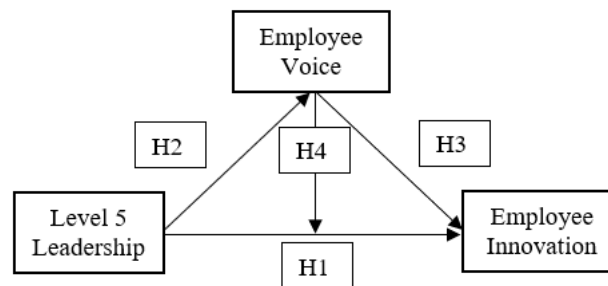

Figure 1: Hypothesised theoretical model

3. Research Methodology

This section defines the research process and methodological and statistical choices used to test the hypotheses derived in the preceding literature review.

3.1. Choice of Methodology

The study employed an objectivist scale and explanatory research design guided by a positivist research philosophy to understand the relationships between the concepts of L5L, EI and EV through the lens of SET (Holden & Lynch, 2004).

A deductive approach was adopted as it involved developing research questions and testable hypotheses from an existing theoretical framework and the collection, analysis, and testing of data to confirm or revise the theory. A deductive research approach initiates with a literature review, theoretical grounding, development of hypotheses and clear results and findings (Ullah et al., 2020). Leadership and innovation theory and the relationships between the constructs are well developed (Hughes et al., 2018). A deductive methodology that tests this theory is therefore most appropriate. The deductive approach entailed using a mono-quantitative approach based on a survey strategy using a planned questionnaire and a cross-sectional design. The target population and unit of analysis for this study were delineated to be supervisors, specialists, managers and executives from manufacturing organisations in South Africa. The self-measured approach for the dependent variable, EI was deemed appropriate for the following reasons. Firstly, innovative behaviour is an internal process (Iqbal et al., 2020). Secondly, supervisors may take note of only those ideas that impress them and could miss some creative activities (Coetzer et al., 2018; Iqbal et al., 2020; Odoardi et al., 2015). Thirdly, self-measurement has been used in past research (Coetzer et al., 2018; Iqbal et al., 2020; Prieto & Pérez-

Santana, 2014). Finally, previous studies have shown high convergent validity between employee-measured and leader-measured innovative behaviour (Coetzer et al., 2018; Iqbal et al., 2020; Ng & Feldman, 2013).

3.2. Research Methodology

Given that the population is large and impractical to reach, the non-probability sampling methods of purposive and snowball sampling were used. A minimum sample size of 160 was calculated after considering the "10-times" rule (Hair et al., 2011), the minimum R^2 method (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2014) and the inverse square root technique (Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

An anonymous online questionnaire was utilised through the Qualtrics platform for data collection. The variables listed in the questionnaire were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale that spanned from expressing strong disagreement to indicating strong agreement. Existing validated and reliable scales were used to measure L5L, EI and EV.

Level 5 leadership: Reid et al's (2014) 10-point scale was adapted to measure L5L. The scale comprised five dimensions relating to PH and five dimensions relating to PW and was previously used by Sarfraz et al. (2022) to measure the L5L construct. Cronbach's alpha for the composite measure was 0.937.

Employee innovation: EI was measured by adapting the scale developed by Janssen (2000) into a 6-point scale. The 6-point scale was split into equal components of idea creation, idea promotion and idea realisation which were defined as the stages of innovation. Cronbach's alpha for the measure was 0.753.

Employee voice: By adapting the scale established by Liang et al. (2012) into a 4-point measured scale, this was used to measure EV. Two items represent promotive voice, and two items represent prohibitive voice, which are the components of EV (Shin et al., 2022). Cronbach's alpha for the composite measure was 0.836.

Before distributing the official questionnaire, a pilot questionnaire was distributed to ten individuals who met the profile of research participants to test the reliability and accuracy of the questionnaire. The final questionnaire link was then emailed to participants using purposive sampling. Before testing the sample, the dataset was screened for missing data, outliers and assessing data distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Data was evaluated using SPSS for descriptive statistics and SmartPLS 4.0 software (Ringle et al., 2024) for testing the hypotheses.

A risk of self-measured survey responses is common method bias (CMB) (Amankwaa et al., 2019). To address this, the suggestions of Podsakoff et al. (2003) were considered. Firstly, participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous, and their responses would be confidential and

exclusively used for research objectives. Secondly, through temporal psychological separation, a short preamble for each section of the questionnaire was done to minimise potential carry-over effects.

The collinearity approach was used as a second mechanism to deal with the issue of CMB, which is consistent with previous researchers (Kock, 2015). To test for collinearity, the variance inflation factor (VIF) of each variable was computed in PLS-SEM (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). Values ranged between 1.207 and 4.720, however, individual values did not exceed the threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2019) and thus it was concluded that the data was free from CMB.

The next section presents the detailed findings and results based on the research carried out.

4. Results and Findings

This section presents in detail the findings from the analysis of the data collected. It includes a section on the data collection and examination, followed by the PLS-SEM evaluation which consists of the assessment of the measurement and structural model.

4.1. Data Collection and Examination

Among all the participants, 177 usable responses were obtained which exceeded the minimum sample size of 160. This was after screening the dataset for missing data. In this study, 218 responses were obtained. However, 41 responses had more than 50% missing values and were removed from the sample dataset (Hair Jr et al., 2021). Z-scores were used to test for univariate outliers resulting in four observations outside the acceptable threshold (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Using Mahalanobis distance d-squared, six multivariate outliers were identified for observations with a p-value less than 0.001 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The researchers opted not to remove any outliers from the dataset for the following reasons. The use of robust non-parametric bootstrapping methods resulted in the outliers not significantly affecting the results of the hypothesis testing, model robustness and model fit (Leys et al., 2019). Bakker and Wicherts (2014) support this view and the researchers propose that outliers should be kept by default, as their presence does not severely influence the statistical results and alternative tests can be done. Furthermore, by inspection of the outliers' observations, they appear to correctly belong to the distribution and their removal would result in falsely reducing the error estimate. The dataset used for this research is non-parametric (non-normal), which is reflected in Table 1 using skewness and kurtosis values (Byrne & Van de Vijver, 2010; Hair Jr et al., 2021; Kline, 2011).

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

The statistics on gender distribution contained in Table 1, described that 57.6% of the total sample were male and 42.4% were female. The age statistics revealed that most of the candidates were within the age groups of 28–37 years and 38–47 years, with these categories representing 38.4% and 32.2% of the total sample, respectively. The study targeted supervisors, managers and specialists and at this

age, individuals would most likely be at a middle or senior manager level and report to an executive-level leader with the potential to demonstrate L5L traits. The highest number of respondents recorded an education level of postgraduate (39%), which was followed by a bachelor's degree (26%). A key aspect of this research was that participants should be either supervisors, specialists or managers in the organisation by which they are employed. The final samples showed that 9% of the participants were supervisors, 27.1% were specialists, 46.9% were managers and 16.9% were executives. Most of the participants were employed at their present company for one to five years, with the lowest distribution being participants employed at their organisation for less than one year. The manufacturing sub-sectors with the highest proportion of participants were from printing and packaging (31.1%), automotive (22%) and food and beverages (15.8%). These industries were purposely chosen as food and beverages, transport equipment and wood products, and publishing and printing collectively comprise 46% of SA's total manufacturing income (Statistics South Africa, 2023). The mean scores for the constructs of L5L, EI and EV all tended toward "agree" on the five-point Likert scale, indicating that the participants had strong perceptions with the constructs.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis

	N	Percentage	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Gender						
Male	102	57.6%				
Female	75	42.4%				
Age						
18–27 years	16	9.0%				
28–37 years	68	38.4%				
38–47 years	57	32.2%				
48–57 years	28	15.8%				
58 years or older	8	4.5%				
Education Level						
High school	23	13.0%				
Diploma or advanced certificate	39	22.0%				
Degree	46	26.0%				
Postgraduate	69	39.0%				
Job Level						
Supervisor	16	9.0%				
Specialist	48	27.1%				
Management	83	46.9%				
Executive	30	16.9%				
Years of service in current company						
Less than 1 year	24	13.6%				
1 to 5 years	62	35%				
5 to 10 years	52	29.4%				
Greater than 10 years	39	22%				
Sector						
Printing and packaging	55	31.1%				
Automotive	39	22.0%				
Food and beverages	28	15.8%				
Manufacturing support services	27	15.3%				
Chemicals	9	5.1%				

Textiles and clothing	7	4.0%			
Paper	3	1.7%			
Metal	3	1.7%			
Other manufacturing	6	3.4%			
L5L			4.242	0.848	-1.610	2.433
EI			4.503	0.435	-1.123	1.594
EV			4.429	0.573	-1.088	1.088

Table 2 represents the correlation among the study's variables. The correlations between the three constructs are all positive. Further, all the correlations are significant at $p < 0.01$. The correlations between EV and EI show a strong relationship with $r > 0.5$, which may indicate that when employees are in an environment where they are free to communicate and give their ideas, they will be more likely to innovate. None of the other demographic variables had significant statistical correlations with EI and EV.

Table 2: Correlations among study variables

	Age	Gender	Years of Service	Education Level	Job Level	L5L	EI	EV
Age	1.000							
Gender	-0.130	1.000						
Years of Service	0.309**	-0.122	1.000					
Education Level	0.014	-0.076	-0.079	1.000				
Job Level	0.368**	-0.195**	-0.017	0.405**	1.000			
L5L	-0.113	0.174*	-0.201**	-0.119	-0.117	1.000		
EI	0.088	0.014	-0.076	0.053	0.109	0,403**	1.000	
EV	-0.044	0.033	-0.051	-0.023	-0.097	0,385**	0,565**	1.000

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

 ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.3. Model Estimation

SmartPLS 4.0 was employed to estimate the measurement and structural model. The rationale for using PLS-SEM was the following. Firstly, PLS-SEM offers more flexibility for sample size and model fit requirements compared to CB-SEM and proves effective with smaller sample sizes and complex models. (Hair Jr et al., 2014). Secondly, multivariate normality is not a requirement for PLS-SEM, unlike CB-SEM (Garson, 2016; Hair Jr et al., 2014) and it uses non-parametric evaluation criteria to test the study's theoretical models (Hair et al., 2019). Thirdly, researchers indicate that PLS-SEM is an acceptable method to evaluate causal mechanisms and confirmatory research, including mediation tests (Hair et al., 2019). Composite-based SEM techniques which include PLS-SEM overcome the limits of factor-based SEM models when evaluating complex mediation models and are the preferable and superior technique when evaluating mediation models (Sarstedt et al., 2020).

Fourthly, similar and recent studies that aimed to explain relationships between leadership styles and innovation effectively used PLS-SEM to estimate theoretical models (Amankwaa et al., 2019; Rasheed et al., 2021; Sarfraz et al., 2022). Finally, PLS-SEM allows users to measure the models out of sample predictive power using PLSpredict, this is highly relevant in business and management research (Hair, 2020; Hair et al., 2019). While the primary objective of the study was theory testing, PLS-SEM's predictive capacity was also employed to facilitate management decisions by providing a basis for predictability (Becker et al., 2023).

The data was analysed in PLS-SEM following the stepwise guidelines outlined by Hair et al. (2019). First evaluating the measurement model followed by the structural model.

4.4. Measurement Model Evaluation

The results of the reflective measurement model evaluation are shown in Table 3. EI5 was the only indicator with a factor loading that fell outside the recommended value range of 0.61 to 0.9 (Hair, Black, Babin & Sarstedt, 2014; Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2014). Although Stevens (2002) contended that factor loadings above 0.4 are acceptable, EI5 was removed from the model based on the guidelines from Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt (2014). Removing the loading also resulted in an improvement in the average variance extracted (AVE).

Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability were all above the acceptable limit of 0.7 (Hair Jr et al., 2021). This shows that the indicators employed to measure the constructs have good internal consistency reliability.

The convergent validity for the study based on AVE computed confirms that all constructs have AVE of over 0.5. Hence, convergent validity was confirmed (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3: Construct and indicator loadings, composite reliability and AVE

Construct and item description	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Level 5 leadership (Reid et al., 2014)		0.937	0.939	0.638
L5L1	0.821			
L5L2	0.766			
L5L3	0.839			
L5L4	0.858			
L5L5	0.741			
L5L6	0.741			
L5L7	0.776			

L5L8	0.840			
L5L9	0.832			
L5L10	0.765			
Employee Innovation (Janssen, 2000)		0.753	0.762	0.506
EI1	0.648			
EI2	0.652			
EI3	0.783			
EI4	0.619			
EI5	0.526			
EI6	0.788			
Employee Voice (Liang et al., 2012)		0.836	0.846	0.669
EV1	0.761			
EV2	0.816			
EV3	0.854			
EV4	0.838			

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlation (HTMT). HTMT relies on evaluating the correlation among constructs and has been suggested as a more appropriate approach for establishing discriminant validity compared to the conventional metric proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) (Henseler et al., 2015). Henseler et al. (2015) and Franke and Sarstedt (2019) recommended a threshold of 0.9 or less for similar constructs or 0.85 for distinct constructs. Table 4 shows that HTMT is not a concern for this research and discriminant validity is thus confirmed.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity

	HTMT
EV <-> EI	0.813
L5L <-> EI	0.603
L5L <-> EV	0.501

4.5. Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was estimated based on the guidelines from Hair et al. (2019). Firstly, the multicollinearity of the structural model was evaluated. This was followed by an evaluation of the

standardised path coefficients to test the hypotheses. The explanatory and predictive power of the model was then evaluated by explaining the coefficient of determination (R^2), explaining the effect size (f^2) and measuring the Q^2predict. Next, the model fit was assessed by computing and evaluating SRMR.

VIF values for the inner model indicated that all indicators were below the threshold of 3 (Hair et al., 2019), thus confirming that the model is free from multicollinearity and CMB (Kock, 2015; Sarfraz et al., 2022).

The standardised path coefficients were then modelled *(β)* in SmartPLS (Ringle et al., 2024) to test the hypotheses of the research. *t*-Statistics were determined through bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) bootstrapping with 5000 resamples (Hair Jr et al., 2021). Bias corrected *t*-Statistics greater than 1.96 and *p*-values less than 0.005 indicate a significant relationship at a 95% confidence interval (Hair, Black, Babin & Sarstedt, 2014; Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2014). The results of the structural model assessment are presented in Figure 2.

The results contained in Table 5 revealed that L5L has a significant positive effect on EI ($\beta = 0.276$, $t = 4.077$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, L5L has a significant positive effect on EV ($\beta = 0.451$, $t = 6.306$, $p < 0.001$) and EV has a significant positive effect on EI ($\beta = 0.527$ $t = 7.943$, $p < 0.001$). The results revealed significant partial mediating roles of EV ($\beta = 0.238$, $t = 5.062$, $p < 0.001$). The total effect of L5L on EI was also significant ($\beta = 0.514$, $t = 7.308$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect represents 46.3% (0.238/ 0.514 x 100) of the total effect of L5L on EI. At 46.3%, this percentage, known as the variance accounted for, shows that EV is a partial mediator to the L5L and EI relationship (Hair et al., 2013).
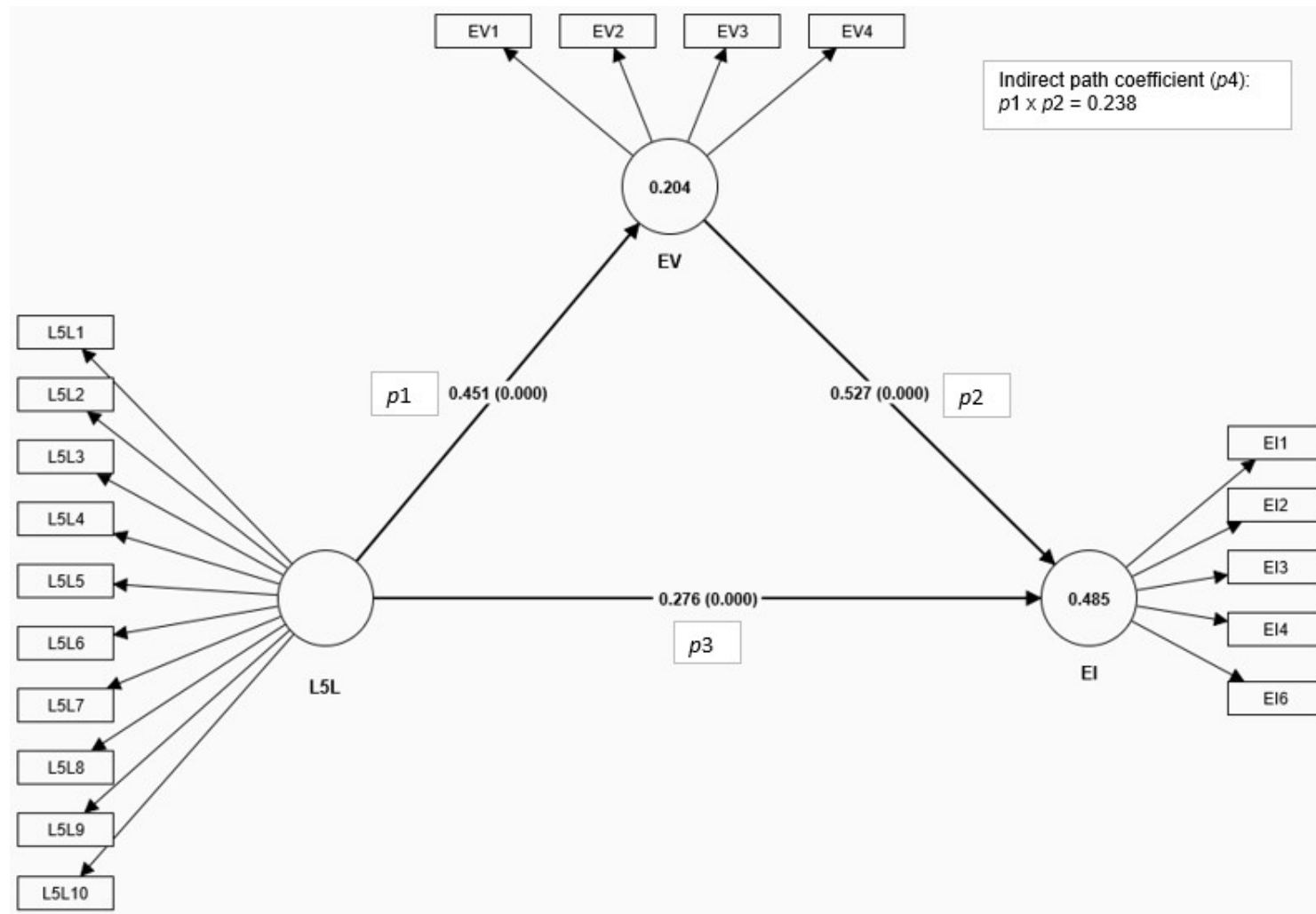
Figure 2: Estimated Structural Model with Path Coefficients, *p*-value and R^2

Table 5: Direct and Indirect Relationship Results

Construct	Path coefficient (original)	Path coefficient (BCa)	SD	t-statistics	p-values	Hypothesis
L5L -> EI	0.276	0.277	0.068	4.077	0.000	Supported
L5L -> EV	0.451	0.456	0.072	6.306	0.000	Supported
EV -> EI	0.527	0.526	0.066	7.943	0.000	Supported
L5L -> EV -> EI	0.238	0.240	0.047	5.062	0.000	Supported

To establish goodness of fit R^2, f^2, Q^2predict were evaluated. The R^2 for EI was 0.485 (Table 6). This indicates that a 48.5% variance in EI can be attributed to L5L and EV. The R^2 for EV was determined to be 0.204. Considering the accepted cut-off value of 0.10 (Falk & Miller, 1992), the results indicate that the model obtained R^2 statistics are acceptable for social science research.

In this study, the impact on EI is evaluated through L5L and EV variables and it is therefore necessary to present f^2 effect size (Hair Jr et al., 2021). Based on the guidelines of Cohen (1988), the result of the study shows that the removal of EV has a large influence on EI, while the removal of L5L has a medium influence on EV and a small influence on EI.

Table 6: Explanatory and Predictive Power of the PLS Path Model

Predictor	Outcome	R^2	f^2	Q^2predict
L5L			0.118	0.247
EV	EI	0.485	0.428	0.186
L5L	EV	0.204	0.256	

Using the two-step approach proposed by Shmueli et al. (2019), firstly a Q^2predict metric > 0 suggests that the PLS-SEM model has greater predictive capability than the computed training model. Secondly, as the mean absolute error (MAE) for the PLS-SEM model was < the linear regression model (LM) for most of the indicators (7 out of 9), it was established that the model has a medium level of predictive power.

Table 7: Assessment of Predictive Power of the PLS-SEM Path Model

Indicator	PLS-SEM_MAE	LM_MAE	Difference
EI1	0.492	0.518	-0.026
EI2	0.386	0.382	0.004
EI3	0.455	0.477	-0.022
EI4	0.623	0.634	-0.011
EI6	0.479	0.491	-0.012

EV1	0.535	0.553	-0.018
EV2	0.569	0.584	-0.015
EV3	0.546	0.565	-0.019
EV4	0.586	0.576	0.010

To evaluate model fit the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) statistic of 0.075 was below the threshold of <0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1998), thereby indicating model fit for the PLS path model.

4.6. Hypothesis Discussion

H1: There is a positive relationship between level 5 leadership and employee innovation.

The analysis of the results indicates that L5L, comprising the core traits of PH and PW, plays a key role in shaping EI. These findings were expected based on the notion that level 5 leaders can favourably influence the behaviour of their employees and thus gain their trust and commitment to engaging in extra-role behaviour (Caldwell et al., 2017; Sarfraz et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2018). Thus, by way of SET, through their actions of L5L, leaders create an environment for employees to participate in extra-role behaviour, namely EI. The role of leader humility and servant leadership which is believed to be likened to the PH trait of L5L, in supporting organisational outcomes including job satisfaction, creativity, employee innovation and performance is well researched (Iqbal et al., 2020; Karatepe et al., 2019; Lehmann et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2017; Ye et al., 2020), however, L5L combining PH and PW is much less understood. Research has also found that leader humility can negatively affect leader effectiveness, as their followers may consider them as having less power to act (Zapata & Haynes-Jones, 2019). The difference of this study again is the inclusion of the dimension of PW, which is consistent with Collins's (2001a) distinction that L5L is not just about PH but is equally about intense resolve and determination. This study thus provides untested insight into the leadership and EI relationship

H2: There is a positive relationship between level 5 leadership and employee voice.

By way of SET, namely through their actions of L5L, leaders establish a conducive environment that encourages employees to participate in additional or extra-role behaviour. Through PH, level 5 leaders create trust in their followers (Caldwell et al., 2017), and this PH along with a strong commitment by way of PW, positively influences followers to commit to extra effort to achieve organisational success (Sarfraz et al., 2022). When followers trust their leader, they have the assurance that the leader will not cause them harm and are more inclined to take risks willingly (Jin et al., 2022). In these circumstances, employees feel comfortable going beyond their job description, to voice concerns and provide constructive feedback. Previous studies have found positive relationships between servant, ethical, humble leadership and EV (Chen & Hou, 2016; Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018; Lin et al., 2019). While the results of this study are mostly in line with previous literature, it extends to the

existing literature by considering a distinctly dissimilar leadership style, L5L in the leadership and EV relationship studies.

H3: There is a positive relationship between employee voice and employee innovation.

The findings indicate this relationship has the highest path coefficient of all the direct relationships, which shows that EV is a substantial predictor of EI.

The results suggest that when employees feel empowered to speak out and give their opinions, ideas, and concerns, it creates an environment conducive to innovation. Theoretically, EV supports new and novel approaches that enable innovation evaluations. Leadership assess employees as high in creativity and EI when they speak up more to achieve positive organisational outcomes (Chen & Hou, 2016). If employees have awareness of an environment that promotes EV behaviour (Kremer et al., 2019), EI is fostered by way of their engagement in activities and an elevated motivation to voice their viewpoints (Nazir et al., 2021). This implies that the act of expressing one's voice serves as a catalyst for generating creative solutions, fostering a culture where innovative thinking is not only welcomed but actively encouraged. These results are not unexpected as previous literature has indicated a strong relationship between EV concepts and organisational and employee innovation (Ashiru et al., 2022; Selvaraj & Joseph, 2020; Shin et al., 2022). While this research corroborates the results of these previous studies, the nuance of the South African manufacturing context offers a distinction. As discussed in the literature review, EV is influenced by macro-factors or national cultures (Kwon & Farndale, 2020), and little research exists that explains the relationship between EV and EI outside of Western countries (McKearney et al., 2023).

H4: Employee voice mediates the relationship between level 5 leadership and employee innovation.

This finding suggests that L5L positively influences EI through EV. The previous section highlighted how through the lens of SET, L5L traits in leaders induce trust and commitment of followers to commit to extra-role behaviour in achieving organisational outcomes (Caldwell et al., 2017; Sarfraz et al., 2022, Wang et al., 2018). With this trust, followers take more risks and, in such circumstances, employees feel comfortable to go beyond their job description and voice concerns and constructive feedback which in turn leads to innovation. Employees are less fearful of penalisation for questioning leaders, speaking up and promoting differences of opinion (Kremer et al., 2019). In such situations, the discretionary behaviour of EV leads to EI. If new and novel ideas are unable to be communicated, it is unlikely that they will be implemented (Kremer et al., 2019). As leaders foster an environment where employees believe that their opinions and suggestions are considered, through EV the organisation benefits from a diverse range of perspectives, contributing to a more innovative and creative workforce

The mediating position of EV on the leadership and EI relationship has become an area of focus in recent literature. In studies involving ethical leadership, EV was found to be a mediating factor in the

relationship between ethical leadership and EI (Jin et al., 2022; Ullah et al., 2020). In a similar study, Chen and Hou (2016) found that the relationship between ethical leadership and creativity is mediated by voice behaviour. A positive mediating effect of EV was noted in the relationship between paternalistic leadership and innovative work behaviour (Nazir et al., 2021). The current study contributes to the literature on voice behaviour by examining how EV mediates the connection between L5L and EI, thus extending the existing theory.

5. Managerial Implications

The section discusses the theoretical contributions and implications of the principal findings for management and other stakeholders.

5.1. Theoretical Contribution

The present study extends the body of existing literature as follows. Firstly, it adds to leadership, EI, and EV studies by looking at the relationships between L5L and EI and L5L and EV, both of which have not been studied until now (Alblooshi et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020). Secondly, it contributes to providing greater insight into L5L, which remains an understudied construct since its introduction by Collins (2001a) (Caldwell et al., 2017; Zhou & Wu, 2018). Thirdly, the relationship between EV and EI has previously not been measured in the South African manufacturing context which is pertinent as EV is affected by macro-factors or national culture (Kwon & Farndale, 2020) and the construct is understudied in the developing world (McKearney et al., 2023). Fourthly, given the inconsistency of past results on the relationship between leadership styles and EI (Grošelj et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2018; Mokhber et al., 2018) researchers have called for the inclusion of more understudied mediating factors (Hughes et al., 2018). Additionally, the mediating effect of EV on the relationship between L5L and EI has not been studied previously. Finally, the study adds to the collective understanding of SET (Homans, 1958).

5.2. Practical Implications

Organisations, as complex adaptive systems, must cultivate the ability to promptly address new challenges or circumstances in the current competitive and ever-changing business setting (Amankwaa et al., 2019). This complex, changing and uncertain business environment requires leaders to become more adaptable (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). The present study argues that to enhance adaptability and capacity building, management and human resource practitioners should promote EI by aligning with the characteristics associated with L5L.

It is also recommended that the leadership in organisations partake in development platforms and programs that focus on L5L traits. Individuals have the potential to be developed into level 5 leaders (Collins, 2001a) and humility can be enhanced through coaching and development (Aziz, 2019; Maldonado et al., 2022). Organisations with innovative ambition can thus prioritise developing and

recruiting individuals with L5L traits. Collins (2001a) highlighted the tendency of organisations to choose highly charismatic leaders over level 5 leaders, which can be to the organisations' detriment.

Not only should leaders and organisations groom L5L traits, but business leaders should provide a work environment in which employees are encouraged to speak up (Jin et al., 2022). This environment should encourage reducing an employee's sense of harm, and foster confidence in engaging in voice behaviour without fear of negative consequences. It is also recommended that leaders and organisations use performance management systems, not only to improve on human capital, but to promote voice (Kremer et al., 2019).

6. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

The defined research problem for this study identified in section one was that in a period of accelerated technological and economic change, South African manufacturing organisations without leadership that inspires innovation, face the risk of being unproductive, uncompetitive, and unsustainable, detrimentally impacting economic growth, job creation and poverty. The importance of innovation to support an underperforming South African manufacturing industry formed the basis of this research problem. This importance was confirmed in the literature review (Jiang & Chen, 2018; Khosravi et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Ortiz-Villajos & Sotoca, 2018; Škerlavaj et al., 2019). Innovation was found to contribute to organisation sustainability, competitiveness, and growth and EI was found to be the determinant of firm innovation. Consequently, leadership was identified as a key driver of innovation and EI. With this challenge, the study aimed to develop a theoretical model that would enhance EI in organisations.

The study's key purpose was thus to understand the potential impact that L5L could have on EI and what role EV plays as a potential mechanism that mediates this relationship. A quantitative assessment was conducted to gather data through surveys, followed by a comprehensive examination of the collected data to accomplish this goal.

The present study found that a significant and positive relationship exists between L5L and EI. In section one it was noted that Tim Cook, the current CEO of the world's most innovative company Apple Inc., portrayed strong L5L qualities (Aziz, 2019). Additionally, humility, a key component of L5L – has been known to enhance organisational outcomes, including creativity (Lehmann et al., 2023). These indicators suggested to the researchers that there may be a relationship between L5L and EI, despite studies on leader humility showing mixed outcomes and PW being a largely untested concept. Until now the relationship between L5L and EI has not been tested.

The results showed that EV is a significant partial mediator in the relationship between L5L and EI. The outcome is thus consistent with the propositions by Kremer et al. (2019), whereby level 5 leaders through social exchange and building trust with employees can form an environment encouraging

employees in speaking up and speaking out. By treating their employees fairly and supporting them, this results in EV which in turn leads to EI.

While the study contributes new theoretical insights and business recommendations, like all research it was done with certain limitations. Firstly, data for the dependent variables were obtained using self-rated data from employees of manufacturing companies in SA, which raises the risk of same source bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Although the tests for CMB indicated no concerns in this study, future research should consider using leader ratings for EI or having time lags between the data collection for the independent and dependent variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Secondly, the study opted for a cross-sectional time horizon, capturing data at a specific moment.

The current study provides an opportunity for further exploration into the L5L construct. Firstly, the interaction among the numerous factors influencing EI is intricate and multifaceted. Future studies can include more understudied mediating mechanisms and contextual boundary conditions and psychological mechanisms that could be moderating factors. Secondly, the current study evaluated L5L as a unitary facet. Although Collins (2001a) viewed L5L as a single construct (Reid et al., 2014), future studies can evaluate the individual impacts of PH and PW and their related traits on EI which may allow for a more in-depth understanding of the relationships. Finally, future studies can also consider the impact of the negative traits of L5L (Reid et al., 2014).

In conclusion, the current study provides a sound basis for understanding the influence of L5L on EI and the mediating effects of EV on this relationship. The practical and theoretical contributions pave the way for the enhancement of management practices and future research.

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