

**Employee resistance towards leader manipulation tactic: A race and gender
difference view**

by

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Abstract

Leaders have manipulated employees who share a similar race and gender identity with the leader. Yet, extant literature has directed little attention towards employee perceptions of a leader who may manipulate employees of a different race and gender from the leader. Leaders seem to face tensions when manipulating diverse employees. Drawing from a political influence and social identity perspective, the study examines employee resistance towards a manipulative leader if a leader has a different race and gender identity from employees. Data was collected on academic employee perceptions of a possibly manipulative direct manager during the transformation of two public higher education institutions in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The study indicates that employees are less likely to show resistance against a perceived manipulative leader based on race and gender differences.

Keywords: Employee resistance, political influence; social identity difference; race; gender; leader manipulation

Introduction

Leaders have used a manipulation tactic to influence employees with a similar race and gender identity to the leader in organisational politics research. Yet, little is known about a leader who manipulates employees who have a different race and gender identity from the leader (Hochwater, Rosen, Jordan, Ferris, Ejaz & Maher, 2020; Nkomo, Bell, Roberts, Joshi & Thatcher, 2019). The study examines whether an employee perceives a leader as manipulative if the leader has a different race identity from the employees. In addition, employees may perceive a leader as manipulative if a leader has a different gender identity from employees. Employees may show resistance against a manipulative leader if the leader has a different race and gender identity from the employees. Hence, the research question of the study is: “*What is the influence of race and gender differences on leader manipulation of employees?*”

The study draws on political influence theory to examine a leader who influences employees based on race and gender differences from the leader. Political influence theory assumes that workplaces are made up of irrational leaders and employees. Diverse leaders and employees’ interests compete for access to limited resources at work. These assumptions highlight the conditions for leaders to manipulate employees and access to scarce resources. Since contributors and outcomes of political influence are known, Munyon, Summers, Thompson & Ferris (2015), building on the work of Treadway, Ferris, Douglas, Hochwarter, Kacmar, and Ammeter (2004), have called for extending the theory. Charles and Nkomo (2012) have suggested the examination of race and gender as intervening aspects of organisational politics, while Hochwarter et al. (2020), Ferris, Ellen, McAllister, and Maher (2019), as well as Frieder, Ferris, Perrewé, Wihler, and Brooks (2019) have proposed diversity as an intervening aspect of political influence. The study examines a leader who may use manipulation to influence employee resistance.

A leader who manipulates employee resistance is likely to be affected by differences with employees based on race and gender. In one instance in North America, the murder of an African American male citizen by a white American policeman ignited race tensions and calls to transform the public police force (del Rio, Eligon & Hassan, 2021; Ely & Thomas, 2020; Yo-Jud Cheng & Groysberg, 2020). In another instance in Europe, a black African Credit Sousse chief executive officer resigned from his employment term, after possible race difference tensions (Kelly, 2020). Both instances highlight tensions that may arise when a leader influences diverse employees regarding aspects of race in private and public institutions.

The presidents resigned after being perceived as antisemitic at ivy league universities in Pennsylvania and a top university in Boston, Massachusetts recently. Both presidents happened to be women (Saul, Blinder, Hartocollis & Farrel, 2023; Schuessler, Hartocollis, Levenson & Blinder, 2024). Both cases highlight tensions about leaders who may manipulate employees based on gender. Leaders can be competent, and capable, and may require manipulation skill for different employees in the wake of transformation tensions, for better career and reputation outcomes in countries like South Africa.

When the former deputy vice chancellor of a university in Cape Town showed the intention to promote the Dean of Health Sciences to a higher position for transformation purposes, the Dean resisted such a promotion and committed suicide eventually (Davies, 2022; Nhlapo, Fikeni, Gobodo-Madikizela & Walaza, 2020). Meanwhile, at a university in KwaZulu-Natal, tensions have arisen between Zulu employees and Indian employees over the possible handling of appointment and promotion decisions. Hence, race and gender identity differences appear to

ignite social tensions for leaders who may manipulate employees in the wake of the transformation of higher education, since the dawn of South Africa's democracy.

Problem statement

A leader exercises manipulation to influence employees with a similar race and gender identity to the leader. Yet, little is known about a leader who may manipulate employees with a different race and gender identity from the leader (Ferris et al., 2019; Nkomo, et al., 2019). Extant literature has under-researched whether employees may perceive a leader as manipulative if the leader has a different race and gender identity from employees. The employee is more likely to show resistance towards a perceived manipulative leader if the leader has a different race and gender identity from the employee.

The study examines whether race and gender differences influence leader manipulation of employees for diversity, inclusion, and representation. The employee is more likely to show resistance against a leader who is viewed as manipulating employees if the leader has a different race and gender identity from employees. *“What is the influence of race and gender differences on leader manipulation of employees?”*

Literature review

The study adopts political influence as a theoretical lens to examine leaders who may manipulate diverse employees. Political influence theory draws from mid-range organisational politics, which argues that organisations are made of irrational leaders who use power to influence employees in political arenas. In turn, organisational politics theory emerges from the classic organisational theory (Ferris & Judge, 1991; Mintzberg, 1985; Weber, 1947) which purports that organisations are made up of rational leaders who create bureaucratic systems for conducting work tasks. Situated in respective organisational and organisational politics theories, political influence entry-level theory presents a set of assumptions about organisations.

Political influence theory

Political influence theory assumes that power politics always exist in every organisation. The theory further assumes that organisations have irrational individuals with differing interests and compete for access to limited resources. The theoretical assumptions are foundational to leaders who use manipulation to influence employees with differing interests, for personal gain (Ferris & Judge, 1991). Alternatively, leaders can collaborate with employees with diverse interests to benefit the organisation. While leaders have used political skill to influence employees who share a similar social identity to the leader, extant literature has under researched leaders who exercise political skill to influence employees with a different social identity from the leader.

Social identity

Social identity literature has undergone an early stream of research on similarities between members of in-groups and out-groups. In particular, the focus of early research examined inter-group processes and conflict between members (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). A later body of research on social identity examined the formation of the self-concept of social group members. In addition, differences between characteristics of in-group members and outgroups were

examined along the intergroup conflict dimension. Social categorisation, concerning about clustering group members, and social comparison, which entailed comparing groups, highlighted intra-group and inter-group similarities and differences between members (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Nkomo & Cox, 1996). For example, leaders gave higher marks to employees during selection interviews, higher performance appraisal scores, and promotions, if the employee was similar to the leader in certain aspects, for example gender.

A recent stream of research determines whether there were differences between members of the same in-group or out-group, respectively, along with intra-group member differences. For example, Brewer (1991) argues that members face tensions about whether to maintain personal identity within a social group which might lead to ostracisation and marginalisation. Alternatively, members should assimilate into social groups' norms and expectations to fit in and for a sense of belonging (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Hogg, 2001; McAllister, Ellen III, & Ferris, 2018; Pan, Gruber & Binder, 2019). Social identity matters when members interact, and is likely to affect a leader who manipulates employees who are different from the leader, based on race and gender. Employees are more likely to show resistance against a manipulative leader.

A social-political perspective draws from literature on organisational politics and social influence. With regards to the social dimension, a leader and employee interact in the presence of social aspects of identity. In the case of politics, the leader may manipulate employees to meet the organisational goals. Social-political perspective has been used to investigate innovation, performance, and leadership (Grosser, Obstfeld, Choi, Woehler, Lopez-Kidwell, Lablanca & Borgantti, 2018; McAllister et al., 2018; Munyon, Frieder, Satomino, Carnes, Bolander & Ferris, 2020).

Race and gender difference

The social identity differences between a leader and employees can assume race and gender, differences. Race and gender identity categories are highlighted during the transformation for diversity (Arnett, 2023; Fitzsimmons, Ozbilgin, Thomas, & Nkomo, 2023; Nkomo, 2021; Powell & Butterfield, 2015). Since leaders and employees have multiple social identities exemplified by different gender identities (Arnett, 2023; Brown, 2019; Hogg, 2001; Nkomo & Hobbler, 2014). Women who operate from positions of less power than men, due to fewer networks, allies, and mentors may form social groups for a sense of belonging and identity. In addition, women are likely to be more susceptible to social influence than males can provide unique insights about leader and employee interactions in the workplace.

Differences refer to aspects of profession and belonging. Employees and leaders may highlight tensions of differences of race and gender for multiculturalism, diversity, and uniqueness for belonging and satisfaction. Both the leader and employee develop respective personal identities for social identity. Personal identities of the leader and employee may be different based on aspects of gender (Ely, 1994; Haslam, Gaffney, Hogg, Rast & Steffens, 2022; Hogg, 2000; Nkomo & Hobbler, 2014; Ferris & Mitchell, 1987; Izraeli, 1987; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001; Ragins & Sundrom, 1989). Since there are power dynamics between a leader and an employee, a salient social group of leaders could shape employees' perceptions of a leader's social group.

Leader manipulation and employee resistance influenced by social identity

Employees may show resistance against a perceived manipulative leader if a leader has a different social identity from the employee. Perceptions formed about whether the leader is using insidious ways may depend on whether the actions of the leader appear genuine (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas & Ammeter, 2004; Arnett, 2023; Blickle, Kuckelhaus, Kranefeld, Schutte, Genau, Gansen-Amman & Wihler, 2020; Frieder et al., 2019; Good & Schwepker, 2022; Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams & Thatcher, 2007). Employees may perceive a leader who uses manipulation as serving personal interests at the expense of the organisation's benefit. Yet, social identity difference aspects are likely to shape employee perceptions of manipulation from a leader, especially during transformation to become more inclusive and diverse. Furthermore, the differences between the social identity of the leader and employees are likely to influence the choice of manipulation. Hence, the study proposes the following hypothesis one (HO1):

HO1: Social identity moderates the relationship between leader manipulation and employee resistance

Race difference in employee resistance towards leader manipulation

As a response to manipulation, employees may resist manipulation from the leader, if the leader has a different race identity from the employee. Based on race differences, tensions may arise between leaders and employees. Employee perceptions of the leader's race can create misunderstandings (Ferris, et al., 2019; Nkomo, 2021; Wayne & Kacmar, 1991; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). Employee resistance can be ignoring leader instructions, refusing to undertake job tasks, and showing defiance against leadership orders. A leader is empowered to influence employees because of authority and position. Employees adapt responses based on perceptions and expectations from a manipulative leader. Employee reactions to manipulation from leaders are foundational to navigating tensions during the transformation for diversity. The hypothesis two (HO2) is:

HO2: The employee may show resistance against a manipulative leader if the employee has a different race from the leader

Gender difference in employee resistance towards leader manipulation

As a response to manipulation, employees may resist manipulation from the leader, if the leader has a different gender from the employee. Based on gender differences, tensions may arise between leaders and employees. The perceptions of the employee about the gender identity of the leader can create misunderstandings or working together (Ferris, et al., 2019; Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska & Shaw, 2007; Higgins, Judge & Ferris, 2003; Jones, 1964; Nkomo, 2021). Employee resistance can be ignoring leader instructions, refusing to undertake job tasks, and showing defiance against leadership orders. While the leader has authority, employees adapt responses based on the perceptions of the leader who manipulates employees. Employee reactions to manipulation from leaders are foundational to navigating tensions during the transformation for diversity. The hypothesis two (HO3) is:

HO3: The employee may show resistance against a manipulative leader if the employee has a different gender from the leader

Methods

The study adopts a positivist, cross-sectional, nomothetic approach to conducting the research. I located myself in a positivist paradigm to conduct the research. I selected a nomothetic explanatory cross-sectional research design to conduct the study. The nomothetic explanatory and deductive research design was appropriate to test the levels of variance between the employee-perceived leader's political manipulation as an independent variable, as well as employee resistance as a dependent variable. The nomothetic explanatory research design I chose was deductive in nature, with academic employees as respondents from selected public higher education institutions located in South Africa. A deductive research approach was appropriate for the study where respective political influence and social identity theories were well-developed, rather than nascent (Ferris & Judge, 2001; Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016). Therefore, underpinning a cross-sectional study to test the proposed leader manipulation and employee resistance conceptual model was a deductive approach.

Research sites

I chose two public higher education institutions as research sites in the seaside province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Both research sites had employees who were categorised according to race and gender social groups during apartheid. At the dawn of democracy, both research sites that were divided along race and gender identity aspects underwent mergers to integrate employees and leaders which caused social interaction tensions due to the transformation to become diverse and inclusive (Department of higher education and training, 2022). As a researcher employed at one of the research sites of the study, I have witnessed transformation tensions between leaders and employees based on race and gender identity dimensions. The research sites faced transformation tensions where leaders could be perceived as purging academic employees who were different from leaders on race group, in preference for, race groups similar to leaders raising concerns about whether leaders could manipulate employees (Johnson, 2016; Mail and guardian, 2017). For instance, at one research site, many senior black executives resigned in reaction to the appointment of a white vice-chancellor, which was perceived as anti-transformation and political.

The level of analysis for the study is the organisation made up of two respective public higher education institutions located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The first public higher education institution was a traditional university that underwent a merger to integrate institutions that were categorised according to race lines (Higher education institution two, 2022). Higher education institution one was a research-intensive traditional university with five campuses and several schools and colleges across two cities in KwaZulu-Natal province. The institution has faced transformation challenges between leaders and academic employees.

The second public higher education institution is a university of technology with a primary focus on vocational learning. The institutions underwent a merger to integrate two institutions that were formally divided according to race lines amid transformation tensions (Higher education institution two, 2022). Higher education institution two was a university of technology made up of six campuses as well as various faculties and departments across two cities in KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. Both institutions were sites for collecting data.

Census sample

I used a census sampling technique to invite respondents to participate in an online survey. The G-power software recommended about 160 sample size for a target population of 2025 targeted respondents. The response rate for online surveys usually yielded between 10% to 20% of the target population. The online survey expected about 160 responses which was about 10% of the 2025 target population from both higher education institutions and research sites. The sample was categorised by race and gender of academic employees and dyadic relationships with direct managers. Dyadic relationships were based on academic employee perceptions of an immediate manager in a higher education institution.

Sample profile

Based on the target population the sample comprised 204 (n=204) responses. There was a small number of white people ($f = 24$, $\% = 13.6$) with few coloured people ($f = 8$, $\% = 4.5$) in the sample (n=204) as indicated in Table 4.2 below. The categories of race of African, Coloured, Indian, and white people were drawn from the South African constitution (Constitution, 1996). Female employees ($f = 96$, $\% = 54.5$) were more than half of the respondents while male employees ($f = 80$, $\% = 45.4$) were less than fifty percent of the total (n=204). The number of employees who chose “other” and “prefer not to say” for gender identity was small. Most respondents identified as South African ($f = 178$, $\% = 87.3$) with few non-South Africans ($f = 26$, $\% = 12.7$) in the dataset.

The employee-perceived direct manager results showed a high number of Africans ($f = 97$, $\% = 54.4$), fewer Indian people ($f = 61$, $\% = 34.2$), a small number of white people ($f = 20$, $\% = 11.2$), while there were no coloured people ($f = 0$, $\% = 0$). There were few coloured people in management positions in the higher education sector in the KwaZulu-Natal region. The number of perceived direct managers identified as “other” and “prefer not to say” for gender was small and excluded. Most perceived direct managers were males ($f = 119$, $\% = 66.8$) while females were fewer ($f = 59$, $\% = 33.1$) in the dataset. Most respondents were South African ($f = 178$, $\% = 87.2$) and non-South Africans ($f = 26$, $\% = 12.8$) in the dataset.

Measure

The questionnaire entailed personal and demographic information of respondents and direct managers respectively to reflect the dyadic relationship. Employee personal information was collected on race and gender. Examples of questionnaire statements were “*Please choose ONE response to indicate your gender*”. An option of “*prefer not to say*” and “*other*” were added to gender statements, to be considerate of respondents who chose not to state their gender identity. If a respondent chose “other”, respondents were given the option to specify the meaning of “other” if they so wished. In addition, since the study probed the dyadic relationship between respondents and direct managers, respondents answered a questionnaire about perceptions of direct manager’s personal and demographic information. Questionnaire statement examples were “*Please choose ONE response to indicate your direct manager’s race*”, and options given aligned to race categories based on the South African census survey.

Relevant questionnaire statements were based on respondent perceptions of a direct manager's (Census, 2022; Evans & Mathur, 2018; Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris & Zivnuska, 2011; Messick, 1995) gender and race. Sensitive statements were avoided taking into account the unique research setting of South Africa and its divisive past. The questionnaire had three sections employee-perceived social identity difference, employee-perceived manipulation and employee resistance. Existing measuring scales were used and validated in previous research and the study as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Measure

Variable	Examples of questionnaire statements
Employee-perceived social identity	I feel that I do not have much to offer to my social group I often feel that my social group is not worthy I belong to a social group that is different from my direct manager's social group My direct manager respects my social group
Employee-perceived leader manipulation	My direct manager makes me feel important My direct manager acts humble before making a request to me My direct manager acts in a friendly manner before asking me for something
Employee resistance	I notify another manager if my direct manager takes advantage of me I stop working with my direct manager if my direct manager takes advantage of me. I engage in work slowdown if my direct manager takes advantage of me.

Employee-perceived social identity

Employee-perceived social identity was measured using an adapted social identity questionnaire developed by Brown and Jacoby-Senghor (2021) building on Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) measure. The questionnaire had 19 statements including, "*I feel that I do not have much to offer to my social group*" and "*I often feel that my social group is not worthy*". Further questionnaire statements examples were, "*I belong to a social group that is different from my direct manager's social group*" and "*My direct manager respects my social group*". A Likert scale with a range of *strongly agree* (one) to *strongly disagree* (five) was used.

Dyadic race and gender differences

Race differences were indicated in black, white, Indian and coloured terms for the respondent and immediate manager (Census, 2022; Constitution, 1993). Gender differences were indicated

by male, female, prefer not to say, and other. The differences were between the employee and direct manager.

Employee-perceived leader manipulation and employee resistance

The *manipulation* tactic comprised 11 questionnaire statements. The questionnaire statement examples were, “*My direct manager acts humble before making a request to me*”, “*My direct manager makes me feel good before making a request*”, and “*My direct manager waits until I am in a receptive mood before making a request*” (Good & Schwepker, 2020; Yukl, Seifert & Chavez, 2008). A Likert scale was used with a range of *strongly disagree* (one) to *strongly agree* (five), followed by collaboration influence tactic. In addition, The resistance section of the questionnaire had a total of seven statements. Examples of questionnaire statements were, “*I stop working with my direct manager if my direct manager takes advantage of me*” and, “*I engage in work slowdown if my direct manager takes advantage of me*”, as well as “*My direct manager distorts reasons for making a request to me*” (Fedor, Masyln, Farmer & Bettenhausen, 2008).

I used a questionnaire to collect data from respondents which was susceptible to common method bias. I took steps to mitigate common method biases usually associated with cross-sectional studies. The constructs and questionnaire statements that were closely related were placed together, to mitigate potential respondent mood changes and response styles. Lindell and Whitney (2001) suggest that the demographic and behavioural statements be placed at the end of the questionnaire. Yet, the study covered demographic information at the beginning of the questionnaire to establish demographic information of employees and the dyadic relationship with a direct manager, central to the social identity of respondents, as stated in the introduction of the questionnaire.

I reviewed responses to check for patterns of extreme responses associated with common method biases. As an employee at one of the research sites, I was aware of potential biases that could arise. Yet, I was trained about mechanisms to avoid method biases during the pre-doctoral training I attended and I explained the steps and tests I systematically undertook to minimise potential biases guided by previous studies (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003). To address alternative explanations of relationships between constructs of the study, I included control variables drawn from previous studies, and based on my knowledge of the research setting as well as for the robustness of the results, The study controlled for job title, employment type, years of experience, age, and job position variables which are reflected in the questionnaire.

Data collection

The purpose of the study was explained on the invitation and ethical protocols of anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to the respondents of the study. Respondents were informed about the study on the email invitation and requested to give consent to complete the survey and click on the Google form questionnaire link if they so wished. The cover page of the online survey emphasised ethical protocols and requested to give consent to participate in the study, if they so wished, without reprisal. Respondents who gave consent completed the online survey. Respondents who did not give consent on the first page were directed to the end of the questionnaire. Therefore, the uncompleted questionnaire would be returned blank and reduce the response rate of the study.

To mitigate potential low response rates associated with online surveys, I sent bi-weekly reminder invitations to respondents through institutional pinboards, and emails to respective research sites, in compliance with gatekeeper's letter permissions. I observed that the reminder invitations were useful in increasing the response rate when compared to a week in that I did not resend an invitation to potential respondents (Evans & Marthur, 2018). I extended the data collection period from the initial planned eight weeks to sixteen weeks to accommodate more responses. Given the size of the target population, I used a census sample approach to reach many respondents who were academic employees and reported to direct managers, located across several campuses at both research sites of the study. Overall, I received 205 responses after sixteen weeks of data collection from 30 September 2022 to 01 February 2023. Hence, 204 responses were received finally, in preparation for checking common method bias.

I conducted a study among individual academic employees as units of analysis from a junior lecturer, lecturer, senior lecturer, associate director, associate professor, director, and full professor. The unit of analysis referred to a matter under study (Babbie, 2021). Therefore, the unit of analysis was the respective individual academic employees comprising dyadic relationships with direct managers at both higher education institution research sites. The academic employees who could complete the measuring instrument if they so wish, reported to a direct manager from academic leaders, deputy head of department or school, the head of department or school, deputy dean of faculty and college, dean of faculty and college, deputy vice-chancellors, vice-chancellor and chair of the council.

The respondents were invited to participate in the study in the introduction section of the questionnaire. The purpose of the research was clarified as "*conducting research on employee perceptions of influence from a leader at your organisation*". Informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity ethics protocols were explained as "*Kindly note participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participate*", in preparation for personal information.

Results

The effect of social identity on employee resistance and leader manipulation

Table 2: Social identity and leader manipulation and employee resistance scores

Variable	Employee-perceived leader manipulation LLCI	P-value	employee resistance ULCI
Employee-perceived social identity	-.2304	.0970	.1933

To test hypothesis two (HO1), the X represented employee-perceived leader *manipulation* (X) as an independent variable, Y denoted *employee resistance* (Y) as a dependent variable, and employee-perceived social identity (W) as a moderator variable on SPSS as illustrated in Table 2. A Hayes macro plug test on SPSS was conducted to determine the moderating effect of employee-perceived social identity and employee-perceived leader *manipulation* ($X*W*Z$) as well as *employee resistance* (Y).

The Hayes process macro plug (Hayes, 2017) was used to analyse the moderating effect of employee-perceived social identity on leader manipulation ($X*Z$) and *employee resistance* (Y). In this regard, p-values, LLCI, and ULCI (LLCI = -.2304, $p = .0970$, ULCI = .1933) scores were obtained. The moderation results indicated no significant effect of social identity on employee perceptions of a leader who *manipulates* employees. The moderation results suggested that social identity was unlikely to influence employee resistance towards a leader who *manipulates* employees.

Influence of race difference on leader manipulation and employee resistance

Table 3: Race difference in employee resistance towards leader manipulation scores

Variable	Leader manipulation		Employee resistance
	LLCI	p-value	ULCI
Race difference	-.3359	.5226	.1718

** 0.05 p-value

To test hypothesis two (HO2), the X represented employee-perceived leader *manipulation* (X) as an independent variable, Y denoted *employee resistance* (Y) as a dependent variable, and race (W) as a moderator variable on SPSS as illustrated in Table 3. A Hayes macro plug test on SPSS was conducted to determine the moderating effect of race difference and employee-perceived leader *manipulation* ($X*W*Z$) as well as *employee resistance* (Y).

The Hayes process macro plug was used to analyse the moderating effect of race difference on employee-perceived leader manipulation ($X*Z$) and *employee resistance* (Y). In this regard, p-values, LLCI, and ULCI scores were obtained. The moderation results indicated no significant effect on employee perceptions of a leader who *manipulates* employees along race difference (LLCI = -.3359; $p = .5226$, ULCI = .1718). The moderation results suggested that the race difference was unlikely to influence employee perceptions of a leader who *manipulates* employees.

The influence of gender difference on the employee-perceived manipulative leader, employee resistance

To test hypothesis two (HO2), the X represented leader *manipulation* (X) as an independent variable, Y denoted *employee resistance* (Y) as a dependent variable, and the gender

differences (W) as a moderator variable. A Hayes macro plug test on SPSS was conducted to determine the moderating effect of gender differences on leader *manipulation* (X*W*Z) and *employee resistance* (Y).

Table 4: Gender differences and employee resistance towards leader manipulation scores

Variable	Leader manipulation	p-value	Employee resistance
	LLCI		ULCI
Gender differences	-.5973	.8373	.7354

** 0.05 p-value

The Hayes process macro plug was used to analyse the moderating effect of gender difference on leader manipulation (X*Z) and *employee resistance* (Y). In this regard, p-values, LLCI, and ULCI scores were obtained. The moderation results indicated no significant effect of gender differences on employee perceptions of a leader who *manipulates* (LLCI = -.4649, p = .8093, ULCI = .5937). The moderation results suggested that gender differences were unlikely to influence employee perceptions of a leader who *manipulates* employees.

Discussion

The role of race, and gender differences on employee resistance towards leader manipulation

The social identity between a leader and an employee is less likely to influence an employee to perceive a leader who uses manipulation. The finding contradicts the work of Nkomo et al. (2019) on the role of race and gender differences in excluding and including social groups in leader manipulation of employees in workplace politics (Fitzsimmons, et al., 2023). The observation suggests that race and gender differences may contribute to the initial stages of transformation compared to the latter stages. The view raises further questions about a leader who ingratiates employees as a tactic of manipulation to promote acceptance of transformation and diversity in the workplace. Therefore, there is an emerging need to examine whether transformation reaches a stage of lesser necessity for demographic identity considerations in the workplace. In this regard, employees could associate manipulation with the character of the leader rather than the social identity aspects of race and gender.

Employees are unlikely to attribute a leader to manipulation tactics based on social identity and race and gender differences between the leader and employees. Employees probably justify excessive compliments from a leader based on a leader's sincerity (Davy, 2008; Ferris et al., 2019; Good & Schwepker, 2022). In addition, a leader may be skilled in using manipulation to hide personal intentions by giving excessive compliments to employees. Therefore, the leader can support employees excessively as a means to achieve transformation goals and outcomes for personal gain of reporting requirements.

The manipulation observation further gives insights into perceptions of leader manipulation to manipulate employees who are different from the leader. For example, a white male employee might perceive a black male leader who gives excessive compliments as sincere, alternatively, as a tactic to advance a transformation agenda using the black leader. The interpretation of the compliment and outcome resides in the employee in a dyadic relationship with the leader. Therefore, the significance of a leader's use of manipulation is highlighted in pursuit of and realisation of transformation progress outcomes.

The study finds that social identity and race as well as gender differences play less of a role during social interactions between a leader and employees, therefore, theoretically, the study advances the understanding of political influence theory and social identity which suggests that there are diverse groups with differing interests which creates grounds for manipulation within and between group members. Even though legislation has made inroads and raised questions about social identity differences in the workplace, there are more questions about whether legislative requirements (Wocke & Sutherland, 2008) are necessary if social identity and race as well as gender differences play a less significant role among leaders who influence employees at work.

The social-political perspective further broadens insights about the transformation of workplaces where leaders are less likely to use interpersonal influence to ingratiate employees based on race and gender differences within legislative frameworks. The assertion further implies that legal requirements may have made a difference in bringing diverse groups together in the workplace. The statement underscores the role of legislative requirements such as affirmative action, triple black economic empowerment, and employment equity legislation in entrenching transformation in South Africa and beyond (Wocke & Sutherland, 2008). The legislation has implications for leaders who appear humble in front of diverse employees and authenticity thereof, as a mechanism to foster change in the workplace. In addition, the duration of legislative requirements might indicate that progressively race and gender differences become more nuanced, rather than foregrounded between leaders and employees.

The transformation progression and competence may alleviate more than the race and gender identity of the leader and employees. South Africa's implementation of a programme of bringing skills from the rest of the continent may have met the race and gender requirement of transformation, alternatively, African nationals may have taken advantage of the provision for personal gain (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019; du Pres, Simmonds & Verhoef, 2016). Black people from the African continent who brought scarce skills in the early stages of democratic South Africa could have integrated with diverse race and gender groups. The observations suggest that leaders can focus on skills transfer between white people and black people as a means to build local talent that can meet the needs of the industry. While concerns have arisen about race discrimination, the study finds that race discrimination in South Africa contributes less to the political influence between a leader and an employee.

The study claims that the skill and competence of the leader take precedence over the race and gender difference. The claims suggest that leaders should pay less attention to race when implementing transformation. Legislation protects all official local languages as equal before the law in South Africa. The observation may further show that assimilation is where lines become blurred between identities in the workplace (Ferris et al., 2018; Hochwarter et al., 2020). The integration may further highlight whether social classes indicated by professions that require a certain level of education contribute to perceptions of leader manipulation as is the case in higher education. Senior-level positions in the organisation pay more than lower-

level professions that are underpaid and competitive with local nationalities. The nationality questions raise further questions about the role of social class in resisting leader influence at work.

The nature of race plays out in workplaces that are changing as society transforms. In South Africa, black people are the majority while in the West black people are a minority. The study observes that race identity begins to diminish over time during the transformation and foregrounding of professional values (Blickle et al., 2020). The observation further underscores the role of political influence in changing workplaces and boundary conditions as well as foundations for minimising identity difference changes and foregrounding similarity in the workplace.

Employees are less likely to show resistance against a manipulative leader if leaders belong to a different social group from employees based on race and gender. The assertion suggests that employees may avoid pushing for a change of status quo of manipulation from a leader, as a leader possesses more power and authority over employees (Blickle et al., 2020; Drory & Beaty, 1991; Furst & Cable, 2008; Henderson, 2017; Liao, Liden, Liu & Wu, 2019). In addition, individual employees were likely to be reluctant to ignore a leader's instructions, refuse the leader's requests, and overlook actions towards the leader. Instead, employees could show resistance through employee formations such as trade unions to address manipulative leaders who pursue personal gains at the expense of an organisation.

Employees who look beyond the identity differences with a leader, instead, focus on the nature of manipulation, rather than performing at a minimal level as a form of protest at work. Identity differences probably decrease, in the wake of low resistance from employees against manipulative leaders throughout transformation (Ferris, Judge & Rowland, 1994; Sun, Burke, Chen, Tan, Zhang & Hou, 2021). Further questions are raised about team perceptions of manipulative leaders during the transformation of an organisation. For example, if a leader is perceived as manipulative for personal gain, employees may congregate as a team to address the matter rather than as individuals.

Limitations and future research

While employees' differences are compared according to race and gender categories (Ferris & Judge, 1991; Hochwarter et al., 2020; Nkomo et al., 2019), the study established that the differences facilitated employee reactions and views about diverse groups with unique interests for access to organisational resources. In demonstrating difference as an intervening aspect, the study extends the understanding of the intersection between the use of leader manipulation and employee resistance. Even though the study adopted a cross-sectional design study using a singular data source that addressed the research question, this may be viewed as a manner of limitation. Furthermore, the study collected data from a singular side of a dyadic relationship, which may be viewed as a limitation, despite the study focusing on employee perceptions of a direct manager. Yet, the cross-sectional method was most appropriate for conducting the research and answering the research question on the influence of differences of race, gender, on leader manipulation. Future studies could probe the assumptions about race and gender similarity during transformation drawing from feminist and intersectional perspectives to further understand the role of gender in the wake of tension created by wokism and other movements with implications for organisational politics around the world. The research could assist leaders in better-managing organisations that are transforming and becoming more diverse, inclusive, and equitable.

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