

Leaders in Shared Leadership Settings: Trust, But Not Too Much – A Moderator

Analysis of Top-Down Organizational Trust

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the impact of contemporary shared leadership settings on employee job satisfaction. More specifically, this research examines the moderating effect of the novel concept of top-down trust – the leaders’ trust toward their employees – on the relationship between shared leadership and employee job satisfaction. Utilizing a one-wave, multi-source field study and a dyadic approach that captures perspectives from both leaders and followers, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of how these variables interact within organizational settings in the Netherlands. The results showed a positive relationship between shared leadership and employee job satisfaction. Furthermore, in line with expectations, top-down trust was positively associated with employee job satisfaction. Surprisingly, however, the interaction effect between shared leadership and top-down trust on job satisfaction is negative, contrary to our predictions. This negative moderation effect suggests that excessive top-down trust in shared leadership settings may diminish the unique positive effects of top-down trust and shared leadership on employee satisfaction. Our research highlights the importance for leaders in shared leadership settings to find the appropriate balance between trust and control to promote employee satisfaction. Future research should replicate these findings and explore additional moderating and mediating variables to expand further our understanding of the forces governing workplace outcomes.

Keywords: Shared leadership, trust in the workplace, job satisfaction, top-down trust, leader-follower dyad

Leaders in Shared Leadership Settings: Trust, But Not Too Much – A Moderator Analysis of Top-Down Organizational Trust

According to the Statistical Office of the European Union, the expected duration of working life has significantly increased from just 32.4 years in 2002 to about 36.5 years in 2022, reflecting a rise of almost thirteen percent (Eurostat, 2023). Given the substantial increase in time spent at occupational sites and the pivotal role of work in shaping our identity and well-being (e.g., Warr, 1978; Voßemer et al., 2018), the imperative to investigate the determinants of employee satisfaction in the workplace becomes evident. Understanding job satisfaction in particular is crucial, as previous research has demonstrated that it impacts not only the individual worker but the organization as a whole by influencing various crucial organizational outcome variables, such as employee commitment (e.g., Giessner et al., 2023). Thus, job satisfaction seems to be a concept relevant, not only for the sake of the employee, who presumably welcomes a satisfying workplace experience but also for the governing bodies of organizations since their economic success partly depends on – and simultaneously fosters – the thriving of their individual contributors (Guglielmi et al., 2016).

Recent research has established that the quality of dyadic interactions between leaders and followers significantly predicts employee job satisfaction (Kazemi et al., 2024; Albashiti et al., 2021). Simultaneously, throughout the last decades, there has been a shift from traditional hierarchical structures to more inclusive and empowering leader-follower dynamics in the workplace (Mohrman et al., 1995), which raises the question of how this trend toward more balanced, contemporary dynamics – in which this dyadic interaction is more pronounced than in traditional structures – affects the crucial matter of job satisfaction. Hoch (2013) summarizes the characteristics of one such alternative to the vertical leadership approach, shared leadership, as a form of leadership where the team and its members take control of the planning and execution of their strategies. Whereas some of the existing

literature points towards positive correlations between shared leadership and employees' job satisfaction (e.g., Quek et al., 2021; García Torres, 2019), a more nuanced understanding, potentially taking into account the influence of third variables when investigating this association, is crucial, especially since previous research highlighted the weight of contextual factors in determining the effectiveness of shared leadership (Chen & Zhang, 2023).

Thus, the goal of this paper is to bridge the research gap by providing a clearer picture of shared leadership practices and their complex link with employee job satisfaction. This will be achieved by considering the impact of a third variable Wu and colleagues (2020) identified to moderate the strength of the relationship between shared leadership and team-relevant outcomes. They suggest that organizational trust may enhance this relationship by fostering cooperation and coordinated behavior toward common objectives (Wu et al., 2020). We suspect the workings of trust in the workplace extend beyond the group level and may also be relevant for individual employee outcomes such as job satisfaction. In addition to exploring this variable, previous research by Muterera et al. (2018) stressed the importance of collecting data from both dyad constituents, leader and employee, to achieve a more holistic picture. Consequently, this paper aims to deepen our understanding of the moderating role of 'top-down trust' – the unidirectional trust of leaders toward their employees – in the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction in contemporary organizational settings in the Netherlands, using a dyadic approach that captures the perspectives of both leaders and followers. To the authors' knowledge, this specific association has not been investigated by previous research.

Theory Development and Hypotheses

Job Satisfaction

Research shows that job satisfaction has such an impact that it has been established as an important contributor to overall life satisfaction (Lee & Bae, 2023). Karabati and

colleagues (2019) found that people who are less satisfied with their jobs engage in more rumination, a factor leading to the maintenance of depressed symptoms (Spasojević & Wells, 2004). However, job satisfaction, as previously pointed out, is not only of relevance for the individual worker. Leung and Ling (2022) demonstrated that job satisfaction facilitates creativity in the workplace, which is critical in ensuring companies' survival in the ever-changing, dynamic economic landscape (e.g., Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Amabile, 1996). Furthermore, work performance – which is equally important for ensuring the long-term thriving of firms in the competitive market (Pritchard et al., 2008) – has also been shown to be influenced by workers' job satisfaction in both remote (Khorakian et al., 2023) and on-site environments (Aftab et al., 2023). Given the previous discussion, it should have become apparent that it is critical to mind and investigate employees' job satisfaction.

Shared Leadership and Job Satisfaction

In contrast to traditional leadership styles, shared leadership is generally described as the distribution of decision-making authority among various team members, rather than a single top-down leader asserting control over a company's direction (e.g., Morgeson et al., 2010; Carson et al., 2007). However, for this research, similar to Hoch et al. (2013), we prioritize the dyadic relationship between formal leaders and employees in our conceptualization of shared leadership, emphasizing the significant role of the formal leader in guiding, supporting, and collaborating with team members on both individual and collective levels, rather than focusing on team member relationships. Carson et al. (2007) propose that the changing trends in team dynamics stress the importance of flattening rigid organizational structures towards more team-centered responsibility and decision processes because of the interacting complexity of tasks, members, teams, and organizations, which makes it difficult for single, external managers to successfully direct operations by themselves, as pointed out by Day and colleagues (2004). Research about shared leadership

on organizational outcomes has yielded promising results, seemingly increasing performance on both team and organizational levels (e.g. Chamberlin et al., 2024; Hmieleski et al., 2012) and, in that respect, may even be the more potent leadership form compared to traditional leadership styles (Pearce & Sims, 2002). Nonetheless, as indicated above, job satisfaction outcomes for the individual employee are critical to consider too, especially since leadership style has a significant impact on job satisfaction for workers (Lei et al., 2022). Quek and colleagues (2021) observed that shared leadership among nursing staff not only enhances job satisfaction but also boosts employee effort and loyalty toward their occupation and employer. Their qualitative analysis revealed that shared responsibilities led to feelings of validation and empowerment, thereby increasing engagement in their roles. Similarly, García Torres (2019), found a positive association between shared leadership and teachers' job satisfaction in US schools, because of the increased decision-making influence and cooperation opportunities among teachers. Thus, empowerment and involvement in decision-making processes, thereby leading to a greater sense of control and autonomy over their work environment, seem to be the key drivers of employee job satisfaction under shared leadership.

Minding previous research and considering the context of Dutch teams where collaborative and egalitarian work practices are highly valued, we predict that shared leadership will positively impact employee satisfaction by fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment. Thus, the first hypothesis will be as follows: *Hypothesis one (H1): Shared Leadership is positively associated with employee job satisfaction.*

Organizational top-down trust and Job Satisfaction

Conventionally, interpersonal organizational trust, defined as the wish to be vulnerable towards and confident in another party without direct control over them (Mayer et al., 1995), has been viewed as a key factor allowing organizations to adapt to the novel challenges they face (Bachmann & Zaheer, 2008). Rousseau and colleagues (1998)

summarize that in order to talk about trust, two conditions must be met: Parties must be interdependent, and there must be an element of risk attached to the sphere of trust. Additionally, the researchers propose that trust results, among others, in more cooperation, less conflict, adaptive crisis management, and reduced transaction costs (Rousseau et al., 1998), which could partly explain why trust has been associated with the organizations' ability to effectively overcome obstacles (Bachmann & Zaheer, 2008). Furthermore, intraorganizational trust has been positively related to job satisfaction by several researchers (e.g., Matzler & Renzl, 2006; Perry & Mankin, 2007; Guinot et al., 2014). The literature points to mainly two theoretical frameworks explaining how trust unfolds its positive effects on the employee. Historically the social exchange theory (Blau, 1986; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) has been used as one of these frameworks to explain why trust fosters positive work-related outcomes (e.g., Brower et al., 2000). According to this theory, trust essentially yields positive work outcomes by the norm of reciprocity – when we are trusted, we trust back – and a cognitive mechanism that posits that when feeling trusted, there is a reduced pressure to keep one's guard up, which would enhance cooperation (Rousseau et al., 1998). Gill and colleagues (2019) additionally propose that the workings of trust go beyond a mere exchange apparatus and work via an empowerment mechanism captured by the psychological empowerment theory (Spreitzer, 1995). They found that employees' empowerment too, next to the social exchange processes, uniquely explained work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Gill et al., 2019). Building on these insights, it is crucial to note that the source of trust can significantly influence its impact. Previous research highlighted that the quality of the dyadic interaction between leader and follower significantly impacts employee satisfaction (e.g., Zhao & Xie, 2020). Furthermore, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) established that particularly the leaders' treatment toward their employees

impacts work-related attitudes, such as job satisfaction. Hence, particularly, the leaders' trust in their employees seems to play a pivotal role.

Having explored the concept of organizational trust – specifically the impact of the leaders' trust towards their subordinates – and its implications for employee job satisfaction, as established by previous research, the second hypothesis will be as follows: *Hypothesis two (H2): Organizational top-down trust is positively associated with employee job satisfaction.*

Top-down Trust as a Moderator of Shared Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Previous research has established the importance of shared leadership in enhancing job satisfaction (Quek et al., 2021; García Torres, 2019). While shared leadership has been positively associated with job satisfaction, less is known about how the trust leaders place in their employees impacts this dynamic. This study aims to fill this gap by examining top-down trust – the leaders' trust towards their employees – as a moderator in the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction.

We hypothesize that top-down trust will moderate the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction. Specifically, we propose that high levels of top-down trust will enhance the positive effects of shared leadership on job satisfaction, while low levels of trust may diminish these effects. This hypothesis is supported by existing research from The Energy Project & Harvard Business Review (2014), which suggests that employees who feel trusted by their leaders are more satisfied, engaged, focused, and committed. Furthermore, Altuntas and Baykal (2010) highlighted both the importance of employees feeling trusted and the potential of participatory management models, such as shared leadership structures (Hoch, 2013), to improve employee satisfaction, which points to the possibility of these two factors enhancing job satisfaction when combined.

Regarding the workings of the complex interaction of shared leadership and top-down trust to predict job satisfaction, research by Chen and Sriphon (2022) reveals that trust

directly affects social exchange relationships, which Wu et al. (2020) also highlighted as a possible explanation behind their observed moderating effect of trust on team outcomes in shared leadership settings. We therefore propose that the enhanced social interaction and cooperation fostered by the combination of trust (Chen & Sriphon, 2022) and shared leadership settings (García Torres, 2019), not only moderates desired team outcomes (Wu et al., 2020) but also accounts for employee job satisfaction, such that the employee in a shared leadership setting feels even more satisfied when trusted by their managers. Hence, building on previous research, we propose that high top-down trust in shared leadership settings may be associated with higher employee job satisfaction, compared to less trusting conditions.

Conversely, we propose that low levels of top-down trust in conjunction with shared leadership will decrease employee satisfaction. Multiple scholars have constituted the importance of a quality relationship between the leader-follower dyad (e.g., Zhao & Xie, 2020; Herttala et al., 2022). Specifically, the leadership style (Lei et al., 2022; Elshout et al., 2013) and the leaders' treatment of their employees (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) have been found to impact employee job satisfaction. Combined with the notion that trust is a crucial factor for employee well-being and a functional workplace environment (Baptiste, 2008), this prior research leads us to believe that a lack of organizational top-down trust in shared leadership settings may be associated with lower employee satisfaction. Consequently, the third and final hypothesis is the following:

Hypothesis three (H3): Top-down trust moderates the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction, such that the positive impact of shared leadership on job satisfaction is stronger in the presence of high levels of top-down trust and weaker at low levels of top-down trust.

Methods

Participants

A total of 235 leaders were sampled, of which 136 did not meet the participation criteria. Therefore, the effective sample size for the leaders was 99, with 61% being men and 39% women. The average age was 42 years. Their work experience in their current position within their organization ranged, on average, between two and five years, during which they guided and were responsible for, on average, 18 employees, almost daily. The majority worked in either the healthcare sector, the construction, commerce, and trade sector, or the hospitality sector and typically obtained at least an HBO diploma.

As for the employees, a total of 243 were sampled, of which 143 were not included in the analysis, leaving the effective employee sample size at 100. Of these, 42% were men and 58% were women. The employees' average age was 33, while their work experience in their current position within their company ranged between two and five years. The average employee directly collaborates with, on average, between three and five co-workers in their team. The typical employees held at least an HBO diploma and also mostly worked in the healthcare sector, construction, commerce, and trade sector, and hospitality sector.

To be eligible for participation, the potential candidates – managers and their employees – must be Dutch-speaking and work for at least 17 hours per week for a company located in the Netherlands. Furthermore, both the manager and the related employee needed to respond to the questionnaire, since this research assesses the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers in the workplace. If any of these criteria were not met, the data for that case was disregarded and not included in the analysis.

Design and Procedure

The present study is a one-wave, multi-source field study. The leader and employee pairs were initially recruited through the personal networks of the Bachelor students, thus employing a convenience sampling approach. Additionally, elements of the snowballing technique were used in the recruitment procedure, as the participants were gathered by the

students' immediate network and then called upon their social circle, further increasing the sample size. Lastly, participant accession included face-to-face and digital recruitment efforts via an email containing the QR code for the questionnaire at various local companies. They received — in addition to information about the purpose of the study and all relevant details needed to give informed consent — a link tailored to their role within the company. This link led them to the correct one of the two questionnaires (both programmed on Qualtrics): either for the leader or for the employee. After completion, participants were asked to forward the other questionnaire to their counterparts. Alternatively, if participants did not exchange questionnaires directly, research assistants obtained contact information from the dyads, provided them with all necessary study information, and, upon confirming their willingness to participate, sent them the appropriate links. All participation was voluntary, and responses were kept confidential.

The questionnaire for the leaders consisted of 62 items measuring a total of seven variables that were considered relevant to adequately assess the leader-follower dyad in the workplace, such as trust, psychological safety, or coordination problems. Of the leaders' seven variables, creativity and performance were the ones that only the leader, but not the employee, assessed. Conversely, the employee questionnaire contained a total of 12 variables, measured by 88 items. Among those variables that were exclusively constituted of employee responses were three different forms of leadership styles, team potency (Guzzo et al., 1993), and job satisfaction.

To gain insights into the dyadic dynamics at the given workplace, the researchers needed to match the responses of the leader to the correct employee and vice versa. To achieve that, a unique code was generated at the beginning of each questionnaire. The code consisted of the last two letters of the participants' and their counterparts' last names.

Measures

Shared Leadership (independent variable)

Shared Leadership was measured using 18 items adapted from Hoch et al. (2013) to fit the specific context of our study and subsequently translated into Dutch (see Appendix A, Scale 1: Translated Scale Measuring Shared Leadership). The items, just like all other variables measured in this questionnaire, were answered using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*), where employees rated statements about their leader's behaviors. Three subscales were used to assess the independent variable: transformational leadership, individual empowering leadership, and participative leadership. Transformational leadership entailed items 1-6, which assessed the degree to which the formal leader displays transformational behaviors such as inspiring the team with a clear vision (example item: "My leader provides a clear vision of what our team stands for"). Items 7-14 measured individual empowering leadership, which would encourage self-reliance and decision-making autonomy. This subscale included statements such as: "My leader encourages me to find solutions to my problems at work myself". Lastly, participative leadership, items 15-18, addressed the degree of collaboration between leader and employee, with statements such as: "My supervisor and I work together to choose my performance goals". The scale was reliable, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of .715.

Job Satisfaction (dependent variable)

Job satisfaction was measured using four items, three of which were derived from Judge et al. (1998), who in turn were inspired by Brayfield and Rothe (1951). A fourth item, namely that of 'I like my job better than the average person,' was added to the questionnaire used in this research. The job satisfaction scale, adapted and modified from previous research (Judge et al., 1998; Brayfield & Rothe, 1951) for this study, was again translated into Dutch (see Appendix A, Scale 2: Translated Scale Measuring Job Satisfaction). Employees responded on a 7-point Likert scale, where higher scores reflected greater satisfaction in the

workplace. Due to a technical error in the questionnaire, only 20 valid responses were recorded; however, this scale still yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of .88.

Top-down trust (moderating variable)

Organizational trust was measured by five items, again answered on a 7-point Likert scale, where higher scores indicate a higher level of trust towards their counterpart, based on the framework provided by De Jong and Elfring (2010). Subsequently, the scale was translated into Dutch (see Appendix A, Scale 3: Translated Scale Measuring Top-down Trust). A sample item posed to leaders was, 'I feel confident that my employee informs me about issues that are important for my work.' However, since this work focuses only on leaders' perceptions of the trustworthiness of their employees, and as we are hypothesizing the moderating effect of the concept of top-down trust — the unidirectional trust of leaders in their employees — between shared leadership and job satisfaction, employee responses to the trust measurement will be disregarded for statistical analysis. The scale of top-down trust was reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .91.

Employee trust — the trust of an employee towards their employer —, as explored in the post hoc analysis, considered only employee responses on the five trust items and was reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .89.

Also addressed in this research is the concept of dyadic trust — the mutual trust between employer and employee. Dyadic trust was assessed by combining the trust responses of employees and their leaders into a single variable. This variable captures the mean trust score for each surveyed dyad, representing the mutual trust between employer and employee. The reliability of dyadic trust was assessed by calculating the combined Cronbach's alpha of the five trust items rated by employees and the five trust items rated by leaders. The combined scale was reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .88.

Results

We conducted a moderation analysis using the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2013) for SPSS to examine the influence of shared leadership on job satisfaction and the moderating effect of top-down trust in this relationship. Before presenting the findings of the model analysis, we start by introducing the sample descriptives for the model variables (see Table 1) and subsequently test the regression assumptions essential to ensure a valid and meaningful interpretation of the results.

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of the total sample where N represents the number of individual responses per variable. We observe that shared leadership and job satisfaction had moderately high average scores, while top-down trust displayed a high average score with more variability compared to the other two variables. Correlations between variables were generally quite low, indicating no significant associations at first glance, prior to hypothesis testing. However, shared leadership was significantly and positively correlated with job satisfaction, suggesting that higher levels of shared leadership are associated with higher job satisfaction.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Study Variables

	N	M	SD	1.	2.
Shared Leadership	100	5.53	.69		
Top-down Trust	99	6.27	.96	.047	
Job Satisfaction	20	5.84	.82	.456*	.18

Note: N (individuals); * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$.

Regression Assumption Testing

Before checking the basic, necessary assumptions of a regression model, we controlled for influential outliers. In our analysis, we identified one influential (top-down trust) data point with a Cook's Distance value of *6.09*, indicating it as an influential outlier significantly deviating from the overall distribution. Given the severity of the deviation and the small size of our model sample ($N = 20$), we decided to exclude this dyad from further analysis to maintain the robustness of our results, which leaves us with a total sample size of $N = 19$ leader-follower dyads.

The first assumption to validate is the presence of a linear relationship between the variables. As displayed in the scatterplot matrix (see Appendix B, Figure 1), all graphs indicate a positive linear relationship. Notably, the associations between shared leadership and top-down trust, as well as between shared leadership and job satisfaction, appear particularly strong, as indicated by the pronounced upward slopes. This suggests that higher levels of shared leadership are associated with higher levels of both job satisfaction and top-down trust. The linear relationship between top-down trust and job satisfaction is also positive, but it is not as pronounced as the relationships involving shared leadership (see Appendix B, Figure 1).

Secondly, to investigate whether the normality assumption is met, we conducted the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test. As both tests were not statistically significant ($p_{\text{Kolmogorov-Smirnov}} = .20$, $p_{\text{Shapiro-Wilk}} = .401$), and the histogram of standardized residuals (see Appendix B, Figure 2) shows a normal distribution, we can confirm that the normality assumption is met.

Thirdly, to verify the assumption of homoscedasticity, we plotted the standardized residuals on the standardized predicted values for the dependent variable job satisfaction. The scatterplot shows a random scatter of points around the horizontal line at $y = 0$, with no clear

pattern or funnel shape (see Appendix B, Figure 3). Thus, this visual inspection supports the assumption of homoscedasticity.

Fourthly, we used the Durbin-Watson statistic to confirm the independence of residuals. The test yielded a value of 1.796, indicating that there is no significant correlation between the residuals. Furthermore, to determine the degree of multicollinearity between the predictor variables, we calculated the variation inflation factor (VIF). With a VIF of 1.252, there is no reason for concern regarding the violation of the multicollinearity assumption. Hence, as all necessary assumptions for a valid regression analysis were met, we can move to the presentation of results.

Hypothesis Testing

Results of the moderation analysis show that the global model ($F(3, 15) = 4.013, p = .028, R^2 = .445$), including both predictor variables and the interaction term, explains approximately 45% of the total variance in job satisfaction. When adjusting for the number of predictors, the total explained variance equals about 33% ($R^2_{adj} = 0.334$).

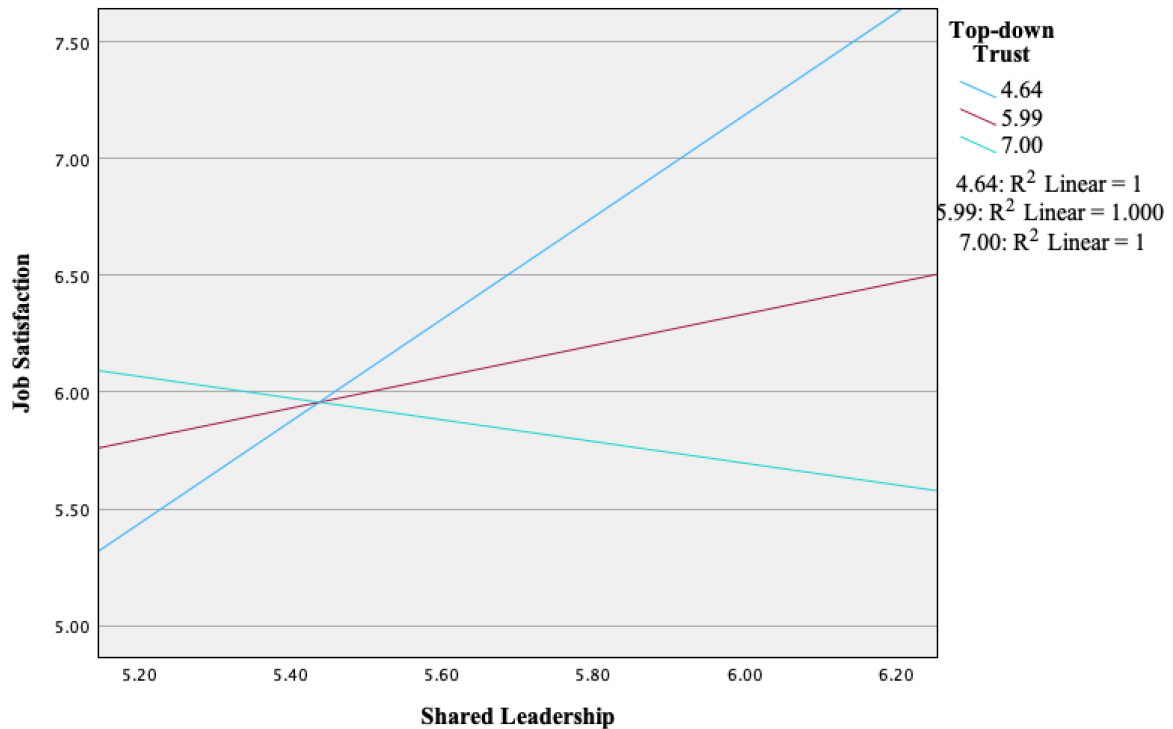
Our first hypothesis (H1) predicted that higher levels of shared leadership would lead to higher job satisfaction among employees. The PROCESS moderation regression results (see Appendix C, Table 2) support this positive association, as the coefficient for shared leadership, representing the effect of shared leadership on job satisfaction, is both positive and significant ($b = 7.39, t(15) = 2.87, p = .012$). Thus, in line with the prediction, shared leadership significantly increases job satisfaction among employees.

Hypothesis two (H2) proposed that top-down organizational trust is positively associated with job satisfaction. The coefficients table (Table 3) shows top-down trust to significantly predict job satisfaction ($t(15) = 2.51, p = .024$) in the hypothesized (positive) direction ($b = 6.10$). With every unit increase in top-down trust, job satisfaction increases by approximately six units.

The third and last hypothesis (H3) asserts that increasing top-down trust moderates the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction in a way that the impact of shared leadership on job satisfaction is stronger in the presence of high occupational trust, compared to lower levels of trust. However, the output indicates a significant, negative slope for the interaction effect ($B = -1.12$, $t(15) = -2.54$, $p = .023$), contrary to our initial hypothesis (H3). The interaction graph (Figure 4) displays the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction at three levels of top-down trust (low, medium, and high). At low levels of top-down trust (4.64), the slope is steep and positive, indicating that higher levels of shared leadership are significantly associated with higher job satisfaction. At medium levels of top-down trust (5.99), the slope is slightly positive, indicating either a minor effect or no interaction effect of shared leadership and top-down trust on job satisfaction. When top-down trust is high, however (7.00), the slope is negative, suggesting that under higher levels of top-down trust, higher shared leadership implementation is associated with lower employee satisfaction. Thus, for the interaction term, we observe an effect in the opposite direction than initially anticipated.

Figure 4

Interaction Effect of Shared Leadership and Top-Down Trust on Job Satisfaction



Post hoc Exploratory Analysis

In addition to the proposed model, the author was interested in the effects of both *employee trust* – the trust of the employee towards their leader – and *dyadic trust* – the mutual trust between the leader and follower – on employee satisfaction. Specifically, we were curious whether only top-down trust alone, both directly (via its main effect) and indirectly (via its moderating effect with shared leadership), influenced employee job satisfaction. Does only the leaders' trust towards their employees in shared leadership settings impact employee satisfaction, or do mutual trust and/or the trust of an employee towards their leader also play a significant role in this relationship?

When we examine dyadic – mutual – trust, neither shared leadership ($b = 5.70, t(15) = 1.71, p = .108$), dyadic trust ($b = 4.99, t(15) = 1.72, p = .106$), nor the interaction between these predictors ($b = -.877, t(15) = -1.61, p = .129$) significantly predicts employee satisfaction. The same insignificance across all predictors is found for the employee trust model (see Appendix C, Table 3), even after controlling for outliers and checking regression assumptions for both models.

Thus, interestingly, we find significant effects for the association of shared leadership on employee job satisfaction only when top-down trust is included in the model (see Appendix C, Table 2). In contrast, when examining the main and interaction effects of both dyadic trust and employee trust on the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction, these effects do not appear to be significant.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the moderating role of the novel concept of top-down trust – the unidirectional trust of a leader towards their employee – on the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction by implementing a dyadic approach, utilizing data from both employees and leaders. The results of our study revealed that shared leadership and top-down trust respectively are positively associated with job satisfaction. However, the interaction effect was significantly negatively associated with job satisfaction, contrary to our prediction. Furthermore, post hoc analysis revealed that only when the concept of top-down trust was included in the model did we find significant results. Neither employee trust – the employees’ trust towards their employer –, nor dyadic trust – the mutual trust between the leader-follower dyad – showed significant results when included in the model.

Theoretical Implications

Based on existing research (e.g., Quek et al., 2021; García Torres, 2019), we predicted that employees working in organizational settings that implement higher levels of shared leadership would also report higher job satisfaction (H1). Our results confirmed that, indeed, shared leadership is significantly and positively associated with job satisfaction, supporting our first hypothesis. The higher employees perceived their superior to display a shared leadership style (after Hoch et al., 2013), the more likely they were to report higher levels of job satisfaction. Thus, our study of dyadic leader-follower relationships in the

Netherlands confirms findings from previous research, supporting the notion that the contemporary trend (Mohrman et al., 1995) towards more inclusive and participative leadership styles, specifically in the form of shared leadership (after Hoch et al., 2013), enhances employee job satisfaction (e.g., García Torres, 2019; Quek et al., 2021) and thus overall well-being (e.g., Lee & Bae, 2023; Karabati et al., 2019).

Furthermore, we found that high levels of the leader's trust towards their subordinate significantly predicted higher employee satisfaction, confirming our second hypothesis (H2). Thus, this study underscored the importance of organizational trust for employee job satisfaction, in line with previous findings (e.g., Perry & Mankin, 2007; Guinot et al., 2014). Interestingly, however, *dyadic trust* – the mutual trust between employer and employee – and *employee trust* – trust of the employee towards their leader – did not significantly predict employee job satisfaction. Hence, it seems that the novel concept of top-down trust was the only conceptualization of organizational trust that predicted employee satisfaction. Consequently, it seems especially critical that the leader trusts their employees in order for the latter to have a satisfying occupational experience. This finding might be explained by the notion of empowerment, which Gill et al. (2019) found to be a crucial theoretical framework explaining how trust unfolds its positive effects on the employee. The employee who feels trusted by their employer might be empowered by the validation and subsequent sense of value, competence, and belonging within the organization, which then could directly enhance their job satisfaction. Another theoretical framework that could explain why only top-down trust is significantly associated with job satisfaction is that of the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This theory focuses on the relationship between leaders and their subordinates and proposes that work-related attitudes and behaviors of the employee are significantly dependent on how they are treated by their leaders. Accordingly,

only the leaders' trust in their employees has the potential to shape employee work satisfaction, which was confirmed by our data.

Lastly, we supposed that top-down trust moderates the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction, such that the positive impact of shared leadership on job satisfaction is stronger in the presence of high levels of top-down trust and weaker at low levels of top-down trust (H3). However, the moderation analysis, contrary to our hypothesis, revealed a significant negative effect, suggesting that the positive effect of shared leadership on job satisfaction decreases and even reverses as levels of top-down, managerial trust increase. This negative interaction effect might be explained by several arguments. First, potential role ambiguity could develop as a result of high top-down trust in shared leadership structures. Research carried out by Nie et al. (2023) indicates that environments characterized by high autonomy – as would be the case in shared leadership environments – promote job crafting in employees, which involves redefining their roles and work behavior. This change in organizational attitudes and behavior enabled by shared leadership settings may lead to ambiguity if not managed well (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Building on that, Urien and colleagues (2017) found that higher levels of role ambiguity are related to lower job satisfaction in employees in Mexico and Spain, which might ultimately also account for the observed negative interaction effect of shared leadership and top-down trust on job satisfaction for employees in the Netherlands. Simply put, employees who already feel trusted by their leaders might not feel the necessity for shared decision-making processes, as it has the potential to destabilize the well-oiled dyadic machine by potentially bringing about an element of ambiguity and thus uncertainty, resulting in lower job satisfaction. Second, the negative interaction effect could be attributed to the cultural dynamics in the sampled organizations. Hofstede (1980) introduced four cultural dimensions, one of which is 'power distance,' describing the degree to which less powerful members of an organization – that

would be employees – welcome and expect a clear hierarchical structure. Research has shown that a power distance orientation in a given organization can reduce the effectiveness of contemporary leadership styles, such as transformative leadership – a form of shared leadership – in terms of various outcomes, such as employee performance (e.g., Kwan et al., 2024). Liang and Knippenberg (2021) evidenced that Hofstede’s power distance dimension can, even on an individual level, influence the relationship between shared leadership and job creativity. Since job performance (Aftab et al., 2023) and individual creativity (Miao et al., 2020) respectively are intertwined with employee job satisfaction, it seems possible that the latter is also subject to the influence of power distance orientation on an organizational and/or individual level. Kirkman and Shapiro (2001) offer additional support for this. They proposed that employee responses to changes in organizational work structures are influenced by the underlying traditional and governing culture in that organization. Specifically, they state that participative management might not be appropriate in countries with high power distance. Their findings on cultural value differences align with Hofstede’s work, indicating that employees tend to oppose management strategies that conflict with their cultural norms (p. 565). Although the Netherlands generally scores low on Hofstede’s power distance dimension (see Hofstede Insights, 2023), the small sample size means we cannot ignore the possibility that responses from members of traditional hierarchical structures, whether influenced by an organizational power distance culture or an individual power distance orientation, significantly affected our research results. However, since this study did not assess this issue, future research should measure and control for the influence of cultural dynamics in the complex interplay between shared leadership, top-down trust, and job satisfaction.

Generally, however, a key theoretical implication of this research is that the positive interaction at low levels of top-down trust (see Figure 4) indicates that shared leadership in

low trust settings may act as a compensatory mechanism. It provides employees with a sense of control and participation (García Torres, 2019; Quek et al., 2021), which is lacking in hierarchical, low trust structures, thereby buffering the negative effect of low trust on job satisfaction.

Practical Implications

The insights derived from this research suggest several practical strategies that different stakeholders can implement to enhance employee satisfaction, which is crucial for both organizational success (e.g., Leung & Lin, 2022; Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Aftab et al., 2023; Pritchard et al., 2008) and individual well-being (Lee & Bae, 2023).

Firstly, organizational leaders should introduce shared leadership practices with caution. While this and other research (e.g. García Torres, 2019; Quek et al., 2021) have generally pointed out a positive association between shared leadership and job satisfaction, our results emphasize that a setting with high top-down trust might mitigate the effectiveness of this association and could actually lead to the reversed effect. Leaders should, therefore, balance shared leadership initiatives with clear communication and guidance for employees to avoid role ambiguity or incompatible cultural dynamics which may undermine shared leadership's potential to foster a healthy and efficient work environment. One way, leaders could avoid uncertainty and gently guide towards a cohesive and effective shared leadership environment is by developing training programs that help leaders to master matters such as team collaboration, decision-making processes, and conflict resolution. Still, since top-down trust and a good relationship with their leader (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) especially affect employees, it is crucial to continue cultivating top-down trust initiatives in workplace settings. These could include practices such as consistent and transparent communication, recognition of employee contributions, and providing autonomy in task execution.

Human resource departments should evaluate cultural orientations toward power distance both in the organization as a whole and in potential candidates specifically, to find the right match for positions, given the prevailing leadership strategy of the organization. Furthermore, HR and decision-makers should conduct regular assessments to understand team dynamics and adjust leadership strategies accordingly. Regular employee feedback could be a valuable tool for gaining a better understanding of cultural orientations, trust levels, and satisfaction.

Employees should help governing forces understand the status quo by authentically and transparently engaging in feedback sessions and communicating their needs and concerns. This not only helps to assess the current situation and its effectiveness but also fosters relationship building of the leader-follower dyad. Additionally, employees should actively seek clarity in their roles and responsibilities when faced with ambiguity or other difficulties when adapting to a change in leadership strategy to help optimize the workplace environment and feel more satisfied.

Lastly, policymakers should support companies in implementing training programs and research into leadership forms and trust-building practices by providing funding and resources. This will continually enhance the understanding and implementation of these concepts in various organizational contexts.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

This study offers several important contributions to the existing literature on the interplay between shared leadership and job satisfaction. However, we also faced methodological challenges resulting in certain limitations we will thoroughly discuss. Lastly, we propose directions for future research to gain an even better understanding of the complex dynamics of contemporary leadership forms, trust in the workplace and other predictors to enhance employee job satisfaction.

Strengths

The first notable contribution of this research paper is the introduction of the novel concept of top-down trust as a moderator in the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction. To the authors' knowledge, the general concept of organizational trust has not yet been investigated as a moderator in this relationship. The more specific focus on top-down trust allows for a more nuanced understanding, especially important given the results of our post hoc analysis where only top-down trust – the leaders' trust towards the employee – significantly impacted job satisfaction, compared to mutual, dyadic trust and employees' trust towards their leader. Furthermore, the data obtained from both leaders and employees and the consequent ability to better grasp the nuanced workings of organizational trust in predicting job satisfaction in a shared leadership setting, follow a much-needed and called-for dyadic sampling approach (Muterera et al., 2018), which provides a more comprehensive and holistic view of workplace dynamics. Additionally, we used robust and reliable measures for our variables which enhances the validity of our findings. Moreover, the sampling across various industries and sectors allows for a broader generalizability, at least across organizational settings in the Netherlands. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the findings of this study offered a range of practical implications to several stakeholders that have the potential to improve individual, organizational, and even industrial outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research

Regarding limitations, one clear and significant obstacle to the value of this research was the small sample size, which may limit the statistical power and thus struggle to confidently contribute valid and reliable knowledge to the scientific community. Future research should, therefore, aim for a larger participant pool to ensure sufficient statistical power, which will help to either confirm, refine or disregard the findings and implications of this study. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of our study restricts the ability to draw

causal inferences, as it fails to establish temporal precedence in the complex interplay of shared leadership, top-down trust, and job satisfaction. Longitudinal studies are therefore recommended to detect changes of the dynamics between our variables over time. These would be most effective when measuring trust, satisfaction, and shared leadership ratings before and during a transition from hierarchical leadership models to more contemporary, shared leadership settings.

The next limitation of our study is a product of our sampling techniques of convenience and snowball sampling, as these techniques are prone to common biases, such as the volunteer bias which threatens external validity (Toerien et al., 2009). Hence, one way to counteract this limitation, although difficult to apply in social sciences (Zhao, 2020), might be to implement a different sampling approach in future research, such as random sampling. To further strengthen the generalizability, future research should also be conducted in more diverse cultural and organizational contexts, extending over the cultural context of the Netherlands. Furthermore, given the challenges in detecting true effects due to the small sample size, future research should not only replicate the significant influence of top-down trust in its interaction with shared leadership on job satisfaction observed in this study but also investigate whether it is exclusively top-down trust, over dyadic and/or employee trust, that has a significant impact on this association. Additionally, exploring more potential moderators and mediators could offer deeper insights into the complex workings of shared leadership on job satisfaction. Whereas the research about moderators between shared leadership and job satisfaction remains scarce, one particularly promising variable that may be worth exploring is cultural orientation, specifically, the concept of power distance (Hofstede, 1980), which may regulate the effectiveness of the association between contemporary leadership styles and job satisfaction through both organizational culture and individual culture orientations (Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001). On the other hand, literature on

variables mediating the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction is more plentiful. However, one concept worth exploring further in the context of the variables assessed in this study is role ambiguity, which, as elaborated in the theoretical discussion section, might explain the observed negative interaction effect of shared leadership and top-down trust on job satisfaction due to excessive trust and a lack of guidance.

Conclusion

This cross-sectional study, aimed at gaining valuable insights into the complex dynamics of shared leadership settings to predict employee job satisfaction by factoring in the moderating role of top-down trust – the leaders' trust towards their employee. Our research, considering perspectives from both leaders and employees, confirms that shared leadership is positively associated with job satisfaction. We also found that top-down trust is a significant predictor for employee satisfaction and moderates the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction, although contrary to our hypothesis, this interaction was negative. Moreover, our post hoc analysis revealed that leaders' trust towards their employees – top-down trust – seems to be a concept to be paid particular attention to, as neither mutual trust between employer or employee, nor the employees' trust towards their leader predicted employee job satisfaction. Thus, the novel concept of top-down trust, as described and discussed in this paper, offers a new perspective for understanding how leadership practices influence employee outcomes. Future research should aim for larger samples and ideally longitudinal (qualitative) designs to overcome the discussed methodological obstacles and better understand the causal dynamics of these variables in the workplace. Furthermore, exploring the role of other potential mediators and moderators in the interplay between shared leadership and job satisfaction, such as that of cultural orientation or role ambiguity may also be insightful. In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights and implications about the complex dynamics between shared leadership, top-down trust, and job

satisfaction in the workplace, although to be treated with caution due to our methodological constraints. By understanding these relationships, organizations and their leaders can better foster environments that support employee well-being and organizational success.

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Appendix A: Translation Measures

Scale 1: Translated Scale Measuring Shared Leadership (Hoch et al., 2013)

De volgende vragen gaan over uw leidinggevende.

Geef alstublieft aan in hoeverre u het eens bent met de stellingen.

[1 Helemaal mee oneens; 7 Helemaal mee eens; 4 niet mee eens, niet mee oneens]

1. Mijn leidinggevende geeft een duidelijk beeld van waar ons team voor staat.
2. Mijn leidinggevende is gedreven door hogere doelen of idealen.
3. Mijn leidinggevende laat waardering zien voor mijn inspanningen.
4. Mijn leidinggevende moedigt mij aan om ideeën te heroverwegen die nooit eerder in twijfel getrokken zijn.
5. Mijn leidinggevende maakt gebruik van veel verschillende perspectieven om problemen op te lossen .
6. Mijn leidinggevende moedigt mij aan om meer te doen dan alleen dat wat van mij verwacht wordt (bijv. extra inspanning).
7. Mijn leidinggevende moedigt mij aan om zelf oplossingen te zoeken voor mijn problemen in het werk.
8. Mijn leidinggevende dringt aan om zelf verantwoordelijkheid voor het werk te nemen.
9. Mijn leidinggevende moedigt mij aan om nieuwe dingen te leren.
10. Mijn leidinggevende moedigt mij aan om mezelf een schouderklopje te geven wanneer ik een nieuwe uitdaging heb behaald.
11. Mijn leidinggevende moedigt mij aan om samen te werken met andere teamleden.
12. Mijn leidinggevende adviseert mij om mijn werk af te stemmen met anderen, die onderdeel uitmaken van het team.

13. Mijn leidinggevende dringt erop aan om als een team samen te werken met anderen, die deel uitmaken van het team.
14. Mijn leidinggevende verwacht dat de samenwerking met de andere teamleden goed verloopt.
15. Mijn leidinggevende besluit samen met mij wat mijn prestatiedoelen zijn.
16. Mijn leidinggevende en ik werken samen om te kiezen wat mijn prestatiedoelen moeten zijn.
17. Mijn leidinggevende en ik gaan samen om de tafel om overeenstemming te krijgen over mijn prestatiedoelen.
18. Mijn leidinggevende werkt met mij samen om mijn prestatiedoelen te ontwikkelen.

Scale 2: Translated Scale Measuring Job Satisfaction (Judge et al., 1998; Brayfield & Rothe, 1951)

De volgende vragen gaan over uw werk.

Geef alstublieft aan in hoeverre u het eens bent met de stellingen.

[1 Helemaal mee oneens; 7 Helemaal mee eens; 4 niet mee eens, niet mee oneens]

Als u specifiek aan uw huidige baan denkt, in welke mate bent u het eens met de onderstaande stellingen?

1. Ik heb echt plezier in mijn werk.
2. Ik vind mijn baan leuker dan de gemiddelde persoon zijn/haar baan vindt.
3. De meeste dagen ben ik enthousiast over mijn baan.
4. Ik voel me best wel tevreden met mijn baan.

Scale 3: Translated Scale Measuring Top-down Trust (De Jong & Elfring, 2010)

De volgende vragen gaan over uw leidinggevende.

Geef alstublieft aan in hoeverre u het eens bent met de stellingen.

[1 Helemaal mee oneens; 7 Helemaal mee eens; 4 niet mee eens, niet mee oneens]

1. Ik kan op mijn leidinggevende rekenen voor hulp als ik problemen heb met mijn werk.
2. Ik heb er vertrouwen in dat mijn leidinggevende rekening met mijn belangen houdt bij het nemen van werk-gerelateerde beslissingen.
3. Ik heb er vertrouwen in dat mijn leidinggevende mij op de hoogte brengt van onderwerpen die belangrijk zijn voor mijn werk.
4. Ik reken erop dat mijn leidinggevende zich aan zijn/haar woord houdt.
5. Ik vertrouw mijn leidinggevende.

Appendix B: Regression Assumptions

Figure 1

Linearity Assumption Check

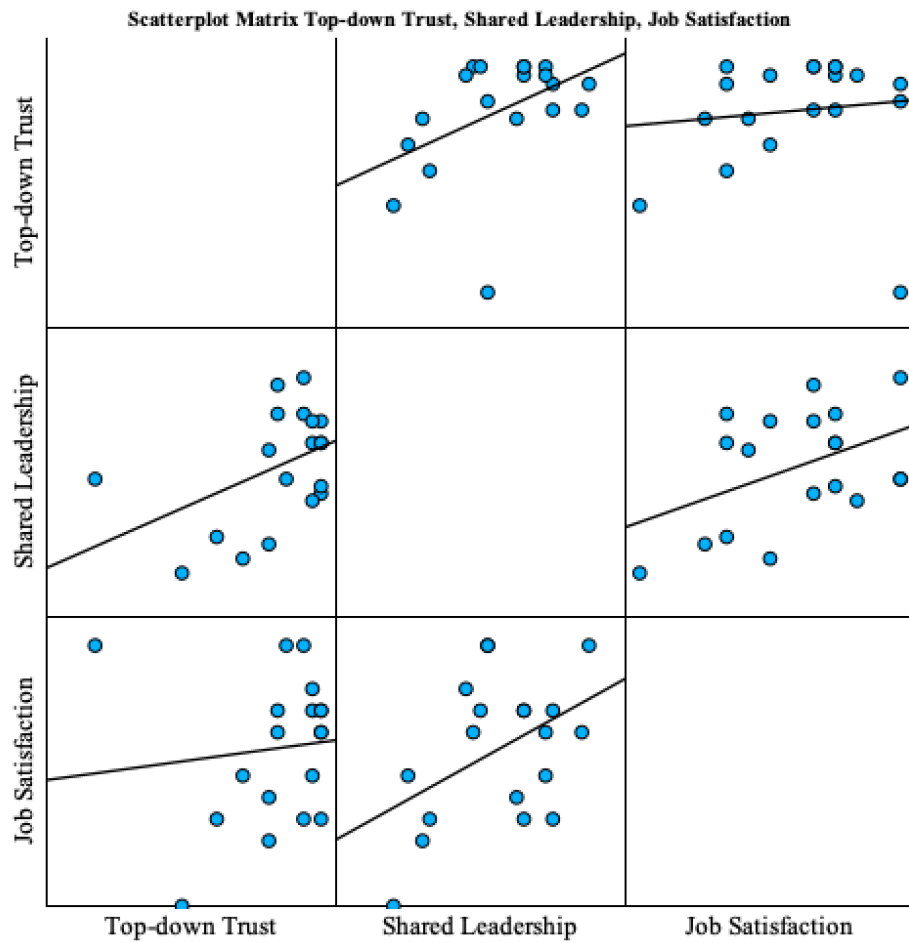


Figure 2

Histogram Indicating Normality of Standardized Residuals

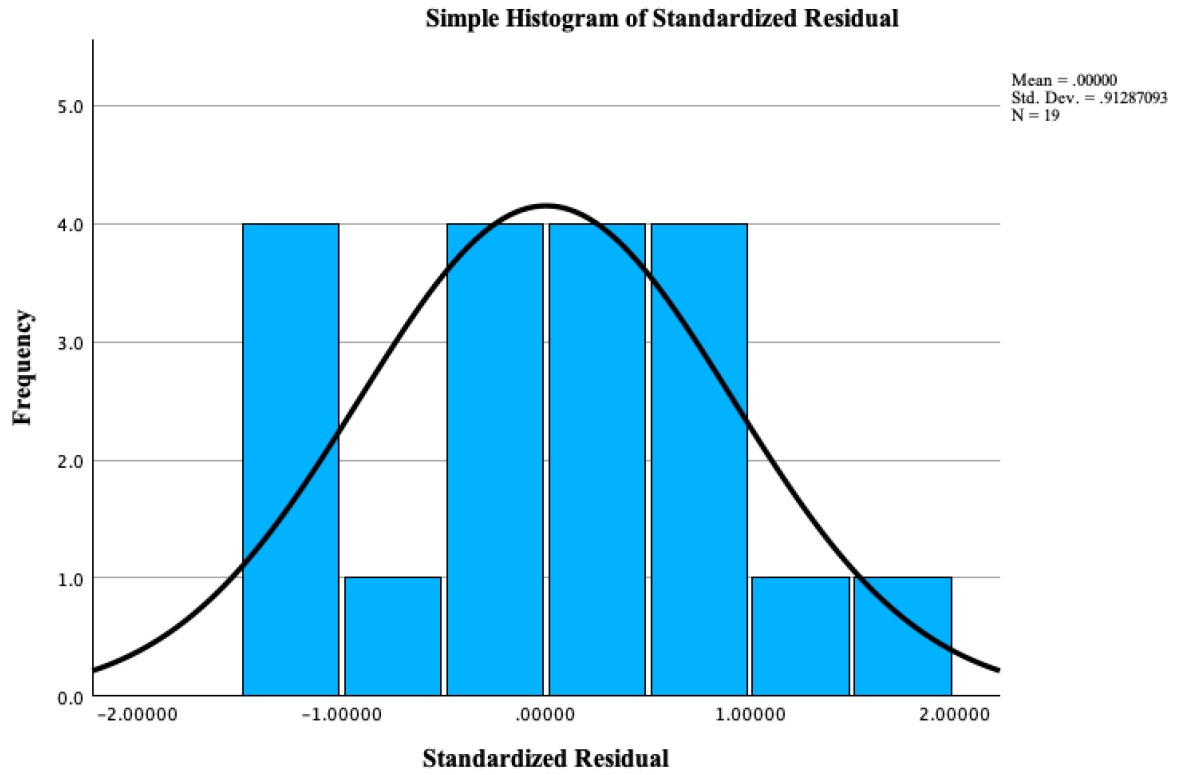
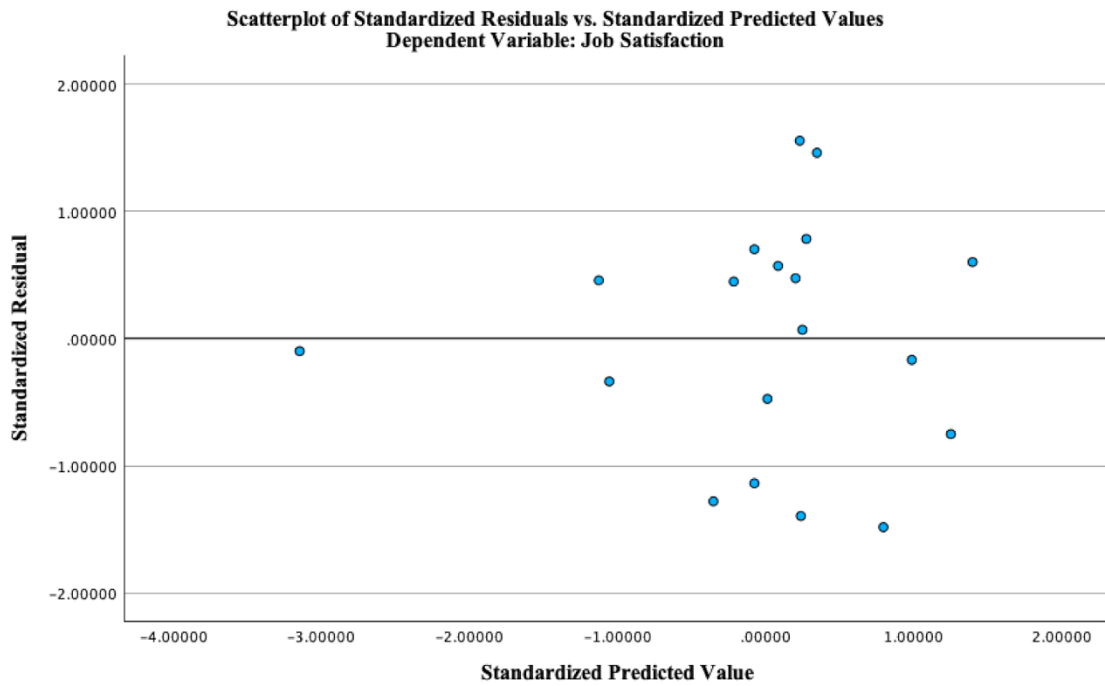


Figure 3

Scatterplot Indicating Homoscedasticity



Appendix C: Regression Outputs

Table 2

Results of PROCESS Moderation Analysis: Shared Leadership and Top-down Trust on Job Satisfaction

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	-34.24	14.00	-2.45	.03	-64.08	-4.40
Shared Leadership	7.39	2.57	2.87	.01	1.91	12.88
Top-down Trust	6.10	2.43	2.51	.02	.92	11.28
Interaction	-1.12	.44	-2.54	.02	-2.06	-.18

Table 3

Results of PROCESS Moderation Analysis: Shared Leadership and Employee Trust on Job Satisfaction

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	13.31	9.71	1.37	.191	-7.39	34.01
Shared Leadership	-2.45	1.88	-1.30	.213	-6.45	1.56
Employee Trust	-1.17	1.59	-.74	.474	-4.55	2.22
Interaction	.385	.30	1.27	.224	-.26	1.03