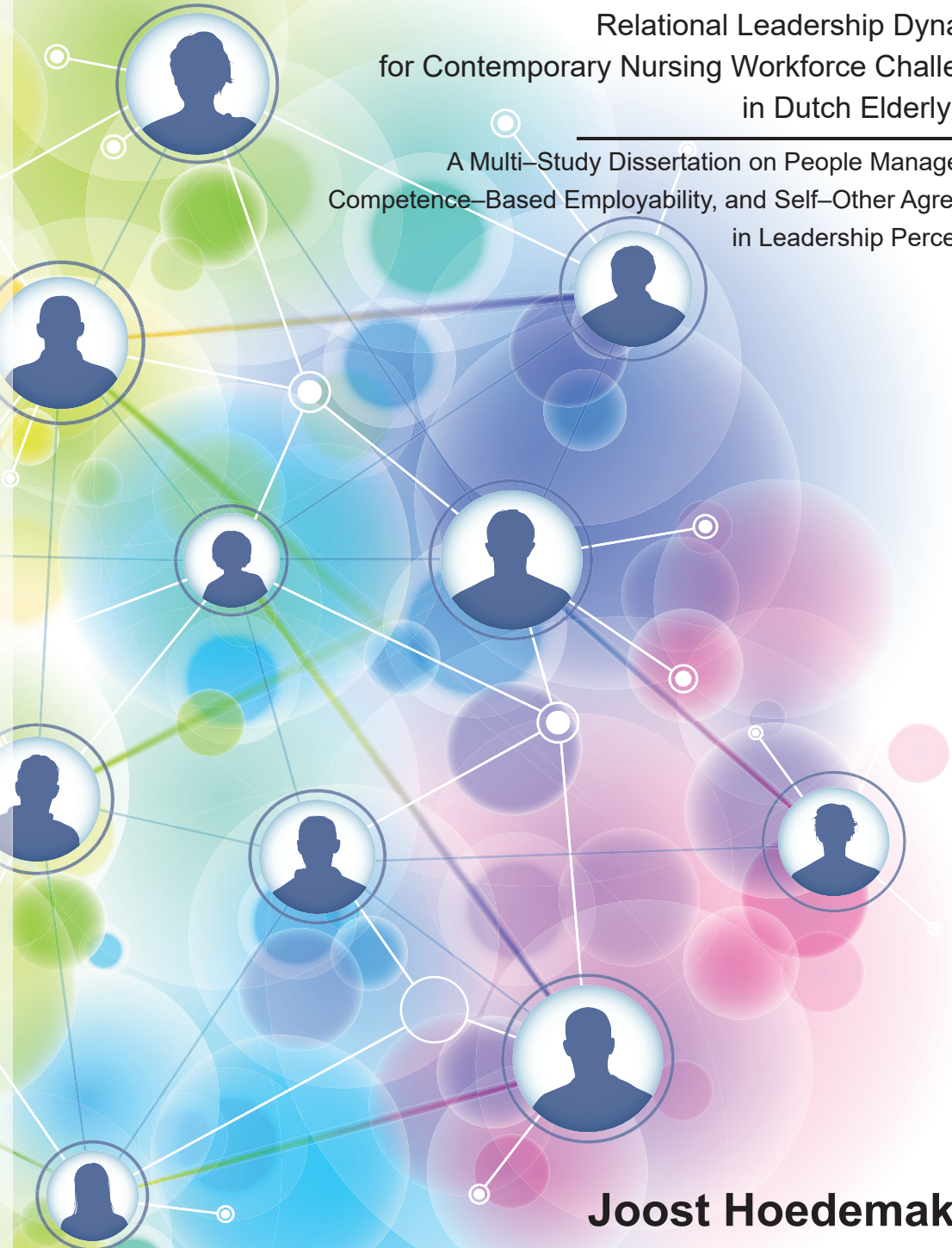
LET'S STICK TOGETHER

Relational Leadership Dynamics
for Contemporary Nursing Workforce Challenges
in Dutch Elderly Care

A Multi–Study Dissertation on People Management,
Competence–Based Employability, and Self–Other Agreement
in Leadership Perceptions



Joost Hoedemakers

Thesis Propositions

Let's Stick Together

Relational Leadership Dynamics for Contemporary Nursing Workforce Challenges in Dutch Elderly Care

Joost Hoedemakers

Heerlen, 26 June 2026

1. Without a high-quality leader–follower relationship, employability interventions remain only marginally effective. *(Chapter 2 of this dissertation)*.

2. Relational leadership alone does not improve nurses' employability; only leadership that results in perceived support and competence development opportunities has a meaningful impact. *(Chapter 3 of this dissertation)*.

3. HR practices alone do not enhance nurses' competence-based employability unless supervisors actively foster psychological safety through relational leadership. *(Chapter 4 of this dissertation)*.

4. Self–other agreement on relational leadership reflects relational and demographic dynamics as much as actual leadership behaviour. *(Chapter 5 of this dissertation)*.

5. Research that focuses primarily on leaders tells us more about individuals than about leadership itself. *(Inspired by Uhl-Bien, 2006; Clarke, 2018)*.

6. Leadership is not possessed by individuals, but constructed within relationships.

7. Methodological diversity is not a limitation but a prerequisite for advancing relational leadership research.

8. Conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic was only possible through the vision of senior management and researchers' ongoing investment in organizational support and relationships.

9. Healthcare organizations that lack visible supervisors undermine the relational foundations necessary to support nurses.

10. Completing a PhD requires not only academic expertise, but above all resilience, adaptability, and continuous learning.

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Let's Stick Together
Relational Leadership Dynamics for Contemporary Nursing Workforce Challenges in Dutch Elderly Care

A Multi–Study Dissertation on People Management,
Competence–Based Employability, and Self–Other Agreement in Leadership Perceptions

PROEFSCHRIFT

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aan de Open Universiteit
op gezag van de rector magnificus
prof. dr. Th.J. Bastiaens
ten overstaan van een door het
College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie
in het openbaar te verdedigen

op vrijdag 26 juni 2026 te Heerlen
om 16.00 uur precies

door
Johannus Franciscus Maria Hoedemakers
geboren op 22 mei 1980 te Sittard

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This PhD was shaped by more than academic work

It was shaped by all of us

To Madeleine, Julie, Maxim, and to Mom and Dad

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Introduction

"If we know all too much about our leaders, we know far too little about leadership"

(Burns, 1978, p. 1)

1.1 RESEARCH CONTEXT

Declining fertility and mortality rates have contributed to a global demographic transition toward rapid population ageing, posing major challenges for healthcare systems worldwide (United Nations, 2024). As ageing populations increasingly experience multimorbidity (Mindlis & Federman, 2025)—including age-related chronic diseases such as diabetes and mental and neurocognitive disorders (e.g., dementia; Maresova et al., 2019)—this shift has resulted in substantially more complex healthcare demands (Jones & Dolsten, 2024). These developments have particularly profound implications for elderly care, including nursing homes and home care services. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted preparedness gaps in many healthcare systems to meet the evolving health needs of ageing populations, revealing critical weaknesses in infrastructure, resources, and—most notably—human resources (The Lancet Healthy Longevity, 2021). These rising demands are compounded by a global nursing workforce experiencing high workloads, stress, burnout, and increasing demographic diversity (Smiley et al., 2025), while persistent workforce shortages continue to intensify in both absolute numbers and required competencies (World Health Organization, 2025).

Moreover, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital health technologies in healthcare (e.g., telemedicine), fundamentally transforming organizations (Isidori et al., 2022). This transformation has altered the nature of healthcare work, with significant implications for nursing roles, thereby underscoring the urgency of investing in nurses' competencies through professional development (Bornhaupt & Mulder, 2025). It has also reshaped the leadership demands placed on middle managers, including supervisors, who increasingly need to adopt relational forms of leadership in which soft skills—such as empathy—play a crucial role (Cummings et al., 2018; Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022).

Taken together, these demographic, organizational, and technological developments highlight the urgent need to strengthen the healthcare workforce, particularly nurses and their supervisors in elderly care. This requires securing sufficient staffing and ensuring the development of the competencies needed to meet the health needs of ageing populations—both of which are essential for sustaining progress toward the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (World Health Organization, 2025).

To address these challenges and accelerate progress toward the health-related SDGs, the World Health Organization launched its *Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030* in 2016 (World Health Organization, 2016). This strategy aims to optimize the healthcare workforce through adequate investment in multiple priority areas, including workforce availability and quality. It stresses the importance of not focusing solely on workforce numbers, but also of motivating and empowering healthcare workers—including nurses—by promoting decent working conditions. Moreover, the

strategy underscores the critical role of professional development opportunities in enhancing healthcare workers' competencies, thereby enabling them to deliver quality care that meets population health needs. This aligns with the *Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery 2021–2025* (World Health Organization, 2021), which highlights the urgency of investing in education, jobs, and leadership.

Building on these international efforts, the European Commission (2022) introduced the European Care Strategy—applicable to EU Member States such as the Netherlands—which calls for national action plans to ensure high-quality, affordable, and accessible formal long-term care (LTC) services. In this dissertation, the term "elderly care" refers specifically to nursing homes and home care services within this broader LTC domain. LTC is defined as "a range of services and assistance for people who, as a result of mental and/or physical frailty and/or disability over an extended period of time, depend on help with daily living activities and/or are in need of some permanent nursing care" (European Commission & Social Protection Committee, 2014, p. 11). The strategy emphasizes the need to improve working conditions in the care sector, including elderly care, by addressing poor work environments, limited career prospects, and gender-related inequalities. Given that nurses constitute one of the most critical resources for ensuring resilient healthcare systems (Halder, 2018), it is therefore paramount to invest in the development and maintenance of their skills, resilience (OECD & ILO, 2022), and leadership (World Health Organization, 2025). This includes improving access to development opportunities and supporting work-life balance (European Commission, 2022), thereby enabling them to cope with the major challenges facing healthcare.

These policy-driven efforts highlight the importance of strengthening the conditions under which individuals—including nurses—can navigate their careers through the effective use and development of their competencies, as captured by the concept of competence-based employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). From a Social Exchange Theory perspective (SET; Blau, 1964), employability can be understood as a shared responsibility of employees and their organizations (Veld et al., 2015). In this regard, supervisors' leadership plays a critical role in facilitating the conditions that enable nurses to obtain or maintain employment (e.g., Van der Heijden & Spurk, 2019).

1.2 THEORETICAL RELEVANCE

Given the growing importance of employability and supervisors' leadership, scholars have increasingly examined the conditions under which individuals can navigate their careers through the effective use and development of their competencies. Accordingly, strengthening competence-based employability has become a central topic within human resource management (HRM) research (Fugate et al., 2021). In contemporary

nursing—characterized by high job demands, persistent workforce shortages (World Health Organization, 2025), and increasing digitalization (Isidori et al., 2022)—competence-based employability is increasingly considered important for coping with work-related challenges (Stoffers, 2023) and for maintaining and enhancing the quality of care (Van de Voort et al., 2025). At a broader level, it also aligns with healthcare system objectives, including progress toward health-related SDGs (World Health Organization, 2025).

From an HRM perspective, both employers and employees contribute to the enhancement of employability (Fugate et al., 2021). Specifically, employers can deploy various HR initiatives—including formal and informal learning opportunities (Froehlich et al., 2014) as well as career development practices such as mentoring, career counseling, and job rotation (Rodrigues et al., 2020)—to support employees' professional development. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), supervisors can be seen as key actors in translating these HR initiatives into day-to-day practice through supportive people management (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Consistent with this people management role, supervisors act as HR implementers who use their leadership behaviors (e.g., transformational leadership; Burns, 1978) to enact HR initiatives and make them visible to employees. Through these behaviors and day-to-day interactions, they shape employees' perceptions of support and empowerment, which may foster employability (e.g., Xie et al., 2019), while also serving as HR sensegivers (Nishii & Paluch, 2018).

Responding to calls to better capture the dynamic and contextual nature of employability development (Akkermans et al., 2024), it is important to consider how leadership—particularly supervisors' leadership—is conceptualized within organizational contexts, given the central role of supervisors in enacting HR practices. Yukl (2006) defined leadership as "a process whereby intentional influence is exerted over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization" (p. 3). This definition highlights the pivotal role of relationships in leadership, which forms a key premise of relational leadership theory (Clarke, 2018). As articulated by Uhl-Bien (2006), this theory conceptualizes leadership as "a social influence process through which emergent coordination (e.g., evolving order) and change (e.g., new approaches, values, attitudes, behaviors and ideologies) are constructed and produced" (p. 654). Building on this relational perspective, Clarke (2018) emphasizes that leadership unfolds through relationships among organizational members—such as between supervisors and nurses—and that the quality of these relationships depends on the behaviors and characteristics of both parties. In this dissertation, we operationalize this relational view of leadership using Carifio's (2010) multidimensional conceptualization of relational leadership, which emphasizes inclusion, empowerment, caring, ethicality, and vision.

In this regard, Carifio (2010) characterizes relational leadership as grounded in inclusion, empowerment, caring, ethicality, and having a vision. Inclusion entails that relational leaders actively recognize and value the contributions of all members (Komives et al., 1998), whereas empowerment involves providing opportunities that enable individuals to further develop and apply their capabilities (Honold, 1997). These interpersonal processes are complemented by caring, reflected in leaders' demonstrations of empathy during interactions (Regan & Brooks, 1995), and by ethicality, which pertains to acting with integrity and conveying a positive, constructive energy (Komives et al., 1998). Finally, having a vision involves articulating a clear direction and establishing concrete objectives that encourage others to commit to realizing them (Regan & Brooks, 1995).

These relational processes are particularly salient in nursing contexts. Work by Leclerc et al. (2022) suggests that relational leadership is associated with positive nursing outcomes, such as skilled communication and meaningful recognition. This aligns with evidence synthesized by Cummings et al. (2018), who reported that relationally oriented leadership behaviors—compared to task-focused leadership behaviors (e.g., transactional leadership; Burns, 1978)—are linked to favorable work-related outcomes, including job satisfaction (e.g., Neubert et al., 2016), well-being (e.g., Van der Heijden et al., 2017), and intention to stay (e.g., Roche et al., 2015).

However, despite this evidence on relational processes in supervisor–nurse relationships—particularly within nursing contexts—the link between supervisors' leadership and nurses' employability remains insufficiently understood. From an employer–employee perspective, it is therefore essential to deepen our understanding of how supervisors' leadership functions as an antecedent of employees' employability, and through which mechanisms this relationship unfolds across work contexts (Chughtai, 2019; Wang et al., 2019). Moreover, there is limited insight into how relational leadership dynamics emerge within supervisor–nurse relationships and how these dynamics subsequently shape employees' employability, particularly in healthcare settings, including elderly care.

This employer–employee perspective is also reflected in people management, which encompasses supervisors' supportive leadership and the enactment of HR practices (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021). Evidence suggests that such people management behaviors may contribute to employee outcomes, including employability, for instance in healthcare settings (Van Leeuwen, 2022). Nevertheless, it remains unclear how people management—through supervisors' relational leadership and the implementation of HR practices—fosters nurses' competence-based employability within the under-researched context of elderly care (Knies et al., 2017).

Finally, although relationally oriented leadership behaviors positively influence work-related outcomes in nursing contexts (Cummings et al., 2018), scholars have argued that

such effects may depend on the extent to which supervisors' and nurses' perceptions of leadership align. Atwater and Yammarino (1992, 1997) emphasized that self–other agreement (SOA) regarding leadership perceptions—rather than actual leadership behaviors—can shape how leadership is interpreted and, in turn, relates to leadership outcomes. Despite extensive research on SOA in general leadership contexts (for an overview, see Fleenor et al., 2010), SOA regarding relational leadership remains unexplored. In particular, how relational leadership dynamics emerge and are perceived within supervisor–nurse relationships remain underexamined, leaving an important research gap.

In sum, despite extensive evidence regarding the positive outcomes of relationally oriented leadership in nursing contexts (Cummings et al., 2018), important research gaps remain. At the same time, employability development is increasingly framed as context-dependent rather than purely individual, underscoring the value of contextualized research (Akkermans et al., 2024). First, the literature on supervisors' leadership as an antecedent of employees' employability remains fragmented, with limited systematic evidence on the mechanisms (e.g., mediators and moderators) and contextual conditions under which this relationship unfolds across work settings. Second, it remains insufficiently understood how supervisors' relational leadership (e.g., Uhl-Bien, 2006)—conceptualized through Carifio's (2010) multidimensional framework—relates to nurses' competence-based employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) in Dutch elderly care, and through which exchange mechanisms this relationship unfolds (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Third, limited insight exists into how these relational leadership dynamics are embedded in supervisors' broader people management, including the enactment of HR practices (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Fourth, it remains unclear how demographic (dis)similarities (i.e., age and gender) within supervisor–nurse dyads shape perceptions of supervisors' relational leadership and the extent to which these perceptions align (i.e., self–other agreement). Accordingly, this dissertation seeks to advance theoretical understanding while simultaneously providing practical insights into how relational leadership dynamics within supervisor–nurse relationships emerge, and how these dynamics subsequently shape nurses' competence-based employability in elderly care. Building on these aims and gaps, the following section outlines the research questions that guide this dissertation.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation is guided by the following overarching research question (RQ):

RQ. *How do relational leadership dynamics emerge within supervisor–nurse relationships, and how do these dynamics subsequently shape nurses' competence-based employability in Dutch elderly care?*

The main research question (RQ) is examined through five subquestions (SQ1–5), each focusing on a different aspect of these relational leadership dynamics:

SQ1. *How does supervisors' leadership influence employees' employability, and through which contexts and mechanisms do this influence occur?* (Chapter 2)

SQ2. *How does supervisors' relational leadership influence nurses' competence-based employability*? (Chapter 3)

SQ3. *How do perceived supervisory support and perceived opportunities for competence development operate within the relational leadership-competence-based employability relationship?* (Chapter 3)

SQ4. *How does people management foster nurses' competence-based employability in elderly care organizations?* (Chapter 4)

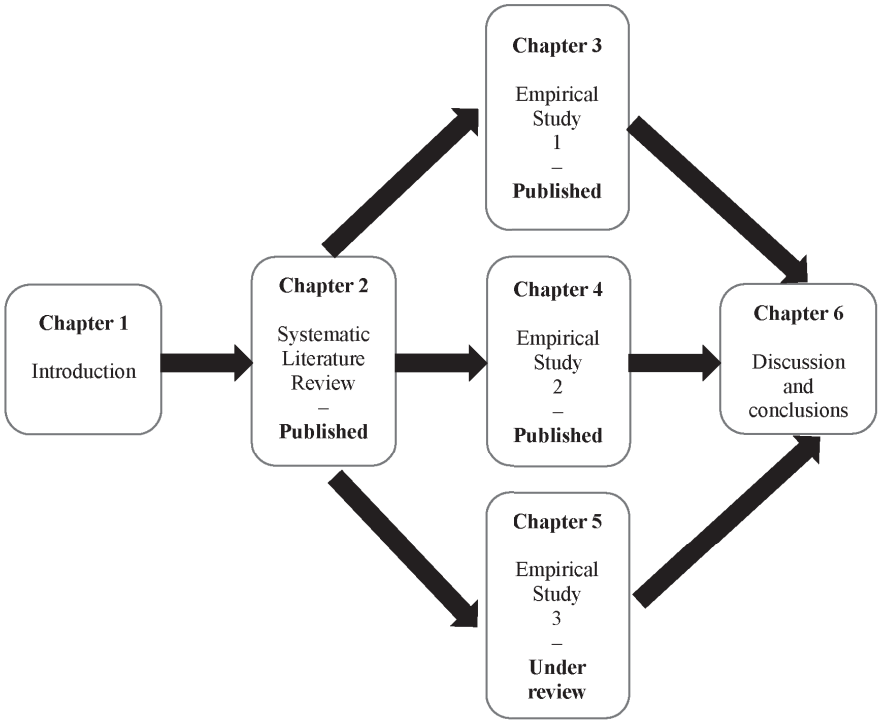
SQ5. *How do age and gender within supervisor–nurse dyads influence Self–Other Agreement (SOA) in perceptions of supervisors' relational leadership in elderly care?* (Chapter 5)

These subquestions are examined across four studies that form the empirical and conceptual core of this dissertation (SQ2 and SQ3 are addressed within the same empirical study reported in Chapter 3). The next section outlines the purpose, design, and interrelations of these studies.

1.4 DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

Following the introduction in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 presents a systematic literature review that provides the conceptual foundation for the empirical chapters and has been published in *Frontiers in Psychology*. Chapter 3 reports the first empirical study, a two-wave panel study, while Chapter 4 presents the second empirical study, a qualitative, interpretive, exploratory investigation using multimethod data collection; these studies have been published in *Career Development International* and *Personnel Review*, respectively. Chapter 5 reports the final empirical study, employing a multi-source ratings design, and the corresponding paper is currently under review at a peer-reviewed journal. Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation by integrating the insights from Chapters 2 through 5, discussing theoretical and practical implications, reflecting on study limitations, and outlining directions for future research. Figure 1.1 illustrates the overall structure of the dissertation.

Figure 1.1
The overall structure of the dissertation



Study 1 — The Influence of Leadership on Employees' Employability: A Bibliometric Analysis, Systematic Literature Review, and Research Agenda (Chapter 2)

To inform policy, practice, and research in human resource management (HRM) studies—particularly in the domain of employability—Study 1 presents a systematic literature review supported by a bibliometric analysis, providing the foundational baseline and rationale for this dissertation. The review posits that employability manifests within dyadic employer–employee relationships. From this perspective, a deeper understanding of the leadership–employability relationship is essential (Fugate et al., 2021), particularly in contexts where talent is scarce, reskilling employees is critical, and investments in employability have become indispensable (Stoffers, 2023). A literature review focusing on supervisors' leadership as an antecedent of employees' employability is therefore both timely and necessary (Chughtai, 2019; Wang et al., 2019). To this end, a preliminary bibliometric analysis was conducted, including performance analysis and co-occurrence analysis with science mapping. This was followed by a systematic literature review conducted according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021) to address the research question (Counsell, 1997).

Study 2 — "Let's stick together": Toward a Serial Mediation Model about the Impact of Relational Leadership on Workers' Employability (Chapter 3)

Building on the conceptual directions emerging from Study 1—particularly the limited attention to healthcare contexts, including Dutch elderly care—Study 2 investigates mechanisms underlying the impact of supervisors' relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006) on nurses' competence-based employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). This study employs a two-wave panel design to test a serial mediation model in which perceived supervisory support and perceived opportunities for competence development operate as sequential mediators. In doing so, it responds to calls to further examine employer–employee interdependence, for instance within leadership processes (Fugate et al., 2021).

Study 2 is also informed by Cummings et al.'s (2018) systematic review, which demonstrated that, compared to task-focused leadership behavior (e.g., transactional leadership; Burns, 1978), relationally oriented leadership behavior is linked to favorable work-related outcomes for the nursing workforce, including job satisfaction (e.g., Neubert et al., 2016), well-being (e.g., Van der Heijden et al., 2017), as well as intention to stay (e.g., Roche et al., 2015), and retention intentions (e.g., Leclerc et al., 2022). Despite this extensive evidence, it remains unknown how supervisors' relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006), including Carifio's (2010) multidimensional conceptualization, contributes to nurses' competence-based employability in elderly care, indicating a clear gap in the literature.

Study 3 — Relational Leadership and Development Opportunities: Enhancing Nurses' Employability in Dutch Elderly Care (Chapter 4)

Study 3 builds on the findings from Study 2 by adopting a people management perspective (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). It recognizes that both supervisors—through their leadership (e.g., transformational leadership; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014)—and HR professionals—through the design and provision of development opportunities (e.g., formal and informal learning opportunities; Froehlich et al., 2014)—are critical stakeholders in advancing employees' employability (Fugate et al., 2021).

This emphasis is also reflected in the growing academic and practical interest in leadership (Figueroa et al., 2019) and human resource management (HRM) (Kabene et al., 2006) within healthcare contexts. People management entails supervisors' supportive leadership and their implementation of HR practices for the employees they supervise (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021). These practices, in turn, influence employees' attitudes, behaviors, and both individual and organizational performance (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), including outcomes such as nurses' employability (Van Leeuwen et al., 2024).

Although previous research has demonstrated the value of relational leadership in nursing contexts (e.g., Hoedemakers et al., 2025), the mechanisms through which multiple dimensions of relational leadership (Carifio, 2010) foster nurses' competence-based employability in elderly care remain unclear. Responding to calls from Fugate et al. (2021) and Van Harten et al. (2020) to examine employer–employee interdependence, Study 3 specifically investigates how people management—including supervisors' relational leadership and the implementation of HR practices—shapes nurses' competence-based employability, while explicitly assessing the underlying mechanisms in the under-researched context of elderly care (Knies et al., 2018).

Study 4 — Self–Other Agreement for Relational Leadership: The Role of Age and Gender (Dis)Similarities in Perceptions of Supervisor–Subordinate Dyads (Chapter 5)

Study 4 complements the other empirical studies by examining Self–Other Agreement (SOA) in perceptions of supervisors' relational leadership. Atwater and Yammarino (1997) argue that leadership outcomes—such as employability—are shaped not only by leadership behavior itself, but also by SOA in leadership perceptions, defined as "the degree of agreement or congruence between a leader's self-ratings and the ratings of usually coworkers such as superiors, peers and subordinates" (Fleenor et al., 2010, p. 1005).

Drawing on the concept of relational demography (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989)—which concerns "the comparative demographic characteristics of members of dyads or groups who are in a position to engage in regular interactions" (p. 403), including supervisor–nurse dyads—prior research has shown that demographic characteristics such as age (e.g., Daldrop et al., 2025) and gender (e.g., Braddy et al., 2020) affect SOA in leadership perceptions. However, the role of age and gender (dis)similarities within supervisor–nurse dyads as predictors of SOA for supervisors' relational leadership has not yet been empirically examined. Study 4 responds to calls for research on SOA predictors (Fleenor et al., 2010), with particular emphasis on gender as a key determinant of leadership perceptions (Braddy et al., 2020).

1.5 DISSEMINATION OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapters 2 through 5 include papers that have been accepted for and presented at, multiple scientific conferences, as well as at several meetings or symposia at the Open Universiteit, including the annual PhD Day and group meetings with colleagues from the Faculty of Management, Department of Organization.

The systematic literature review, reported in Chapter 2, was presented during the PhD Day held on June 11, 2022, at the Open Universiteit, Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

The first empirical study, reported in Chapter 3, was presented at The XII International Workshop on Human Resource Management, held on October 20–21, 2022, at the Universidad de Cádiz, Cádiz, Spain, and at the third MORSE Conference, held on October 23–25, 2023, at Maastricht University, Maastricht, the Netherlands. The second empirical study, reported in Chapter 4, was presented at the Learning and Innovation in Resilient Systems (LIRS) symposium, held on November 7, 2024, at the Open Universiteit, Heerlen, the Netherlands, as well as at The XIII International Workshop on Human Resource Management, held on September 19–20, 2024, at the Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Sevilla, Spain. Additionally, this study was presented online at the International Business Administration Conference, Agile Resilience: Navigating Uncertainty in a Dynamic World, held on October 1–2, 2025, hosted by Parahyangan Catholic University, Bandung, Indonesia. The final empirical study, reported in Chapter 5, was presented during a workshop, held on January 16, 2026, at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, Sittard, the Netherlands. Finally, the findings of the included studies have been disseminated through professional activities, including my work as an HRM consultant, my role as a lecturer at both the Open Universiteit and Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, and my positions as a researcher at the Research Centre for Employability and the Neimed Socioeconomic Knowledge Center. In addition, the results have been shared through open-access publications and professional outreach on LinkedIn.

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2

Study 1 — The Influence of Leadership on Employees' Employability: A Bibliometric Analysis, Systematic Literature Review, and Research Agenda

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The systematic literature review reported in Chapter 2 was presented during the PhD Day held on June 11, 2022, at the Open Universiteit in Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

Abstract

Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners have recently begun treating employability—an individual's ability to possess and continuously adjust and acquire up-to-date competencies, flexibility, adaptability, and openness to change—as crucial to enabling employees to respond to ubiquitous and rapid changes in organizations (e.g., changing tasks and work-related processes). Research into ways to enhance employability, particularly through supervisors' leadership, which, for example, facilitates training and competence development, has thus grown in popularity. The exploratory quantitative bibliometric analysis reported in this paper corroborates employability's recent rise in popularity. A systematic literature review on supervisors' leadership as an antecedent of employability is both evident and timely. This review thus addresses the question of whether a supervisor's leadership influences employees' employability, and in which contexts and through which mechanisms it does so. To address this question, we developed a research protocol that began by identifying initial search terms, deciding on inclusion and exclusion criteria, and searching research databases to identify peer-reviewed published English and Dutch empirical articles. The authors independently identified 134 articles, which were included for full-text analysis, of which 10 met inclusion criteria. The authors also independently used the forward and backward snowballing technique, which identified 7 additional articles, resulting in 17 articles in total. Most of these articles identified positive relationships among several conceptualizations of supervisors' leadership and employees' employability, such as transformational leadership and leader–member exchange, and to a lesser extent, servant leadership and perceived supervisor support. This review suggests that such relationships occur across work contexts, such as educational, SMEs, healthcare, and several other industries, and these contexts also vary geographically. These relationships are largely explained using a social exchange perspective, which means that the positive influence of leadership on employability is itself influenced by a two-way social exchange relationship between supervisors and employees. The quality of the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers thus determines the extent to which leaders offer valuable resources such as training and feedback, which subsequently enhance employees' employability. This review demonstrates that investing in supervisors' leadership is a valuable HRM strategy to foster employability, and it identifies practical implications that inform policy and practice and sets an agenda for future employability research.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Employability, defined as the ability to adjust and acquire up-to-date competencies, and being flexible, adaptable, and open to change (Van Harten et al., 2020; Van der Heijden et al., 2018), has recently attracted policymakers', researchers', and practitioners' attention (OECD, 2019). Employability allows employees to respond to contemporary ubiquitous and rapid changes in organizational environments (e.g., changing tasks and work-related processes; Bozionelos et al., 2016), thereby changing job demands. Worldwide megatrends cause various rapid changes, such as ongoing technological innovation (Baptista et al., 2020; Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022), hyper-competition (D'Aveni, 1994), aging of the populations, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Rudolph et al., 2020). For example, COVID-19 influenced work-related processes, and employees subsequently had to cope with work-family challenges because work became increasingly organized around working from home, telecommuting, and virtual teamwork (Rudolph et al., 2020). Employability helps employees cope with rapidly changing job demands for two reasons. First, employable employees are, by definition, more skilled and flexible than those who are less employable; they acclimatize quickly to, and even thrive in, new environments (Van der Heijden et al., 2018). Second, employable employees are less likely to develop feelings of job insecurity and panic in reaction to changes; they are confident that they can pursue employment, outside of the current organization if necessary (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011). Employability contributes to optimal employee functioning (Vanhercke et al., 2014), which subsequently enhances organizational success, for example, in terms of performance (Camps & Rodríguez, 2011) and lower turnover intentions (Nauta et al., 2009). Employability is thus crucial to contemporary employees and employers.

Historical analyses suggest that employability associates with transitions in both the labor market and organizations (Thijssen et al., 2008). Over time, the meaning of employability evolved, resulting in multiple conceptualizations (Forrier & Sels, 2003). The current systematic literature review uses an input-based approach of employability (Vanhercke et al., 2014), focusing on "the subjective perception held by an employee (or by his or her supervisor) about his or her possibilities in terms of competences, to obtain and maintain work" (Van der Heijden et al., 2018, p. 237). Drawing from conceptualizations of employability in human resources management (HRM) and career psychology literature (Fugate et al., 2021), we argue that employability manifests in employer–employee relationships, with employers (e.g., HRM professionals and supervisors) and employees as focal stakeholders. The individual challenge of retaining and enhancing employability is a shared responsibility among employers and employees, and organizations must thus be adaptable since employers are unable to guarantee lifetime job security. Employers focus on employability because it enhances agreements between employers and employees—that is, the psychological contract (Garavan, 1999)—and, as a result, such contracts motivate employees to agreements in the employer–employee relationship (Rousseau, 2004).

The pandemic transformed job demands (e.g., increase in remote working), consequently employers focus on job resources such as leadership to empower employees so that they are able to respond to challenging post-pandemic job demands (Manuti et al., 2022). Employers seek HRM strategies that enhance employability (Veth et al., 2018), and using such strategies, they facilitate job resources, such as leadership (e.g., contexts), so employees are able to cope with job demands, including, for example, work overload (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Employability as a dual employer–employee responsibility namely suggests an increase of the resources of the organization, which enhances the competitive advantage at the organizational level (Vermeeren & Van der Heijden, 2022), and provides career perspective at the individual level (Van der Heijde et al., 2018). However, despite the obvious benefits of employability to organizations, some employers remain reluctant to invest in employability. De Cuyper and De Witte (2011) evidence the employability paradox, which demonstrates risks to organizations, such as increased turnover intentions. The question, then, is which HRM strategies foster employability. Extant studies suggest that job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), such as training and development opportunities (Froehlich et al., 2015; Van der Heijden et al., 2009) and job's learning value (Le Blanc et al., 2019), foster employees' employability. Several authors thus stress the urgency of "learning to become employable" (Houben et al., 2019, p. 1). Similarly, supervisors' leadership, as a work-related, contextual factor (e.g., a job resource), also stimulates employability (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008; Van der Heijden & Spurk, 2019), for example, by empowering followers and facilitating training and competence development (Becker, 1962). Such leadership, as both context and determinant, might contribute to employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014).

From a relational perspective, leadership associates with "a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, and ideologies) are constructed and produced" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655). This is particularly true because the influences of training and development on employees' employability are also influenced by both leadership and the quality of the relationship between supervisors (e.g., employer or leader) and the employee (Strużyna & Marzec, 2017). From an employer–employee relationship perspective, better understanding of the leadership–employability relationship is paramount (Fugate et al., 2021), especially when talent is scarce and retraining employees is important to employers, and when investing in employability is crucial. A literature review of supervisors' leadership as antecedents to employees' employability enhancement is thus evidently needed (Chughtai, 2019; Wang et al., 2019).

To advance employability research, this review identifies, selects, and evaluates extant studies to report on the state of knowledge (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009) regarding the relationship between supervisors' leadership and employees' employability. To address high-quality reporting, which is "transparent, complete and accurate" (p. 8), this

review uses Page et al.'s (2021) Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) to address the research question (Counsell, 1997) of which work contexts and mechanisms influence supervisors' leadership on employees' employability. This review has the potential to inform policy, practice, and research in management and organization studies (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009), especially those related to employability. From both career (i.e., employees) and HRM (employers) perspectives, it is important to synthesize the findings in extant studies to assess for consistency (Petticrew, 2001). This literature review is the first to synthesize empirical findings on relationships between supervisors' leadership and employees' employability, and it therefore represents a valuable contribution to employability literature.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

A triangulation approach was used to enhance the consistency of findings, and subsequently to increase the review's validity (Saunders et al., 2012). We therefore began with an exploratory quantitive bibliometric analysis. We retrospectively report on the publication-related metric total publications (TP) on two topics—employability and both leadership AND employability. We then map these topics as they relate to employability, and we are thus able to identify research gaps in the literature (Donthu et al., 2021). Research gaps are relevant as a starting point when reporting on the current state of research on a topic in the form of a literature review, which additionally includes recommendations for future research. As the main study, a qualitative systematic literature review (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009) is used to search for and synthesize peer-reviewed Dutch and English studies systematically and subsequently report on the present state of knowledge on the relationship between leadership and employability. Both methodologies allow a systematical, explicit, and replicable , and replicable systematical (Fink, 2005) investigation of employability literature.

2.3 PRELIMINARY STUDY: BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

2.3.1 Methodology

During December 2021, we began with a manual qualitative literature review (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009), and we used a bibliometric methodology to explore the current state of scientific research on employability, particularly the combination of leadership and employability. The purpose was to quantify Chughtai's (2019) and Wang et al.'s (2019) arguments of research gaps on the relationship between leadership and employability. Bibliometric methodology mitigates researcher bias (Zupic & Čater, 2015) and is thus relevant as a preliminary study to a literature review. The methodology uses quantitative techniques, including, for example, co-occurrence (i.e., co-word) analysis, to identify

and analyze large amounts of bibliometric data from scientific databases, such as Web of Science (Broadus, 1987). It extracts bibliometric data (e.g., keywords, journals, and researchers) from scientific databases and uses them as inputs to allow a researcher to map bibliometric networks using bibliometric software (e.g., VOSviewer; Donthu et al., 2021; Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). Such networks consist of nodes and edges. Nodes represent bibliometric data (e.g., keywords), which depend on a specific analysis (Liao et al., 2018). For example, co-occurrence networks visualize relationships between keywords, and the size of a node represents the frequency of such occurrences in bibliometric data. Edges represent indications and the strength of relationships between nodes (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). To discover such indications and the strength of relationships between nodes in a bibliometric network, VOSviewer uses lines to connect nodes. The thickness of a line and the size of a node represent the strength and frequency of co-occurrences, between nodes (e.g., keywords). As a result, a theme-related node forms a thematic cluster. VOSviewer shows nodes that relate to a thematic cluster using color schemes (Donthu et al., 2021; Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). Bibliometric methodology uses two techniques—performance analysis and science mapping (Donthu et al., 2021). Performance analysis considers contributions to a field from research constituents (e.g., authors, topics, and countries) (Cobo et al., 2011), and science mapping analyzes relationships between research constituents (Baker et al., 2021).

Performance analysis

We conducted performance analysis to assess the publication-related metric total publications (TP) retrospectively regarding employability and both leadership and employability. These topics associate with keyword searches of an article's title, abstract, and author keywords. We identified bibliometric data and subsequently extracted and analyzed them as output files of the Web of Science (WoS) database using the search string topic *"employability," "publication years until year 2022",* document types *"article,"* and language *"English"* OR *"Dutch."* We also used the Web of Science bibliographic database, using search string topic *"employability"* AND *"leadership," "publication years until year 2022",* document types *"article"* and language *"English"* OR *"Dutch."*

Co-occurrence analysis

We applied a core technique—keyword co-occurrence analysis—for science mapping. We visualized relationships between keywords in a co-occurrence network (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014), which is used commonly in management research (Phulwani et al., 2020). Keyword co-occurrence analysis focuses on actual content (i.e., words) in publications, such as author keywords, words in article titles, and abstracts as a unit of analysis. Co-occurrence refers to the degree to which two keywords are included in an article's keywords, title, and abstract (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). To identify, extract, and analyze bibliometric data, we searched the WoS database using the search string topic *"employability," "publication years until year 2022",* document types *"article",* and language *"English"*

OR *"Dutch."* We downloaded the resulting bibliographic data in *.txt format in batches of 1000 publications, which were included for further analysis. To analyze and visualize the bibliometric network, we used data from WoS (e.g., output data) as input data in VOSviewer. We applied all keywords as a unit of analysis and full counting as the counting method to visualize co-occurrence networks of the search string (see Figure 2.3) (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). We used 20 as the minimum number of occurrences of a keyword as a threshold, and we did not verify selected keywords further.

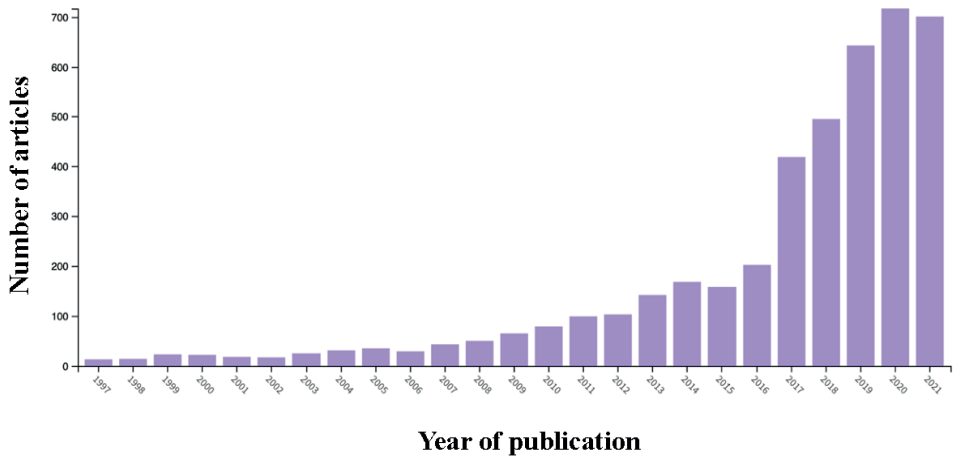
2.3.2 Results

Performance analysis

The search string topic *"employability," "publication years until year 2022",* document types *"article,"* and language *"English"* OR *"Dutch,"* resulted in 4453 articles, and search string topic *"employability"* AND *"leadership," publication years until year 2022, document types "article," and language "English"* OR *"Dutch,"* resulted in 143 articles. Results suggest that education (34.9%; *n* = 1556), management (10.4%; *n* = 465), and applied psychology (9.1%; *n* = 405) are the best represented categories in WoS for employability and both leadership and employability (education, 36.4%; *n* = 52; management, 17.5%; *n* = 25; applied psychology, 13.3%; *n* = 19). Outcomes from performance analysis appear in Figures 2.1 and 2.2, which report publication-related metric total publications (TP) year-wise for both topics (Donthu et al., 2021).

Figure 2.1

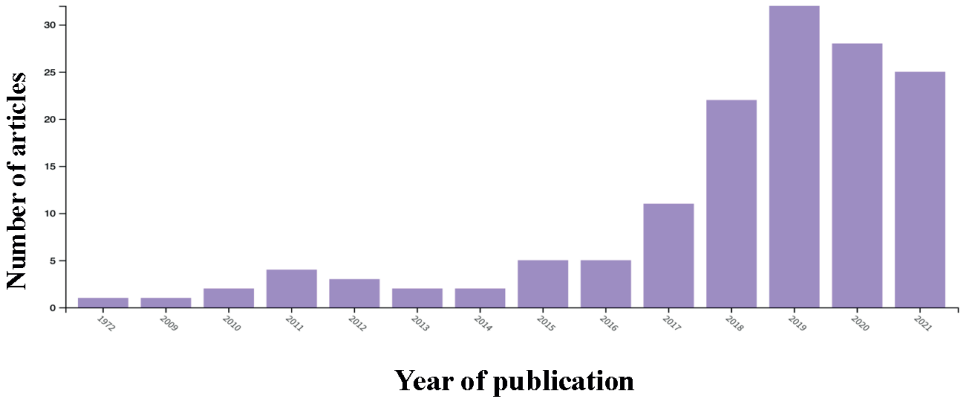
Year-wise number of employability articles (1997–2021)



Note. This figure reports the publication trend of scientific articles on the topic of employability to 2022. Data were retrieved from the Web of Science database using the search string: topic "employability," document type "articles," language "English" OR "Dutch," and "publication years to 2022".

Figure 2.2

Year-wise number of employability and leadership articles (1972–2021)



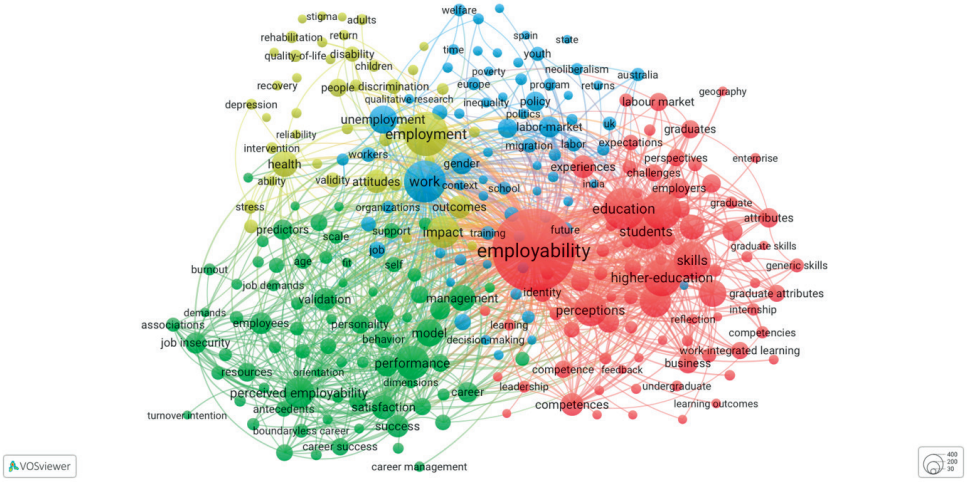
Note. This figure reports the publication trend of scientific articles on the topics of employability and leadership to 2022. Data were retrieved from the Web of Science database using the search string: topic "employability" AND "leadership," document type "articles," language "English" OR "Dutch," and "publication years to 2022."

Science mapping and co-occurrence analysis

Using VOSviewer, results from co-occurrence analysis on the topic of employability (see Figure 2.3) returned 12,644 keywords, of which 267 met the threshold of 20 as the minimum number of occurrences of a keyword. These 267 keywords were distributed across four colored thematic clusters, with 14,134 links and a link strength of 49,482. VOSviewer uses colors to reveal a cluster and links between keywords within a cluster. Results suggest that Cluster 1 (red) contained 80 keywords, which focus on education topics (e.g., academic performance and curriculum development), and Cluster 2 (green) contained 75 keywords, which are associated with work-related topics such as HRM and career development. Cluster 3 (blue) contained 69 keywords related to labor market topics, such as unemployment, and Cluster 4 (yellow) contained 43 keywords that focus on health-related topics that related to employability, such as mental health and depression.

Figure 2.3

Co-occurrence network visualization using VOS viewer on the topic of employability



Note. This figure reports the publication trend of scientific articles on the topic of employability to 2022. Data were retrieved from the Web of Science database using the search string: topic "employability," document type "articles," language "English" OR "Dutch," and "publication years to 2022".

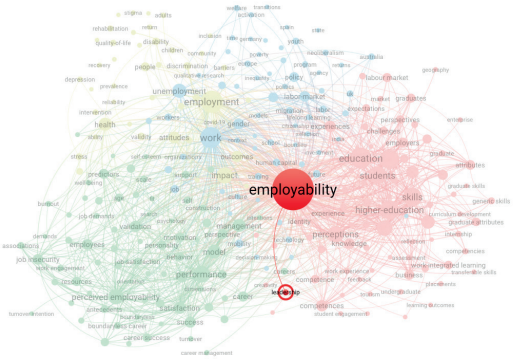
2.3.3 Conclusion

The performance analysis suggested an increase in research articles on both employability and the combination of employability and leadership, particularly between 2017 and 2022, during which 66.8% (n = 2973) of articles on employability and 82.5% (n = 118) on employability and leadership were published. Since 2012, the number of employability articles has exceeded 100. Co-occurrence analysis of keywords suggested that employability links to multiple keywords, including leadership (see Figure 2.4).

Cluster 1 (red), which comprises education and work-related topics such as students, education, skills, competencies, work experience, and employers, contained both main keywords—leadership and employability. Thus, the link between leadership and employability relates to the aforementioned topics, examining education and work-related topics. From the co-occurrence analysis, we argue that employability researchers focus on major topics such as employment, work, (higher) education, careers, skills, and competencies. From 1972 to 2021, there was an increase in the year-wise number of articles on employability and leadership. However, we are interested in the influence of supervisors' leadership as a job resource, and thus in a work context, on employees' employability. A systematic literature review is thus relevant to revealing the current state of research on the employability–leadership link from an employer–employee perspective, specifically within work contexts. We are thus able to identify research gaps and develop an agenda for new research directions to further explore these topics from that perspective.

Figure 2.4

Co-occurrence network visualization using VOS viewer on the topic employability, which revealed the employability–leadership link



Note. This figure reports the publication trend of scientific articles on the topic employability to 2022. Data were retrieved from the Web of Science database using the search string: topic "employability," document type "articles," language "English" OR "Dutch," and "publication years 2022".

2.4 MAIN STUDY: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

2.4.1 Methods

This literature review uses PRISMA 2020's recommendations regarding producing high-quality reporting (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021). Following Page et al.'s (2021) PRISMA 2020 flow diagram, this article reports on PRISMA's process to explore supervisors' leadership influence on employees' employability. To conduct the review, we use Grant and Booth's (2009) critical four stages—Search, AppraisaL, Synthesis, and Analysis (SALSA)—so that the four principles of systematic reviews—transparency, inclusivity, an explanatory, and heuristic nature—are guaranteed (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). Transparency means being clear and explicit about methodologies, procedures, and processes, such that readers are able to audit them. Inclusivity requires assessing only studies that meet inclusion criteria, and subsequently addressing a research question. Explanatory means synthesizing findings from studies so that the findings, in combination, "make a whole that should be more than the sum of the parts" (p. 680). Heuristic means reporting findings in a way that they have practical implications for practitioners and policymakers (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). Drawing from SALSA (Grant & Booth, 2009) and guided by the review's purpose, the Search stage identified relevant literature using multiple search techniques, such as database searching using free-text searches, with limited function and reference list checking (e.g., backward and forward snowballing).

The AppraisaL stage comprised selecting studies systematical by assessing whether each met the inclusion criteria. Synthesis is concerned with seeking patterns, for example, by comparing findings from the reviews' included studies (Gray & Malins, 2004). The Analysis stage reports on the robustness of the Synthesis in terms of the quality of included studies (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009) that reasonably demonstrate the current state of research regarding what is and is not known (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009) about the influence of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability.

From January 2022 to 8 February 2022, we developed a research protocol that began with determining initial search terms, and inclusion and exclusion criteria, and with searching research databases, such as Academic Search Elite (EBSCO), APA PsycARTICLES (EBSCO), Emerald Insight (management) Psychology, Behavioral Sciences Collection, and WoS, to identify published peer-reviewed English and Dutch empirical articles. We did not exclude conference articles, books, and book chapters. The initial search term was based on core concepts of the aforementioned research question—leadership and employability—and was used to identify as many articles as possible, up to February 2022. Employability has been studied from many perspectives, which led to a plurality of definitions and operationalizations of the concept. The current review uses HRM and career perspectives that encompass focal stakeholders in organizations—employees and employers (Fugate et al., 2021).

Eligibility criteria

We used inclusion and exclusion criteria to select studies that investigated the influence of leadership on employability among employees (i.e., subordinates) and supervisors (i.e., leaders). We searched major research databases using advanced filters, such as subjects that included "employability" OR "perceived employability" AND "leadership." Searches were restricted to English- and Dutch-language peer-reviewed articles because such articles identify validated knowledge (Podsakoff et al., 2005), and there is lack of knowledge or resources for clear translations. Table 2.1 reports our inclusion and exclusion criteria.

From January 2022 to 8 February 2022, the first and second authors independently initially searched multiple major research databases using a combination of search techniques, such as Boolean searching. The Appendix reports the full list of research databases that we searched. From a preliminary search, we identified "self rated employability" and "competence-based employability" as additional keywords, resulting in a final search string that contained the keywords *"perceived employability"* OR *"self rated employability"* OR *"self rated employability"* OR "*competence-based employability"* OR "*competence based employability"* AND *"leadership."* For inclusion, and using free-text searching with a limit function, the search string was restricted to language *"English"* OR *"Dutch"* AND *"peer-reviewed publications,"* with additionally content type *"all,"* publication date *"all,"* subjects

"employability," "perceived employability," and *"leadership,"* which resulted in 134 articles that were included during full-text analysis.

Table 2.1
Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	**Motivation**
Empirical studies on the influence of supervisors' leadership (e.g., managers, mentors, and coaches on employees' employability.	
Peer-reviewed journals	Explicitly identify validated knowledge (Podsakoff et al., 2005).
Content types	Published empirical articles in peer-reviewed journals, conference articles, books, and book chapters
Type of data	Quantitative and qualitative data
Subjects	Employability, perceived employability, and leadership
Contexts and participants	Employees and supervisors in work contexts
Publication date	No restriction
Language	English or Dutch
Exclusion criteria	**Motivation**
Language: non-English or Dutch	Lack of resources for clear translation
Content types	Repetitive articles such as reviews and opinion articles. Scale construction articles

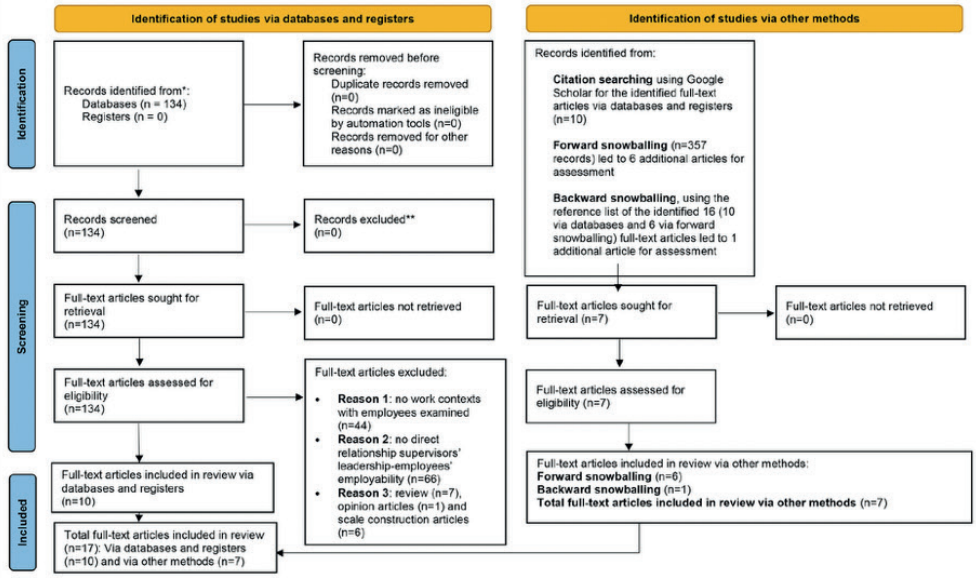
2.4.2 Results

Study selection

Of the 134 articles found during the searches, 10 met the inclusion criteria. During the last stage of appraisal, the first and second authors independently conducted forward and backward snowballing (Wohlin, 2014) to discover additional articles based on the 10 already identified. Forward snowballing discovers additional articles forward in time (Wohlin, 2014). We used Google Scholar to examine authors that cited the 10 articles. Forward snowballing revealed 357 additional articles, which the first and second authors reviewed independently by assessing the articles' titles and abstracts. We included articles that met the inclusion criteria reported in Table 2.1. Forward snowballing returned six additional articles. The first and second authors also independently used backward snowballing (Wohlin, 2014) to identify additional articles based on the 16 found during the initial searches and using forward snowballing. Backward snowballing discovered additional articles that met the inclusion criteria backward in time by using the reference lists in the 16 articles (Wohlin, 2014). The first and second authors examined the titles in the reference lists of the 16 articles, which resulted in 1 additional article that met the inclusion criteria. The researchers agreed on using these 17 articles as the final set to be analyzed (for the PRISMA flowchart of this study, see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5

Flowchart of study selection using PRISMA 2020

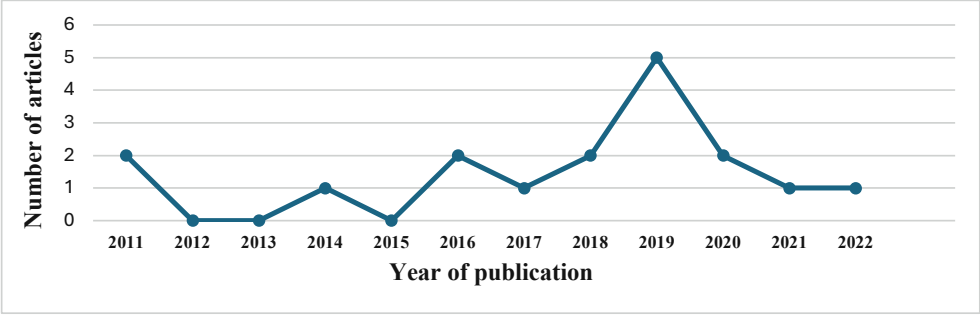


Study characteristics

Since 2011, researchers have examined the influence of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability, and since 2016, they have published at least one empirical, peer-reviewed study each year (see Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6

Yearly publication of included articles on the relationship between leadership and employability



Regarding context, and work contexts particularly, researchers have studied the relationship between leadership and employability in both non-profit and for-profit organizations. Most of the studies assessed in the current study (n = 5), were conducted in education contexts, such as universities (Camps & Rodríguez, 2011; Van der Heijden & Spurk, 2019), higher vocational education institutions (Bhattacharya & Neelam, 2018;

Gustari & Widodo, 2020), and primary schools (Strużyna & Marzec, 2017), followed closely by three studies conducted in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Epitropaki et al., 2021; Stoffers et al., 2019). Studies have also examined building (Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014), and healthcare organizations, such as non-academic hospitals (Van Harten et al., 2016), acute-care hospitals (Matsuo, 2022), and public healthcare units (Strużyna & Marzec, 2017). In addition, multiple public service (Strużyna & Marzec, 2017), information and communication technology (Wang et al., 2019), food and beverage (Chughtai, 2019), automotive (Böttcher et al., 2018), insurance (Park, 2020), and mixed-industry (e.g., construction, manufacturing, finance, insurance, and communication; Yizhong et al., 2019) organizations have been assessed.

Regarding addressing participation by employees and supervisors, in most of the studies (*n* = 8), data were collected in European organizations (Böttcher et al., 2018; Bozionelos et al., 2016; Epitropaki et al., 2021; Stoffers et al., 2019; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011; Van der Heijden & Spurk, 2019; Van Harten et al., 2016), followed closely by Asia in six studies (Chughtai, 2019; Gustari & Widodo, 2020; Matsuo, 2022; Park, 2020; Wang et al., 2019; Yizhong et al., 2019) and South America (Camps & Rodríguez, 2011) (see Table 2.2). Two studies did not report the countries in which they were conducted (Bhattacharya & Neelam, 2018; Strużyna & Marzec, 2017).

Table 2.2

Overview of countries in which data were collected

Country	Number of articles
The Netherlands	6
China, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Poland	2
Belgium, Costa Rica, Great Britain, Indonesia, Japan, Norway, Pakistan, and South Korea	1
Unspecified	2

Note. Some studies collected data in multiple countries, and thus the total number of articles in combination with the countries in which the studies were conducted exceeded the 17 included articles.

Regarding methodology, excepting one study, all studies used quantitative survey designs. Bhattacharya and Neelam (2018) used a mixed-methods design to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research (Saunders et al., 2012).

Table 2.3
Details of included studies

Publication	Empirical context	Research design	Sample/participants	Conceptualization of leadership	Conceptualization of employability	Theories used in research frameworks
Van der Heijden and Bakker (2011)	The Netherlands One large Dutch building company	Quantitative cross-sectional survey research Mediation research model	Employees/supervisors pairs (n = 303)	Perceived supervisors' transformational leadership assessed using employee ratings Five of the nine original subscales (45 items) from Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe's (2001) transformational leadership questionnaire; α ranged from .82 to .95	Perceived employees' employability measured using supervisor ratings for a maximum of three employees Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) 47-item, 5-factor employability instrument; α ranged from .83 to .95 within dimensions	Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017)
Camps and Rodríguez (2011)	Costa Rica One large university	Quantitative cross-sectional survey research Two-level data structure Department-level (n = 75) Employee-level Moderated mediation model	Employees (n = 795)	Perceived Head of Department leader's transformational leadership assessed using lecturers' and professors' ratings Perceived transformational leadership measured using Podsakoff et al.'s (1990) 5-dimensional scale (18 items)	Perceived employees' employability measured using Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) 47-item, 5-factor employability instrument	Social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005)

Table 2.3
Continued

Publication	Empirical context	Research design	Sample/participants	Conceptualization of leadership	Conceptualization of employability	Theories used in research frameworks
Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2014)	The Netherlands One large Dutch building company	Quantitative cross-sectional survey research Main effect research model Multi-source data collection	Employees (n = 314) Immediate supervisors (n = 334) Employee/supervisor pairs (n = 290)	Perceived supervisors' transformational leadership assessed using employee ratings Five of the nine original subscales (45 items) of Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe's (2001) transformational leadership questionnaire; α ranged from .82 to .95	Perceived employees' employability assessed using both self-ratings and supervisor ratings of Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) 47-item, five-factor employability instrument; α ranged from .78 to .90 for self-ratings, and .83 to .95 for supervisor ratings	Authors revealed no theory for explaining the findings.
Van Harten et al. (2016)	The Netherlands Three Dutch non-academic hospitals	Quantitative cross-sectional survey research Mediated research model	Employees (n = 1626): Nursing staff (39%), medical office assistants or clerical staff (25%), non-nursing medical employees (24%), middle or higher managers or staff members (12%).	Perceived supervisors' support of employees' wellbeing and functioning assessed using Knies and Leisink's (2014) 4-item scale; α was .91 Perceived supervisors' support of employees' development assessed using Knies and Leisink's (2014) 4-item scale; α was .87	Perceived employees' employability measured using two constructs: Thijssen and Walter's (2006) 3-dimension, 9-item, up-to-date expertise scale; α was .78, and willingness to change assessed using a 4-item scale based on Wittekind et al. (2010) and Van Dam (2004); α was .71	Authors revealed no theory for explaining the findings.

Table 2.3
Continued

Publication	Empirical context	Research design	Sample/participants	Conceptualization of leadership	Conceptualization of employability	Theories used in research frameworks
Bozionelos et al. (2016)	Greece, Italy, and Poland Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)	Quantitative cross-sectional survey design Moderated mediation model Multi-source data collection: IT professionals and line managers	Information technology (IT) professionals (n = 207) from Greece (n = 50), Italy (n = 43), and Poland (n = 114)	Perceived mentoring receipt assessed using Dreher and Ash's (1990) 5-item scale; α was .83	Perceived employees' employability assessed using supervisor ratings of Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) 47-item, 5-factor employability instrument; α ranged from .81 to .92 within dimensions	Authors revealed no theory for explaining the findings.

Table 2.3
Continued

Publication	Empirical context	Research design	Sample/participants	Conceptualization of leadership	Conceptualization of employability	Theories used in research frameworks
Strużyna and Marzec (2017)	Unspecified Several public organizations: Municipal/commune centers of culture ($n = 14$) Public health care units ($n = 14$) County labor offices ($n = 14$) Municipal/commune units of social assistance ($n = 14$) Primary schools ($n = 14$) Commune centers for family support ($n = 44$) Municipal commune offices ($n = 33$)	Quantitative cross-sectional survey design Mediated model	Employees ($n = 566$) specified by public organizations: Municipal/commune centers of culture ($n = 80$) Public health care units ($n = 80$) County labor offices ($n = 80$) Municipal/commune units of social assistance ($n = 80$) Primary schools ($n = 80$) Commune centers for family support ($n = 80$) Municipal commune offices ($n = 86$)	Perceived quality of supervisor-employee relationships (i.e., LMX) measured using Liden and Maslyn's (1998) scale Perceived transformational leadership was measured with a constructed scale based on scales developed by Hartog et al. (1997) and Avolio et al. (1999).	Perceived employees' employability measured using an 8-dimensional constructed scale, drawing from Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) 47-item, 5-factor employability instrument The scale contains the dimensions of social competences, ability to adjust to changes, civic competences, knowledge and professional skill, ability to maintain balance, ethical competences, pro-active professional attitude, anticipatory strive for professional development	LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)

Table 2.3
Continued

Publication	Empirical context	Research design	Sample/participants	Conceptualization of leadership	Conceptualization of employability	Theories used in research frameworks
Böttcher et al. (2018)	Germany Two organizational units in one large German automotive company	Quantitative cross- sectional survey design Moderated model	White-collar employees (n = 1006)	Perceived transformational leadership assessed using a 20-item, multi-dimensional German version of the Multifactor Leadership Scale 5X short (Felfe, 2006), developed by Bass (1985) This multi-dimensional scale contains five dimensions (each dimension assesses 4 items), (I) idealized influence attribute, (II) idealized influence behavior, (III) inspirational motivation, (IV) intellectual stimulation, and (V) individual consideration; α ranged from .80 to .91, and .96 for the overall scale	Perceived employability measured using Rothwell and Arnold's (2007) 11-item scale, which contains sub-dimensions internal employability (four items; α =.55) and external employability (seven items; α =.79)	Authors revealed no theory for explaining the findings.

Table 2.3
Continued

Publication	Empirical context	Research design	Sample/participants	Conceptualization of leadership	Conceptualization of employability	Theories used in research frameworks
Bhattacharya and Neelam (2018)	Unspecified One business school Two large multinational conglomerates, two retail companies, two financial services companies and three IT companies	Mixed-method research design with two data collections: first was a quantitative survey and second was semi-structured, in-depth interviews Multi-source data collection	Quantitative survey: first year students/interns (n = 110) from human resources, sales/marketing, operations, and finance Qualitative research using semi-structured, in-depth interviews among 14 pairs of students/interns and their mentors from two large multinational conglomerates (n = 4), two retail companies (n = 2), two financial services companies (n = 2), and three IT companies (n = 6)	Characteristics of supervisors that leads to intern's satisfaction from LMX-perspective.	Intern's satisfaction in terms of future employability	LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)

Table 2.3

Continued

Publication	Empirical context	Research design	Sample/participants	Conceptualization of leadership	Conceptualization of employability	Theories used in research frameworks
Yizhong et al. (2019)	China Organizations in industries such as construction, manufacturing, finance, insurance, and communications	Quantitative survey with two waves of data collection Mediated model	Employees (n = 760) who worked under line manager for more than one year	Perceived transformational leadership assessed using the 20-item, 5-dimensional Multifactor Leadership Scale (Bass and Ovolio, 1995). This 5-dimension scale contains dimensions (I) idealized influence attribute, (II) idealized influence behavior, (III) inspirational motivation, (IV), intellectual stimulation, and (V) individual consideration; α was .938 for the overall scale	Perceived employability assessed using Rothwell and Arnold's (2007) 10-item scale, which contains subdimensions internal and external employability; α was .882 for the overall scale	Job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldman, 1975) Social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)
Chughtai (2019)	Pakistan One large food and beverage company	Quantitative cross- sectional survey design Mediated model	Full-time employees (n = 176) who worked in the head office	Perceived servant leadership measured using Liden et al.'s (2015) 7-item servant leadership scale; α was .86	Perceived employability measured using De Vos and Soens's (2008) 3-item scale; α was .84	Authors revealed no theory for explaining the findings.

Table 2.3
Continued

Publication	Empirical context	Research design	Sample/participants	Conceptualization of leadership	Conceptualization of employability	Theories used in research frameworks
Van der Heijden and Spurk (2019)	The Netherlands One University	Quantitative cross- sectional survey design Moderated model	Academic employees across science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and social science disciplines (n = 139)	Perceived LMX measured using Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) 7-item scale; α was .92	Perceived employability measured using Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) 47-item, 5-factor employability instrument; α ranged from .79 to .92 within dimensions	Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) Conservation of resources (COR) theory from Hobfoll (1989) LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)
Wang et al. (2019)	China One internet technology company	Quantitative survey design with two waves of data collection Moderated mediation model	Employees (n = 283)	Perceived servant leadership measured using Liden et al.'s (2015) 7-item servant leadership scale; α was .89	Perceived employability measured using Eby et al.'s (2003) 6-item scale; α was .89	Authors revealed no theory for explaining the findings.
Stoffers et al. (2019)	Belgium and the Netherlands Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)	Quantitative cross- sectional survey design Moderated mediation model	Employees–immediate supervisor pairs: Belgian sample (n = 105) Dutch sample (n = 487)	Perceived LMX measured using Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) 7-item, multi-dimensional scale, which contains dimensions respect (two items, α .70 to .76), trust (two items, α .61 to .69), obligation (two items, α .74 to .75), and relationship quality (one item)	Perceived employability measured using Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) 47-item, 5-factor employability instrument; α ranged in the Belgian sample from .75 to .90, and in the Dutch sample from .78 to .91	LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)

Table 2.3
Continued

Publication	Empirical context	Research design	Sample/participants	Conceptualization of leadership	Conceptualization of employability	Theories used in research frameworks
Park (2020)	South Korea One life insurance company	Quantitative cross- sectional survey design Main-effects model	Employees ($n = 257$)	Perceived LMX measured using Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) 7-item scale; α was .768	Perceived employability measured using Van der Heijden et al.'s (2018) 22-item, short-form, 5-factor employability instrument; α ranged from .790 to .892 within dimensions	LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)
Gustari and Widodo (2020)	Indonesia Three private higher-education institutions	Quantitative cross- sectional survey design Mediated model	Permanent ($n = 170$).	Perceived transformational leadership assessed using a modified, multi-dimensional, 12-item scale based on Bass and Avolio (1990b); α was .966	Perceived employability measured using a 10-item scale based on Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) 5-dimension scale; α was .875	No information about used theory to embed the findings within theory

Table 2.3
Continued

Publication	Empirical context	Research design	Sample/participants	Conceptualization of leadership	Conceptualization of employability	Theories used in research frameworks
Epitropaki et al. (2021)	Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)	Quantitative cross- sectional survey design Moderated mediation model	Information and communication technology (ICT) employees (n = 1127) and 988 supervisors (n = 988); leader–follower dyads (n = 967)	Follower- and leader-rated perceived LMX measured using an adapted 7-item version of LMX-7 (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Scandura and Graen, 1984); α was .88 for follower-rated LMX and .85 for leader-rated LMX	Follower/employee-rated and leader-rated perceived employability measured using both leaders and followers from Van der Heijden et al.'s (2018) 22-item, short-form, 5-factor employability instrument; composite α was .89 for follower-rated employability and .94 for leader-rated employability	Sponsorship theory (Rosenbaum, 1979; Wayne et al., 1999)
Matsuo (2022)	Japan One acute care hospital	Quantitative survey design with two waves of data collection Mediated model	Nurses and assistant nurses (n = 221)	Perceived supervisor support for strengths use (PSSSU) was assessed using Keenan and Mostert's (2013) 8-item scale; α was .97	Perceived employability measured using De Cuyper et al.'s (2011) 4-item scale; α was .84	Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) Positive psychology (Seligman, 2019)

Measurements of the dependent variable: employees' perceived employability

Excepting Bhattacharya and Neelam's (2018) qualitative measure of employees' employability, all studies used a quantitative design, measuring employability quantitatively as a dependent variable. Employability is operationalized disparately across the quantitative studies using validated scales, in which employees reported their perceived employability on questionnaires. Seven studies (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Camps & Rodríguez, 2011; Park, 2020; Stoffers et al., 2019; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011; Van der Heijden & Spurk, 2019) assessed employability using Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) 47-item instrument, which consists of five dimensions—occupational expertise (15 items), anticipation and optimization (i.e., whether an individual responds to changes in internal and external job markets; 8 items), personal flexibility (8 items), corporate sense (7 items), and balance (i.e., balancing personal and a team's or organization's preferences; 9 items). Two studies (Epitropaki et al., 2021; Park, 2020) used a shortened version of Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) 5-factor employability instrument, a 22-item, short-form instrument that also measures the five dimensions—occupational expertise (5 items), anticipation and optimization (4 items), personal flexibility (5 items), corporate sense (4 items), and balance (4 items). Two studies (Gustari & Widodo, 2020; Strużyna & Marzec, 2017) used Van der Heijden et al.'s (2006) 47-item, 5-factor employability instrument to construct a valid fit-for-purpose employability scale, tailored to those studies. Drawing from Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006), Strużyna and Marzec (2017) constructed a fit-for-purpose, 46-item employability scale that comprises eight dimensions of public-organization employees' employability—social competences, adjustability to changes, civic competences, knowledge and professional skills, ability to maintain balance, ethical competences, professional proactivity, and anticipatory striving for professional development. Gustari and Widodo (2020) used a self-constructed fit-for-purpose, 10-item employability scale based on Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) 47-item scale, which also comprises five dimensions, though labeled differently specific work skills and competencies that are more general, proactivity, adaptability, work feelings, and balance. Böttcher et al. (2018) and Yizhong et al. (2019) used Rothwell and Arnold's (2007) 11-item perceived employability scale, which assesses two dimensions—internal (4 items) and external employability (7 items). The dimensions associate with employees' ability to remain employable in (e.g., internal labor market) and outside (e.g., external labor market) the organization (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Van Harten et al. (2016) assessed employees' perceived employability using two constructs—up-to-date expertise and willingness to change. Up-to-date expertise was measured using Thijssen and Walter's (2006) 9-item, 3-dimensional scale, which contains the dimensions technical expertise (3 items), economic expertise (3 items), and perceptional expertise (3 items). Willingness to change was measured using a self-constructed fit-for-purpose, 4-item scale based on Wittekind et al. (2010) and Van Dam (2004). Multiple studies treated perceived employability as a

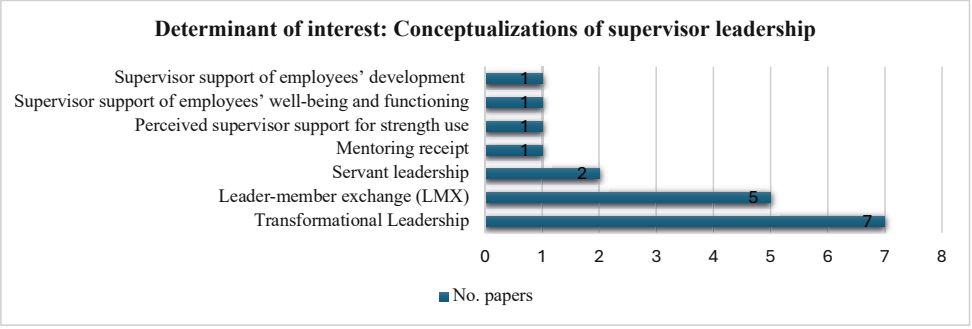
unidimensional construct. Chughtai (2019) used De Vos and Soens' (2008) 3-item scale, Wang et al. (2019) used Eby et al.'s (2003) 6-item scale, and Matsuo (2022) used De Cuyper et al.'s (2011) 4-item scale. Table 2.3 reports greater details on these studies' participants, conceptualizations of constructs, and other information.

Measurement leadership as a determinant of employability enhancement: content and effects

The determinant of interest is supervisors' leadership. We now discuss how such leadership was measured and how it contributes to employees' employability, as illustrated in Figure 2.7.

Figure 2.7

Conceptualizations of supervisors' leadership in included articles (n = 17)



The 17 studies were heterogeneous concerning research models. The majority (*n* = 7; Chughtai, 2019; Gustari & Widodo, 2020; Matsuo, 2022; Strużyna & Marzec, 2017; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011; Van Harten et al., 2016; Yizhong et al., 2019) examined leadership as a determinant of employability enhancement using a mediated model. Researchers also investigated the relationship between supervisors' leadership and employees' employability using moderated (Böttcher et al., 2018; Van der Heijden & Spurk, 2019), moderated mediation (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Camps & Rodríguez, 2011; Epitropaki et al., 2021; Stoffers et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019), mixed methods (Bhattacharya & Neelam, 2018), and main effects (Park, 2020; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014) models.

Findings suggest that supervisors' leadership has been conceptualized in several ways. Most of the studies focus on relationships between transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) and employability. Transformational leadership contains four dimensions, the four I's (Avolio et al., 1991), including idealized influence (e.g., charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These four I's encourage followers to transform their attitudes, values, and behaviors through empowerment, such that followers achieve outstanding performance (Bass & Avolio, 1990a; Bass, 1999; Burns, 1978). Idealized influence associates with a leader's behaviors that make employees

perceive their leaders as role models. Inspirational motivation is concerned with leaders having a vision of a future state that inspires and motivates followers so that they achieve outstanding performance and increase job satisfaction. Intellectual stimulation describes a leader's behaviors that stimulate and recognize followers' creativity and innovation by, for example, fostering autonomy. Individualized consideration is concerned with a leader's behaviors that focus on followers' developmental needs through, for example, support and coaching (Bass & Avolio, 1990a; Bass, 1999).

Several authors have found that transformational leadership relates positively to employability (Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011, $\beta = 0.14$, $p < .05$; Camps & Rodríguez, 2011, $\beta = 0.62$, $p < .01$; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014, $\beta = 0.23$, $p < .001$ for supervisor' ratings of employees' employability and $\beta = 0.17$, $p < .01$ for employees' ratings of employability; Strużyna & Marzec, 2017, $\gamma = 0.12$, $p < .01$; Yizhong et al., 2019, $\beta = 0.21$, $p < .01$; Gustari and Widodo, 2020, $\beta = 0.34$, $p < .01$).

Böttcher et al. (2018) argue that the relationship between transformational leadership and internal employability ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .01$ for the full-item scale and $\beta = 0.24$, $p < .01$ for the one-item scale is stronger than that with external employability ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .01$). They found that when the subdimensions of transformational leadership were entered simultaneously, three dimensions—idealized influence attributed ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < .05$), idealized influence behavior ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < .05$), and individualized consideration ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < .01$)— had a greater positive influence on internal employability (full-item scale), in contrast with inspirational motivation ($\beta = -0.45$, $p = .45$, n.s.) and intellectual stimulation ($\beta = -0.05$, $p = .38$, n.s.).

When the subdimensions of transformational leadership were entered simultaneously, idealized influence attributed ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .05$) and individualized consideration ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < .01$) also influenced internal employability (one-item scale) positively. This contrasts with non-significant influences of idealized influence behavior ($\beta = 0.02$, $p = .73$, n.s.), inspirational motivation ($\beta = -0.00$, $p = .94$, n.s.), and intellectual stimulation ($\beta = -0.05$, $p = .73$, n.s.) on internal employability (one-item scale) when the subdimensions were entered simultaneously. When the subdimensions of transformational leadership were entered simultaneously, Böttcher et al. (2018) found no relationship between them and external employability. When entered separately, the idealized influence attributed ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .01$), idealized influence behavior ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < .01$), inspirational motivation ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < .01$), intellectual stimulation ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < .01$), and individualized consideration ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .01$) influenced external employability positively.

Assessing the second most common leadership model, multiple authors report a positive influence of Leader–Member eXchange (LMX) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) on employability. LMX represents the perceived quality of social exchanges between followers and

immediate supervisors, characterized by dyadic affection, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect (Liden & Maslyn, 1998), and their influence on both leaders' and followers' attitudes and behaviors (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), such as employability. Epitropaki et al. (2021) found that both follower- (β = 0.570, p < .01) and leader-rated (β = 0.632, p < .01) employability are influenced positively by agreement on LMX among followers and leaders. In the context of LMX disagreement, leader-rated employability was higher when leaders perceived that LMX was higher than followers' perceived LMX. Stoffers et al. (2019) found a positive influence of immediate supervisors' LMX on employees' employability, which was influenced by national context in Belgium and the Netherlands. Findings suggest that a positive relationship in a Dutch sample (β = 0.341, p < .001) was greater than in a Belgium sample (β = 0.296, p < .05). Strużyna and Marzec (2017) found that LMX fosters employees' employability (γ = 0.45, p < .01), but Van der Heijden and Spurk (2019) found no support for an influence of LMX on all dimensions of perceived employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006)—occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense, and balance. Park (2020) found that LMX associates with only one dimension of perceived employability (Van der Heijden et al., 2018)—corporate sense (β = 0.245, p < .01).

Examining a third leadership model, Chughtai (2019) and Wang et al. (2019) demonstrate contrary findings of a positive influence of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) on employees' perceived employability. Servant leadership concerns fulfilling followers' needs by providing support that subsequently enhances followers' potential (Greenleaf, 1977), such as career potential (e.g., employability). Wang et al. (2019) found that servant leadership fosters employees' perceived employability (β = 0.19, p < .01), but Chughtai (2019) found no support for the same (β = -0.09, *ns*).

Some studies instead assess employees' perceived supervisor support, with one suggesting that leadership influences employees' perceived employability positively, including informal mentoring (Bozionelos et al., 2016, β = 0.26, p < .01), but perceived supervisor support does not (Matsuo, 2022, β = -0.11, n.s). Mentoring represents a relationship between two individuals, traditionally of unequal status, during which the mentor provides multiple development opportunities through, for example, coaching and counseling (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Supervisor support associates with perceived supervisory support, which contributes to positive work outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Miglianico et al., 2020). Van Harten et al. (2016) demonstrate that supervisors' support of employees' well-being and functioning (β = 0.24, p < .001) influences employability, conceptualized as up-to-date expertise, positively, but not employability conceptualized as willingness to change. Supervisors' support of employees' development influences employability conceptualized as willingness to change, but not that conceptualized as up-to-date expertise. Table 2.3 reports greater details on these articles.

The mechanisms: mediators and moderators

While reporting on direct influences of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability, findings from the 17 articles suggested that the relationship between leadership and employability can be explained by several mechanisms, such as mediators, moderators, or both. Mechanisms represent "the basis for the effect, i.e., the processes or events that are responsible for the change; the reasons why change occurred or how change came about" (Kazdin, 2007, p. 3). Van der Heijden and Bakker (2011) found that work-related flow is a mediator and thus represents a mechanism in the positive relationship between transformational leadership and employability. Work-related flow is "a short-term peak experience at work that is characterized by absorption, work enjoyment and intrinsic work motivation" (Bakker, 2005, p. 27). Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2014) demonstrate that the influence of leadership on employability enhancement is moderated by both an employee's work role (e.g., managerial/non-managerial work role) and personality. Findings suggest that among employees without a managerial work role, the relationship between transformational leadership and employability was positive only for supervisors' ratings of employability ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$) and not for employees' ratings of the same. However, among employees who had a managerial work role, the relationship was positive for both supervisors' ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .05$) and employees' ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < .01$) ratings (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014).

Böttcher et al. (2018) argue that transformational leadership, particularly idealized influence behavior and individualized consideration, moderates the negative relationship between age and both internal and external employability. Transformational leadership diminishes the negative influence of age on internal employability, but not external employability. Yizhong et al. (2019) found that job characteristics, such as job demands, skill discretion, and decision authority, and social exchanges, particularly perceived organizational support and team member exchanges, help explain the positive effects of leadership on employability. Chughtai (2019) demonstrated that servant leadership indirectly and positively influences employability through mediators such as proactive career behaviors (e.g., career planning, skill development, and networking).

Van der Heijden and Spurk (2019) used leadership, particularly LMX, to explain the relationship between learning value of a job and employability. In a context of high LMX, relationships between learning value of a job and all five dimensions of employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) are positive and strengthened. Wang et al. (2019) demonstrated a positive association between servant leadership and employability, influenced by two mechanisms—career skills (i.e., a mediator) and proactive personality (i.e., a moderator). Servant leaders foster employees' career skills, which subsequently enhance employees' employability. Proactive personality strengthens the influence of servant leadership on career skills, which subsequently enhances employees' employability. Stoffers et al. (2019) demonstrated that employees' national context

(i.e., Belgium and the Netherlands) minimally moderates the positive influence of LMX on employability. Matsuo (2022) found that perceived supervisor support enhances employees' employability (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011) through the mechanism (i.e., a mediator) of strength.

2.5 DISCUSSION

This review is the first to provide an overview of the influence of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability at work (i.e., internal, external, and subdimensions of employability). Despite a lack of studies that assess leadership as a predictor of employability enhancement, we identify and review 17 empirical articles, most of which report positive relationships. This review suggests that supervisors' leadership influences employees' employability positively, thus demonstrating that investment in such leadership represents a valuable HRM strategy regarding employability.

As a result of the preliminary study, and according to Chughtai (2019) and Wang et al. (2019), we argue that there exists scant research that assesses the leadership–employability link explicitly. To develop a research agenda from an employer–employee relationship perspective, it is paramount to recognize the current state of research on the leadership–employability relationship (Fugate et al., 2021). When talent is scarce and retaining employees is important to employers, identifying how leadership, as a job resource, contributes to employability enhancement is crucial.

To explain the positive influences, both direct and indirect, of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability, researchers use various theories of perceived support from leaders in terms of job resources, and subsequent outcomes such as employability. We found that the 17 reviewed articles use social exchange perspectives to explain this influence. From a social exchange perspective, the articles use social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) ($n = 2$) or LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; $n = 6$) to explain the positive influence of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability. SET and LMX suggest that two-way social exchange relationships between supervisors and employees affect employees' perceptions of organizational support strongly (Wayne et al., 1997). High LMX is dominated by high dyadic respect, trust, commitment, and interest in each other's wellbeing, which subsequently foster employees' access to job resources (e.g., support and both informal and formal learning opportunities). Employees' improved access to job resources positively affects workplace outcomes (Liden et al., 1997), such as employability. The articles also use other theories to explain the positive influence of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability. Van der Heijden and Spurk (2019) and Matsuo (2022), for example, use job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). According to Bakker and Demerouti (2017), JD-R involves a human

resources management approach, suggesting that job resources, defined as "physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job are functional in achieving work goals" (p. 274), influence employees' work motivation, especially under challenging work conditions. Job resources, such as performance feedback, LMX, and opportunities for growth, help employees cope with job demands, which subsequently enhance employability. Drawing on this theory, Matsuo (2022) found that a positive psychology (Seligman, 2019) lens explains the link between supervisors' leadership and employees' employability. As a job resource, supervisor support fosters employees' confidence to succeed with task performance, and as a result such confidence is employees succeeding with their task performance, which enhances work performance (Van Woerkom et al., 2016) and influences employability positively.

To explain the positive influence of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability, Van der Heijden and Spurk (2019) use conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which is generally similar to Yizhong et al.'s (2019) use of job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldman, 1975). COR associates with JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) because both focus on employees who use resources to cope with organizational stress such as job insecurity. According to Hobfoll et al. (2018), COR suggests that "individuals strive to obtain, retain, foster and protect those things they centrally value" (p. 104), such as employment. Using this coping strategy, employees obtain and retain resources by, for example, investing in skill development (i.e., a personal resource) and LMX, the quality of a supervisor–employee relationship (i.e., a social resource; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Froehlich et al. (2019) demonstrate that skill development through task variety fosters employability indirectly, and Wayne et al. (1997) argue that degree of access to job resources is affected by the quality of supervisor–employee relationships, which subsequently contributes to employees' employability enhancement. Job characteristics (JC) theory (Hackman & Oldman, 1975) appears suitable to explaining the positive influence of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability. JC theory (Hackman & Oldman, 1975) suggests that resources such as autonomy, job feedback, task significance, and task identity influence feelings and behaviors, such as motivation. From this perspective, supervisors' leadership, as a contextual resource, influences employees' work experiences, (i.e., work meaningfulness and responsibility for work outcomes), which subsequently enhance employability.

According with JD-R, COR, and JC theory, Epitropaki et al. (2021) use sponsorship theory (Rosenbaum, 1979; Wayne et al., 1999), to explain the positive link between supervisors' leadership and employees' employability. The theory suggests that supervisors provide resources such as sponsoring activities and career mentoring, and they subsequently contribute to career success and thus employability. Sponsorship theory is, therefore, a suitable lens to explain the positive association between supervisors' leadership and employees' employability.

Excepting Bhattacharya and Neelam's (2018) mixed-method study, a design that combines quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 1999), all studies used cross-sectional, quantitative, and deductive (i.e., hypothesis testing) approaches. All also collected, at most, two waves of data, which means that they used cross-sectional, not longitudinal, designs. Ployhart and MacKenzie (2015) argue that longitudinal designs include three waves of measurement of the same variables, which provides insights into cause-and-effect (i.e., causality) among them. Since cross-sectional designs involve one-time specific measurement from a single source (e.g., a respondent), the design inherently includes validity concerns, such as common method bias and causal inference (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). We are thus unable to argue a case for causal relationships between supervisors' leadership and employees' employability (Setia, 2016). Despite the advantages of quantitative, deductive hypothesis testing, including the ability to conduct surveys quickly, quantitative research does not include in-depth analyses of individuals' characteristics (e.g., beliefs, values, and assumptions; Neuman, 2014). Due to the quantitative designs used in the studies assessed, we are unable to discover greater insights into participants' behaviors, and thus we are able only to test existing theories, instead of constructing new ones (Neuman, 2014).

The studies were conducted in various work contexts, such as educational, SMEs, healthcare, and several industries at once, and the studies' contexts also varied geographically. Some were conducted in Europe (Böttcher et al., 2018; Bozionelos et al., 2016; Epitropaki et al., 2021; Stoffers et al., 2019; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011; Van der Heijden & Spurk, 2019; Van Harten et al., 2016), followed closely by Asia (Chughtai, 2019; Gustari & Widodo, 2020; Matsuo, 2022; Park, 2020; Wang et al., 2019; Yizhong et al., 2019) and South America (Camps & Rodríguez, 2011). This suggests that we found support for a mostly positive relationship between supervisors' leadership and employees' employability in various work contexts across countries. However, from a "cross-context scholarship" (Whetten, 2009, p. 29) perspective this is an important finding. Namely, outcomes of supervisors' leadership are influenced by context effects (Oc, 2018) defined as "the set of factors surrounding a phenomenon that exert some direct or indirect influence on it (Whetten, 2009, p. 31). Namely, overall, and based on the studies assessed, we argue that results do not differ greatly among these work contexts.

Research conceptualizes supervisors' leadership and employees' employability in several ways. We argue that leadership influences, that is enhances, at least one dimension of employees' employability both directly and indirectly. Chughtai (2019) found contradictory results; that is, no support for a direct influence of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability. We refer to Fiedler's (1964) contingency theory of leadership as an explanation for different results within several conceptualizations of the constructs. Fiedler (1964) suggests no universal leadership style that fits every context.

Findings suggest that major leadership concepts, such as transformational leadership, LMX, and servant leadership, and leadership concepts related to employees' support of employees' development, perceived supervisor support of employees' wellbeing and functioning, and perceived supervisor support for strength use and mentoring, are leader-support leadership concepts (Cheong et al., 2019) that have a positive and direct influence on employability. Such leadership encourages followers to transform their attitudes, values, and behaviors through empowerment so that followers achieve outstanding performance (Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders motivate employees by being role models, sharing inspired visions of a desired future, and recognizing and stimulating employees' creativity and development (e.g., stimulate self-development) (Bass, 1999), and using power and authority to focus on change (e.g., progress and development; Tucker & Russell, 2004), which subsequently enhances employability. Similar to Bass (1999), Greenleaf (1977) also focuses on transforming employees' attitudes, values, and behaviors by putting service first instead of leading, such that employees "grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous and more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13). LMX represents the quality of social exchanges between a leader and follower, which associate with exchanges of job resources and subsequently influence both leaders' and followers' behaviors (Wayne et al., 1997). The quality of dyadic relationships between leaders and followers determines the extent to which leaders offer valuable resources such as training and feedback (Liao et al., 2009), which subsequently enhance employees' employability (Froehlich et al., 2019). Perceived supervisor support of employee development, well-being, functioning, strength use, and mentoring associates with employees' perceptions of whether supervisors care about them and value their work (Eisenberger et al., 2002). However, the strength of this positive influence differs among leadership conceptualizations. Transformational leadership (Camps & Rodríguez, 2011), followed closely by LMX (Epitropaki et al., 2021), are the types of leadership that associate most positively with employability. Wang et al. (2019) demonstrate a positive influence of servant leadership on employability, and in contradiction, Chughtai (2019) found no support for the same relationship. Instead of assessing explicit leadership styles, the remainder of the studies assess employees' perceived supervisor support, with inconclusive results reported. Depending on the conceptualization of employees' perceived supervisor support, such support might enhance employees' employability, but to a lesser degree than major leadership concepts such as transformational leadership and LMX.

Regarding the influence of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability, findings suggest the importance of mediators and moderators. Mediators such as work-related flow (Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011), job demands, skill discretion, and decision authority (e.g., job characteristics), and social exchange mechanisms, particularly perceived organizational support and team–member exchange (Yizhong et al., 2019), career planning, skill development, and networking (e.g., proactive career behaviors; Chughtai, 2019), career skills (Wang et al., 2019), and strength use (Matsuo, 2022), are crucial to

explaining the influence of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability. Moderators such as work roles, personality (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014), proactive personalities (Wang et al., 2019), and national contexts (Stoffers et al., 2019) influence the relationship between supervisors' leadership and employees' employability. This implies that in addition to several leadership concepts and mediators discussed above, the positive influence of leadership on employability differs among work roles, personalities (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014), proactive personalities (Wang et al., 2019), and national contexts (Stoffers et al., 2019). As mechanisms, both mediators and moderators are crucial to explaining the positive influence of supervisors' leadership on employees' employability.

2.6 SETTING AN AGENDA FOR EMPLOYABILITY RESEARCH

This review suggests how supervisors' leadership influences employees' employability, but more research is needed to explore this relationship further. We therefore propose multiple directions for future research, setting an agenda, from (1) a theoretical perspective that investigates how other, as yet unapplied leadership frameworks and other mechanisms (e.g., mediators and moderators) operate in the relationship; (2) and from a methodological perspective, i.e., how other methodologies might be pursued in future empirical studies which might enhance the understanding of the supervisors' leadership and employees' employability which consequently represents a valuable contribution to the employability literature.

To enhance theoretical knowledge about the leadership–employability relationship, findings suggest little research on the influence of other leadership concepts, such as relational (Clarke, 2018), authentic (Avolio et al., 2004) and empowering (Cheong et al., 2019) leadership, on employees' employability. Relational leadership is a social-process leadership style that stresses the role played by social interactions, which are dominated by mutual respect and trust between supervisors and employees (Clarke, 2018). Carifio (2010) argues that relational leadership includes five attributes—inclusion, empowerment, caring, ethicality, and having vision—which might enhance employability. Authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2004) is associated with enhancing followers' motivation and engagement, which subsequently foster employees' work outcomes (e.g., performance). Cheong et al. (2019) argue that empowering leadership relates closely to transformational and other process leadership approaches that provides relational support by, for example, fostering employees' autonomy. These leadership styles might operate as a job resource, enhancing employability. Therefore, we suggest further research directions by addressing research questions such as: How does supervisors' leadership (e.g., relational, authentic and empowering leadership) influence employees' employability? For instance, will supervisors' relational leadership enhance employees' employability more strongly

than authentic or empowering leadership? Moreover, despite the growing literature on collective forms of leadership such as shared leadership (Sweeney et al., 2019) which also may influence the employee–employer relationship in terms of employees' employability enhancement, we propose further research guided by the research question: How does shared leadership influences employees' employability?

Furthermore, the current systematic literature review uses an input-based approach to employability (Vanhercke et al., 2014), focusing on "the subjective perception held by an employee (or by his or her supervisor) about his or her possibilities in terms of competences, to obtain and maintain work" (Van der Heijden et al., 2018, p. 237), which is a limitation of this paper. Namely, according to De Lange et al. (2021), employability operationalizations can be categorized as "input- or competence-based" (p. 1) or "output- or labor market-based" (p. 1). Building on this review, we therefore suggest examining in future research how "output- or labor market-based" employability operates within the leadership–employability relationship.

We found that mechanisms such as mediators (e.g., work-related flow; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011) and moderators, for instance proactive personality (Wang et al., 2019), operate as mechanisms within the leadership–employability relationship. To explore further how supervisors' leadership influences employees' employability, we propose including other mediators and moderators as a starting point. We suggest assessing whether mediators, such as mutual respect and trust (Clarke, 2018), hope (Avolio et al., 2004), and psychological empowerment (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2015), operate in the relationship. More insights are also needed regarding whether moderators, such as a leader's gender (Cheong et al., 2019), influence the relationship. Thus, we propose addressing research questions such as: Do mutual respect and trust, hope, and psychological empowerment mediate the leadership–employability relationship? And, how does leader gender moderate the leadership–employability relationship?

From a methodological perspective, cross-sectional designs dominated this review, which suggests validity concerns such as common method bias and causal inference (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). We therefore suggest that longitudinal designs with at least 3 waves of data collection, as well as experiments (e.g., pretest-posttest, control-group designs) and multi-level designs, are needed to increase validity by assessing causal relationships between leadership and employability (Setia, 2016). Researchers should use multi-source data (e.g., multi-level data structures) among employees and immediate supervisors who work in under-researched contexts, such as healthcare and SMEs. Therefore, we propose to conduct research in under-researched contexts, such as healthcare and SMEs, especially because outcomes of the supervisors' leadership–employability relationship are influenced by context effects (Oc, 2018).

2.7 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This review offers several implications that inform policy, practice, and research in management and organization studies (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009), particularly in relation to employability and leadership. Findings demonstrate the possibilities of supervisors' leadership as a job resource that enhances employees' employability, contributing to their subjective career success. Employees are thus able to cope with rapidly changing jobs (Van der Heijden et al., 2018) and are less likely to develop feelings of job insecurity and panic in reaction to change because they are confident that they can pursue employment both inside and outside of the current organization if necessary (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011).

Policymakers should facilitate conditions that enhance supervisors' leadership as a job resource (e.g., a contextual variable), which subsequently fosters employees' employability (i.e., a personal variable). From an organizational perspective, policymakers can foster supervisors' transformational leadership, for example, by facilitating training such as workshops (Bass & Avolio, 1990a) and feedback (Kelloway et al., 2000).

Supervisors should focus on the quality of LMX, being aware of the influence of shared identities and personal values between leaders and followers, which subsequently enhance the quality of relationships (Jackson & Johnson, 2012). Organizations should be aware of the role supervisors play as delegates of the organization, facilitating job resources such as perceived supervisor support. Supervisors should thus pay greater attention to providing job resources such as enhancing work experiences by offering informal social learning opportunities that foster employability (Froehlich et al., 2019). Among supervisors, insights suggest opportunities to enhance employability by creating a supportive work context with fit-for-purpose job resources. This is an important finding for policymakers, researchers, and supervisors.

2.8 LIMITATIONS

This review's methodology was crucial to assessing the current state of scientific research (Snyder, 2019), but it has some limitations. This review was influenced by several types of reporting biases, such as publication, location, and language biases (Higgins et al., 2019). Higgins et al. (2019) argue that publication bias, regardless of the expertise of the researcher, derives from whether articles get published. We are unable to review research findings in unpublished articles, which might influence the results.

Regarding location bias, we were restricted to using the university's interface. Thus, when identifying articles that met the inclusion criteria, we were restricted by access to a limited

number of databases that are connected to the university's interface. Such restrictions determine access to articles and might influence findings.

Language biases also affected results. Our inclusion criteria included peer-reviewed journal articles, conference articles, books, and book chapters published in English and Dutch. Due to a lack of resources to translate languages unknown to the researchers, findings were restricted to these two languages, which might have influenced findings.

We did not assess the quality of the methodologies used in the articles, which is also a limitation. Thus, the quality of the methodologies affected the quality of this review. When conducting a systematic review, the number of authors affects the review's quality. Two of the three authors independently identified, selected, and reviewed the articles used during the review, but a greater number of authors might have enhanced its quality.

Despite the growing literature on collective forms of leadership such as shared leadership (Sweeney et al., 2019) we focus exclusively on the individual leadership–employability relationship which is a limitation of this paper. Finally, we exclusively look at "input- or competence-based" (De Lange et al., 2021, p. 1) employability, consequently we do not search for "output- or labor market-based" (p. 1) employability, which is a restriction and thus a limitation of this paper.

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APPENDIX

Full list of searched major research databases using university's interface—January 2022 to February 2022.

Academic Search Premier (EBSCO)
ACM Digital Library
AIS (Association for Information Systems)
APA PsycArticles (EBSCO)
APA PsycInfo (EBSCO)
Ars Aequi
Beeld en Geluid op school
Business Source Complete (EBSCO)
Cambridge Journals
CINAHL (EBSCO)
Cochrane Library
Company.info
Delpher
DOAJ – Directory of Open Access Journals
EBSCO Host (EBSCO)
Electronic Journals Service (EBSCO)
Embase on OvidSP
Emerald Insight [management]
ERIC EBSCO
Europeana
Europeana Newspapers
Factset
Google Scholar
Greenfile (EBSCO)
HeinOnline
IEEE Digital Library
Jesuit Online Bibliography
JSTOR
Kluwer Navigator
Lecture Notes in Computer Science
Legal Intelligence
Library Information & Technology Abstracts (EBSCO)
LibSearch: discovery tool UM
LiteRom (Nederlandstalig)
Max Planck Encyclopedias of International Law (MPIL)
Medline (EBSCO)
MUSE Humanities Collection
NARCIS
Nature
NDFR (Nederlandse Documentatie Fiscaal Recht)
Nederlandse historische parlementaire documenten
Nexis Uni (Lexis Nexis)
NLFiscaal
OA journal browser
Open Book Publishers
OpMaat Premium Plus
Overheid.nl
Oxford Historical Treaties (OHT)
Oxford International Organizations Database (OXIO)
Oxford Reports on International Law (ORIL)
Oxford Scholarly Authorities on International Law (OSAIL)
Oxford University Press
Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection (EBSCO)
Pubmed
Regional Business News (EBSCO)
Sage Business Cases
Sage Journals Online
Science
Sciencedirect (Elsevier)
SpringerLink
Strada Lex
Taylor & Francis Online
UN-iLibrary
Van Dale online woordenboeken
Web of Science
Westlaw UK
WestlawNext
Wiley Online Library
Worldcat

3

Study 2 — "Let's stick together": Toward a Serial Mediation Model about the Impact of Relational Leadership on Workers' Employability

This chapter has been published as Hoedemakers, J., Vanderstukken, A., Stoffers, J., & Van der Heijden, B. (2025). "Let's stick together": toward a serial mediation model about the impact of relational leadership on workers' employability. *Career Development International, 30*(1), 106–122.

This study was presented at The XII International Workshop on Human Resource Management, held on October 20–21, 2022, at the Universidad de Cádiz, Cádiz, Spain, and at the third MORSE Conference, held on October 23–25, 2023, at Maastricht University, Maastricht, the Netherlands.

Abstract

This paper explores whether relational leadership enhances nurses' employability. An empirical study was conducted to investigate associations between relational leadership, perceived supervisory support, perceived opportunities for competence development, and employability. A serial mediation model was constructed to investigate our hypothesized relationships. We applied a two-wave panel design and collected self-reported survey data from 109 nurses working in a Dutch homecare organization. Relationships were tested using PLS-SEM. Our findings suggest no direct association between relational leadership and employability. However, we found support for a serial mediation model, in which perceived supervisory support and perceived opportunities for competence development fully mediated the relationship between relational leadership and employability. This scholarly work contributes to the employability literature; a supervisor who fosters high-quality relationships with nurses communicates a willingness to support their development and provides competence development opportunities, which, in turn, fosters nurses' employability. HR managers and supervisors in homecare organizations should create leadership development policies and practices that encourage relational leadership, particularly empowering leadership. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to use supervisors' relational leadership to predict employees' employability.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

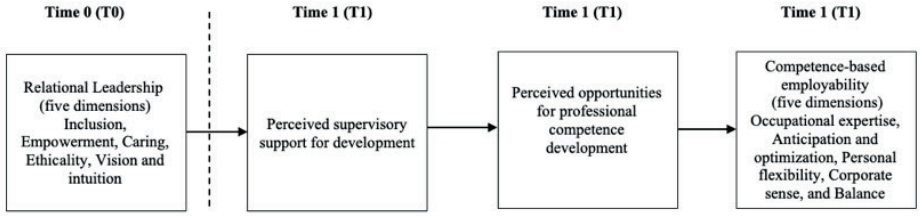
Healthcare organizations must respond to complex, worldwide megatrends, such as demographic and digital shifts (Baptista et al., 2020; International Labour Organization, 2019). Specifically, nurses must cope with patients who are more likely to have multiple chronic diseases (Dall et al., 2013), making their work demands more complex. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the implementation of technologies in healthcare, which subsequently transformed nurses' jobs drastically (Isidori et al., 2022), resulting in technological skill gaps (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2018). When nurses fail to meet these changing work demands, they become dissatisfied and might leave their profession entirely (Buchan et al., 2013; Lu et al., 2005; World Health Organization, 2020), herewith worsening the severe nursing labor shortage (International Labour Organization, 2019).

These changing work demands require nurses to develop new knowledge, skills and attitudes (Isidori et al., 2022). Highly employable workers have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills and competences and are thus better able to cope with all requirements at the workplace (Stoffers, 2023; Stoffers et al., 2020a). Employability, or "the subjective perception held by an employee (or by their supervisor) about their possibilities, in terms of competences, to obtain and maintain work" (Van der Heijden et al., 2018, p. 237), is thus paramount to both nurses' career success and healthcare organizations' performance (Fugate et al., 2021).

Recently, Leclerc et al. (2022) found that relational leadership (RL) contributes to positive nursing outcomes, but, so far, the effects of RL on employability, particularly in healthcare, remain underexplored (cf. Hoedemakers et al., 2023). Stoffers et al. (2020b) and Van der Heijden and Spurk (2019) identified the relevance of Leader–Member eXchange (LMX), for workers' employability enhancement. Building on the principles of social exchange (Blau, 1964) as our underlying theoretical framework, we argue that supervisor's RL might affect nurses' behavior, and, in turn, their perceptions of support (PSS) and opportunities for competence development (POCD) (Wang et al., 2022), which foster their employability (Froehlich et al., 2014; Stoffers et al., 2014; Van der Heijden & Spurk, 2019). Indeed, to establish employability, organizations should invest in employees' competence development (Martini & Cavenago, 2017). In doing so, the current study aims to shed more light on the mechanisms underlying the impact of RL on employability and hereby addresses Fugate et al.'s (2021) and Van Harten et al.'s (2020) call to examine how employer–employee interdependence in terms of POCD, stimulates employability.

Our central research question: *how does relational leadership influence employability*? This study therefore examines a serial mediation model in which supervisors' RL predicts employability, with PSS for development and POCD being sequential mediators (see Figure 3.1 for the research model).

Figure 3.1
Research model



3.2 THEORY AND HYPOTHESES' DEVELOPMENT

Relational leadership

Relational leadership (the current study adds the concept of RL to the employability literature, with its focus on respect, trust and self-expression in dyadic relationships (e.g., Clarke, 2018) is "a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e. evolving social order) and change (e.g. new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, and ideologies) are constructed and produced" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655). Relational leaders recognize the importance of relationships and focus on the interactions they have with others (Clarke, 2018). During interactions, they focus on "the need to be respectful, establishing trust, and for people to be able to 'express themselves'" (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011, p. 1433). RL is thus characterized by inclusion, empowerment, caring, ethicality and having vision (Carifio, 2010). Inclusion concerns the positive value of every individual, regardless of dissimilarities (Komives et al., 1998), and empowerment refers to leaders' choices to create value for individuals (e.g., autonomy enhancement; Honold, 1997). Caring emphasizes the importance of empathy in relationships (Regan & Brooks, 1995), and ethicality concerns positive energy and integrity (Komives et al., 1998). Having vision is concerned with being explicit about goal achievement at the team and individual levels and stimulating commitment to goals (Regan & Brooks, 1995).

Since RL is a new concept, empirical evidence of its predictive value for work-related outcomes is scarce. Building on extant literature that evidenced positive associations with, for instance, innovative work behaviors (Kim, 2022), we investigate its impact on employability.

Relational leadership and competence-based employability

The construct of competence-based employability comprises "knowledge, skills and attitudes, or more general competencies to assess employability" (Van der Heijden et al., 2018, p. 237), and it contains five dimensions—occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

Occupational expertise means possessing the right professional skills and knowledge (e.g., meta-cognitive knowledge) and being acknowledged socially by focal stakeholders. Anticipation and optimization refer to competence with self-initiated anticipation and optimization with regard to changes in an individual's job or career in the future, focusing on realizing the best job or career outcomes. Personal flexibility encompasses reactive, passive adaptation to changes within and between jobs and organizations. Corporate sense relates to social capital, associating with the capacity to participate and perform through collaboration on and in teams, groups, departments, and networks. Balance is paradoxical because it refers to balance between opposing interests, such as from employers and employees, regarding jobs, careers and private interests.

Although, to the best of our knowledge, up until now, employability has not been studied empirically as an outcome of RL, extant research suggests a link between the two. For instance, Hoedemakers et al.'s (2023) systematic literature review indicated that other leadership types, especially transformational leadership (e.g., Vermeeren & Van der Heijden, 2022) and LMX (e.g., Epitropaki et al., 2021), influence employability. Such leadership styles are characterized by inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence and individualized consideration (Avolio et al., 1991), representing high-quality, dyadic relationships between a leader and followers (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), much like RL (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Tu et al. (2022) demonstrated the importance of leaders' secure-base support for employees' career-related outcomes (i.e., job crafting). Furthermore, in education contexts, leadership, in terms of social relationships between lecturers and students, affects students' perceptions of obtaining a job, and thus their employability (Alawamleh & Mahadin, 2022; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Since a supervisor with a RL style engages in social exchanges with their employees, particularly caring about, supporting and empowering them, and Richards (2024) denoted RL as an important job resource for supporting nurses toward work-related outcomes, we argue that RL contributes to nurses' employability.

H1. *A supervisor's RL style relates positively to nurses' employability.*

Mediation by perceived supervisory support for development and perceived opportunities for competence development

Relational leaders may elicit positive employee outcomes because they signal greater support for development. They focus on dyadic supportive relationships (Cleary et al., 2018), including behaviors of inclusiveness, empowerment and caring (Clarke, 2018). Recently, Leclerc et al. (2022) argued that a relational leader motivates nurses and advocates their professional growth by focusing on providing support for development. Furthermore, a systematic review by Aleo et al. (2024) demonstrated that supervisors who adopt a RL style play a substantial role in the effectiveness of professional development

of their subordinates, which may be because they signal the need for support for their development.

H2. *A supervisor's RL style relates positively to nurses' PSS for development.*

PSS for development, in turn, leads to POCD. PSS is associated with employees' perceptions concerning how supervisors value their contributions, support them and care about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2002). As such, supportive supervisors operate as a job resource that "provides guidance, assistance, and feedback to subordinates" (Yang et al., 2018, p. 498) and facilitate training tailored to their employees' needs (Komives et al., 1998), herewith raising awareness for POCD both inside and outside of the organization (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Consequently, PSS for development, for instance through delegating tasks (Van Vianen et al., 2019) positively affects employees' perceptions of available development opportunities for them (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010), such as POCD.

H3. *Nurses' PSS for development relates positively to their POCD.*

Finally, POCD by practices such as training (Bozionelos et al., 2020) and functional rotation (De Vos et al., 2011) are likely to lead to perceptions of increased employability. Previous research already suggested that POCD, both informal (Froehlich et al., 2023) and formal (Van den Elsen et al., 2022), contribute to workers' employability (Van der Klink et al., 2014). Since such opportunities are also evidenced to be of critical importance for career progression in healthcare (e.g., Aleo et al., 2024), we argue that they stimulate employability in that context as well.

H4. *Nurses' POCD relates positively to their employability.*

In sum, based on the above-mentioned hypotheses we argue that nurses' PSS for development and POCD mediate serially in explaining the association between RL style and nurses' employability. Specifically, RL motivates nurses to continue their professional growth as they experience support for development (Leclerc et al., 2022). Supervisors foster nurses' competence development through, for instance, guidance and feedback (Yang et al., 2018, p. 498), hereby increasing their perceptions of available competence development opportunities (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). The latter, in turn, stimulates their employability (e.g., Bozionelos et al., 2020; Froehlich et al., 2023).

H5. *PSS for development and nurses' POCD mediate serially the relationship between a supervisor's RL style and nurses' employability.*

3.3 METHOD

Organizational context and procedure

To test our serial mediation model, an empirical study was conducted in a homecare organization in the Netherlands. Our sample included direct nursing staff members (Backhaus et al., 2018) (n = 496) who held a qualification level of 1 through 6 on the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Due to COVID-19, nurses had to cope with challenging work demands at the time of data collection.

We collected two-wave, self-reported online survey data from this sample during October 2021 (T0) and April 2022 (T1) (i.e., adopting a six-month interval). The online questionnaires contained validated scales for all our study's variables. Complying with principles of scientific integrity (NWO, 2023), participants received an informed consent letter about the objective of the study, their voluntary participation, the time needed to complete the questionnaire, and the anonymity and confidentiality of data processing. To maximize participation, we informed potential respondents about the response rate during the study. The research was approved by The Research Ethics Committee of the Open Universiteit (number: U202108211).

To enhance the reliability and validity of our study and to mitigate common-method bias (among others), we utilized procedural controls (Kock et al., 2021). For this, we established temporal separation when collecting data from the same respondents, using two waves (see Figure 3.1). Furthermore, to prevent response bias (Dolnicar, 2020), we executed a pretest of the questionnaire using a sample of four nurses.

Sample

The sample of nurses who provided full data at T0 and T1 consisted of 109 nurses (response rate was 21.98%; 95.40% female and 4.60% male), with a mean age of 49.49 years (SD = 11.24). Respondents' education level varied from EQF 2 (9.2%) to EQF 6 (18.3%), with the majority having EQF level 3 or 4 (69.7%). 54.1% held a certified nurse assistant position, followed by baccalaureate-educated registered nurses (23.8%), vocationally trained registered nurses (15.6%), nurse assistants (3.7%) and nurse aides (2.8%). Job tenure was, on average, 15.5 years (SD = 12.20), and nurses worked, on average, 11.6 years (SD = 13.80) in their function.

Measures

We measured RL, PSS for development, POCD, and employability at two times using the same scales, which have been validated in extant research. Items for RL, perceived supervisory support for development and perceived opportunities for professional competence development were translated into Dutch using the translation-back-translation

methodology (Brislin, 1970). The items for employability have not been translated as the original items were in Dutch.

Supervisors' RL style was assessed using Carifio's (2010) 25-item, 5-dimensional scale of each 5 items, which consists of inclusion (e.g., "My supervisor creates opportunity for professional and personal growth for supervisors and others"), empowerment (e.g., "My supervisor acknowledges the abilities and skills of others"), caring (e.g., "My supervisor steps out of his/her personal frame of reference into that of others"), ethicality (e.g., "My supervisor influences others by mutual liking and respect") and having vision (e.g., "My supervisor provides inspiring and strategic goals"). The response format was a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Perceived supervisory support for development was assessed using Salminen and Miettinen's (2019) 8-item scale. The response format was a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". A sample item was: "My supervisor supports me in learning new things."

Perceived opportunities for competence development was assessed using Salminen and Miettinen's (2019) 5-item instrument. The response format was a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". A sample item was: "My employer creates opportunity to receive training that promotes professional competencies."

Employability was measured using the 22-item instrument from Van der Heijden et al. (2018), consisting of five dimensions—occupational expertise (5 items, e.g., "During the past year, I was, in general, competent to perform my work accurately and with few mistakes"), anticipation and optimization (4 items, e.g., "I consciously devote attention to applying my newly acquired knowledge and skills"), personal flexibility (5 items, e.g., "I adapt to developments within my organization"), corporate sense (4 items, e.g., "I share my experience and knowledge with others") and balance (4 items, e.g., "My work and private life are evenly balanced"). The response format was a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Control variables participants' age, gender, education level, job tenure and years in function were controlled for in our data analysis. Since the inclusion of these controls did not affect the results, we present our results without them.

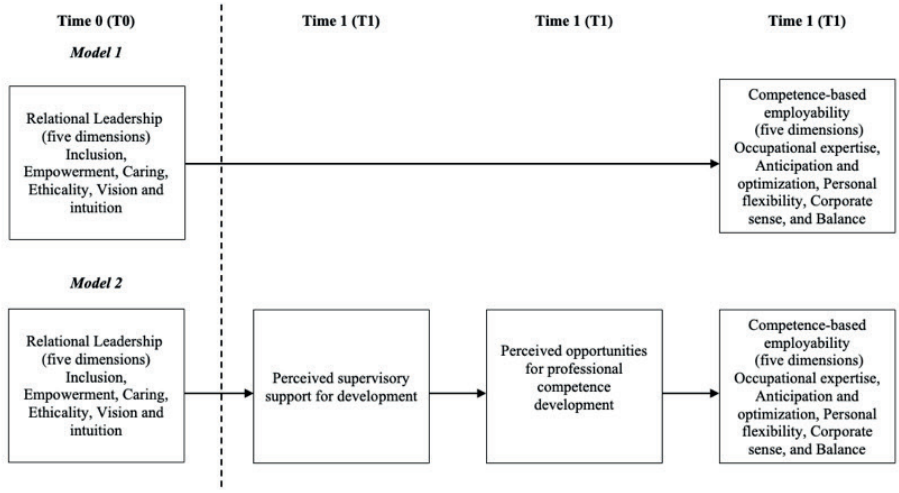
Data analysis

We used R (R Core Team, 2023) to conduct PLS-SEM, which allowed us to estimate a complex model that includes two multidimensional latent variables, and which accommodates the small sample size (Hair et al., 2019). We used the bootstrap method (10,000 iterations; Streukens & Leroi-Werelds, 2016), and measurement and structural

models were evaluated using Hair et al.'s (2019) procedure. We assessed two structural models for hypotheses' testing. Model 1 exclude the mediators PSS and POCD, and thus examined the total association between RL and employability. Model 2 include the mediators, herewith assessing both direct and indirect relationships among variables (see Figure 3.2 for the measurement models).

Figure 3.2

Measurement models



3.4 RESULTS

Assessment of the measurement model

We evaluated the quality of the measurement model by examining the internal consistency and the convergent and discriminant validity of the latent constructs. We first assessed the reflective indicator loadings on corresponding constructs (Kock, 2014). Results demonstrated insufficient loadings, for one indicator in each case, for the dimensions inclusion, and vision and intuition of the RL style construct, and for the dimensions occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance for the employability construct; they did not exceed the threshold value of 0.708, as Hair et al. (2019) recommend. We thus excluded those seven indicators during our subsequent analyses. We then reassessed indicator loadings, which suggested that, for all remaining indicators, loadings exceeded the threshold value, except one indicator for the inclusion dimension of the RL style construct. We thus also excluded this indicator, resulting in loadings that all exceeded the threshold value. We used Cronbach's alpha (α) and rho_A to examine the constructs' internal consistency. Our results suggested an acceptable reliability for all measurement scale, since for all constructs reliabilities exceeded both the threshold values of 0.65 for α (i.e., ranging from 0.706 to 0.911) (Vaske, 2008) and the cut-off of 0.70 for rho_A (i.e., ranging from 0.766 to 0.974) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Subsequently, we examined each construct's convergent validity using average variance extracted (AVE). Results suggested acceptable convergent validity for all measures because AVEs values ranging from 0.605 to 0.768 and thus exceeded the 0.5 threshold value (Hair et al., 2021). Following Henseler et al. (2015), we assessed the discriminant validity for all measures using bootstrapping (10,000 iterations; Streukens & Leroi-Werelds, 2016) to investigate whether the HeteroTrait-MonoTrait (HTMT) correlations for the inter-construct correlations differed from 1. Our results suggested acceptable HTMT correlations, since the upper bounds of the 95% confidence intervals (CI) were lower than 1 (Henseler et al., 2015), except for those that between caring and ethicality (both dimensions of RL). Hence, the inter-construct correlations between RL dimensions' caring and ethicality exceeded the upper value of the 95% CI [0.914, 1.023] suggesting discriminant validity has not been established (Henseler et al., 2015). We therefore, aggregated the supervisor's RL style dimensions of caring and ethicality into one dimension, so that the different meanings of all the dimensions are consequently reflected by the corresponding four different dimensions (Van der Heijden & Verhelst, 2002) and reassessed the measurement model.

Measurement model reassessment after aggregating the supervisor's relational leadership style dimensions of caring and ethicality

Reflective indicator loadings (Kock, 2014) demonstrated insufficient loadings, for one indicator in each case, for the dimensions of inclusion, caring/ethicality, vision and intuition, for the RL style construct, and for the dimensions of occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance, for the employability construct (i.e., they did not exceed 0.708, as Hair et al. (2019) recommend). We thus excluded these indicators during subsequent analyses. A reassessment of the measurement model suggested acceptable reliabilities for all measurement scales (i.e., α ranged from 0.650 to 0.929; and rho_ A from 0.654 to 0.958); and acceptable convergent validity for all measures, since the AVEs for each construct exceeded the 0.5 threshold value, because they ranged from 0.576 to 0.760 (Hair et al., 2019).

We reassessed discriminant validity between the measures using the method of bootstrapping HTMT correlations (10,000 iterations; Henseler et al., 2015; Streukens & Leroi-Werelds, 2016). Our results suggested a lack of discriminant validity between the measures for anticipation and optimization, on the one hand, and corporate sense, on the other hand. However, since the upper value of the 95% CI was close to one [0.914, 1.023], and since the employability measurement instrument (Van der Heijden et al., 2018) has been thoroughly validated in extant studies (e.g., Crans et al., 2021), we proceeded without further alterations to the measurement model.

Correlations and means

Table 3.1 revealed that correlations among the variables under study were aligned with our expectations.

Table 3.1

Correlations

	Mean	***SD***	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**
1. Inclusion (T0)	4.96	0.86	-										
2. Empowerment (T0)	5.44	0.94	.701**										
3. Caring (T0)	5.55	0.89	.677**	.851**									
4. Ethicality (T0)	5.47	0.83	.593**	.733**	.853**								
5. Vision and intuition (T0)	5.30	0.91	.607**	.773**	.805**	.795**							
6. PSS (T1)	3.42	0.59	.299**	.415**	.282**	.182	.240**						
7. PDO (T1)	3.62	0.69	.174	.200*	.173	.108	.136	.761**					
8. Occupational expertise (T1)	4.56	0.51	.090	.227*	.140	.129	.076	.174	.105				
9. Anticipation and optimization (T1)	3.50	0.66	.307**	.262**	.207*	.194*	.184	.265**	.307**	.357**			
10. Personal flexibility (T1)	4.46	0.61	.089	.089	.027	.101	-.016	.039	.047	.578**	.432**		
11. Corporate sense (T1)	4.12	0.74	.214*	.279**	.199*	.226*	.205*	.210*	.184	.470**	.540**	.314**	
12. Balance (T1)	4.12	0.63	-.079	.055	.082	.056	.098	.240*	.264**	.323**	.024	.149	.138

*Note(s). *p <0.05; ** p <0.01*

Assessment of the structural model

To mitigate bias during the regression analyses, we tested for multicollinearity using Variance Inflation Factors (VIF; Hair et al., 2019). Our results indicated VIF values that did not exceed the cut-off of 5 (Becker et al., 2015), because values ranged from 1.264 to 4.892 herewith demonstrating an absence of multicollinearity. We bootstrapped the estimated structural model using 10,000 iterations to assess the significance of the structural paths with bias-corrected 95% CI (Streukens & Leroi-Werelds, 2016; see Table 3.2 for the significant structural paths).

Table 3.2

Structural model hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Path	Bootstrap Mean	Bootstrap SD	R^2	T-value	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
H2.	RL-Empowerment -> PSS for development	0.554	0.224	0.209	2.678	0.086	0.968
H3.	PSS for development -> POCD	0.843	0.058	0.621	14.639	0.728	0.955
H4.	POCD -> Employability-Anticipation and Optimization	0.316	0.091	0.219	3.610	0.126	0.480
H4.	POCD -> Employability-Corporate Sense	0.206	0.096	0.160	2.085	0.012	0.384
H4.	POCD -> Employability-Balance	0.296	0.098	0.117	2.942	0.098	0.480
H5	RL-Empowerment -> PSS for development -> POCD -> EMP- Anticipation and Optimization	0.151	0.082	0.219	2.038	0.013	0.325
H5	RL-Empowerment -> PSS for development -> POCD -> EMP-Balance	0.140	0.078	0.117	1.86	0.012	0.313

Note. 10,000 bootstrap iterations.

Contrary to our expectations, the path coefficient for the relationship between RL style (T0) and employability (T1) was not significantly differed from zero. Hence, H1 was not supported by our data. Our results suggest a significant coefficient for the relationship between the empowerment dimension of RL (T0) and PSS for development (T1), but not for the other dimensions. Thus, H2 was partially supported with our data. Our results revealed a significant coefficient for the relationship between PSS for development (T1) and POCD (T1). Hence, H3 was supported by our data. We found that POCD (T1) was positively associated with the employability dimensions of anticipation and optimization, corporate sense and balance (T1), but not with occupational expertise and personal flexibility. H4 was thus partially supported with our data.

We found significant serial mediation effects of the RL style dimension empowerment (T0) on both the employability dimensions of anticipation and optimization, and balance (T1), through PSS for development, and POCD. Other indirect effects were non-significant. H5 was thus partially supported with our data.

We assessed the model's in-sample predictive power (Schmueli & Koppius, 2011) by calculating the coefficient of determination (R^2) of the endogenous constructs. RL (T0) explained 20.9% of the variance in PSS for development (T1). RL (T0) and PSS for development (T1) explained 62.1% of the variance in nurses' POCD (T1). RL (T0), PSS for development (T1) and nurses' POCD (T1) explained 21.9% of the variance in anticipation and optimization (T1), 16% of the variance in corporate sense (T1) and 11.7% of the variance in balance (T1). Hence, we conclude that a supervisor's relational leadership style (particularly empowerment) stimulates nurses' PSS for development, and their POCD, which subsequently enhance their employability regarding anticipation and optimization, and balance.

3.5 DISCUSSION

Our findings make both theoretical contributions and practical implications.
First, this study contributes to the employability literature, specifically to research that emphasizes the importance of leadership to employability. Although previous research has shown a significant effect of leadership styles, such as servant leadership (Wang et al., 2019), on employability, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first empirical work that focuses on relational leadership as a possible predictor of workers' employability. Hoedemakers et al. (2023) argued for a positive association between supervisors' leadership and employees' employability, thereby laying the groundwork for this empirical work. As such, the current study adds the concept of relational leadership to the employability literature, with its focus on respect, trust, and self-expression in dyadic relationships (e.g., Clarke, 2018).

Whereas in earlier research servant leadership was found to influence employability directly (Wang et al., 2019), we conclude that relational leadership affects employability indirectly. This finding may occur because relational leadership's conceptualization is considerably different from that of servant leadership. Contrary to relational leadership (e.g., Uhl-Bien, 2006), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970) focuses on one angle, namely, the angle of the leader holding a formal leader position, and thus largely neglects the role of, in terms of interaction with, their followers. These traditional leadership theories utilize leaders' characteristics, behavior, and personality, to explain how leadership affects followers toward goal achievement (e.g., enhancing their employability). Relational leadership, in contrast, denotes leadership as the constitution of reciprocal relationships

between leaders and followers, and therefore emphasizes the role of followers in addition to the role of their leaders, when trying to understand the impact of leadership style on effects under study (Clarke, 2018). Hence, as indicated by our empirical work, relational leadership appears to influence (desired) outcomes, through the empowerment that is created by means of employees' perceptions about the nature and characteristics of this particular leadership style (cf. Carifio, 2010). As such, relational leadership style does lead to PSS that influence POCD, which subsequently enhance followers' employability.

Altogether, we found support for a fully mediated serial model that explains the mechanisms (Kazdin, 2007) behind the association between relational leadership and employability. Relational leadership appears to influence employability as relational leaders signal support for development and provide opportunities for competence development, which in turn enhance workers' employability. This finding accords with previous research that suggested that workers should make use of learning opportunities to build up skills and competences that make them more employable (e.g., Froehlich et al., 2014). Principles of social exchange (Blau, 1964) serve as our underlying theoretical framework—nurses seem to reciprocate supervisors' resources (e.g., empowerment, PSS for development and POCD) by developing knowledge and skills, thereby increasing their employability in terms of anticipation and optimization, balance.

Second, this study contributes to the relational leadership literature by evidencing additional outcomes of this recent leadership concept. Extant studies have identified relational leadership as a predictor of positive employee outcomes, including innovative work behaviors (Kim, 2022), and improvements to nurses' work environments (Leclerc et al., 2022). By focusing on employability enhancement as our outcome variable, we enrich the relational leadership literature by identifying that relational leadership, especially the empowerment dimension, contributes to new outcomes such as PSS for development, POCD, and employability in terms of anticipation and optimization, and balance. The association between relational leadership and employability appears to be indirect, through the mediators of PSS for development and POCD.

Moreover, we add to the relational leadership literature by testing the concept in a new occupational context. We, therefore, expand our knowledge on Carifio's (2010) relational leadership construct that originated from a sample of high school teachers in the United States to a sample of direct nursing staff members within a Dutch home care organization.

Another contribution to the relational leadership literature lies in testing the impact of separate dimensions of the construct. Most earlier work treated Carifio's (2010) relational leadership construct as one-dimensional (e.g., Ansong et al., 2024), while the construct was originally conceptualized as a five-dimensional one (Carifio, 2010). The current study is one of the very few that assesses the five dimensions separately, thereby further vali-

dating the concept's multidimensional nature. Our analyses suggest that it is difficult to distinguish caring and ethicality statistically, and therefore aggregated caring and ethicality into one dimension, which demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, and both convergent and discriminant validity. However, these findings may be sample-specific, and we therefore suggest further validation of the instrument.

3.6 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study has implications for HRM and supervisors in home care organizations. In particular, we suggest that focusing on policies and practices that stimulate supervisors' relational leadership, particularly empowering subordinates, is a valuable evidence-based HR strategy for home care organizations.

To induce the necessary conditions for relational leadership development, earlier work (Hong et al., 2019) revealed the critical role of collaborative HRM (e.g., job rotation) that stimulates social exchange (Liao et al., 2007), and through these experiences fosters relational leadership. Moreover, Ansong et al. (2024) stressed the importance of open communication to foster employees' participation in decision-making, which is associated with empowerment and inclusion (Carifio, 2010), when aiming to implement a relational leadership style. Ansong et al. (2024) proposed policies and practices that are linked to both leader and leadership development that focus on interpersonal relationships, and that effectuate intra- and interpersonal competences (e.g., self-awareness and social skills). Home care organizations should thus provide development practices that subsequently enhance mutual trust, respect, and emotional intelligence, which relate to relational leadership (Clarke, 2018).

3.7 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

We collected self-reported data, which might be prone to some common-method bias, and constructs were measured using nurses' survey responses; thus, our results might have been affected by a single-source bias as well (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The study's two-wave panel design mitigated some of these effects, but future research is recommended wherein multi-source data from leader–follower pairs are collected.

To enhance our scholarly knowledge about the impact of relational leadership on employability, future studies should investigate possible mediation effects by other variables, such as mutual trust, respect, and emotional intelligence (Clarke, 2018), which would advance the relational leadership and employability literatures. We also call for

more research wherein the role of possible moderators, such as age and gender is considered.

Furthermore, this empirical work was conducted using a survey research design that was based on deductive reasoning, and it was thus limited by theoretically proposed relationships among four constructs in a conceptual model. To gain greater insights into our model's relationships, future studies should use inductive, qualitative research designs (Neuman, 2014).

Finally, Carifio's (2010) relational leadership construct still lacks empirical work aimed at cross-validation of its predictive value across contextual and occupational settings. Therefore, we invite scholars to continue research in this field, ideally by further examining its multidimensional character.

3.8 CONCLUSION

This study highlights the role supervisors' relational leadership plays in enhancing nurses' employability. Both perceived supervisory support for development and perceived opportunities for competence development help explain the positive association between relational leadership and competence-based employability.

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4

Study 3 — Relational Leadership and Development Opportunities: Enhancing Nurses' Employability in Dutch Elderly Care

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The present study was presented at the Learning and Innovation in Resilient Systems (LIRS) symposium, held on November 7, 2024, at the Open Universiteit, Heerlen, the Netherlands, as well as at The XIII International Workshop on Human Resource Management, held on September 19–20, 2024, at the Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Sevilla, Spain. Additionally, this study was presented online at the International Business Administration Conference, Agile Resilience: Navigating Uncertainty in a Dynamic World, held on October 1–2, 2025, hosted by Parahyangan Catholic University, Bandung, Indonesia.

Abstract

This study explores how people management, particularly relational leadership and both general and tailored HR practices, influences nurses' competence-based employability for the purpose of theory development on employability, people management, strategic human resource management, and relational leadership. This study uses a qualitative, interpretive exploratory design and multimethod data collection in five elderly care organizations in the Netherlands. Supervisors focus on the quality of dyadic relationships with nurses by using people management, especially relational leadership and both general and tailored HR practices in shaping and sustaining a strong HR system. Such leadership appears to be an antecedent of psychological safety, which may foster competence-based employability. Synergies between supervisors' leadership and the implementation of HR practices appear to empower nurses by highlighting development opportunities, thereby enhancing competence-based employability. People management, including relational leadership, should be actively encouraged among supervisors in elderly care organizations. Policymakers, supervisors, and HR professionals should also collaborate closely to enhance psychological safety and cultivate a workplace learning climate. Although prior research indicates that leadership and HR practices foster competence-based employability, relational leadership has not yet been integrated into this line of research, and the underlying processes have received limited attention from a people management approach. This study addresses this gap by investigating these relationships within the context of elderly care.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the inability of global healthcare systems to accommodate the demographic transition of an ageing population, thereby revealing critical deficiencies in infrastructure and resources (Lancet Healthy Longevity, 2021). As age-related chronic diseases, including multimorbidity, increasingly affect ageing populations (Mindlis & Federman, 2025), the growing complexity of healthcare needs and the rising demand for elderly care (Lancet Healthy Longevity, 2021) are further exacerbated by global nurse shortages (Di Martino et al., 2024).

In response, healthcare organizations (e.g., elderly care organizations) are adopting technological innovations, including wearable information technology, and virtual reality, in their work processes (Stoumpos et al., 2023), transforming the nursing profession and associated job demands considerably, resulting in significant skill gaps (Aleo et al., 2024), including technological skill gaps among (residential long term-care) nurses (Llena-Nozal et al., 2022). As these developments amplify the challenges nurses experience—such as increased workloads and job complexities (World Health Organization, 2020)— the continuous enhancement of their knowledge, skills, and competences becomes imperative to meet evolving healthcare needs and technological demands (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023), and to ensure their employability (Stoffers, 2023).

Highly employable employees—those who perceive themselves as possessing the competences required to obtain and maintain work—can better cope with evolving and challenging job demands (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Investing in nurses' competence-based employability is thus paramount (Van der Heijden et al., 2018). Elderly care organizations are therefore urgently seeking strategies to enhance nurses' employability (Heijkants et al., 2023), as scholars have increasingly positioned employability as a critical strategic approach to HRM and its associated systems of HR practices (Peeters et al., 2019), referring to it as a "new form of employment security" (Fugate et al., 2021, p. 268).

Scholars suggest that people management is closely associated with both leadership and strategic human resource management (SHRM) (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021). It represents a symbiotic relationship between supervisors' leadership behaviors and the implementation of HR practices—such as development opportunities—that effectuate employees' attitudes and behaviors toward organizational outcomes (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), including competence-based employability (Schrimpf et al., 2021). Supervisors thus represent critical stakeholders in employability enhancement, as they represent the crucial link between intended HR practices and employees' perceptions of these practices (Fugate et al., 2021). Through their leadership behaviors, supervisors shape how intended practices

are interpreted and communicated, thereby influencing employees' perceptions of these practices and, in turn, how they affect outcomes (Nishii & Wright, 2007).

Regarding leadership behaviors, Hoedemakers et al. (2023) argue that supervisors' leadership has a predominantly positive influence on employees' employability across contexts. In nursing, relationally oriented leadership styles, such as transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), associate with, for example, decreases to turnover intentions (Cheng et al., 2016) and psychological empowerment (Avolio et al., 2004), in contrast with task-oriented leadership that, for example, effectuates poorer relations among staff members (Hendel et al., 2005). In home care organizations, supervisors' relational leadership associates positively with nurses' competence-based employability regarding anticipation and optimization, and balance (Hoedemakers et al., 2025), and development of healthy work environments, including a culture of trust (Leclerc et al., 2022). Supervisors' leadership shapes employees' perceptions of intended HR practices (Nishii & Paluch, 2018), such as career development opportunities (Rodrigues et al., 2020) and (in)formal learning opportunities (Froehlich et al., 2014), which subsequently foster employability. Within elderly care organizations, nurses often have limited access to HR practices such as professional development opportunities (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023), despite the need to enhance their knowledge, skills, and competences to effectively respond to evolving job demands (Aleo et al., 2024). In this context, supervisors should engage in career-oriented people management instead of focusing on performance indicators (Van Leeuwen et al., 2024) so they can implement and communicate professional development opportunities to nurses (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023). Due to high-quality relationships with nurses, such supervisors are particularly able to identify HR practices needed most and encourage employees to take advantage of them (Knies et al., 2017).

Extant research suggests that supervisors can increase home care nurses' employability by using relational leadership and emphasizing appropriate HR practices, including competence development opportunities (Hoedemakers et al., 2025). However, people management skills vary across and within industries, such as healthcare (Knies & Leisink, 2018), and which characteristics and mechanisms explain how people management stimulates nurses' employability in elderly care organizations remains unclear. Using a people management approach, this study combines extant fragmented findings on enhancing nurses' employability in elderly care into a comprehensive, context-specific people management framework. To gain richer insights into theoretical relationships, we use a qualitative, exploratory design to investigate how people management, in terms of supervisors' relational leadership and the implementation of HR practices, fosters nurses' competence-based employability in the under-researched context of elderly care (Knies et al., 2017).

We thus address:

RQ. *How does people management foster nurses' competence-based employability in elderly care organizations?*

This study thus contributes to the literature on employability, people management, SHRM, and, especially, relational leadership.

First, building on Hoedemakers et al.'s (2025) call, it extends the employability literature by exploring how supervisors influence nurses' competence-based employability through relational leadership and perceived HR practices, offering significant insights for employability enhancement strategies in elderly care settings. Additionally, it answers Fugate et al.'s (2021) and Van Harten et al.'s (2020) calls to examine how employer–employee interdependence regarding perceived HR practices facilitates employability across contexts.

Second, this study contributes to the people management literature by responding to Jacobsen and Knies's (2021) call to examine how supervisors enact people management in practice and by contextualizing this research within the under-researched context of elderly care. Specifically, it assesses people management (Knies et al., 2017) including relational leadership (Carifio, 2010) and its association with competence-based employability.

Third, from a SHRM perspective, this study advances understanding of supervisors' critical role in shaping a strong HR system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). It sheds light on the process model of SHRM (Nishii & Wright, 2007) by examining how supervisors, as key delivery agents, invest in the employment relationship through their communication and implementation of HR practices. These practices influence employees' perceptions of the HR system strength (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), which, in turn, influence their attitudes and behaviors (Wang et al., 2020).

Finally, this paper contributes to the nascent relational leadership literature (Uhl-Bien, 2006), by exemplifying how such leadership, characterized by inclusion, empowerment, caring, ethicality, and having a vision (Carifio, 2010), promotes nurses' competence-based employability, thereby cross-contextualizing the concept from the educational to the elderly care context, highlighting its practical relevance for leadership development in elderly care.

4.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Competence-based employability

Notwithstanding fragmented conceptualizations of employability (Van Harten et al., 2022), the concept represents an individual's potential within internal/and or external labor markets (Forrier & Sels, 2003). The five-dimensional, competence-based employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) examines personal strengths, such as knowledge, skills and attitudes, and more generic competencies, that facilitate "continuous fulfilment, acquisition, and creation of work through the optimal use of competences" (p. 453).

Competence-based employability comprises five dimensions—occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense, and balance (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Occupational expertise associates with acquiring domain-related skills and knowledge, such as meta-cognitive knowledge. Anticipation and optimization comprise acting proactively and being competent to strive for the best outcomes from a job or career perspective. Personal flexibility associates with reacting to adjustments regarding job and organizational changes. Corporate sense refers to succeeding by collaborating in teams, groups, departments, and networks, and balance means coping with conflicting jobs, careers, and personal interests between employers and employees (Van der Heijden et al., 2018).

Competence-based employability is beneficial to both employers' competitive advantage and employees' careers sustainability (Van der Heijden et al., 2020), paramount in contemporary, challenging times of ongoing change (Van Harten et al., 2020), such as in elderly care (Aleo et al., 2024). Employers, therefore, emphasize urgency in investing in employability (Stoffers, 2023; Veld et al., 2015), while elderly care providers seek ways to enhance nurses' employability (Heijkants et al., 2023), which aligns with their need for support and competence development (Heijkants et al., 2024). From an HRM perspective, supervisors are critical stakeholders, with the responsibility of supporting employees' career development (Fugate et al., 2021). They foster employability through leadership behaviors (e.g., Hoedemakers et al., 2025) and HR practices (Van Harten et al., 2016), such as people management (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). However, since context matters (Whetten, 2009), Knies et al. (2024) stress context-specific approaches to people management.

Contrary to private organizations, public organizations have distinct features in terms of organizational performance (Knies et al., 2024). They focus on achieving service- and community-oriented missions (Wright & Pandey, 2011), rather than maximizing profit. Elderly care organizations are typically public organizations that are funded externally, challenging HR professionals to balance provision of high-quality care and labor costs (Cooke &

Bartram, 2015). Public organizations have unique types of HRM, often challenged by low wages, lack of performance indicators, an inability to terminate employment, and difficulties with attracting skilled personnel. The link between HRM and performance outcomes in public organizations differs because supervisors have less autonomy and are bound by rules and procedures that establish public value for citizens and societies (Knies & Leisink, 2018). These features have implications for people management in elderly care organizations, and on their influence on organizational performance and effectiveness (Sowa et al., 2004), such as thoughtful care (Knies et al., 2017) and competence-based employability (Van der Heijden et al., 2018).

People management: relational leadership and nurses' employability

People management entails supervisors' supportive leadership and their implementation of HR practices for the employees they supervise (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021), which in turn influence employees' attitudes, behaviors, and both individual and organizational performance (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), for example, regarding nurses' employability (Van Leeuwen et al., 2024). When characterizing supportive leadership behaviors, employability research commonly uses relationships between two individuals, reflected in relational theories such as social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964) and leader–member exchange (LMX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Such theoretical foundations suggest that the quality of social exchanges (i.e., the relationships) associates with the norm of reciprocity—a receiving party reciprocates with investments from another party (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In practice, this leads to transformational (Burns, 1978) and servant (Greenleaf, 1970) leadership, which promote employability (Camps & Rodríguez, 2011; Wang et al., 2019). Van Harten et al. (2016) argue that in Dutch hospitals, a supervisor's support for development enhances nurses' employability (i.e., willingness to change), and Knies et al. (2017) find that people management in elderly care contributes to thoughtful care.

We use a novel conceptualization of supportive leadership behaviors—relational leadership (Carifio, 2010)—which refers to "a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, and ideologies) are constructed and produced" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655). This conceptualization stresses the importance of social process quality and reciprocal relationships between leader and followers. Quality thus depends on behaviors and characteristics from both leaders and followers (Clarke, 2018). Carifio (2010) argues that relational leadership associates with inclusiveness, empowerment, caring, ethicality, and having a vision. Inclusiveness means focusing on everyone's positive contribution (Komives et al., 1998), and empowerment involves leaders providing opportunities for individuals to be empowered (Honold, 1997). Caring stresses empathy during exchanges (Regan & Brooks, 1995), and ethicality links with integrity and optimistic energy (Komives et al., 1998). Having a vision includes the vision itself but also setting explicit goals and stimulating people's commitment to them (Regan & Brooks, 1995).

Although relational leadership is rooted in the same theoretical frameworks as other conceptualizations of supportive leadership behaviors, such as transformational and servant leadership, it provides a unique perspective. Transformational and servant leadership focus solely on the leader's role in leadership, especially behaviors and characteristics, based on an individualistic perspective that neglects the follower's role. Relational leadership uses a collective perspective, emphasizing followers' central and active role in the creation and enactment of leadership, whereby "it is the relationship itself that constitutes what we refer to as leadership" (Clarke, 2018, p. 1), shaped by and embedded in a context. This conceptualization is particularly relevant to studying supportive leadership behaviors in elderly care because it organizes and responds to major challenges (Clarke, 2018). Hoedemakers et al. (2025) demonstrate that in elderly care, relational leadership in terms of empowerment influences nurses' perceptions of supervisory support for competence development, which subsequently fosters competence-based employability in terms of anticipation and optimization, and balance. Although research already demonstrates the utility of relational leadership in this context, mechanisms that explain how multiple dimensions of relational leadership (Carifio, 2010) stimulate nurses' competence-based employability remain unclear. We therefore address a sub-research question (SQ):

SQ1. *How does supervisors' leadership behaviors, in terms of relational leadership, foster nurses' competence-based employability in elderly care organizations?*

People management: perceived HR practices and nurses' employability

In addition to engaging in supportive leadership behaviors, supervisors should implement the right HR practices (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021) because they are crucial to implementing and communicating such practices (Nishii & Paluch, 2018). The people management-performance causal chain (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007) suggests that the "symbiotic relationship" (p. 3) between supervisors' leadership behaviors and implementation of both general and tailored HR practices (Guest, 2007) affects employees' perceptions of those practices, which in turn determines attitudes and behaviors toward performance outcomes (Wang et al., 2020). Moreover, Santori et al. (2023) indicates that the proactive seeking of challenges (i.e., behavioral job crafting; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), enhances the applicability of training in the workplace. This improved transfer of training contributes to greater competence-based employability (i.e., corporate sense), underscoring the value of behavioral job crafting as a mechanism for aligning individual development with organizational outcomes. Since supervisors maintain high-quality relationships with employees, they know which HR practices are needed most, and they can cast practices in a positive light for employees (Knies et al., 2017).

Extant healthcare research suggests that perceived HR practices, including training, participative decision-making, and development opportunities, stimulate performance in

terms of quality care and safety through engagement (Shantz et al., 2016). Hoedemakers et al. (2025) argue that perceived opportunities for competence development enhance nurses' competence-based employability in terms of anticipation and optimization, corporate sense, and balance in elderly care. Conversely, Van Harten et al. (2016) found that perceived supportive HR practices do not enhance nurses' employability in Dutch hospitals. Applying these findings to elderly care and acknowledging nurses' limited access to professional development opportunities (World Health Organization, 2020), we argue that nurses' perceptions of HR practices regarding continuous professional development enhance their competencies, knowledge, and skills (Aleo et al., 2024), which they reciprocate with employability. To address Fugate et al.'s (2021) and Van Harten et al.'s (2020) calls to examine how employer–employee interdependence in terms of perceived HR practices facilitates employability across contexts, such as the under-researched context of elderly care (Knies et al., 2018), we assess and explain mechanisms that underlie this relationship. We specifically address a second sub-research question:

SQ2. *How does supervisors' implementation of HR practices foster nurses' competence-based employability in elderly care organizations?*

4.3 METHODOLOGY

Design

This qualitative study uses an interpretive methodology to explore supervisors' behaviors, perspectives, and experiences in elderly care. It assesses how supervisors cultivate relationships with nurses through people management, including relational leadership behaviors and implementation of HR practices, promoting nurses' competence-based employability. We conduct rigorous thematic analysis that combines inductive though primarily deductive approaches (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), following Guba's (1981) four criteria—creditability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—to ensure the study's trustworthiness. To ensure the ethical conduct of qualitative research, we obtained approval from The Research Ethics Committee of the Open Universiteit (Document U202108211), adhering to principles of scientific integrity (NWO, 2023).

Data collection and sample

This study used purposive sampling to identify information-rich cases—employees who were knowledgeable experts, experienced in the phenomena under study (Patton, 2002), i.e., those who held formal supervisor positions in five elderly organizations in the Netherlands. To both address researcher bias and enhance credibility (Shenton, 2004), we used random sampling to select 10 supervisors from among those employed in the elderly organizations. To enhance transferability of findings, we included supervisors from five diverse elderly care organizations (Shenton, 2004). To ensure creditability (Shenton,

2004), prior to data collection and in accordance with principles of scientific integrity (NWO, 2023), participants received an informed consent letter that detailed the study's objectives, their voluntary participation, the interview and workshop duration, their right to cease an interview or workshop at any time, and the anonymity and confidentiality of data processing. Participants granted both oral and written consent to use the data collected.

To ensure dependability (Shenton, 2004), we used data and thematic saturation as principles for discontinuing data collection. We used methodological data triangulation and pretested an interview guide that included topics derived from extant literature. Two authors independently identified codes, searched for data patterns, and recoded and clustered codes into primary and sub-themes to maximize validity of findings. To enhance confirmability (Shenton, 2004), we used methodological triangulation. We initially conducted 10 face-to-face (n = 7) and online semi-structured (n = 3) interviews with supervisors to assess their knowledge on people management and collect data. To increase supervisors' comfort (Briggs, 1986), we conducted the interviews in their personal offices at the elderly care organizations in which they were employed. An interview topic guide guided the interviews, which lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were both audio and video recorded. The guide comprised four sections—demographics, competence-based employability, HR practices, and relational leadership.

The first author conducted three interactive workshops, each lasting 3 hours, among supervisors (n = 33), which focused on people management. The workshops were conducted in collaboration with two leadership experts who were independent of the organizations, or who were researchers involved in the study. The experts possessed a rich, knowledge-based understanding of people management, including leadership, due to their education and work at the master's level in a university of applied sciences. We followed Ørngreen and Levinsen's (2017) approach, using the workshops as a data collection methodology. We engaged the supervisors in discussions and took field notes, asking the supervisors to report characteristics of their leadership behaviors and HR practices, and how both foster nurses' competence-based employability. The field notes enriched the interview data, enhancing the trustworthiness of the study.

Interview and workshop participants were predominantly female, 86% (n = 37) of the 43 supervisors who consented to the study, while males represented 14% (n = 6). The mean age of participants was 39.98 years (SD = 12.60), with 48.8% (n = 21) being younger than 35, 25.6% (n = 11) between 35 and 55 years, and 25.6% (n = 11) 55 years or older. According to Statistics Netherlands (Langenberg et al., 2023) regarding the elderly care workforce in the Netherlands during the fourth quarter of 2022, 91% were female and 9% were male, with an age distribution of 30.7% younger than 35 years, 38.3% between 35 and 55 years, and 31% 55 years or older. In conclusion, our sample has a relatively similar

distribution in terms of gender and age, although our sample is on the younger side. The Table 4.1 reports each participant's demographics. To protect anonymity, we use an ID code to identify participants.

Table 4.1

Interview and Workshop Participants' Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Participant	Gender	Age
I1	M	61	W23	F	29
I2	F	53	W24	F	34
I3	F	51	W25	F	29
I4	F	58	W26	F	28
I5	F	57	W27	F	46
I6	F	55	W28	F	29
I7	M	63	W29	F	34
I8	F	58	W30	F	26
I9	M	62	W31	F	35
I10	F	36	W32	M	30
W11	M	59	W33	F	29
W12	F	28	W34	F	33
W13	F	26	W35	F	58
W14	F	57	W36	F	28
W15	M	36	W37	F	33
W16	F	23	W38	F	38
W17	F	34	W39	F	39
W18	F	31	W40	F	27
W19	F	34	W41	F	57
W20	F	36	W42	F	36
W21	F	27	W43	F	39
W22	F	37			

Note. I=interview participant; W=workshop participant.

Analysis

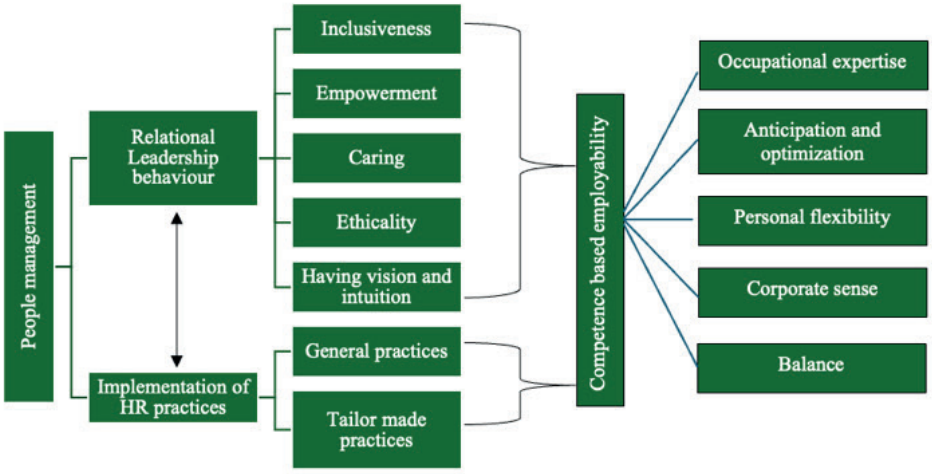
An expert transcribed the audio and video recordings of the interviews verbatim (McMullin, 2023). We used ATLAS.ti (2023) version 23.1.0 to facilitate coding, with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework used as a foundation for thematic analysis. During the first step, two authors independently examined the transcripts and field notes to familiarize themselves with the data. During the second step, those same authors generated initially latent theory-driven codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), drawing from broad theoretical frameworks of relational leadership (Carifio, 2010), people management (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), and competence-based employability (Van der Heijden et al., 2018). The authors then independently investigated and recoded the initial codes. During the

third step, both searched for data patterns, merging and clustering codes into primary and sub-themes that were relevant to the research questions. During the fourth step, two authors reviewed, refined, and confirmed the themes, resulting in a coherent and satisfactory thematic map of related main and sub-themes. During step five, the authors defined and refined the thematic map iteratively, resulting in five main themes—relational leadership, tailored workplace learning, general HR practices, competence-based employability, and psychological safety as a prerequisite. During a final step, the authors validated the themes and wrote a story that related to the research questions.

4.4 FINDINGS

Findings suggest that people management is associated with nurses' competence-based employability. Particularly, this study demonstrates that supervisors utilize various aspects of their relational leadership behaviors and both general and tailored HR practices to cultivate nurses' competence-based employability encompassing occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Shown in Figure 4.1, this study builds on a refined conceptualization of people management from Knies et al. (2020), which guided rigorous inductive and deductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This study thus provides insights into the potential of people management in elderly care organizations, with a particular emphasis on relational leadership behaviour.

Figure 4.1
Measurement model



Note. Slightly refined conceptualization of people management from Knies *et al.* (2020, p. 713).

4.4.1 People management: supervisors' relational leadership behaviors to promote nurses' competence-based employability

Caring, ethicality, and inclusiveness

The supervisors stressed one leadership characteristic—developing dyadic inclusive relationships with nurses—which is common in relational leadership (Clarke, 2018). This characteristic involved recognizing the significance of dialogue between supervisors and nurses. The supervisors prioritized workplace visibility to nurture such dialogue, which further offered an opportunity to invest significantly in dyadic relationships daily. This may subsequently induce shared feelings and responsibilities, potentially stimulating nurses' corporate sense. The supervisors reported, "You just have to be visible and approachable and keep talking to each other all the time," and "Critical is being there as responsible, thus being visible."

Workplace visibility creates opportunities for supervisors to engage with nurses, allowing them to invest in relational dialogues through personal attention, honesty, and positivity. Some supervisors said, "Just good listening and especially that attention. It sounds weird, but that attention is so crucial," and "I think it is particularly the visibility, as well as the fact that people have a feeling that I know who they are and also what their issues are." Empathy, openness, integrity, respect, and positive communication characterized the supervisors' relation-oriented leadership to cultivate relational dialogues, and thus by relational leadership, especially caring and ethicality. Consequently, these aspects of relational leadership enabled nurses to share their personal experiences and failures, thereby stimulating their corporate sense. Several supervisors noted, "I try to empathize with the person's situation," so supervisors used each nurse's positive value, regardless of dissimilarities (Komives et al., 1998), and their leadership thus associated with inclusiveness. Several supervisors also reported, "So equivalence, I think, is an important one," and "No matter what position, whether it's a care assistant or a nurse, it doesn't matter. People give each other feedback here and they accept that from each other. So, the equality is there." Moreover, several supervisors reported that their relation-oriented leadership stimulates teamwork, with one stating, "What I find very important in that is how do you have the conversation with each other and do you seek each other out and do you look together like, 'Gosh can you still help me?,' use the power together. So, we are very much focused on consultation with each other, helping each other, because together we can help very well." Therefore, supervisors' inclusiveness is associated with nurses' ability to engage within integrated teams, as reflected in corporate sense.

Relational leadership's inclusiveness also balanced opposing interests regarding jobs, careers, and private interests. The supervisors paid attention to nurses' work-life balance, primarily by offering flexible work schedules, which might stimulate nurses' balance aspect of employability. Some supervisors reported, "Suppose a colleague says, 'Gosh, I

have a problem today. I have children and I must take one of them to the doctor. And that colleague has a shift in which he does not have the opportunity to go to that doctor, then start thinking in terms of possibilities."

Empowerment

Workplace visibility provides opportunities to observe nurses during their daily work routines, empowering them through, for example, work-related career support and reflection on cases through peer feedback that stimulates their occupational expertise. This, in turn, enhances their ability to cope with changing job demands. Supervisors thus serve as role models. Some supervisors reported, "Walk the talk. I think, you can say this is what I expect of you, but if you don't do it yourself, then it becomes a very complicated story. So, I think exemplary behaviour is very important." "I still come to work with my nursing uniform on. And I still think it's important, because the moment you start cracking down on a department, I think you should put a nursing uniform on and just be the example to others, team I will support you." Relational leadership stimulated the nurses' resilience and thus their employability in terms of personal flexibility and occupational expertise. The supervisors encouraged self-reflection, strengthening nurses' occupational expertise, allowing them to cope with changes to their work environment and function. One supervisor reported, "What would you want then? So there, with the good conversation, that's where it starts. Knowing that it can be done, that it exists, the possibilities. So, I also do try to encourage, motivate and inspire people also of what do you need to do your work?"

Having a vision and mission

The supervisors' leadership also cultivated nurses' commitment to the organization's mission, vision, and shared values, thereby strengthening their corporate sense, which contribute to competitive advantages. One supervisor noted, "On the one hand, I must be clear about what is expected of employees in this organization, particularly regarding the organization's mission, vision and shared values, but on the other hand, I also indicate and ask employees what they need to meet these expectations…providing clarity, that's how we get started. We do have very clear guidelines."

4.4.2 People management: the implementation of HR practices to promote nurses' competence-based employability

The data suggest that supervisors use an inclusive approach to implement HR practices (e.g., career development opportunities) that fosters nurses' competence-based employability. As one supervisor reported, "There is a growth opportunity for every employee…. If employees are open to it, then there are possibilities for every individual." Consequently, relationships among relational leadership, HR practices, and competence-based employability are evident. Relational leadership, especially empowerment, inclusiveness, and having a vision associate with supervisors' focus on articulating and implementing HR

practices. As one supervisor stated, "Positive health is something we are going to work on again this year. I think that's beneficial as well."

General practices

Relational leadership shaped the nurses' perceptions of general HR practices, such as courses and training mostly aimed at stimulating nurses' employability in terms of occupational expertise. The supervisors largely focused internally, though they lacked awareness of learning opportunities beyond the organization. Several supervisors reported, "I think a wide range of development opportunities. Those are both in terms of their personal and professional development. We offer them things within the field that they can learn. We offer them courses, trainings." "What happens outside the organization or what the opportunities are outside the organization? I think I have too little insight into that. Too much internally oriented."

The supervisors fostered competence-based employability (i.e., balance) by influencing nurses' perceptions of HR practices, especially through development such as online learning platforms (e.g., GoodHabitz). One supervisor reported, "I don't know what it is, I'm not always comfortable in my own skin, I say, Oh, on GoodHabitz there is a training course Mindfulness. Try that. There we also must point people much more in the direction for your own health, while you also take a responsibility yourself. You can also follow a module on GoodHabitz." The supervisors also discussed the complex interdependence between leadership and HRM strategies. One stated, "And you also very often hear, I say, but managers also have a lot of HR tasks. Having a conversation is an HR task, but it's yours, not mine. And similarly, monitoring employee's development, having the nasty conversation, absenteeism conversation, those are all HR tasks that lie on the line. These are also things that we still struggle with a bit."

Tailored arrangements

The supervisors empowered the nurses mostly by fostering a flexible learning climate, not only through supportive, empowered communication, but by articulating tailored HR practices and initiating informal learning opportunities such as feedback, coaching, mentoring, and intervision. Such development stimulated the nurses' autonomy and self-reflection, which subsequently may enhance their employability, particularly their occupational expertise, personal flexibility and corporate sense. Several supervisors stated, "Then I say. Go ahead, go…Go ahead and try." "I watch and listen very carefully. I then see employees coming forward with a particular problem. I try to analyze that and then I also ask, 'What do you need?' So, I don't decide what the employee needs, but I really want to hear what they need." "I ask to apply self-reflection…." Multiple supervisors believed that tailored, flexible practices leverage nurses' talent so that they can succeed in their careers. "You're working in a place where you're not so good, but you had to do it and then I think don't do that. Go and enjoy working in the place where you are good." The

supervisors noted the possibilities of continuous on-the-job coaching to foster employability. "Maybe coaching on the job. That you really have people 24/7 then, not an hour here an hour there, but continuously in the process to give that guidance, because then it stays very practical. I think these people need practical guidance and that from training or everything we offer in terms of training, intervision, and education."

The supervisors sought to enhance nurses' anticipation and optimization, or competence-based employability, by offering career development opportunities both in and outside the organization. Several supervisors reported, "…somehow going to look at how we can get you to work in another way inside or outside, but we are going to help you." "At the moment, there is also a team coordinator working alongside me. This is an employee who aspires to become a supervisor, so it's a kind of progression for her to become a supervisor in two years. So now I do have good support." The supervisors also used tailored arrangements, offering, for example, flexible work hours, which associates with balance in employability. One supervisor noted, "…if we see that employees could use help with certain things or get stuck, that we really engage with that and go and see what is needed to make that change or your work-life balance or at least support you in things that you get stuck in."

4.4.3 Psychological safety as a mechanism

Psychological safety is a belief, shared among individuals, regarding the safety of engaging in interpersonal risk-taking at work (Edmondson, 1999). The supervisors believed that psychological safety represents a mechanism within the relationship between people management and competence-based employability.

Supervisors' relational leadership behaviors and psychological safety

The supervisors noted that trust, respect, and support are mechanisms in the people management, particularly in terms of supervisors' relational leadership behaviors, and employability relationship in elderly care. Relational leadership, specifically inclusiveness, empowerment, caring, and ethicality, is reflected in the reciprocal relationship between supervisors and nurses, stimulating psychological safety through relational leadership. As several supervisors reported, "When I reach out to my colleagues, my caregivers especially, gosh, what is that and what are you afraid of? Take that step, or shall we take that step together? And by participating in that, you're going to see that the colleagues, at least I do notice that, are going to dare to take it and the communication is only going to become more open and the bonds are going to become closer."

Psychological safety is also evident in the quality of supervisor–nurse relationships, reflected in relational dialogues characterized by inclusion and open communication. The supervisors believed that relational leadership effectuates empathy that fostered psychology safety, and that it intervenes the relational leadership–employability relationship.

Several supervisors noted. "I think that [psychological] safety is a very important aspect, that nurses feel safe to be able to be himself to be in it without judgment, to be able to discuss things and be himself. That I think is a very important one…." "So, equivalence I think is an important one, trust, equality, [psychological] safety." The supervisors believed that relational leadership effectuates empathy, and that it intervenes the relational leadership–employability relationship.

4.4.4 HR practices

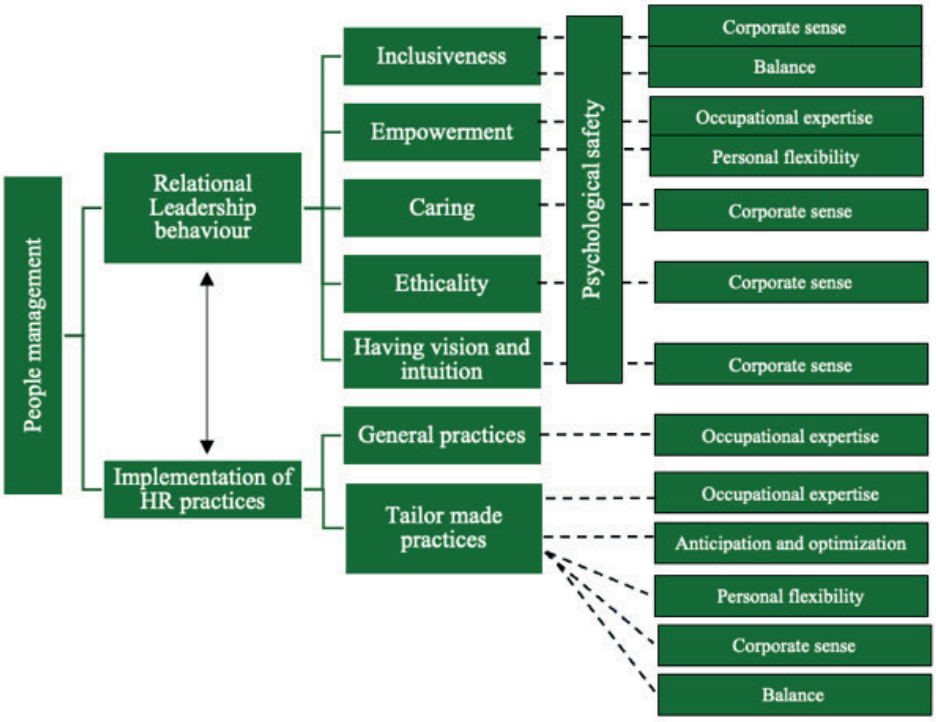
The supervisors used leadership to empower nurses by encouraging a learning climate through communicating development opportunities, which, in turn, foster competence-based employability. However, empowerment alone is insufficient, and they therefore emphasized the critical role of open communication, inclusion, respect, and trust to achieve psychological safety. Consequently, psychological safety operates as a mediator – a mechanism – within the relational leadership–employability relationship. Several supervisors stated, "Because you can have wonderful educational opportunities, but if you're not seen or heard as a human being or don't feel like 'I matter, I belong here, I want to be part of the bigger picture here. Then it often becomes difficult anyway," "The one doing it should enjoy doing it and the other person should feel [psychological] safe of yes it doesn't matter, how many times I must ask, but you must facilitate that as a supervisor."

4.4.5 The relationship between relational leadership and perceived HR practices for nurses' employability enhancement

The findings indicate that supervisors utilized relational leadership to empower nurses by, for instance, communicating HR practices, which subsequently fostered nurses' competence-based employability. Moreover, supervisors believed that the synergy between relational leadership (i.e., inclusiveness and empowerment) and HR practices, particularly development opportunities, is critical to fostering nurses' employability. The supervisors noted the significance of understanding the organization's HR strategy and its associated HR practices, and they can enact relational leadership behaviour (i.e., empowerment) by offering and implementing HR practices. "We then have attention conversations in which the supervisor discusses that with the employee of I have a training or development wish. Where does that come from? What would you want? So there, with the good conversation, that's where it starts. Knowing that it is possible, that it exists, the possibilities. Some employees know that themselves, but others need a little more support from the manager in that. And the supervisor, I think, has a very important role in that whole piece."

Figure 4.2 depicts a comprehensive overview of the conceptual associations identified in this study.

Figure 4.2
Overview of the conceptual associations identified in this study



Note. Slightly refined conceptualization of people management from Knies *et al.* (2020, p. 713)

4.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings suggest that supervisors support and empower nurses through relational leadership behaviors, characterized by inclusiveness, empowerment, caring, ethicality, and having a vision and intuition (Carifio, 2010), that subsequently foster nurses' competence-based employability. The supervisors reported that quality dyadic relationships with nurses are critical. They engaged in supportive dialogues with nurses, characterized by positivity, clarity, openness, integrity, respect, trust, and empathic listening (Clarke, 2018), and the nurses perceived such dialogues as support, value, and empowerment, allowing them to cope better with changing job demands. The supervisors emphasized workplace visibility regularly, offering them opportunities to invest in their relationships with nurses, for example, by acting as role models.

The supervisors noted the importance of articulating HR practices to foster a learning climate, empower nurses, and enhance competence-based employability, making it easier to cope with changing job demands. They exemplified that general and tailored

HR practices, including coaching, mentoring, intervision, courses, and training (Lawton & Wimpenny, 2003), foster diverse aspects of competence-based employability. They implemented HR practices such as online learning communities and toolboxes, continuous dialogues, job rotation, and career coaching, and they observed that psychological safety enhances competence-based employability. Interpersonal factors, such as respect, trust, and supportive communication, reflected in relational leadership, are antecedents to psychological safety. These findings have both theoretical contributions and practical implications.

4.6 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

First, this study contributes to the employability literature by demonstrating that supervisors in elderly care organizations view people management (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021)—encompassing relational leadership characterized by inclusiveness, empowerment, caring, ethicality, and having a vision and intuition (Carifio, 2010)—and the implementation of HR practices as mechanisms that foster nurses' competence-based employability. This includes the competence-based dimensions of occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). In doing so, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how these competence-based dimensions are associated with characteristics of the employer–employee relationship, shaped by organizational representatives, especially supervisors and HR professionals (Fugate et al., 2021). Up until now, only Hoedemakers et al. (2025) examine the relationship between supervisors' relational leadership and nurses' competence-based employability in elderly care, finding that nurses' competence-based employability is indeed linked to such leadership. In that study, supervisors who engaged in relationships characterized by empowerment fostered nurses' perceptions of supervisory support and opportunities for competence development. The current study builds on this by suggesting that supervisors should foster nurses' employability through relational leadership, specifically by empowering them through general and tailored HR practices that influence nurses' perceptions and access to professional development opportunities (King et al., 2021). The supervisors noted that workplace visibility also empowers nurses, an antecedent to relational leadership that allows supervisors to support, value, and empower nurses through role modelling and coaching. This study thus demonstrates that enhancing nurses' competence-based employability in elderly care is reflected in employer–employee relationships that use a people management approach and includes relational leadership. It suggests that a refined context-specific framework of people management from Knies et al. (2020) associates with nurses' competence-based employability enhancement in elderly care organizations. In doing so, it answers Fugate et al.'s (2021) and Van Harten et al.'s (2020) calls to examine how employer–employee interdependence regarding perceived HR practices facilitates employability across contexts.

Second, this study advances the people management literature by highlighting how supervisors perceive and enact a symbiotic relationship between their relational leadership behaviors and HR practices that foster supportive learning climates. In doing so, it responds to Jacobsen and Knies's (2021) call to examine how supervisors enact people management in practice within public organizations, particularly within the under-researched context of elderly care (Knies et al., 2017). Supervisors therefore utilize relational leadership (Carifio, 2010) to implement intended HR practices (Nishii & Wright, 2007), including both general and tailored practices. Extant studies commonly examine leadership styles (Stoffers et al., 2014) and HR practices, including both formal and informal learning opportunities (Froehlich et al., 2014), as isolated antecedents to employability. The present study, however, underscores the critical interplay and synergy between leadership and HR practices, positioning supervisors as pivotal people management agents (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). HR professionals design strategies and practices that cultivate a learning environment, and supervisors implement them (Guest, 2021) in a way that enhances nurses' competence-based employability (Hoedemakers et al., 2025). Supervisors support nurses by communicating HR practices that shape perceptions of available work-related development (Lawton & Wimpenny, 2003), both informal (e.g., supervision, coaching, and mentoring) and formal (e.g., online learning opportunities, trainings, and courses). Notably, when individuals engage in challenge-seeking behaviour it will enhances the applicability of training, which, in turn, indirectly contributes to perceived employability (i.e., corporate sense, Sartori et al., 2023). When promoting employability, supervisors referred to what Nishii and Wright (2007) call a strong HR system, in which supervisors translate HR practices into clear expectations to bridge the gap between espoused and implemented HR practices.

Third, this study contributes to the SHRM literature, particularly to the process model of SHRM, which describes how HR practices are delivered to and perceived by employees (Nishii & Wright, 2007). Supervisors act as critical stakeholders in articulating HR messages and shaping how employees perceive intended HR practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), encompassing both general and tailored practices. These perceptions, in turn, influence employees' attitudes and behaviors (Wang et al., 2020), ultimately fostering outcomes such as competence-based employability. Our study builds on this and reveal how supervisors—particularly through their relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006), a key leadership behaviour in the nursing context (Cummings et al., 2018)—, and the implementation of both general and tailored HR practices contribute to the employment relationship with nurses (Nishii & Wright, 2007). To our best knowledge, relational leadership has not yet been empirically examined in relation to the implementation of HR practices. In doing so, our study suggests the significant role of relational leadership in implementing both general and tailored HR practices, thereby contributing to the development of a strong and coherent HR system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii & Paluch, 2018) in elderly care contexts. These findings extend the work of Nishii and Paluch

(2018) by elucidating how relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006) functions as a form of HR implementation behaviour in creating a strong HR system—through articulating expectations, role modelling desired behaviors, reinforcing preferred behavior, and assessing nurses' perceptions of HR messages. Taken together, and consistent with prior research (Nishii & Paluch, 2018), these findings underscore the paramount importance of supervisors' leadership in shaping and constituting employees' perceptions of a strong HR system. Indeed, our study demonstrates how supervisors function as HR implementers by articulating the intended meaning and expectations of HR practices—for example, by providing feedback, coaching and mentoring, sometimes daily. They act also as role models who reinforce desired behaviors, provide positive feedback to strengthen behavioral expectations, and assess employees' understanding of HR messages through cultivating relational dialogues. In the context of elderly care, such relational leadership behaviors—particularly those that emphasize inclusion and empowerment (Carifio, 2010)—play a significant role in shaping nurses' perceptions of a strong learning climate, thereby fostering a strong and coherent HR system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Fourth, this study also advances the relational leadership literature by demonstrating that nurse supervisors emphasize all five dimensions of relational leadership (Carifio, 2010), illustrated through concrete leadership behaviors. The importance of inclusiveness, caring, ethicality, and having a vision and intuition was recognized, but supervisors unanimously discussed empowerment (Carifio, 2010) to foster nurses' competence-based employability. Extant research, particularly among nurses in the Netherlands, suggests a relationship between perceived supervisors' relational leadership (Carifio, 2010) and nurses' competence-based employability (Hoedemakers et al., 2025), though its underlying processes remain underexplored. Current findings show that supervisors' relational leadership emphasizes respect, trust, empathy, and openness in dyadic relationships with nurses, which is important because Ito et al. (2022) suggest that interpersonal factors, such as trust, respect, support, high-quality communication, and leadership, affect psychological safety in healthcare. Psychological safety explains why supportive workplaces, in terms of supervisors' relational leadership and development opportunities, influence work outcomes such as competence-based employability (Newman et al., 2017).

Finaly, this study contributes to psychological safety literature by highlighting that supervisors report that supportive, relation-oriented, and thus relational leadership, particularly inclusiveness, caring, and ethicality, associates with trust in dyadic relationships between leaders and employees, subsequently fostering nurses' psychological safety. Extant research demonstrates a positive association between authentic leadership and psychological safety in healthcare (Fausett et al., 2023). Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) found that leader inclusiveness stimulates healthcare teams' psychological safety. The current study identifies psychological safety as an outcome of supervisors' relational leadership in elderly care, an important finding because psychological safety encourages

employees to engage in development, which fosters competence-based employability (Froehlich et al., 2014).

4.7 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A qualitative design allows comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon, but it does not allow causal inferences (Neuman, 2014). Longitudinal studies on the influence of people management, including influences of supervisors' relational leadership on nurses' competence-based employability in the context of elderly care, are needed. This study is constrained by data interpretation (i.e., interpretation bias) and the observers' abilities (Duffy, 1985), raising concerns about credibility (Shenton, 2004). To counter such constraints and increase credibility, future studies should use mixed methods to enhance analyses and interpretation of findings (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). Although we collected data from nurses employed at five elderly care organizations, the study is limited by selection bias. To promote transferability of findings, future research should use replication during sampling (Polit & Beck, 2010). The study assesses supervisors' relational leadership and HR practices from a single source (i.e., the supervisors themselves), which might be affected by single-source bias, threatening the findings' validity (Avolio et al., 1991). Specifically, the data were gathered from a single source only, limiting the findings to the perspective of the supervisors. To further validate the findings, we therefore suggest that future studies avoid collecting data from a single source and should employ multi-source data collection methodologies, for instance, include supervisor self- and other-ratings (i.e., nurses) to rate supervisors' relational leadership behaviors. Quantitative methods should also validate current findings in a deductive quantitative study. Future research should use Campbell and Fiske's (1959) multitrait-multimethod (MTMM) approach to validate Carifio's (2010) relational leadership in elderly care contexts.

4.8 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study suggests that supervisors should engage in relational leadership, particularly high-quality, dyadic, leader–member exchanges (LMX), with nurses. Although extant literature does not address how to train LMX adequately, programs that stimulate relational leadership remain valuable. Leclerc et al. (2022) argue that a 9-month, web-based learning program for nursing leaders, which consists of online virtual learning labs and online coaching and mentoring, fosters relational leadership, particularly through recognition and skilled communication. Recently, Nakamura et al. (2025) indicates that video-based conversation analysis, including peer feedback sessions combined with surveys, can facilitate leadership development like relational leadership. Both, reviewing

videos and engaging in peer feedback and surveys can stimulate discussions between supervisors and nurses about areas requiring increased attention, thereby creating opportunities for leadership development.

Psychological safety is crucial in healthcare because it contributes to quality care, organizational culture (e.g., creativity and innovation), and both psychological (e.g., job satisfaction and organizational commitment) and behavioral (e.g., learning behaviors and high-quality communication; Ito et al., 2022) outcomes. Elderly care organizations should, therefore, develop policies and procedures that foster psychological safety, such as emphasizing fairness, promoting leadership styles that associate with behavioral integrity, including inclusiveness (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006), and providing leader and peer support at the team level (O'Donovan & McAuliffe, 2020). Supervisors should foster psychological safety at the team level by encouraging inclusiveness (i.e., minimizing status disparities in and among roles and functions; Ito et al., 2022), involving team members when generating team goals, and expressing and understanding each team member (Faraj & Yan, 2009). Recently, Peddie et al. (2025) has demonstrated that healthcare policymakers and practitioners should implement mental health support services and team development activities aimed at fostering psychological safety among staff.

To foster nurses' competence-based employability, HR professionals and supervisors should promote a learning climate by offering learning opportunities, with supervisors' people management and empowering behaviour being paramount. To promote learning on-the-job, policymakers, practitioners and supervisors should prioritize a combination of formal workplace training and behavioral job crafting (Sartori et al., 2023), that is, the proactive role of employees in shaping and redesigning tasks to align with their personal characteristics and attitudes (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Particularly, interventions focused on behavioral job crafting in terms of seeking challenges behaviors enhance the applicability of training, thereby fostering competence-based employability regarding corporate sense (Sartori et al., 2023). HR professionals and supervisors should also cooperate in doing so (Stoffers & Van der Heijden, 2018).

According to the process model of strategic HRM (Nishii & Wright, 2007), HR professionals are responsible for creating intended HR practices, but whether such practices are implemented and how employees perceive them depend on synergies between HR professionals and supervisors' people management (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021). Informal learning is particularly relevant in low job-resource contexts, such as nursing (Sjogren et al., 2005). Since such learning is flexible and occurs in a nursing context, leadership should stimulate daily, self-directed interactions with peers and supervisors, and self-reflection that fosters work-related knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ham & Cho, 2015), thus employability. Supervisors should promote informal workplace learning by offering opportunities for

feedback, self-efficacy, positive relationships among individuals, cooperation, proactivity, mentoring, and daily conversations (Berings et al., 2007; Kyndt et al., 2016).

4.9 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that people management—encompassing relational leadership and the implementation of both general and tailored HR practices— fosters nurses' competence-based employability. Supervisors emphasized that people management should focus on the quality of dyadic relationship, thereby strengthening the HR system. They also highlighted the importance of psychological safety, which influences the relationship between relational leadership and competence-based employability. Overall, people management, or the symbiotic relationship between leadership behaviors and HR practices, influences nurses' perceptions of those practices, including development opportunities that, in turn, enhance competence-based employability.

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5

Study 4 — Self–Other Agreement for Relational Leadership: The Role of Age and Gender (Dis)Similarities in Perceptions of Supervisor–Subordinate Dyads

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Self–Other Agreement for Relational Leadership: The Role of Age and Gender (Dis)
Similarities in Perceptions of Supervisor–Subordinate Dyads.

This study was presented during a workshop, held on January 16, 2026, at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, in Sittard, the Netherlands.

Abstract

Relational leadership addresses contemporary organizational challenges and is particularly vital in the nursing sector. As workforce diversity increases globally, understanding how this leadership is perceived across age and gender is essential. This study integrates concepts from relational demography and self–other agreement research to examine how age and gender (dis)similarities within supervisor–nurse dyads predict self–other agreement across the five dimensions of supervisors' relational leadership in a Dutch elderly nursing care organization. Drawing on similarity–attraction and role congruity theories, we propose that demographic similarity and role congruence foster social exchanges that provide supervisor–nurse dyads with opportunities to build up positive perceptions regarding leadership behaviour which subsequently results into higher self–other agreement for relational leadership. Results from multi-source ratings reveal that age and gender dyadic similarities are positively associated with self–other agreement for several dimensions of relational leadership. Furthermore, female supervisor–male nurse dyads exhibit higher self–other agreement across multiple dimensions than male supervisor–female nurse dyads. Contrary to our expectations, younger supervisor–older subordinate dyads were not perceived as role incongruent and consequently did not display lower self–other agreement. These findings advance understanding of relational leadership by integrating demographic predictors into self–other agreement research and offer insights for leadership development in diverse nursing care settings.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006)—defined as "a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, and ideologies) are constructed and produced" (p. 655)—has recently garnered increasing scholarly interest, framing leadership as an inherently dyadic leader–follower phenomenon (Clarke, 2018). Following this notion, both parties actively shape leadership, which is fundamentally constituted by the relationship itself and central to understanding its effectiveness (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Moreover, this approach addresses contemporary organizational challenges (Clarke, 2018), which are also omnipresent in the nursing sector (e.g., Cummings et al., 2018).

Specifically, nurses play a pivotal role in strengthening healthcare systems by enhancing patient care quality and addressing workforce challenges (Cummings et al., 2021). They face persistent labor shortages (International Labour Organization, 2019), while simultaneously needing to enhance their capabilities to meet increasing primary care demands arising from demographic changes, including the ageing of both patients and the nursing workforce (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021). Together, these developments underscore the urgency of leadership development and employee reskilling (Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022; Stoffers, 2023).

In the nursing sector, relationally-focused leadership outperforms task-focused approaches by generating positive outcomes, such as enhanced job satisfaction (e.g., Neubert et al., 2016), wellbeing (e.g., Van der Heijden et al., 2017), and retention intentions (e.g., Leclerc et al., 2022). Building on this evidence, studies adopting Carifio's (2010) relational leadership conceptualization have demonstrated its benefits for the healthcare sector by fostering nurses' organizational citizenship behavior (Ansong et al., 2024), and enhancing their employability (Hoedemakers et al., 2025). Although these findings highlight demonstrate the beneficial effects of relational leadership for both nurses and nursing organizations (Cummings et al., 2018), Atwater and Yammarino (1992, 1997) emphasized that it is self–other agreement (SOA) in leadership perceptions, rather than actual leadership behavior, that determines leadership outcomes.

SOA refers to "the degree of agreement or congruence between a leader's self-ratings and the ratings of usually coworkers such as superiors, peers and subordinates" (Fleenor et al., 2010, p. 1005). Prior research indicates that, regardless of leadership style, SOA links with leaders' self-awareness, which, in turn, relates to their behavior and performance outcomes (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992). These findings highlight that SOA inherently involves interpersonal perceptions, thereby linking leader self-awareness to the relational processes central to relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Despite extensive

research on SOA in leadership (for an overview, see Fleenor et al., 2010), SOA for certain leadership behaviors, such as relational leadership, has not been examined.

Although SOA is well-established as being associated with self-awareness and leadership effectiveness (Fleenor et al., 2010), relational leadership theorizing is both novel (Uhl-Bien, 2006), yet highly relevant to nursing (Cummings et al., 2018). Against this background, this study investigates predictors of SOA for relational leadership, focusing on demographics, i.e., the surface-level characteristics of age and gender (Harrison et al., 2002), within supervisor–subordinate (i.e., nurse) dyads.

We draw on the notion of relational demography (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), which concerns "the comparative demographic characteristics of members of dyads or groups who are in a position to engage in regular interactions" (p. 403), including supervisor–subordinate dyads. Consistent with similarity–attraction theory (Byrne, 1971), demographic similarity in such dyads influences behavior, as individuals are generally more attracted to and prefer those who share similar demographics (e.g., age, gender) and psychological characteristics (e.g., attitudes, behaviors, values; Abbasi et al., 2024). This interpersonal attraction fosters more frequent interactions and more effective communication (Roberts & O'Reilly, 1979; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), thereby enhancing mutual understanding of behavior.

Role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) integrates research on prejudice and stereotyping with organizational studies of managerial role perceptions. It posits that prejudice arises when demographics create perceived mismatches between group stereotypes and social role expectations (e.g., supervisory roles)—a phenomenon termed role incongruence—which, in turn, influences perceptions of both supervisors and their subordinates within dyads. Empirical evidence suggests that supervisors who are younger than their subordinates (Daldrop et al., 2025), and women in leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002), experience role incongruence. This incongruence diminishes interpersonal attraction and interaction frequency (Byrne, 1971), thereby influencing SOA for leadership perceptions (Fleenor et al., 2010).

To address these gaps in the scholarly literature in this field, the present study examines how age and gender within supervisor–subordinate dyads influence SOA for relational leadership perceptions among nurses in elderly nursing care, thereby contributing to both theory and practice.

First, this study advances SOA research by empirically examining SOA for relational leadership, an area that, to the best of our knowledge, has not yet been studied. We assess SOA across all five dimensions of relational leadership. Second, we extend SOA research beyond the predominantly U.S.-based samples used in prior studies (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014). Responding to calls to broaden understanding of dyadic leadership

across contexts (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992, 1997; Kim et al., 2020), we investigate SOA for relational leadership in the elderly care sector in the Netherlands. Third, this study contributes to the relational demography literature (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) by examining how age and gender within supervisor–subordinate (i.e., nurse) dyads predict SOA for relational leadership. Given inconsistent findings across contexts on age dissimilarity in supervisor–subordinate relationships, we assess its effects on SOA across the five relational leadership dimensions in elderly care. Moreover, this is the first study to examine how dyadic gender composition of supervisor–subordinate pairs influences SOA for relational leadership, thereby addressing calls for research on SOA predictors (Fleenor et al.'s, 2010), and the role of gender in leadership perceptions (Bradley et al., 2020).

5.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

SOA in leadership research

High SOA reflects leaders' accurate self-perceptions of their behavioral strengths and weaknesses (Ostroff et al., 2004), and thus indicates stronger self-awareness (Atwater & Yammarino, 1997). Such self-awareness is essential for developing leadership capabilities (Day et al., 2014), which are critical for effectively managing leader–follower relationships (Fletcher, 1997). Moreover, SOA has been linked to leadership effectiveness (Atwater & Yammarino, 1997), leadership performance (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Taylor et al., 2012), and both individual outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction), and organizational outcomes (e.g., organizational commitment; Szell & Henderson, 1997).

The focal unit of analysis in SOA research is the supervisor–subordinate dyad (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992). Such studies examine the extent of agreement between leaders' (i.e., supervisors) self-ratings and other-ratings—particularly those of followers (i.e., subordinates)—regarding leadership behaviour (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992), including relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Prior research indicates that this agreement is often lacking, with leaders and subordinates holding divergent perceptions of leadership behaviour, as reflected in discrepancies between their ratings (Lee & Carpenter, 2018).

Previous empirical work has identified several consequences of SOA, including ineffective decision-making, avoidance of development opportunities (Bass & Yammarino, 1991), and even leadership failure (Tsui & Ohlott, 1988). SOA for constructive leadership styles, such as transformational leadership and contingent reward, is positively associated with subordinates' perceptions of a supportive learning climate (Hasson et al., 2020). In contrast, SOA for passive leadership styles (e.g., passive management-by-exception) impairs subordinates' well-being and performance. For empowering leadership, leaders' overestimation of their behaviour is linked to lower subordinate satisfaction and higher turnover, whereas underestimation relates positively to superiors' perceptions of leaders' effective-

ness. However, optimal SOA was not found to significantly influence subordinates' job satisfaction or turnover intentions (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014).

SOA regarding relational leadership

We adopt relational leadership, a novel conceptualization of supportive leadership behaviour (Uhl-Bien, 2006), defined as "a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, and ideologies) are constructed and produced" (p. 655). This approach emphasizes social processes and reciprocal relationships between leaders and their followers; conceptualizing leadership as fundamentally embedded within leader–follower dyads. The quality of these relationships depends on the behavior and characteristics of both parties, with the relationship itself constituting leadership (Clarke, 2018).

Carifio (2010) conceptualized relational leadership as comprising five dimensions—inclusion, empowerment, caring, ethicality, and having a vision. Inclusion refers to leaders acknowledging the positive contributions of all members (Komives et al., 1998), while empowerment involves providing opportunities for individuals to develop their capabilities (Honold, 1997). Caring reflects leaders' empathy in interpersonal exchanges (Regan & Brooks, 1995), and ethicality entails demonstrating integrity and optimistic energy (Komives et al., 1998). Finally, having a vision captures leaders' engagement in articulating a vision and setting explicit goals that foster commitment to its achievement (Regan & Brooks, 1995).

Given the multi-dimensional nature of relational leadership, SOA in this context reflects the degree of agreement between leaders' self-ratings and subordinates' ratings (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992) across its five dimensions (Carifio, 2010). As suggested by relational demography theory (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), leader–follower agreement may be influenced by dyadic demographics (Atwater & Yammarino, 1997). However, although prior research has examined demographic predictors of SOA (e.g., Brutus et al., 1999), these demographics have not yet been linked to SOA for leadership perceptions regarding relational leadership (e.g., Uhl-Bien, 2006). Building on this gap, we integrate insights from relational demography (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) with SOA research on relational leadership.

Integrating relational demography theory and SOA for relational leadership

Relational demography theory (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) comprises a dyadic approach, examining how demographic similarities between interacting individuals within a work unit influence work-related outcomes. Its relevance has grown considerably in recent decades due to evolving legislation, the globalization of labor markets, and other societal trends that have significantly increased workforce demographic diversity worldwide (Kaur & Ren, 2022).

Relational demography also encompasses supervisor–subordinate interactions, where demographic similarity is termed vertical demographic similarity (Guillaume et al., 2012). Harrison et al. (1998) distinguished surface-level demographic similarities (e.g., age, gender) from deep-level similarities (e.g., norms, values), both of which influence work-related and organizational outcomes, and serve as predictors in relational demography research (Kaur & Ren, 2022). In this study, we focus on dyadic surface-level demographic (dis)similarities—specifically age and gender—within supervisor–subordinate dyads as predictors of SOA regarding relational leadership, while deliberately excluding deep-level (dis)similarities from our analysis.

Surface-level demographic dissimilarities between supervisors and their subordinates may have negative workplace consequences. Prior research indicates that directional age dissimilarity (i.e., role congruence) exerts a stronger influence on work-related outcomes than non-directional age differences (Perry, 1999). In contrast, dyadic gender similarity has been positively associated with work-related outcomes, such as Leader–Member eXchange (LMX) quality—perceived by both supervisors and subordinates—and subordinates' job satisfaction (Bakar & McCann, 2014). Jansen et al. (2017) found that dyadic gender dissimilarity within work units was related to higher absenteeism through reduced perceived social inclusiveness, but only under the condition of perceived negative diversity. However, findings across studies remain mixed; for instance, Wijaya (2025) demonstrated that dyadic gender dissimilarity can positively affect innovative work behaviour. Gender also appears to relate to SOA for leadership perceptions (McKee et al., 2018), and Braddy et al. (2020) argued that including gender is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of the SOA phenomenon.

Relational demography research commonly explains outcomes of dyadic surface-level similarity through similarity–attraction theory (Byrne, 1971), which posits that individuals are attracted to others who share similar demographics, activities, and attitudes. Such similarity promotes more frequent interactions (Roberts & O'Reilly, 1979) and stronger communication patterns (Byrne, 1971). Consequently, greater similarity is positively associated with interpersonal attraction, fostering subordinate satisfaction (Tsui et al., 2002) and strengthening relational connections with supervisors (Bakar & McCann, 2014).

Increased interpersonal attraction and the resulting interaction frequency (e.g., Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007) may explain how surface-level similarity relates to SOA for leadership, including relational leadership. Frequent interactions facilitate social exchanges, enabling supervisors and subordinates to observe each other's behaviour—including leadership behaviour—and gain insights into one another's perspectives, thereby fostering mutual understanding. Such understanding is essential, as individuals generally cannot accurately judge how they are perceived by others (Tsui & Ohlott, 1988),

making interpersonal exchanges vital for SOA in leadership perceptions (Watson et al., 2000).

Although similarity–attraction theory applies to various surface-level demographics, research distinguishes between conceptually distinct types of similarity (Guillaume et al., 2012). We therefore consider the impact of age and gender separately.

Age similarity and SOA for relational leadership

Prior research suggests that non-directional age dissimilarity (i.e., absolute age difference, regardless of which party is older) is associated with positive outcomes than directional age dissimilarity within supervisor–subordinate dyads (e.g., Parent-Rocheleau et al., 2024), consistent with similarity–attraction theory (Byrne, 1971). Accordingly, we hypothesize that more age similarity between supervisors and subordinates relates to better SOA for relational leadership:

H1. *Supervisor–subordinate non-directional age similarity positively affects SOA for relational leadership, regarding the five dimensions of inclusion (H1a), empowerment (H1b), caring (H1c), ethicality (H1d), and having a vision (H1e).*

Non-directional age similarity between a supervisor and subordinate captures the absolute age difference, whereas Guillaume et al. (2012) described vertical directional age dissimilarity as the *direction* of the age difference—specifically, whether a supervisor is older or younger than their subordinate. Drawing on the notion of status-incongruence (Perry et al., 1999), Van der Heijden (2018) demonstrated that directional age difference—in which the supervisor is younger than the subordinate—was negatively related to supervisors' evaluations of subordinates' occupational expertise. Extending this line of research, Scholarios and Van der Heijden (2021) found that such age dissimilarity negatively affected supervisors' ratings of subordinates' competence-based employability. Conversely, Perry et al. (1999) reported positive outcomes, including reduced absenteeism, and increased citizenship behaviour among subordinates.

The impact of status-incongruence can be explained by role congruity theory (Eagly, 1987) which addresses prejudice and stereotyping in relation to the expected requirements, behaviors, and capabilities of specific roles, including supervisory roles. The theory explains how expectations about who typically occupies a social role create friction when these expectations are unmet (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Accordingly, perceived role incongruence arises when younger supervisors supervise older subordinates, creating mismatches between supervisors' ages and their positions in the organizational career hierarchy (Perry et al., 1999).

Due to age-based stereotyping, young supervisors are perceived as role incongruent for supervisory roles (Daldrop et al., 2025). This violation of conventional career progression—where organizational hierarchy typically aligns with age and experience—influences behaviour and attitudes (Perry et al., 1999). Directional age dissimilarity (i.e., where a supervisor is younger than their subordinate) reduces interpersonal attraction, leading to less frequent interactions (Byrne, 1971). These reduces interactions limit opportunities for mutual observation and understanding of leadership behaviour, resulting in lower SOA for leadership perceptions (Watson et al., 2000).

Building on this reasoning, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H2. *The relationship between supervisor–subordinate age dissimilarity and SOA for relational leadership is directional, such that when a supervisor is younger than their subordinate, the relationship is more strongly negative than when a supervisor is older than their subordinate with respect to the five dimensions of inclusion (H2a), empowerment (H2b), caring (H2c), ethicality (H2d), and having a vision (H2e).*

Gender similarity and SOA for relational leadership

Role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) posits that individuals evaluate whether others' attributes align with the characteristics associated with a particular role, as shaped by prevailing stereotypes, whereas similarity–attraction theory (Byrne, 1971) explains the relational consequences of such role (in)congruence. In supervisor–subordinate dyads, these theories suggest that individuals prefer demographic similarity, including gender similarity (Bakar & McCann, 2014). Accordingly, we argue that, alongside age, gender also influences SOA for leadership perceptions (e.g., Yammarino & Atwater, 1997).

Prior research has shown that dyadic gender composition—particularly gender similarity in supervisor–subordinate dyads—is associated with greater attitudinal and value similarity (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Gender similarity enhances SOA, with same-gender dyads exhibiting more agreement than mixed-gender dyads (Mobley, 1982). We therefore hypothesize that gender similarity between supervisors and subordinates enhances SOA for leadership perceptions:

H3. *The supervisor–subordinate gender dyad affects SOA for relational leadership, such that gender-similar dyads are characterized by a higher SOA in comparison to gender-dissimilar dyads across the five dimensions of inclusion (H3a), empowerment (H3b), caring (H3c), ethicality (H3d), and having a vision (H3e).*

We further argue that the gender composition of supervisor–subordinate dyads also influences leadership dynamics (e.g., Biddle, 1979), as gender shapes leadership perceptions (e.g., Fleenor et al., 2010). For instance, men generally hold less accurate leadership

self-perceptions than women (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). Nevertheless, SOA research has rarely examined the role of gender (Braddy et al., 2020). Building on role congruity theory (Eagly, 1987), scholars have argued that incongruence between gender and leadership roles leads to biased evaluations, particularly for women in supervisory positions (e.g., Del Carmen Triana et al., 2024).

Gender-based stereotyping frames leadership abilities and traits as predominantly masculine (Eagly & Karau, 2002), exemplified by the "think manager—think male" paradigm (Schein, 1973). Because men have historically dominated leadership roles, such stereotyping generates friction when women occupy supervisory positions, arising from perceived mismatches between traditional female gender role expectations and leadership demands (Del Carmen Triana et al., 2024; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

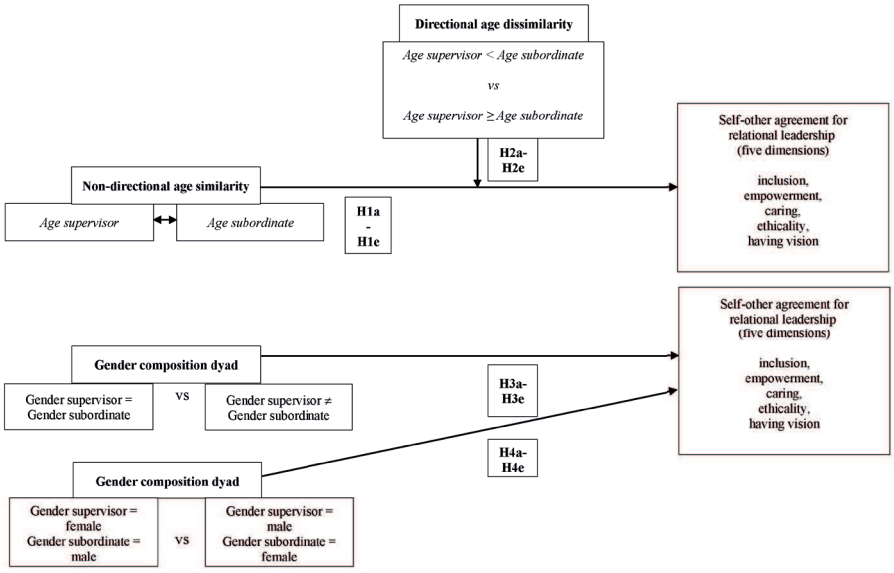
However, in the female-dominated elderly nursing care sector (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021), we expect distinct SOA patterns based on supervisor–subordinate gender composition. Female supervisors may benefit from role congruence in this context, as their communal characteristics (e.g., helpfulness, kindness, and sympathy) align with both gender stereotypes and prevailing leadership expectations in nursing (Cummings et al., 2018). Such role congruence is likely to foster positive dyadic perceptions of relational leadership behaviour. Consequently, we predict favorable ratings for relational leadership, which emphasizes interpersonal relationships (Uhl-Bien, 2006), and is characterized by inclusion, empowerment, caring, ethicality, and having a vision (Carifio, 2010).

Conversely, male supervisors may experience gender-based role incongruence (Eagly, 1987) in elderly nursing care, due to mismatches between traditional masculine traits (e.g., agentic characteristics and dominance; Eagly & Karau, 2002) and the relational leadership expectations prevalent in this context (Wee et al., 2021). Accordingly, we expect female supervisor–male subordinate dyads to exhibit higher SOA for relational leadership than male supervisor–female subordinate dyads:

H4. *The gender composition of a supervisor–subordinate dyad affects SOA for relational leadership, such that female supervisor–male subordinate dyads have more SOA in comparison to male supervisor–female subordinate dyads regarding the five dimensions of inclusion (H4a), empowerment (H4b), caring (H4c), ethicality (H4d), and having a vision (H4e).*

Our hypothesized model is shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1
The research model



5.3 METHODS

Procedure and Participants

We employed a dyadic design, within a Dutch elderly nursing care organization, using an online questionnaire in which supervisors provided self-ratings and direct nursing staff members provided other-ratings (Backhaus et al., 2018). Data were collected between October 2021 and October 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period in which employees faced challenging job demands, underscoring the importance of investing in job resources, particularly leadership.

Prior to data collection, the Research Ethics Committee of the Open Universiteit approved the study for compliance with ethical guidelines and international regulations (reference number U202108211). Survey invitations were distributed via email and included a link to the questionnaire, an informed consent letter outlining the study's objectives, voluntary participation, the estimated time required to complete the questionnaire, and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality in data processing. To increase response rates, progress updates were communicated through the organization's intranet and team meetings. Conditional incentives (three €25 vouchers) were offered for complete responses, and reminder emails were sent two weeks after the initial invitation. To mitigate response bias (Dolnicar, 2020), we pretested the questionnaire's design with four nurses to assess item clarity, evaluate the Likert scales, and determine whether its length-imposed time constraints (Kock et al., 2021).

Sample

The final sample comprised a representative group of direct nursing staff members (subordinates) and their immediate supervisors. Responses were obtained from 267 of 415 invited nurses and all 30 invited supervisors, yielding 267 supervisor–subordinate dyads for analysis. Supervisors had a mean age of 34.97 years (*SD* = 9.95), with 93.6% female and 6.4% male participants. Their educational level ranged from European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Level 3 (22.1%) to Level 7 (2.2%), with most holding a Level 6 qualification (75.7%). Subordinates' mean age was 45.67 years (*SD* = 12.87), with 92.9% female and 7.1% male participants. Their educational qualifications ranged from EQF Level 2 (9.7%) to Level 7 (0.7%), with the majority holding Level 3 (62.9%).

Measures

Age similarity was operationalized using supervisors' and subordinates' ages in years. Non-directional age similarity was calculated as the absolute difference in age between supervisor and subordinate. For directional age difference, a dichotomous variable was created, coded 0 when the supervisor was younger than the subordinate, and 1 when the supervisor was the same age or older.

Gender similarity was operationalized as a dummy variable (0 = gender-similar dyads, 1 = gender-dissimilar dyads). Dyadic gender composition was coded 0 when the supervisor was female and the subordinate male, and 1 when the supervisor was male and the subordinate female.

SOA for Relational Leadership was measured using a Dutch translation of Carifio's (2010) 25-item, five-dimensional scale, with each dimension comprising five items. Items were translated following the translation-back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1970) to ensure linguistic equivalence. The scale was adapted to the elderly nursing care context by rewording items and creating parallel (i.e., nominally identical) versions for supervisors and subordinates. Supervisors provided self-ratings on items beginning with "I as a supervisor", whereas subordinates rated their supervisors on items beginning with "My supervisor". The five dimensions were: *inclusion* (e.g., "My supervisor recognizes and engages all internal and external stakeholders in building coalitions"; example other-rating), *empowerment* (e.g., "I as a supervisor, encourage others by sharing information, bringing people into group process and promoting individual and group learning"; example self-rating), *caring* (e.g., "My supervisor establishes relationships built on values, caring and support"), *ethicality* (e.g., "I as a supervisor, actively practice in "leading with integrity"), and *having a vision* (e.g., "My supervisor has vision, and often offers ideas about possibilities for the future"). All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The absolute difference was calculated for each dimension to represent SOA for relational leadership.

Control variables included respondents' educational level, measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 ("high school or equivalent") to 7 ("master's degree"). For analysis, educational level was recoded into a dichotomous variable (0 = "high school or equivalent," 1 = "higher education degree") to align with prior research (e.g., Scholarios & Van der Heijden, 2021) and facilitate replication.

Analyses

Hypotheses were tested using dyadic data analyses (Kenny et al., 2006) with 95% confidence intervals. To test Hypothesis 1, we conducted five two-step hierarchical regression analyses in IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 30.0; IBM Corporation, 2024), one for each dimension of relational leadership. In Step 1, supervisor's gender was entered as a control variable; in Step 2, non-directional age similarity was added to assess its predictive influence on SOA.

To examine Hypothesis 2, we conducted five moderation regression analyses using Model 1 of Hayes' PROCESS macro (Version 4.2; Hayes, 2022) in SPSS, entering supervisor's gender as a control, non-directional age similarity as the predictor, and directional age dissimilarity as the moderator. To gain deeper insights into the hypothesized relationships, we conducted a series of five polynomial regression analyses with response surface analysis (RSA; Edwards & Parry, 1993), following Shanock et al.'s (2010) procedure. These analyses examined complex (in)congruence effects between supervisors' and subordinates' ages on outcome variables—specifically, SOA for each dimension of relational leadership). To facilitate interpretation, three-dimensional response surface plots were generated in RStudio (Version 2025.05.1; RStudio Team, 2025) using the plotly package (Version 4.11.0; Sievert, 2020).

Finally, to test Hypotheses 3 and 4, we conducted five one-tailed independent samples' *t*-tests (one per dimension of relational leadership) using SPSS. Levene's test determined the appropriate *t*-test procedure. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's *d* for Hypothesis 3 and Hedges' *g* for Hypothesis 4, to account for relatively small group sizes (Goulet-Pelletier & Cousineau, 2018). Hypothesis 3 compared SOA for relational leadership between gender-similar and gender-dissimilar dyads, whereas Hypothesis 4 focused on SOA differences between male supervisor–female subordinate dyads and female supervisor–male subordinate dyads.

5.4 RESULTS

Means, standard deviations and inter-correlations among variables

Means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations among all model variables appear in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1
Means, standard deviations and inter-correlations among variables

Variables	*Mean*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age supervisor	34.97	9.95														
2. Age subordinate	45.67	12.87	–.08													
3. Non-directional age similarity	16.87	10.71	–.13*	.62												
4. Directional age dissimilarity	0.29	0.45	.56**	–.63**	–.37**											
5. Gender supervisor	0.94	0.25	.09	–.06	–.04	.06										
6. Gender subordinate	0.93	0.26	.13*	.04	–.03	.02	.22**									
7. Gender similarity	0.10	0.30	–.13*	–.02	.03	.01	–.52**	–.61**								
8. Gender composition	0.44	0.51	.20	.19	.03	–.09	–1.00**	1.00**	.[a]							
9. Educational level supervisor	1.00	0.00	.[a]	.[a]	.[a]	.[a]	.[a]	.[a]	.[a]	.[a]						
10. Educational level subordinate	0.88	0.33	–.01	–.27**	–.18**	.16**	–.01	–.11	.05	–.32	.[a]					
11. Inclusion SOA	0.92	0.89	–.05	.11	.07	–.12	–.30**	–.04	.17**	.56**	.[a]	.02				
12. Empowerment SOA	0.81	0.87	.02	.15*	.13*	–.11	–.20**	.03	.12	.53**	.[a]	–.02	.65**			
13. Caring SOA	0.86	0.89	–.04	.11	.13*	–.09	–.11	.01	.09	.27	.[a]	.05	.63**	.75**		
14. Ethicality SOA	0.78	0.77	–.01	.07	.06	–.07	–.21**	–.04	.11	.39*	.[a]	.08	.64**	.69**	.76**	
15. Having a vision SOA	1.04	0.86	–.11	–.03	.02	–.07	–.05	–.01	.06	.12	.[a]	.04	.52**	.43**	.40**	.50**

Note(s). Directional age dissimilarity coded as 0 = supervisor is younger than subordinate, 1 = supervisor is of same age or older than their subordinate. Gender coded as 0 = male, 1 = female. Gender similarity coded as 0 = gender-similar dyad, 1 = gender-dissimilar dyad. Gender composition coded as 0 = female supervisor-male subordinate dyad, 1 = male supervisor-female subordinate dyad. Education coded as 0 = high school or equivalent, 1 = higher education degree. SOA represents self-other rating agreement between supervisors and subordinates on the five relational leadership dimensions, calculated as absolute difference scores. $N = 267$ for all correlations, except gender composition, where $N = 27$. [a] Variable is a constant.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Hypotheses' Testing

H1. predicted that supervisor–subordinate non-directional age similarity would positively affect SOA across the five dimensions of relational leadership. Hierarchical regression results for Model 1 show that supervisors' gender was significantly associated with SOA for *inclusion* (H1a) $F(1,265) = 25.70$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .09$, *empowerment* (H1b) $F(1,265) = 10.45$, $p = .001$, $R^2 = .04$, and *ethicality* (H1d) $F(1,265) = 11.82$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .04$, but not for *caring* (H1c), and *having a vision* (H1e). Model 2 results indicate that supervisor–subordinate non-directional age similarity positively predicted SOA for *empowerment* (H1*b*) ($\beta = .13$, $p = .037$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(2,264) = 7.49$, $p < .001$) and *caring* (H1c) ($\beta = .12$, $p = .046$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(2,264) = 3.66$, $p = .027$), but not for *inclusion* (H1a), *ethicality* (H1d), or *having a vision* (H1e). Together, these results provide partial support for H1. Detailed outcomes of the five two-step hierarchical regression analyses (H1a-e) are presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

H1 Results: Non-Directional Age Similarity Predicting SOA Across Relational Leadership Dimensions

		SOA for Inclusion (H1a)					SOA for Empowerment (H1b)					SOA for Caring (H1c)				
Predictor(s)		R^2	ΔR^2	β	F	p	R^2	ΔR^2	β	F	p	R^2	ΔR^2	β	F	p
Step 1		.09			25.70	< .001	.04			10.45	.001	.01			3.26	.072
	Supervisors' gender [a]			−.30***		< .001			−.20***		.001			−.11		.072
Step 2		.09	.00		13.37	< .001	.05	.02		7.49	<. 001	.03	.02		3.66	.027
	Supervisors' gender [a]			−.30***		< .001			−.19***		.001			−.11		.083
	Non-directional age similarity			.06		.310			.13*		.037			.12*		.046

		SOA for Ethicality (H1d)					SOA for Having a vision (H1e)				
Predictor(s)		R^2	ΔR^2	β	F	p	R^2	ΔR^2	β	F	p
Step 1		.04			11.82	<. 001	.05			.61	.435
	Supervisors' gender [a]			−.21***		<. 001			−.05		.435
Step 2		.05	.00		6.26	.002	.05	.00		.33	.719
	Supervisors' gender [a]			−.21***		<. 001			−.05		.441
	Non-directional age similarity			.05		.397			.01		.822

Note(s). $N = 267$.

[a] Gender coded as 0 = male, 1 = female.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

H2. predicted that supervisor–subordinate age dissimilarity would moderate the association between non-directional age similarity and SOA, such that the relationship would be more strongly negative when supervisors were younger than their subordinates. Descriptive statistics revealed that supervisors were younger in 71.2% (n = 190) of the cases, older in 27.7% (n = 74), and of the same age in 1.1% (n = 3).

Moderation analyses yielded consistent non-significant effects: directional age dissimilarity did not moderate the relationship between non-directional age similarity and SOA for any dimension of relational leadership. Interaction terms were non-significant for *inclusion* (H2a; β = .01, SE = .01, t = .49, p = .62), *empowerment* (H2b; β = .02, SE = .01, t = 1.78, p = .08), *caring* (H2c; β = .02, SE = .01, t = 1.42, p = .16), *ethicality* (H2d; β = .01, SE = .01, t = .70, p = .48), and *having a vision* (H2e; β = .00, SE = .01, t = .02, p = .99). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Given the complexity of the relationship between age similarity and SOA for relational leadership, linear models might oversimplify and mask associations between variables (Edwards & Parry, 1993). To gain deeper insight, we conducted five polynomial regression analyses with RSA, calculating four surface test values a_1, a_2, a_3 and a_4, and visualizing our results in response surface plots. a_1 represents the slope of the line of perfect agreement, i.e., the similarity line (supervisors' age = subordinates' age), and a_2 its curvature along the line, both of which reflect associations between age and SOA across the five dimensions of relational leadership. a_3 and a_4 represent the line of incongruence, that is the dissimilarity line (supervisors' age ≠ subordinates' age), with a_3 representing the slope (i.e., indicating whether SOA is higher or lower when supervisors are older versus younger than their subordinates) and a_4 its curvature (i.e., the degree of discrepancy between supervisors' age, subordinates' age, and SOA for the five dimensions of relational leadership). For sake of parsimoniousness, we only discuss significant surface test values. Table 5.3 presents the results of the polynomial regressions, including significant and non-significant surface test values (i.e., a_1, a_2, a_3, and a_4), and Figures 5.2–5.6 visualize the results for all five dimensions. Polynomial regressions with RSA revealed non-significant surface test values for *inclusion* (H2a; see Figure 5.2) and *empowerment* (H2b; see Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.2

The relationship between supervisor age, subordinate age and SOA for inclusion

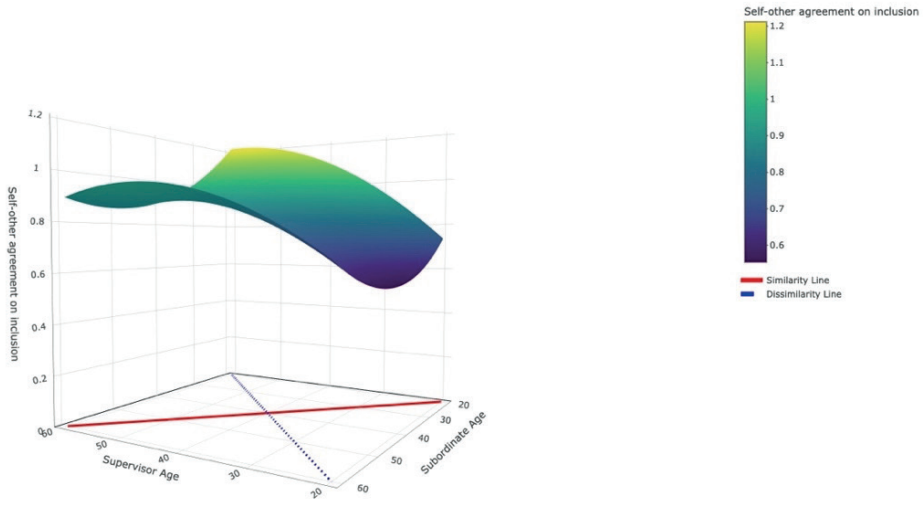
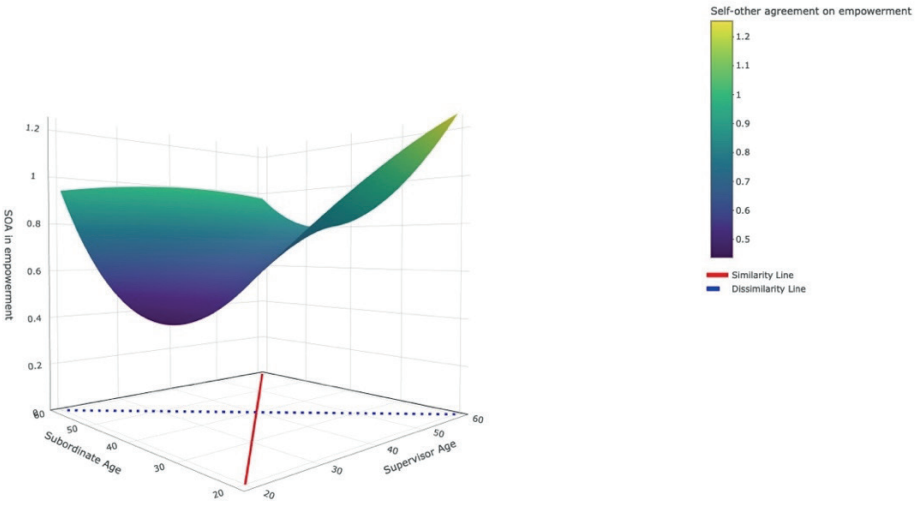


Figure 5.3

The relationship between supervisor age, subordinate age and SOA for empowerment



Polynomial regressions analyses revealed significant surface test values, and directional age-related patterns for three dimensions of relational leadership. Negative slopes were observed along the line of dissimilarity for *caring* (H2c; $a_3 = -.03$, $t = -2.74$, $p = .007$), *ethicality* (H2d; $a_3 = -.02$, $t = -2.13$, $p = .034$), and *having a vision* (H2e; $a_3 = -.04$, $t = -3.21$, $p = .001$), implying that SOA for these dimensions of relational leadership worsens when supervisors are older than their subordinates. As illustrated in Figures 5.4–5.6, SOA for these dimensions is higher when subordinates are older (left corners) and lower in case supervisors are older (right corners). *Having a vision* had a negative slope along the similarity line ($a_1 = -.04$, $t = -4.04$, $p = .000$), indicating that SOA for this dimension decreases with supervisors and subordinates both being older. Figure 5.6 shows the similarity and dissimilarity effects for this dimension.

Figure 5.4

The relationship between supervisor age, subordinate age and SOA for caring

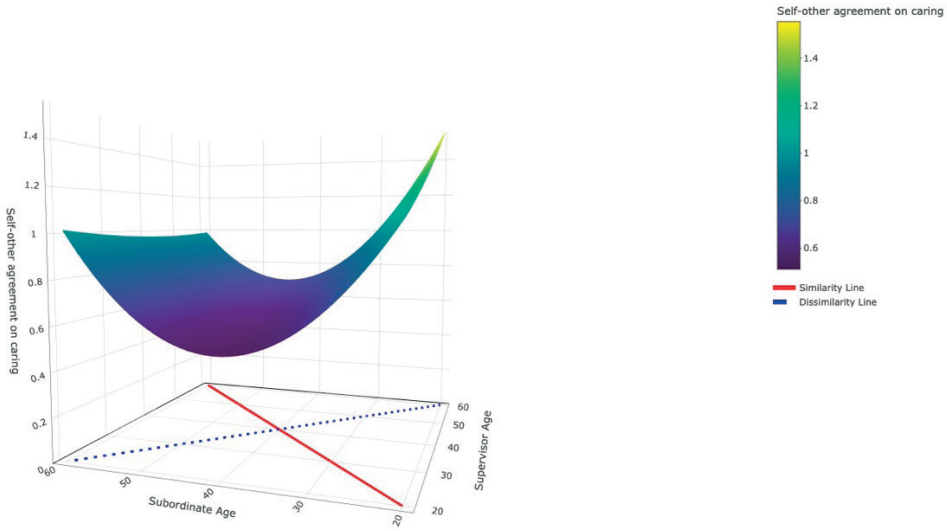


Figure 5.5

The relationship between supervisor age, subordinate age and SOA for ethicality

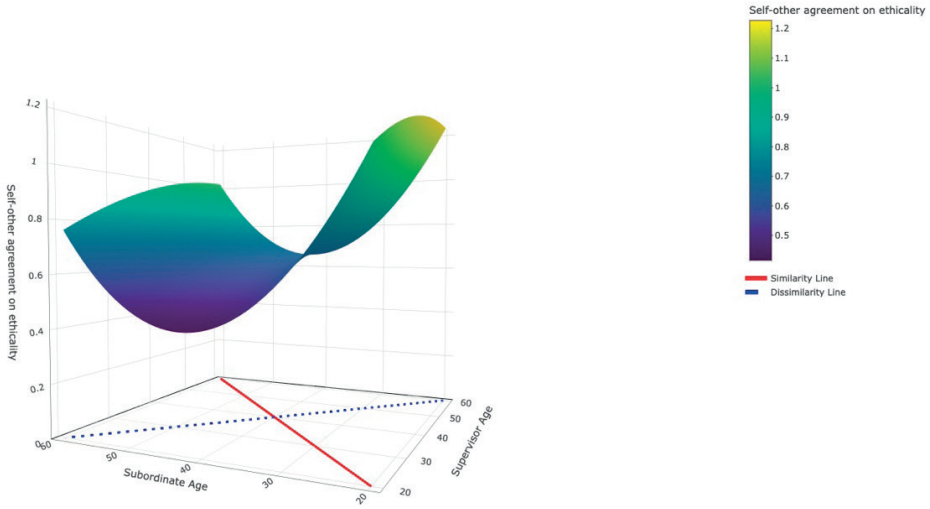


Figure 5.6

The relationship between supervisor age, subordinate age and SOA for having vision

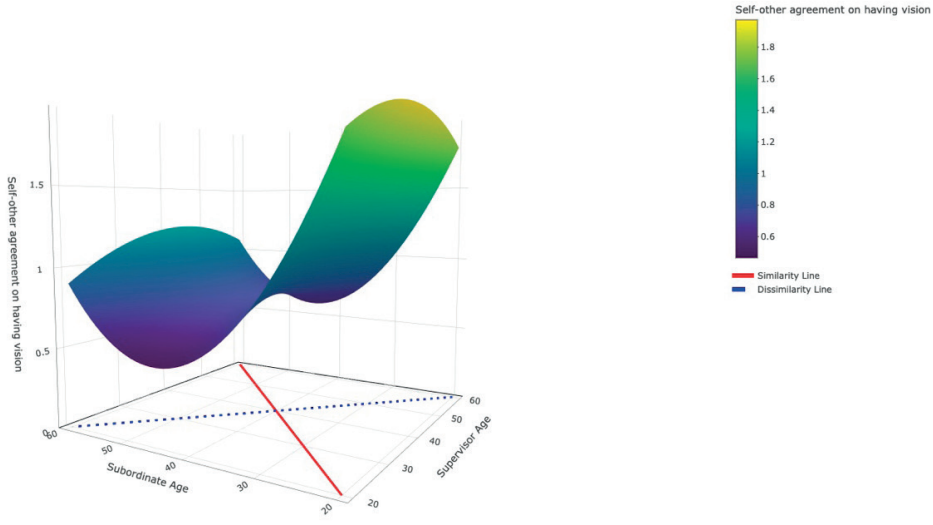


Table 5.3

Polynomial Relations Between Supervisor–Subordinate Age and SOA for Relational Leadership Dimensions: RSA Results

	Inclusion (H2a)	Empowerment (H2b)	Caring (H2c)	Ethicality (H2d)	Having a vision (H2e)
Constant	.940***	.751***	.714***	.694***	.936***
Variable – *b* (se)					
Supervisor age centered (b_1)	-.009 (.010)	-.009 (.010)	-.023 (.010)*	-.017 (.009)	-.039 (.010)***
Subordinate age centered (b_2)	.006 (.005)	.010 (.004)*	.008 (.005)	.004 (.004)	-.004 (.004)
Supervisor age squared (b_3)	.000 (.001)	.001 (.001)	.001 (.001)*	.001 (.001)*	.002 (.001)***
Cross-product:	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)
Supervisor age centered					
x Subordinate age centered (b_4)					
Subordinate age squared (b_5)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.001 (.000)
Surface tests					
a_1 Similarity slope	.00	.00	-.02	-.01	-.04***
a_2 Similarity curvature	.00.	.00	.00	.00	.00
a_3 Dissimilarity slope	-.02	-.02	-.03**	-.02*	-.04**
a_4 Dissimilarity curvature	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00

Note(s). $N = 267$. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

H3. predicted that gender similar dyads would show higher SOA across the five dimensions of relational leadership than gender-dissimilar dyads. Significant Levene's test indicated unequal variances for *inclusion*, $F(1, 265) = 4.46$, $p = .036$, and *empowerment*, $F(1, 265) = 5.68$, $p = .018$, and non-significant equal variances for *caring*, $F(1, 265) = 3.44$, $p = .065$, *ethicality*, $F(1, 265) = 2.69$, $p = .102$, and *having a vision,* $F(1, 265) = 0.57$, $p = .452$.

A series of five, one-tailed independent samples' *t*-tests revealed that gender-similar dyads reported significantly higher SOA than gender-dissimilar dyads for both *inclusion* ($M = 0.87$, $SD = 0{,}86$ vs. $M = 1.37$, $SD = 1.11$), $t(265) = -2.26$, $p = .016$, $d = 0.88$, confirming H3a, and for *ethicality* ($M = 0.75$, $SD = 0.76$ vs $M = 1.02$, $SD = 0.84$), $t(265) = -1.73$, $p = .042$, $d = 0.77$, supporting H3d.

Although not statistically significant, the same pattern was observed for *empowerment* (H3b; $M = 0.78$, $SD = 0.85$ vs. $M = 1.11$, $SD = 0.98$), $t(30.52) = -1.69$, $p = .051$, $d = 0.86$, *caring* (H3c; $M = 0.83$, $SD = 0.87$ vs. $M = 1.09$, $SD = 1.06$), $t(265) = -1.42$, $p = .079$, $d = 0.89$, and *having a vision* (H3e; $M = 1.03$, $SD = 0.87$ vs. $M = 1.19$, $SD = 0.74$), $t(265) = -0.91$, $p = .181$, $d = 0.86$., with all large effect sizes. These results provide partial support for Hypothesis 3. Detailed results of all five *t*-test are presented in Table 5.4.

H4. predicted that gender composition of a supervisor–subordinate dyad would affect SOA, such that female supervisor–male subordinate dyads would report higher SOA than male supervisor–female subordinate dyads across the five dimensions of relational leadership. Levene's test were non-significant for all dimensions (*F*'s ranged from 0.01 to 1.14, $p > .05$), indicating equal variances between the two dyad types.

One-tailed independent samples *t*-tests showed significantly higher SOA for female supervisor-male subordinate dyads on *inclusion* (H4a), $M = 0.83$, $SD = 0.76$ vs. $M = 2.05$, $SD = 1.13$, $t(25) = -3.37$, $p = .001$, $g = 0.97$, *empowerment* (H4b), $M = 0.65$, $SD = 0.79$ vs. $M = 1.68$, $SD = 0.92$, $t(25) = -3.13$, $p = .002$, $g = 0.88$, and *ethicality* (H4d), $M = 0.73$, $SD = 0.77$ vs. $M = 1.38$, $SD = 0.82$, $t(25) = -2.12$, $p = .022$, $g = 0.82$. Non-significant differences were found for *caring* (H4c), $M = 0.84$, $SD = 1.16$ vs. $M = 1.40$, $SD = 0.85$, $t(25) = -1.39$, $p = .088$, $g = 1.07$, and *having a vision* (H4e), $M = 1.11$, $SD = 0.74$ vs. $M = 1.28$, $SD = 0.76$, $t(25) = -0.61$, $p = .273$, $g = 0.77$. Overall, these results provide partial support for H4.

Table 5.4

Independent Samples T-test Results for H3a Through H3e

Outcome Variable	Gender-similar dyad		Gender-dissimilar dyad						
(Hypothesis)	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***t***	**df**	***p***	**Cohen's *d***	**Result**
Inclusion SOA *(H3a)*	.87	.86	1.37	1.11	−2.26	265	.016*	.88	Supported
Empowerment SOA *(H3b)*	.78	.85	1.11	.98	−1.69	265	.051	.86	Rejected
Caring SOA *(H3c)*	.83	.87	1.09	1.06	−1.42	265	.079	.89	Rejected
Ethicality SOA *(H3d)*	.75	.76	1.02	.84	−1.73	265	.042*	.77	Supported
Having a vision SOA *(H3e)*	1.03	.87	1.19	.74	−.91	265	.181	.86	Rejected

Note(s). $N = 267$. Gender-similar dyads, $n = 240$. Gender-dissimilar dyads, $n = 27$. Effect sizes are Cohen's *d*.

All tests were one-tailed based on directional hypotheses that gender-similar dyads would show better SOA (i.e., greater agreement between supervisors and subordinates scores) in comparison to gender-dissimilar dyads across all relational leadership dimensions.

*$p < .05$ (one-tailed).

5.5 DISCUSSION

In this study, we assessed how relational leadership—characterized by inclusion, empowerment, caring, ethicality, and having a vision (Carifio, 2010)—is perceived across age and gender within supervisor–subordinate dyads, and to what extent these demographics relate to the degree of SOA for relational leadership. Drawing on similarity–attraction (Byrne, 1971) and role congruity theories (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002), we reveal that demographic similarity and role congruence foster social exchanges that provide supervisors and their subordinates with opportunities to develop positive perceptions regarding relational leadership behaviour. In turn, these processes results into higher SOA for relational leadership. These findings offer both theoretical contributions and practical implications, which we discuss below.

5.6 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Our study contributes to the extant literature in three ways. First, it expands SOA literature on leadership (e.g., Lee & Carpenter, 2018) by examining SOA in the context of relational leadership, being a novel and increasingly relevant leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006), particularly in nursing care contexts (Cummings et al., 2018). While SOA studies have increasingly focused on (dis)agreements in leadership perceptions at the dyadic level —that is, the most neglected analytical level in current scholarship (Yammarino & Gooty, 2017; Kim et al., 2020)— no prior work has examined SOA in relation to relational leadership. We employed a multi-rater design to assess supervisors' and subordinates' SOA on perceptions of supervisors' relational leadership across its five dimensions, using the context-specific adaptation by Hoedemakers et al. (2025) of Carifio's (2010) relational leadership concept. This study is therefore the first to investigate SOA for relational leadership across all five of its dimensions.

Second, our study contributes to the SOA literature by extending research beyond the predominantly studied U.S.-based context (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014) to the elderly care nursing sector in the Netherlands. Yammarino and Atwater (1997) argued that multiple factors, such as contexts (e.g., elderly nursing care), biodata (e.g., age and gender), individual characteristics (e.g., self-awareness), and cognitive processes (i.e., schemas, beliefs, and expectations) influence SOA. These factors may help explain current findings indicating that supervisors' perceptions of their relational leadership differ from those of their subordinates, suggesting potential inaccuracies in supervisors' self-perceptions (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997) of their relational leadership behaviour. SOA focusses on (dis)agreement between leaders and followers regarding leadership perceptions. We found that in at least 51.3% of cases, supervisors' ratings diverged by at least 0.5 *SD* from their subordinates' ratings across the five dimensions of relational leadership (i.e.,

the percentage of cases that exceeded 0.5 *SD* varied from 51.3% to 64.8% across the five dimensions). Consistent with Fleenor and Prince (1997), these findings reveal self-other disagreement between supervisors' and subordinates' perceptions of relational leadership, being a significant result given that such disagreement impedes leaders' ability to foster change (i.e., new knowledge, skills, and attitudes) among their followers (Atwater et al., 1998), and is negatively related to both leaders' (e.g., Lee & Carpenter, 2018) and organizational (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992) performance. A lack of self-awareness might indicate insufficient insights into one's own behavioral strengths and weaknesses (Ostroff et al., 2004), potentially hindering leadership development (Atwater et al., 1998; Day et al., 2014). This finding is particularly relevant in elderly nursing care contexts, with its worrisome increasing shortages of staff, where relational leadership enhances nurses' perceptions of their work environment and contributes to nurses' employability (Hoedemakers et al., 2025) and retention (Leclerc et al., 2022). Relational leadership prioritizes relationships, empowerment, and wellbeing (Carifio, 2010; Leclerc et al., 2022; Uhl-Bien, 2006), being all critical for addressing societal healthcare demands and strengthening healthcare systems (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021).

Third, our scholarly work advances the relational demography literature (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) by integrating it with SOA research on leadership (Atwater & Yammarino, 1997), and demonstrating that dyadic demographic similarity (i.e., increasing age and gender similarity between supervisors and subordinates) enhances SOA for relational leadership. This responds to calls for examining dyadic demographic (dis)similarities as predictors of SOA for leadership perceptions (Curtis & Douglas, 2024; Tsui et al., 2002) and addresses the paucity of research on supervisor–subordinate dyads (Kim et al., 2020).

We find that increasing dyadic age similarity (i.e., non-directional age similarity) between supervisors and subordinates enhances SOA for the relational leadership dimensions of empowerment and caring, while dyadic gender similarity improves SOA for the dimensions of inclusion and ethicality. These patterns align with role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), suggesting that such characteristics are congruent with social roles in this context, making them recognizable to individuals and, in turn, fostering mutual attraction (Byrne, 1971), which enables supervisors and subordinates to assess relational leadership better. However, mixed effects across relational leadership dimensions might reflect power issues due to substantial discrepancies in sample sizes (i.e., gender-similar dyads n = 240, gender-dissimilar dyads n = 27). Regarding the positive associations between gender similarity and both empowerment and caring, given the large effect sizes (Goulet-Pelletier & Cousineau, 2018) and the increased emphasis on effect sizes in contemporary research, the associations with empowerment (p = .051; d = .86) and caring (p = .079; d = .89) may be considered marginally significant (Cumming, 2013). Our findings align with extant research revealing that both age and gender similarities in leader–follower dyads are associated with positive outcomes, as earlier studies have

found that age similarity mitigates relational burden (Parent-Rocheleau et al., 2024), and gender similarity improves Leader–Member eXchange quality (Bakar and McCann, 2014).

These findings support the similarity–attraction hypothesis (Byrne, 1971), which suggests that easily identifiable demographic similarities, such as age and gender, foster interpersonal attraction, since individuals are attracted to similar others. Tsui and O'Reilly (1989) suggested that such attraction is based on affection, increasing the frequency of interactions between dyadic partners (e.g., supervisors and subordinates) in organizations (e.g., Abbasi et al., 2024; Pfeffer, 1985). Frequent interactions create greater opportunities for mutual observations of leadership behaviour, improving SOA for relational leadership perceptions.

In contrast, and contradictory to our expectations, our analyses of directional age dissimilarity revealed that having younger supervisors did not hinder SOA for relational leadership, despite prior claims of role incongruence (Perry et al., 1999). A positive relationship between non-directional age similarity and SOA for relational leadership was consistent regardless of whether supervisors were younger than subordinates, as directional age dissimilarity demonstrated no moderation effect. However, using RSA, we found that directional age differences —especially when supervisors were older than subordinates—, were associated with poorer SOA for relational leadership's caring, ethicality, and having a vision. This finding is noteworthy because we would expect that directional age dissimilarity (i.e., younger supervisors supervising older subordinates) is associated with perceived role incongruence (Perry et al., 1999), as organizational hierarchies typically feature older supervisors supervising younger subordinates (e.g., Perry et al., 1999; Tsui et al., 2002).

According to role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), role incongruence reduces interpersonal attraction between dyadic partners, and diminished attraction limits interactions (Byrne, 1971), thereby restricting opportunities to observe leadership behaviour and, in turn, reducing SOA for leadership perceptions. Our results contradict both this theoretical prediction and extant empirical evidence that demonstrates that younger supervisors experience age-based role incongruence (e.g., Buengeler et al., 2016; Daldrop et al., 2025).

The current sample differed from traditional organizational hierarchies, where older individuals typically hold supervisor positions due to the presumed knowledge and wisdom associated with age (Linton, 1936); in contrast, 71.2% (n = 190) of the dyads in our work comprised supervisors who were younger than their subordinates. Such violations are typically linked to role incongruence (i.e., age stereotyping), creating challenges for young supervisors in establishing positive leadership perceptions (Daldrop et al., 2025), and potentially have negative implications for SOA (Fleenor et al., 2010). Unexpectedly,

we found that this deviation from tradition does not hinder SOA for relational leadership within elderly nursing care, which may be explained by Tsui et al.'s (2002) relational norms theory. According to this theory, dyadic compositions (i.e., younger supervisors) align with prevailing relational norms and expectations in a work context including elderly nursing care. Relational norms theory does not focus exclusively on demographic dissimilarity (e.g., regarding age), but on whether dissimilarities violate organizational and occupational norms. In this context, directional age dissimilarity does not impair SOA for relational leadership, supporting the view that SOA is shaped by contextual factors (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997) as well. Possibly, this impact of contextual factors outweighs the impact of relational demography (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) on role congruency (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and the associated interpersonal attraction (Byrne, 1971), subsequently shaping SOA for relational leadership. This line of reasoning may be particularly valid in certain occupational sectors, urging us to broaden the scope of scholarly work to include a variety of professions. The current findings seem to align with relational norms in elderly nursing care, where younger supervisors leading older subordinates are common (Tsui et al., 2002), and, in turn, does not hinder SOA for relational leadership. Greater educational attainment among young employees in Western countries compared to previous generations (Eurostat, 2024) may enable them to leverage qualifications and advance into supervisory positions more rapidly. In addition, rapid technological innovation also facilitates younger employees moving into supervisory positions (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). These trends contribute to an increase in younger supervisors leading older subordinates or similarly aged subordinates, a phenomenon common in nursing (Tsui et al., 2002), and consistent with Cappelli and Novelli's (2013) finding that subordinates are increasingly confronted with younger supervisors, which we believe might have downplayed the impact of status-incongruence in favor of the impact of relational norms.

Despite the significant role of gender in interpersonal dynamics, extant SOA research has largely neglected gender as an antecedent (Braddy et al., 2020). To address this gap, we positioned dyadic gender composition as central to our study, thereby extending knowledge in an understudied yet critical domain. Specifically, we examined the effects of two types of dyadic gender composition on SOA for relational leadership, i.e., gender-similar dyads and gender-dissimilar dyads. Our findings support similarity–attraction theory (Byrne, 1971), as gender-similarity in supervisor–subordinate dyads was associated with increased interpersonal attraction. Through positive social exchanges, supervisors and subordinates are provided with opportunities to observe each other's leadership behaviour, gaining insights into one another's perspectives, and, in turn, resulting in stronger SOA for inclusion and ethicality.

Findings suggest that female supervisor-male subordinate dyads are associated with better SOA for the relational leadership dimensions of inclusion, empowerment, and ethicality. Role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) posits that female supervisors

may be perceived as more suitable for supervisory roles in elderly nursing care due to stereotypically communal characteristics (e.g., helpfulness, kindness, interpersonally and orientation). This role congruence is particularly relevant given that relational leadership inherently aligns with communal attributes traditionally associated with women. Consequently, we expected that this congruence would enhance interpersonal attraction, which in turn would lead to more favorable ratings for relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Role congruence also facilitates more accurate perceptions of relational leadership behaviour (Eagly & Diekman, 2005). In line with Ko et al.'s (2015) argument that relationships between a leader's gender and perceived leadership effectiveness varies across industries, the current findings suggest that in female-dominated elderly nursing care (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021), female supervisors are perceived as more role-congruent (i.e., gender stereotypes aligning with relational leadership demands), thereby eliciting less prejudice. However, given the lack of research on dyadic gender compositions in SOA (Braddy et al., 2020) —especially concerning perceptions of male supervisors in female-dominated industries such as nursing— these findings might be context-specific to Dutch elderly care.

As a final contribution, this study is the first integration of relational demography (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) with SOA for leadership (Atwater & Yammarino, 1997) in a relational leadership context, thereby contributing to relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006). In doing so, it advances relational leadership theory by demonstrating that supervisors' and subordinates' perceptions of relational leadership diverge across its dimensions, with important consequences for leadership behaviour development practices (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997).

5.7 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Adding to an important gap in prior research (Gooty & Yammarino, 2011), this study employed dyadic multi-rater data, which constitutes a methodological strength and enhances the validity of its conclusions (Eid et al., 2024) compared to studies relying solely on self-reported data (Kenny, 1995). Nevertheless, several limitations warrant consideration.

First, the data were nested, with supervisor–subordinate dyads embedded within higher-level work groups and individual supervisors appearing in multiple dyads ranging from 1 to 34. This lack of independence may have influenced the results and therefore future research applying multi-level modeling approaches is needed to account for such structures (Gooty & Yammarino, 2011).

Second, the sample comprised supervisor–subordinate dyads from a single elderly nursing care organization, where 71.2% of supervisors were younger than their subordinates.

It remains unclear whether these findings generalize to similar or dissimilar organizations across industries, particularly since SOA has been found to be context-dependent (Fleenor et al., 2010)—for instance, varying across functional areas (Ostroff et al., 2004). Future research should therefore examine a broader range of organizations across industries to assess the scope of generalizability.

Third, consistent with the characteristics of the female-dominated elderly nursing care profession (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021), the group sizes of male supervisors (6.4 %) and male subordinates (7,1%) were relatively small. This limited representation reduces statistical power, increases the likelihood of type II errors (Cohen, 1988), and constrains the composition of gender-diverse supervisor–subordinate dyads. As a result, the ability to test hypotheses regarding gender as a predictor was restricted, which may have influenced the results as well. Future work should therefore aim to include samples with larger male supervisors and subordinates representation, thereby increasing statistical power, enabling more balanced dyad compositions, and enabling more robust tests of gender effects on SOA for relational leadership.

Fourth, this study's quantitative design assessed theoretically derived predictions about whether dyadic demographics predict SOA across five dimensions of relational leadership. While appropriate for our hypotheses' testing, this design limits the ability to provide more in-depth explanations. Future research should therefore incorporate quantitative mediator analyses including variables such as trust and relational identity (Maritsa et al., 2022), as well as qualitative approaches to explore underlying mechanisms (Taherdoost, 2022).

Finally, because the study included self-ratings of supervisors' relational leadership and revealed disagreement for SOA across relational leadership dimensions, self-enhancement (Atwater et al., 2018; Lee & Carpenter, 2018) and social desirability biases (Neuman, 2014) may have affected results. Future research should expand samples and include more diverse supervisor populations to better understand supervisors' self-ratings of relational leadership across its dimensions.

5.8 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this study have several implications for HR professionals and supervisors in elderly care organizations. SOA is commonly utilized in leadership development to provide insights into how multiple individuals perceive leadership, thereby shaping the understanding of an individual's leadership behaviour in terms of strengths, weaknesses, and degree of self-awareness (Fleenor et al., 2010). It is therefore critical to include multiple perspectives, for instance through 360-degree feedback to help gaining deeper

insights into leadership behaviour and effectiveness and to support organizational performance appraisal processes (Day et al., 2014; Yammarino & Atwater, 1997), since leaders' self-ratings alone are insufficient for accurate assessment due to self-enhancement bias (Lee & Carpenter, 2018). Such feedback is most effective when followed by developmental interventions, since follow-up is essential for sustained leadership development (Cummings et al., 2021). These assessments typically collect anonymous multi-source feedback (i.e., self- and other-ratings) of supervisors' leadership behaviour and traits, analyze these data, and determine the degree of agreement among perspectives. Levels of (dis)agreement (i.e., SOA) foster supervisors' self-awareness, which in turn facilitates behavioral changes that support leadership development (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). In addition, we recommend HR strategies that prioritize SOA by offering incentives and training opportunities to enhance supervisor's leadership rating accuracy (Murphy, 2008). Evidence from healthcare supports this approach, as Mosson et al. (2018) demonstrated that concomitant feedback fosters SOA for leadership perceptions and thus strengthens leadership development initiatives in this sector.

5.9 CONCLUSION

By integrating relational demography (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) and SOA, the present study advances the understanding of how age and gender (dis)similarities in supervisor–nurse dyads predict SOA for relational leadership in elderly nursing care. Our findings reveal that age and gender similarity are directly and positively associated with SOA for relational leadership. In addition, female supervisor–male subordinate dyads demonstrated higher SOA compared to male supervisor–female subordinate dyads. These results have practical implications to elderly nursing care organizations aiming to strengthen relational leadership by enhancing SOA through interventions such as 360-degree feedback assessments and concomitant feedback practices. To interpret these findings, we drew on similarity–attraction (Byrne, 1971) and role congruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002) theories. While this study is the first to examine SOA for relational leadership, future research is needed to validate and extend these initial insights.

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6

General discussion
Samenvatting (Dutch summary)
About the author

The traditional idea of leadership as being about the solo, heroic leader has now run its course. A new way of thinking about leadership is now needed to address major challenges such as achieving greater social responsibility, enhancing leadership capacity and recognizing the importance of context as affecting how leadership occurs.

(Clarke, 2018, n.p.)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Population ageing is exerting mounting pressure on healthcare systems worldwide (United Nations, 2024), with particularly acute implications for elderly care. Healthcare organizations must respond to older adults' increasingly complex healthcare needs while ensuring equitable, high-quality care for a growing population (Jones & Dolsten, 2024). At the same time, rapidly evolving digital technologies are transforming healthcare work and the organization of care (Isidori et al., 2022). Together, these developments intensify leadership demands on middle managers, including supervisors, who are increasingly expected to enact relational forms of leadership in which soft skills, such as empathy, play a pivotal role (Cummings et al., 2018; Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022), as illustrated in Study 3 (Chapter 4). Research on nursing leadership has grown substantially over the past decade (Cummings et al., 2021), highlighting the importance of leadership approaches that support nurses' ongoing competence development and, in turn, their competence-based employability.

Against this backdrop, these developments have important implications for nursing roles in elderly care. They also underscore that strengthening nurses' competence-based employability requires sustained investment in professional development, facilitated through supervisors' day-to-day leadership, consistent with evidence synthesized in Study 1 (Chapter 2) (Bornhaupt & Mulder, 2025; Froehlich et al., 2014). This pattern is reflected in the quantitative findings from nurses in Study 2 (Chapter 3) and reinforced by qualitative insights from supervisors in Study 3 (Chapter 4).

Prior research further shows that employability is essential for coping with contemporary work-related challenges (e.g., Stoffers, 2023) and for improving and sustaining care quality (Van de Voort et al., 2025). At the same time, employability development is context-dependent (Akkermans et al., 2024), and, from a relational perspective, is likely to be facilitated when a high degree of complementary fit is achieved between supervisors and nurses within their day-to-day working relationship (Rus et al., 2024). As a result, employability, including "input- or competence-based employability" (De Lange, 2021, p. 1) has become a central topic within human resource management (HRM) research (Fugate et al., 2021).

Taken together, these demographic, technological, and organizational shifts underscore the need to foster conditions that facilitate nurses' competence-based employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006)—that is, "the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competences" (p. 453)—across elderly care settings.

Evidence synthesized in Study 1 (Chapter 2) indicates that supervisors' leadership is associated with both direct and indirect effects on employees' (e.g., nurses') employability—such as competence-based employability—across work contexts, including healthcare. Accordingly, employers, such as healthcare organizations increasingly pursue HRM strategies that enhance employability (Veth et al., 2015) by embedding HR initiatives, including professional development, within the employer–employee relationship (Fugate et al., 2021). This link is further substantiated by empirical evidence from Studies 2 and 3 (Chapters 3 and 4) in Dutch elderly care, which illustrate how supervisors' relational leadership and day-to-day people management interactions are enacted and can support (or hinder) nurses' competence-based employability.

Drawing on Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), we argue that supervisors—as key HR implementers—enact HR practices through relational leadership behaviors in day-to-day supervisor–nurse interactions, thereby shaping nurses' perceptions of support and empowerment (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). SET is an appropriate theoretical lens because it explains how supervisors' relational leadership and HR enactment—through perceived support and access to development opportunities—may be associated with nurses' willingness to reciprocate with developmental effort that underpins competence-based employability. Through these behaviors, supervisors can foster nurses' employability (e.g., Xie et al., 2019), which is further supported by findings from Studies 2 and 3 (Chapters 3 and 4).

In nursing contexts, relationally oriented leadership is positively associated with favorable work-related outcomes, including job satisfaction (e.g., Neubert et al., 2016), well-being (e.g., Van der Heijden et al., 2017), and intention to stay (e.g., Roche et al., 2015). Relational leadership also fosters skilled communication and meaningful recognition (Leclerc et al., 2022), which aligns with supervisors' accounts in Study 3 (Chapter 4) and—consistent with nurses' perceptions in Study 2 (Chapter 3)—supports nurses' competence-based employability by enhancing perceptions of supervisory support and opportunities for competence development.

Despite extensive evidence that relationally oriented leadership yields favorable outcomes in nursing contexts (Cummings et al., 2018), scholars argue that these effects depend on the extent to which supervisors' and nurses' perceptions of leadership align, as captured by the concept of self–other agreement (SOA) (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992, 1997). Importantly, such perceptual alignment is contextually embedded. Relational demography theory (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) posits that SOA is shaped by demographic (dis)similarities, such as age and gender, within supervisor–nurse dyads—a pattern reflected in the findings of Study 4 (Chapter 5).

Adopting an HRM perspective and grounded in SET, this dissertation addresses four research gaps. First, evidence on supervisors' leadership as an antecedent of employees' including nurses' competence-based employability remains dispersed, leaving limited integrative insight into the mechanisms and boundary conditions under which this relationship unfolds across work settings (Chughtai, 2019; Wang et al., 2019). Second, it remains unclear how supervisors' relational leadership—conceptualized through Carifio's (2010) multidimensional framework— relates to nurses' competence-based employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) in elderly care settings, and through which exchange processes this relationship may operate (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Third, limited insight exists into how these relational leadership dynamics are embedded in supervisors' broader people management, including the enactment of HR practices (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Finally, insufficient knowledge exists about the extent to which supervisors' and nurses' perceptions of relational leadership align and how demographic characteristics—specifically age and gender within supervisor–nurse dyads—shape this alignment (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989).

To address these research gaps, this dissertation is guided by the following overarching research question (RQ):

RQ. *How do relational leadership dynamics emerge within supervisor–nurse relationships, and how do these dynamics subsequently shape nurses' competence-based employability in Dutch elderly care?*

To address the overarching question, operationalized through five subquestions (SQ1–5), this dissertation comprises four studies, each offering a distinct contribution to the overall inquiry. The following section summarizes the key findings of these studies.

6.2 MAIN FINDINGS

Study 1 (Chapter 2) was guided by Subquestion 1 (SQ1):

SQ1. *How does supervisors' leadership influence employees' employability, and through which contexts and mechanisms does this influence occur?*

As the foundational study of this dissertation, Study 1 synthesized empirical evidence on supervisors' leadership as an antecedent of employees' employability, thereby providing the basis for the subsequent empirical studies. Methodological triangulation was applied through a preliminary bibliometric analysis followed by a systematic literature review.

The principal findings of Study 1 were as follows. First, the bibliometric analysis identified 118 articles addressing the leadership–employability relationship, highlighting gaps previously noted by Chughtai (2019) and Wang et al. (2019) regarding the limited number of studies explicitly examining this relationship. Second, the systematic literature review included 17 articles and showed predominantly positive associations between supervisory leadership (e.g., transformational leadership, Leader–Member eXchange [LMX], servant leadership, perceived supervisor support) and employees' employability. Third, the reviewed studies covered diverse work contexts (e.g., education, small- and medium-sized enterprises [SMEs], and cross-sector organizations) and demonstrated substantial geographical variation. Fourth, the literature identified several mediators (e.g., work-related flow; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011; strength use; Matsuo, 2022) and moderators (e.g., personality; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014; proactive personality; Wang et al., 2019; national context; Stoffers et al., 2019) that may shape the leadership–employability relationship. Fifth, Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) was the dominant explanatory framework, which also informed the subsequent empirical studies in this dissertation.

Study 2 (Chapter 3) was guided by Subquestions 2 and 3 (SQ2–SQ3):

SQ2. *How does supervisors' relational leadership influence nurses' competence-based employability*?

SQ3. *How do perceived supervisory support and perceived opportunities for competence development operate within the relational leadership–competence-based employability relationship?*

Study 2 examined the hypothesized associations among relational leadership, perceived supervisory support for development, perceived opportunities for competence development, and competence-based employability using a two-wave panel design analyzed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

The principal findings of Study 2 were as follows. First, relational leadership was not directly associated with competence-based employability. Second, the empowerment dimension of relational leadership was positively associated with perceived supervisory support for development, which, in turn, was associated with perceived opportunities for competence development. Third, perceived opportunities for competence development were positively associated with the competence-based employability dimensions anticipation and optimization, corporate sense, and balance, but not with occupational expertise or personal flexibility. Fourth, significant serial mediation effects were found. The empowerment dimension of relational leadership was indirectly related to anticipation

and optimization and balance via perceived supervisory support for development and perceived opportunities for competence development as sequential mediators.

Study 3 (Chapter 4) was guided by Subquestion 4 (SQ4):

SQ4. *How does people management foster nurses' competence-based employability in elderly care organizations?*

Study 3 used a qualitative, interpretive, exploratory design with multi-method data collection among supervisors across five elderly care organizations to examine how people management—particularly supervisors' relational leadership as conceptualized by Carifio (2010), alongside their use of both general and tailored HR practices—related to nurses' competence-based employability.

The principal findings of Study 3 were as follows. First, supervisors supported nurses' competence-based employability by cultivating high-quality dyadic relationships through daily people management behaviors, including relational leadership and the enactment of both general and tailored HR practices. Second, these people management behaviors contributed to shaping and strengthening HR system strength within elderly care organizations. Third, supervisors described relational leadership as supporting psychological safety, which may help explain how relational leadership related to competence-based employability. Fourth, synergies between supervisors' leadership and their enactment of HR practices appeared to empower nurses by enhancing perceived HR opportunities, particularly development opportunities, thereby strengthening their competence-based employability.

Study 4 (Chapter 5) was guided by the final Subquestion (SQ5):

SQ5. *How do age and gender within supervisor–nurse dyads influence Self–Other Agreement (SOA) in perceptions of supervisors' relational leadership in elderly care?*

Study 4 used a dyadic design including supervisors and their direct nursing staff members. Hierarchical and moderated regression analyses, as well as polynomial regression with response surface pattern analysis, were conducted to test associations between age similarity (non-directional and directional), gender similarity, and gender composition within supervisor–nurse dyads as antecedents of SOA across relational leadership dimensions.

The principal findings of Study 4 were as follows. First, non-directional age similarity within supervisor–nurse dyads was positively associated with higher SOA for the relational leadership dimensions empowerment and caring. Second, directional age

dissimilarity did not moderate this association; however, response surface analyses suggested asymmetrical patterns, with SOA on caring, ethicality, and vision worsening when supervisors were older than their subordinates (i.e., nurses). Third, gender-similar dyads reported higher SOA than gender-dissimilar dyads for inclusion and ethicality. Fourth, female supervisor–male nurse dyads exhibited higher SOA for inclusion, empowerment, and ethicality than male supervisor–female nurse dyads.

Taken together, these findings inform the theoretical and practical implications of this dissertation and motivate the limitations and directions for future research discussed in the following sections.

6.3 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation contributes to research at the intersection of relational leadership (e.g., Clarke, 2018; Leclerc et al., 2022; Uhl-Bien, 2006) and competence-based employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) by examining how supervisors' relational leadership is associated with nurses' competence-based employability in Dutch elderly care settings (i.e., nursing homes and home care services). This section outlines the theoretical implications of the findings across Studies 1–4 for relational leadership theory, people management, competence-based employability research, and self–other agreement (SOA) research on leadership perceptions. Overall, the findings underscore employability as a relational and context-sensitive process that unfolds through day-to-day social exchanges within supervisor–nurse relationships.

This section is structured around contributions to relational leadership theory (Section 6.3.1), people management (Section 6.3.2), the process model of Strategic Human Resource Management (Section 6.3.3), competence-based employability (Section 6.3.4), and Self–Other Agreement in perceptions of supervisors' relational leadership (Section 6.3.5).

6.3.1 Relational leadership theory

As a first contribution to relational leadership theory (e.g., Clarke, 2018; Uhl-Bien, 2006), this dissertation extends its empirical scope to nurses' competence-based employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) as a novel outcome domain in elderly care. Prior research has linked Carifio's (2010) five-dimensional conceptualization of relational leadership to a range of positive employee outcomes across contexts, such as innovative work behavior (Akram et al., 2016; Kim, 2022), organizational citizenship behavior (Ansong et al., 2024), and psychological empowerment- and voice-related outcomes (Memon & Ooi, 2024). Additionally, relationally oriented leadership has been associated with favorable nursing workforce and work-environment outcomes across healthcare

contexts (Cummings et al., 2018). Study 1 (Chapter 2), however, indicates that supervisors' relational leadership has rarely been examined as an antecedent of nurses' employability. Building on this, findings from Studies 2 and 3 (Chapters 3 and 4) provide converging survey and qualitative support that supervisors' relational leadership relates—primarily indirectly—to nurses' competence-based employability in Dutch elderly care. By adding nurses' competence-based employability to this set of outcomes, this dissertation reinforces the applicability of relational leadership theory to employability development outcomes in elderly care contexts.

As a second contribution to relational leadership theory, this dissertation sharpens theorizing about how relational leadership is enacted and experienced within supervisor–nurse relationships by operationalizing Carifio's (2010) five dimensions and empirically differentiating them using multi-source and mixed-method evidence from Dutch elderly care (Studies 2–4; Chapters 3–5). Supervisors' relational leadership is operationalized as distinct, measurable behaviors enacted in day-to-day supervisor–nurse interactions (i.e., inclusion, empowerment, caring, ethicality, and vision). Seminal work by Uhl-Bien (2006) is used to frame leadership as a dynamic, interactional process, through which these behaviors may also be understood as qualities of the supervisor–nurse relationship. This multidimensional operationalization enables a more fine-grained empirical examination of how specific relational leadership dimensions operate within supervisor–nurse relationships and moves beyond prior empirical applications that have often treated relational leadership as largely one-dimensional (e.g., Ansong et al., 2024).

Third, this dissertation contributes to relational leadership theory by extending relational leadership to a dyadic level by investigating self–other agreement (SOA) in supervisor–nurse perceptions of relational leadership. Consistent with relational leadership as an interactional process (Uhl-Bien, 2006), Study 4 (Chapter 5) applies a SOA lens (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992, 1997) to Carifio's (2010) multidimensional framework and demonstrates dimension-specific divergence between supervisors' and nurses' ratings, suggesting that relational leadership is not uniformly experienced within supervisor–nurse dyads.

Fourth, this dissertation advances relational leadership theory, by identifying psychological safety as a plausible relational mechanism and outcome through which supervisors' relational leadership may operate within supervisor–nurse relationships. In Study 3 (Chapter 4), supervisors described trust-building relational dynamics through which supportive, relation-oriented behaviors—particularly inclusion, caring, and ethicality—may foster conditions in which nurses feel safe to speak up, ask questions, and share ideas. This interpretation aligns with prior research showing that leader inclusiveness can promote psychological safety (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006) and that relationally oriented

leadership approaches (e.g., authentic leadership) are positively associated with psychological safety in healthcare contexts (Cho & Steege, 2025).

As a final contribution to relational leadership theory, this dissertation provides evidence on the contextual sensitivity of Carifio's (2010) multidimensional Relational Leadership Questionnaire (RLQ) by applying it in a different occupational and national context—nurses and their supervisors in Dutch elderly care. After minor contextual rewording, the measure was examined in nurse samples (Studies 2 and 4; Chapters 3 and 5) and in a supervisor sample (Study 4; Chapter 5). Findings indicate context-specific overlap between caring and ethicality (Study 2; Chapter 3), as discriminant validity between these dimensions was not supported. This suggests that, in this context, nurses may not clearly differentiate supervisors' caring from ethicality, underscoring that relational leadership—and the manifestation and distinctiveness of its dimensions—is context-sensitive and may therefore be context-embedded (Clarke, 2018).

Building on this focus on supervisors' relational leadership as a leadership construct, the next section adopts a people management lens (Knies et al., 2017) to examine how relational leadership is embedded in supervisors' broader people management behaviors, including the enactment of HR practices.

6.3.2 People management

As a first contribution to the people management literature (e.g., Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), this dissertation conceptually integrates Carifio's (2010) multidimensional relational leadership construct into Knies et al.'s (2020) people management framework. By empirically examining this integration in Dutch elderly care, the dissertation extends people management theorizing by explicitly positioning relational leadership as a leadership approach through which supervisors enact people management in daily supervisor–nurse interactions—an area that has remained under-theorized in healthcare contexts (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021).

As a second contribution, this dissertation advances people management research by unpacking how supervisors enact people management in practice. Drawing on qualitative evidence from Study 3 (Chapter 4), the findings demonstrate that supervisors' relational leadership behaviors and the enactment of HR practices operate in synergy, with tailored developmental practices playing a particularly salient role alongside general practices. This contribution elucidates how supervisors selectively utilize specific relational leadership dimensions when translating intended HR practices into implemented and experienced practices, thereby shaping supportive learning climates and fostering nurses' competence-based employability.

6.3.3 The process model of Strategic Human Resource Management

This dissertation contributes to HRM/SHRM process and implementation research by showing how supervisors' day-to-day HR enactment shapes nurses' perceptions of HR practices and development opportunities (Study 3; Chapter 4), consistent with SHRM process perspectives (Nishii & Wright, 2007). Using Carifio's (2010) framework to examine HR enactment in supervisor–nurse interactions, the findings indicate that relational leadership can promote more consistent communication and enactment of HR practices, thereby strengthening the distinctiveness and consistency of HR messages and potentially reinforcing HR system strength (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Building on Nishii and Paluch (2018), the results further suggest that relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006) may operate as an HR implementation behavior in this context (e.g., articulating expectations and reinforcing desired behaviors), underscoring supervisors' central role in shaping perceptions of HR system strength (Nishii & Paluch, 2018).

6.3.4 Competence-based employability

As a first contribution to employability research, this dissertation positions supervisors' relational leadership (Carifio, 2010) as a contextual antecedent of nurses' competence-based employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) in Dutch elderly care, thereby strengthening contextual accounts of employability development (Akkermans et al., 2024). While prior research has examined antecedents such as workplace learning opportunities (Froehlich et al., 2014) and leadership approaches such as transformational leadership (Böttcher et al., 2018) and Leader–Member eXchange (Park, 2020), relational leadership has received comparatively less attention as an antecedent of competence-based employability. Responding to calls to further integrate leadership perspectives into employability research (Rus et al., 2024), this dissertation specifies how relational leadership operates at the interactional level of day-to-day supervisor–nurse exchanges to shape competence-based employability.

Second, this dissertation advances an interactional, employer–employee view of employability development by integrating leadership and HRM perspectives. Building on the premise that employability unfolds through employer–employee interactions in which supervisors—acting as organizational and HR agents—shape employees' (e.g., nurses) employability-related development opportunities through information and resource exchanges (Akkermans et al., 2024), this dissertation elaborates how relational leadership is enacted in supervisor–nurse dyads and how it connects to the day-to-day enactment of employability-relevant HR practices from a people management perspective (Study 3; Chapter 4). In doing so, it illustrates how supervisors' relational leadership may be associated with employability development within everyday supervisor–nurse interactions.

As a third contribution to employability research, this dissertation refines employability theorizing by leveraging its multidimensional nature to examine dimension-specific

pathways from relational leadership to competence-based employability. Using Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) competence-based employability dimensions—occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense, and balance—the findings enable a differentiated examination of how specific relational leadership dimensions (Carifio, 2010) relate to distinct employability facets. Building on the systematic literature review (Study 1; Chapter 2), which indicates that the supervisors' leadership–employees' employability relationships can be both direct and indirect, the findings across the empirical studies suggest that supervisors' relational leadership is primarily indirectly associated with nurses' competence-based employability.

As a fourth contribution to employability research, this dissertation specifies exchange-based mechanisms through which supervisors' relational leadership may contribute to nurses' competence-based employability in elderly care. Prior research has often relied on exchange perspectives—most notably Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and Leader–Member eXchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)—to explain why leadership may foster employability. Building on these perspectives and their emphasis on reciprocity and perceived support, and consistent with relational leadership as a reciprocal, co-constructed influence relationship (Clarke, 2018), Study 2 (Chapter 3) indicates an indirect, sequential pathway through which relational leadership may support employability via support- and development-related perceptions. Across studies, empowerment appears particularly salient as Study 2 highlights its role in the proposed pathway, and Study 3 (Chapter 4) provides converging qualitative insight suggesting that supervisors described all five relational leadership dimensions as contributing to nurses' competence-based employability development, with empowerment most consistently emphasized. Theoretically, empowerment may be central because it strengthens developmental exchanges within supervisor–nurse relationships and enables supervisors to identify and provide developmental opportunities that support competence development (e.g., Froehlich et al., 2014).

6.3.5 Self–other agreement in perceptions of supervisors' relational leadership

As a first contribution to Self–Other Agreement (SOA) research in leadership perceptions (e.g., Lee & Carpenter, 2018), this dissertation extends SOA to supervisors' relational leadership by explicitly assessing perceptual alignment between supervisors and nurses across Carifio's (2010) five relational leadership dimensions. In doing so, it demonstrates that such alignment may differ across relational leadership dimensions, rather than operating uniformly across the overall construct level, underscoring the value of a dimension-specific approach to SOA in leadership research.

As a second contribution, this dissertation broadens the empirical scope of SOA research by providing evidence from the Dutch elderly care context, thereby extending a literature

that has been dominated by U.S.-based studies (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014). By focusing on supervisor–nurse dyads in elderly care, the findings contribute to more context-sensitive and internationally grounded theorizing on perceptual alignment in leadership.

As a third contribution, this dissertation advances theory on antecedents of SOA by conceptualizing demographic (dis)similarity between supervisors and nurses as a dyadic characteristic that helps explain when perceptual alignment is more likely to emerge. Drawing on relational demography (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) and similarity–attraction arguments (Byrne, 1971), the findings suggest that age and gender similarity may serve as cues that facilitate shared interpretations of supervisors' relational leadership behavior and thereby contribute to SOA in relational leadership perceptions.

6.4 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Beyond theoretical implications, this dissertation yields practical implications for policy and practice in elderly care settings, including nursing homes and home care services, drawing on evidence from the Dutch context. Against the backdrop of workforce challenges in elderly care and rising, increasingly complex care demands, the findings indicate that nurses' competence-based employability can be strengthened through supervisors' relational leadership in daily supervisor–nurse interactions by embedding supportive people management in day-to-day work. Accordingly, HRM departments and supervisors should ensure that nurses experience tangible supervisory support for development and meaningful opportunities for competence development, supported by a psychologically safe climate that fosters learning, including speaking up and reflection. Strengthening nurses' competence-based employability may help them cope with contemporary work-related challenges (Stoffers, 2023), support sustainable care quality (Van de Voort et al., 2025), and contribute to broader health system goals (World Health Organization, 2025).

Building on these findings, a key practical implication is that HRM should invest in supervisors' relational leadership to strengthen nurses' competence-based employability. To strengthen supervisors' relational leadership in daily practice, HRM strategies should embed relational leadership development in routine people management and supportive HR practices. For example, HRM can offer regular development opportunities with structured reflection on real supervisor–nurse interactions, for instance through blended online learning programs with virtual learning labs alongside coaching and mentoring (Leclerc et al., 2022), and video-based reflection with peer feedback and brief surveys (Nakamura et al., 2025).

In addition, self–other agreement (SOA)—for instance through 360-degree feedback, can help clarify how supervisors' leadership is experienced by both supervisors and

nurses and can identify areas for further developing relational leadership (e.g., Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). When interpreting SOA results, HRM should also be attentive to dyadic characteristics such as age and gender similarity between supervisors and nurses, as these may be associated with (dis)agreement in leadership perceptions and, more broadly, with how leadership effectiveness is understood (e.g., Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). Importantly, feedback processes should be followed by structured, tailored developmental interventions that use areas of disagreement as input for reflection, coaching, and sustained behavior change, given that follow-up is essential for sustained leadership development (Cummings et al., 2021).

Because supervisors' relational leadership is enacted in daily supervisor–nurse interactions, HRM should strengthen its impact by developing the people-management conditions that enable learning and development in everyday work. From a strategic HRM perspective, this requires alignment between intended HR practices and their day-to-day enactment, while allowing tailored application to situational demands and individual nurses' development needs (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021; Nishii & Wright, 2007). In particular, elderly care settings should foster a psychologically safe climate in which speaking up and reflection are encouraged, as this supports learning behaviors and high-quality communication in complex care contexts (Ito et al., 2022). Concretely, this requires policies and routines that promote fairness and inclusiveness, as well as visible leader and peer support that nurses experience in their immediate work environment (Faraj & Yan, 2009; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; O'Donovan & McAuliffe, 2020). These conditions can be reinforced through team development activities and accessible mental health support services (Peddie et al., 2025). Finally, employability development can be further supported by combining informal learning opportunities at work (Froehlich et al., 2023) with formal learning and behavioral job crafting, particularly challenge-seeking behaviors that help transfer learning into day-to-day practice (Sartori et al., 2023).

6.5 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Notwithstanding the strengths of this dissertation, several limitations should be acknowledged. While limitations specific to each individual study have been addressed in the preceding chapters, this section outlines the overarching limitations of the dissertation and identifies directions for future research.

First, this dissertation is subject to theoretical limitations related to the scope of relational leadership as a conceptual framework. Relational leadership adopts a social and collective perspective on leadership as a relational process (Clarke, 2018). To provide analytical focus, relational leadership was examined primarily within the supervisor–nurse relation-

ship. This constitutes a theoretical boundary condition, as the findings regarding competence-based employability may not directly generalize to relational leadership processes unfolding in other relational configurations (e.g., peer-, team-level or interprofessional relationships). Future research could examine whether similar leadership–employability associations emerge across these configurations.

Second, theoretical limitations relate to the dissertation's interpretive framework. Findings are primarily interpreted through SET (Blau, 1964) and a people management perspective (Knies et al., 2020). While this theory and perspective provide a coherent basis for interpretation, they foreground reciprocity and supervisors' enactment of HR/people management practices and may underrepresent alternative mechanisms that could also shape competence-based employability. Future research could compare or integrate SET with alternative theoretical frameworks, such as the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) or Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), to test complementary or competing mechanisms linking relational leadership to competence-based employability.

Third, theoretical limitations relate to the interpretive framework used to explain differences in self–other agreement (SOA) regarding supervisors' relational leadership. Associations between SOA and age and gender were primarily interpreted through role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and similarity–attraction theory (Byrne, 1971), which guided the reasoning underlying these associations. While these theories provide plausible explanations, alternative theoretical perspectives may offer complementary or more suitable explanations for age- and gender-related differences in SOA. Future research could therefore explore these associations using an alternative theory, such as social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Fourth, a methodological limitation concerns the timing of data collection across the empirical studies in this dissertation. Data were collected during the COVID-19 period, a particularly challenging time for supervisors and nurses working in elderly care. These exceptional circumstances may have influenced experiences and perceptions of relational leadership and competence-based employability and may also have contributed to the notably lower response rate in Wave 2. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Future research could replicate these findings using data collected outside periods of exceptional strain to assess the robustness of the observed associations.

Fifth, a further methodological limitation concerns the scope of the SOA analyses regarding supervisors' relational leadership. The dyadic SOA approach captures agreement between supervisors' and nurses' ratings, providing insight beyond single-source ratings. However, SOA was examined in relation to age and gender but not linked to competence-based employability, limiting insight into whether SOA is associated with employability.

Future research could examine the association between SOA and competence-based employability.

Finally, a limitation concerns the scope of the empirical studies, as data were collected within a limited number of organizations in elderly care. This focus represents a trade–off: while it bounds generalizability, it simultaneously provides detailed, context-specific insight into relational leadership and competence-based employability. As employability development unfolds over time and is context-dependent (Akkermans et al., 2024), caution is warranted when generalizing beyond this context. Future research could replicate the findings in comparable elderly care settings using a longitudinal design and extend the conceptual model by incorporating psychological safety as a potential mechanism linking relational leadership to nurses' competence-based employability.

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SAMENVATTING (DUTCH SUMMARY)

Introductie

De vergrijzing van de bevolking legt wereldwijd een steeds grotere druk op de gezondheidszorg (Verenigde Naties, 2024), met bijzonder acute gevolgen voor de ouderenzorg. Zorginstellingen moeten inspelen op de steeds complexere zorgbehoeften van ouderen en tegelijkertijd rechtvaardige, hoogwaardige zorg blijven bieden aan een groeiende groep zorgvragers (Jones & Dolsten, 2024). Tegelijkertijd transformeren snel evoluerende digitale technologieën het werk in de gezondheidszorg en de organisatie van de zorg (Isidori et al., 2022). Deze ontwikkelingen stellen hogere eisen aan het leiderschap van leidinggevenden in de zorg. Van hen wordt steeds vaker verwacht dat zij relationele vormen van leiderschap toepassen, waarbij soft skills, zoals empathie, een cruciale rol spelen (Cummings et al., 2018; Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022). Dit wordt geïllustreerd in Studie 3 (Hoofdstuk 4).

Het onderzoek naar leiderschap binnen de *nursing contexts* is de afgelopen tien jaar aanzienlijk toegenomen (Cummings et al., 2021). Daarbij wordt het belang benadrukt van leiderschapsbenaderingen die de continue competentieontwikkeling van *nurses* ondersteunen, en daarmee hun *competence-based employability* (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Tegen deze achtergrond hebben deze ontwikkelingen belangrijke implicaties voor de rol van *nurses* in de ouderenzorg. Ze benadrukken dat het versterken van de *competence-based employability* van *nurses* een voortdurende investering in professionele ontwikkeling vereist (Bornhaupt & Mulder, 2025; Froehlich et al., 2014). Deze ontwikkeling wordt in belangrijke mate gefaciliteerd door het dagelijkse leiderschap van leidinggevenden, in lijn met de bevindingen uit Studie 1 (Hoofdstuk 2). Dit patroon komt terug in de kwantitatieve bevindingen van *nurses* in Studie 2 (Hoofdstuk 3) en wordt aangevuld door kwalitatieve inzichten van *supervisors* in Studie 3 (Hoofdstuk 4).

Eerder onderzoek toont verder aan dat *competence-based employability* essentieel is om hedendaagse werkgerelateerde uitdagingen het hoofd te bieden (zie bijvoorbeeld, Stoffers, 2023) en om de kwaliteit van de zorg te handhaven en te verbeteren (Van de Voort et al., 2025). Tegelijkertijd is de ontwikkeling van *employability* afhankelijk van de context (Akkermans et al., 2024). Vanuit een relationeel perspectief, wordt *employability* waarschijnlijk bevorderd wanneer een hoge mate van complementaire fit wordt bereikt tussen *supervisors* en *nurses* in hun dagelijkse werkrelatie (Rus et al., 2024). Als gevolg daarvan is *employability*, met inbegrip van "*input- or competence-based employability*" (De Lange, 2021, p. 1), een centraal onderwerp geworden binnen onderzoek naar human resource management (HRM) (Fugate et al., 2021).

Gezamenlijk benadrukken deze demografische, technologische en organisatorische veranderingen de noodzaak om omstandigheden te creëren die de *competence-based*

employability van *nurses* bevorderen (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden). Hierbij wordt *competence-based employability* gedefinieerd als "het continu vervullen, verwerven of creëren van werk door het optimaal gebruik te maken van competenties" (p. 453), binnen alle typen instellingen voor ouderenzorg.

De bevindingen van Studie 1 (Hoofdstuk 2) laten zien dat het leiderschap van leidinggevenden zowel directe als indirecte effecten heeft op de *employability* van werknemers (bijvoorbeeld *nurses*) in verschillende werkcontexten, waaronder de gezondheidszorg. Om die reden streven werkgevers, zoals zorginstellingen, steeds vaker naar HRM-strategieën die *employability* versterken (Veth et al., 2015), onder meer door HR-initiatieven, waaronder professionele ontwikkeling te integreren in de werkgever–werknemer relatie (Fugate et al., 2021). Dit verband wordt verder onderbouwd door empirisch bewijs uit Studies 2 en 3 (Hoofdstukken 3 en 4) die uitgevoerd zijn binnen de Nederlandse ouderenzorg. Deze studies illustreren hoe relational leadership van *supervisors* en dagelijkse interacties vanuit *people management* worden uitgevoerd, en hoe dit de *competence-based employability* van *nurses* kan ondersteunen (of belemmeren).

Op basis van de Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) stellen wij dat *supervisors*—als belangrijke HR-uitvoerders— HR-praktijken toepassen via *relational leadership* in dagelijkse interacties tussen *supervisors* en *nurses*. Daarmee beïnvloeden zij de percepties van *nurses* ten aanzien van *support* en *empowerment* (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). SET is in dit proefschrift een geschikte theoretische lens, omdat de theorie verklaart hoe *relational leadership* en HR-implementatie door supervisors—via waargenomen ondersteuning en toegang tot ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden—samenhangen met de bereidheid van *nurses* om zich te ontwikkelen. Deze bereidheid vormt een belangrijke basis voor *competence-based employability* versterking. Door dit gedrag kunnen leidinggevenden de *employability* van *nurses* bevorderen (zie bijvoorbeeld, Xie et al., 2019), hetgeen aansluit bij de bevindingen van Studies 2 en 3 (Hoofdstukken 3 en 4).

In *nursing contexts* wordt relationeel georiënteerd leiderschap positief geassocieerd met werkgerelateerde resultaten, waaronder werkplezier (zie bijvoorbeeld, Neubert et al., 2016), welzijn (zie bijvoorbeeld, Van der Heijden et al., 2017) en de intentie om bij de organisatie te blijven werken (zie bijvoorbeeld, Roche et al., 2015). *Relational leadership* bevordert bovendien vaardige communicatie en betekenisvolle erkenning (Leclerc et al., 2022). Dit sluit aan bij de opvattingen van *supervisors* in Studie 3 (Hoofdstuk 4) en—overeenkomstig de percepties van *nurses* in Studie 2 (Hoofdstuk 3)—bij het idee dat *relational leadership* de *competence-based employability* van *nurses* ondersteunt via verbeterde ervaren ondersteuning en verbeterde mogelijkheden voor competentie-ontwikkeling.

Ondanks het uitgebreide bewijs voor positieve effecten van relationeel georiënteerd leiderschap in *nursing contexts* (Cummings et al., 2018), stellen wetenschappers dat

deze effecten mede afhangen van de mate waarin percepties van *supervisors* en *nurses* over leiderschap op elkaar zijn afgestemd. Dit resoneert met het concept van *Self–Other Agreement* (SOA) van Atwater & Yammarino (1992, 1997). Belangrijk is dat deze overeenstemming in perceptie contextueel is ingebed. De *Relational Demography Theory* (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) stelt dat SOA mede wordt gevormd door demografische (on)gelijkheden, zoals leeftijd en geslacht, binnen *supervisor–nurse dyads*. Dit patroon komt terug in de bevindingen van Studie 4 (Hoofdstuk 5).

Vanuit een HRM-perspectief en gebaseerd op SET adresseert dit proefschrift vier hiaten in het onderzoek. Ten eerste is het bewijs over leiderschap van leidinggevenden als antecedent van *competence-based employability* van werknemers, waaronder *nurses*, versnipperd. Daardoor is er beperkt inzicht in de mechanismen en randvoorwaarden waaronder deze relatie zich in verschillende werkomgevingen ontvouwt (Chughtai, 2019; Wang et al., 2019). Ten tweede is nog onvoldoende duidelijk hoe *relational leadership* van *supervisors*—geoperationaliseerd met het multidimensionale concept van Carifio (2010)—zich verhoudt tot de *competence-based employability* van *nurses* (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) in de ouderenzorg, en via welke uitwisselingsprocessen deze relatie tot stand komt (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Ten derde is er weinig inzicht in hoe *relational leadership* is ingebed in het bredere *people management* van *supervisors*, waaronder de uitvoering van HR-praktijken (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Ten slotte is er beperkte kennis over de mate waarin de percepties van leidinggevenden en nurses over *relational leadership* overeenkomen, en over hoe demografische kenmerken—met name leeftijd en geslacht binnen *supervisor–nurses dyads*—deze overeenstemming beïnvloeden (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989).

Om deze hiaten te adresseren, wordt dit proefschrift geleid door de volgende overkoepelende onderzoeksvraag (RQ):

RQ. *Hoe ontstaat relational leadership binnen de relatie tussen supervisor en nurses, en hoe beïnvloedt deze dynamiek vervolgens de competence-based employability van nurses in de Nederlandse ouderenzorg?*

Om deze overkoepelende vraag te beantwoorden, die is geoperationaliseerd in vijf deelvragen (SQ1–5), bestaat dit proefschrift uit vier studies, die elk een eigen bijdrage leveren aan het geheel. In het volgende hoofdstuk worden de belangrijkste bevindingen van deze studies samengevat.

Belangrijkste bevindingen

Studie 1 (Hoofdstuk 2) werd geleid door deelvraag 1 (SQ1):

SQ1. *Hoe beïnvloedt het leiderschap van leidinggevenden de employability van werknemers, en via welke contexten en mechanismen vindt deze invloed plaats?*

Als fundament van dit proefschrift bood Studie 1 een synthese van empirisch bewijs over leiderschap van leidinggevenden als antecedent van *employability*. Methodologische triangulatie werd toegepast door een verkennende bibliometrische analyse te combineren met een systematisch literatuuronderzoek. De bibliometrische analyse identificeerde 118 artikelen die de relatie tussen *leiderschap* en *employability* behandelen en bevestigde hiaten die eerder zijn gesignaleerd door Chughtai (2019) en Wang et al. (2019), met name het beperkte aantal studies dat deze relatie expliciet onderzoekt.

Het systematische literatuuronderzoek omvatte 17 artikelen en liet overwegend positieve verbanden zien tussen *leiderschap* van leidinggevenden—zoals transformationeel leiderschap, Leader–Member eXchange (LMX), dienend leiderschap en waargenomen ondersteuning door leidinggevenden—en *employability* van werknemers. De geïncludeerde studies waren uitgevoerd in uiteenlopende werkcontexten, waaronder het onderwijs, kleine en middelgrote ondernemingen en sectoroverstijgende organisaties, en vertoonden substantiële geografische spreiding. Daarnaast werden meerdere verklarende mechanismen en randvoorwaarden geïdentificeerd, waaronder mediatoren zoals werkgerelateerde flow (Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011) en het benutten van sterke punten van werknemers (Matsuo, 2022), evenals moderatoren zoals persoonlijkheid (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014), proactieve persoonlijkheid (Wang et al., 2019) en nationale context (Stoffers et al., 2019). Ten slotte bleek de Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) het dominante verklarende kader, dat ook richting gaf aan de daaropvolgende empirische studies in dit proefschrift.

Studie 2 (Hoofdstuk 3) werd geleid door deelvragen 2 en 3 (SQ2–SQ3):

SQ2. *Hoe beïnvloedt relational leadership van supervisors de competence-based employability van verpleegkundigen?*

SQ3. *Welke rol spelen perceived supervisory support for development en perceived opportunities for professional competence development binnen deze relatie?*

Studie 2 onderzocht de veronderstelde verbanden tussen *relational leadership*, *perceived supervisory support for development en perceived opportunities for professional competence development* met behulp van een two-wave paneldesign, geanalyseerd met Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). De resultaten lieten zien dat *supervisors'*

relational leadership niet direct samenhing met *nurses' competence-based employability*. De empowermentdimensie van *relational leadership* bleek echter positief gerelateerd aan *perceived supervisory support for development* die op haar beurt samenhing met *perceived opportunities for professional competence development*. Deze waargenomen ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden waren positief geassocieerd met de dimensies *anticipatie en optimalisatie*, *organisatiegevoel* en *balans* van *competence-based employability*, maar niet met *vakinhoudelijke expertise* of *persoonlijke flexibiliteit*. Daarnaast werden seriële mediatie-effecten gevonden, waarbij de empowermentdimensie van *relational leadership* indirect samenhing met *anticipatie en optimalisatie* en met *balans* via *perceived supervisory support for development* en *perceived opportunities for professional competence development*,.

Studie 3 (Hoofdstuk 4) werd geleid door deelvraag 4 (SQ4):

SQ4. *Hoe bevordert supervisors' people management de comptence-based employability van nurses in ouderenzorgorganisaties?*

Studie 3 hanteerde een kwalitatief, interpretatief en exploratief onderzoeksontwerp met multi-method dataverzameling onder leidinggevenden in vijf ouderenzorgorganisaties. Centraal stond hoe *people management*—met name *relational leadership* zoals geconceptualiseerd door Carifio (2010), in combinatie met de toepassing van zowel generieke als maatwerk HR-praktijken—samenhangt met *competence-based employability* van *nurses*. De bevindingen laten zien dat *supervisors nurses' competence-based employability* ondersteunen door het opbouwen en onderhouden van hoogwaardige dyadische relaties via dagelijks *people management* gedrag. Dit omvat zowel *relational leadership* als de uitvoering van generieke en op maat gemaakte HR-praktijken. Deze gedragingen droegen bovendien bij aan het vormgeven en versterken van de sterkte van het HR-systeem binnen ouderenzorgorganisaties. *Supervisors* gaven daarnaast aan dat *relational leadership* psychologische veiligheid ondersteunt, wat kan helpen verklaren hoe *relational leadership* samenhangt met *competence-based employability*. Tot slot wijzen de resultaten op synergieën tussen *relational leadership* van *supervisors* en de uitvoering van HR-praktijken, waarbij *nurses* worden versterkt door het vergroten van waargenomen HR-mogelijkheden—met name ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden—en daarmee hun *competence-based employability*.

Studie 4 (Hoofdstuk 5) werd geleid door deelvraag 5 (SQ5):

SQ5. *Hoe beïnvloeden leeftijd en geslacht binnen supervisor–nurses dyads de Self–Other Agreement (SOA) in percepties van relational leadership van supervisors in de ouderenzorg?*

Studie 4 gebruikte een dyadisch onderzoeksontwerp met *supervisors* en hun direct aangestuurde *nurses*. Met hiërarchische en gemodereerde regressieanalyses en polynomiale regressie met response surface-analyse werd onderzocht hoe leeftijdsgelijkheid (niet-directioneel en directioneel), geslachtsgelijkheid en geslachtscompositie binnen *supervisor–nurses dyads* samenhangen met SOA op verschillende dimensies van *relational leadership*. De resultaten tonen dat *niet-directionele leeftijdsgelijkheid* samenhing met hogere SOA voor *empowerment* en *zorgzaamheid*. Directionele leeftijdsongelijkheid modereerde deze relatie niet, maar response surface-analyses suggereerden asymmetrische patronen: SOA voor *zorgzaamheid*, *ethisch handelen* en *visie* nam af wanneer *supervisors* ouder waren dan 'hun' *nurses*. Daarnaast rapporteerden geslachtsgelijke *dyads* een hogere SOA dan geslachtsongelijke *dyads* voor *inclusie* en *ethisch handelen*. Ten slotte vertoonden vrouwelijke *supervisor*–mannelijke *nurse dyads* een hogere SOA voor *inclusie*, *empowerment* en *ethisch handelen* dan mannelijke *supervisor*–vrouwelijke *nurse dyads*.

Gezamenlijk bieden deze bevindingen aanknopingspunten voor de theoretische en praktische implicaties van dit proefschrift en vormen zij de basis voor de bespreking van beperkingen en richtingen voor toekomstig onderzoek in de volgende paragrafen.

Theoretische implicaties

Dit proefschrift levert een bijdrage aan onderzoek op het snijvlak van *relational leadership* (bijv. Clarke, 2018; Leclerc et al., 2022; Uhl-Bien, 2006) en *competence-based employability* (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) door te onderzoeken hoe *relational leadership* van *supervisors* samenhangt met de *competence-based employability* van *nurses* in de Nederlandse ouderenzorg (verpleeghuizen en wijkverpleging). In deze sectie worden de theoretische implicaties van de bevindingen uit Studies 1–4 uiteengezet voor theorieontwikkeling rond *relational leadership*, *people management*, *HRM/SHRM-proces en implementatie*, *competence-based employability* en onderzoek naar *Self–Other Agreement (SOA)* in leiderschapspercepties. Overkoepelend onderstrepen de bevindingen van *competence-based employability* als een relationeel en contextgevoelig proces dat zich ontvouwt via dagelijkse sociale uitwisselingen binnen de werkrelatie tussen *supervisors* en *nurses*.

De opbouw van deze sectie volgt vier bijdragen: aan theorievorming rond *relational leadership*, bijdragen aan de *people management* literatuur, aan onderzoek naar *competence-based employability* en *Self–Other Agreement* in percepties van *relational leadership* van *supervisors*.

Relational leadership theory

Dit proefschrift levert een eerste bijdrage aan theorievorming rond *relational leadership* (zie bijvoorbeeld Clarke, 2018; Uhl-Bien, 2006) door de empirische reikwijdte uit te breiden naar *competence-based employability* van *nurses* (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006)

als uitkomstmaat in de ouderenzorg. Eerder onderzoek koppelde Carifio's (2010) vijf-dimensionale conceptualisering van *relational leadership* aan uiteenlopende positieve uitkomsten, zoals innovatief werkgedrag (Akram et al., 2016; Kim, 2022), organizational citizenship behavior (Ansong et al., 2024) en uitkomsten die samenhangen met psychologische empowerment en voice (Memon & Ooi, 2024). Daarnaast is relationeel georiënteerd leiderschap in zorgcontexten verbonden aan gunstige uitkomsten voor teams en werkomgevingen (Cummings et al., 2018). Studie 1 (Hoofdstuk 2) laat echter zien dat *relational leadership* van *supervisors* zelden is onderzocht als antecedent van *employability*. Tegen deze achtergrond bieden de bevindingen uit Studies 2 en 3 (Hoofdstukken 3 en 4) convergerende bewijs—via survey- en kwalitatieve gegevens—dat *relational leadership* van *supervisors* in de Nederlandse ouderenzorg vooral indirect samenhangt met *competence-based employability* van *nurses*. Daarmee benadrukt dit proefschrift dat *relational leadership* ook relevant is voor *employability*-ontwikkeling van *nurses* in ouderenzorgcontexten.

Een tweede bijdrage betreft het verfijnen van theorievorming over hoe *relational leadership* wordt uitgevoerd en ervaren binnen de werkrelatie tussen *supervisors* en *nurses*. Door Carifio's (2010) vijf dimensies expliciet te operationaliseren en empirisch van elkaar te onderscheiden met multi-source en mixed-method bewijs (Studies 2–4; Hoofdstukken 3–5), wordt *relational leadership* gepositioneerd als een set van herkenbare, meetbare gedragingen in dagelijkse interacties. Het gaat daarbij om *inclusie*, *empowerment, zorgzaamheid*, *ethisch handelen* en *visie*. Aansluitend bij Uhl-Bien (2006) kan *relational leadership* worden opgevat als een dynamisch, interactioneel proces, waardoor deze gedragingen ook te begrijpen zijn als kwaliteiten van de relatie tussen *supervisors* en *nurses*. Deze multidimensionale benadering maakt het mogelijk om specifieker te toetsen welke dimensies via welke routes samenhangen met uitkomsten en vormt een stap voorbij toepassingen waarin *relational leadership* veelal als een grotendeels één-dimensionaal construct werd benaderd (bijv. Ansong et al., 2024).

Daarnaast draagt dit proefschrift bij door *relational leadership* expliciet op dyadisch niveau te bestuderen via *Self–Other Agreement* in percepties van *supervisors' relational leadership*. In lijn met het interactionele karakter van *relational leadership* (Uhl-Bien, 2006) past Studie 4 (Hoofdstuk 5) een SOA-lens toe (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992, 1997) op het multidimensionale kader van Carifio (2010). De resultaten laten dimensie specifieke verschillen zien tussen beoordelingen van *supervisors* en *nurses*, wat erop wijst dat *relational leadership* binnen *dyads* niet uniform wordt ervaren.

Verder identificeert dit proefschrift *psychologische veiligheid* als een plausibel relationeel mechanisme en een relevante uitkomst waarlangs *relational leadership* kan werken. In Studie 3 (Hoofdstuk 4) beschrijven relationele dynamieken die vertrouwen opbouwen, waarbij ondersteunend en relationeel gedrag—met name *inclusie, zorgzaamheid*

en *ethisch handelen*—voorwaarden kan creëren waarin *nurses* zich veilig voelen om vragen te stellen, ideeën te delen en zich uit te spreken. Deze interpretatie sluit aan bij onderzoek waaruit blijkt dat inclusiviteit van leidinggevenden psychologische veiligheid kan bevorderen (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006) en dat relationeel georiënteerde leiderschapsbenaderingen (bijv. authentiek leiderschap) in zorgcontexten positief samenhangen met psychologische veiligheid (Cho & Steege, 2025).

Tot slot levert dit proefschrift bewijs voor de contextgevoeligheid van Carifio's (2010) multidimensionale Relational Leadership Questionnaire (RLQ) door deze toe te passen in een andere beroeps- en nationale context, namelijk *nurses* en *supervisors* in de Nederlandse ouderenzorg. Na beperkte contextuele herformulering is de vragenlijst onderzocht onder *nurses* (Studies 2 en 4; Hoofdstukken 3 en 5) en *supervisors* (Studie 4; Hoofdstuk 5). De bevindingen wijzen op context-specifieke overlap tussen zorgzaamheid en ethisch handelen (Studie 2; Hoofdstuk 3), omdat de discriminerende validiteit tussen deze dimensies niet werd ondersteund. Dit suggereert dat *nurses* in deze context zorgzaamheid en ethisch handelen van *supervisors* niet scherp van elkaar onderscheiden, wat de context gebonden manifestatie van *relational leadership* en de distinctiviteit van de dimensies benadrukt (Clarke, 2018).

Aansluitend op deze focus op *relational leadership* wordt in de volgende paragraaf een *people management* perspectief gehanteerd (Knies et al., 2017) om te duiden hoe *relational leadership* is ingebed in bredere *people management* praktijken van *supervisors*, waaronder de uitvoering van HR-praktijken.

People management

Dit proefschrift draagt bij aan de *people management* literatuur (bijv. Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007) door Carifio's (2010) multidimensionale construct van *relational leadership* conceptueel te integreren in het concept van *people management* van Knies et al. (2020). Door deze integratie empirisch te onderzoeken in de Nederlandse ouderenzorg, wordt *people management* theorie verder ontwikkeld door *relational leadership* expliciet te positioneren als een leiderschapsbenadering waarmee *supervisors' people management* vormgeven in dagelijkse interacties met *nurses*. Dit is relevant, omdat *people management* processen in zorgcontexten tot op heden relatief beperkt zijn onderzocht (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021).

Daarnaast biedt dit proefschrift inzicht in hoe *supervisors' people management* in de praktijk uitvoeren. De kwalitatieve bevindingen uit Studie 3 (Hoofdstuk 4) laten zien dat *relational leadership* en de uitvoering van HR-praktijken in samenhang functioneren. Daarbij blijken op maat gemaakte ontwikkelpraktijken een bijzonder prominente rol te spelen naast generieke praktijken. De resultaten maken zichtbaar hoe *supervisors* selectief specifieke dimensies van *relational leadership* inzetten bij het vertalen van beoogde

HR-praktijken naar uitgevoerde en door *nurses* ervaren praktijken. Daarmee dragen zij bij aan ondersteunende leerklimaten en aan de ontwikkeling van *competence-based employability*.

HRM/SHRM-proces en implementatie

Dit proefschrift draagt bij aan HRM/SHRM-proces- en implementatieonderzoek door te laten zien hoe de dagelijkse uitvoering van HR door *supervisors nurses'* percepties van HR-praktijken en ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden vormgeeft (Studie 3; Hoofdstuk 4), in lijn met procesperspectieven binnen SHRM (Nishii & Wright, 2007). Door Carifio's (2010) kader te gebruiken om HR-uitvoering binnen *supervisor–nurse* interacties te analyseren, laten de bevindingen zien dat *relational leadership* kan bijdragen aan consistentere communicatie en uitvoering van HR-praktijken. Hierdoor kunnen HR-boodschappen duidelijker en consistenter worden, wat mogelijk bijdraagt aan de sterkte van het HR-systeem (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). In het verlengde van Nishii en Paluch (2018) suggereren de resultaten bovendien dat *relational leadership* in deze context kan functioneren als implementatiegedrag van HR, bijvoorbeeld door verwachtingen te expliciteren en gewenst gedrag te bekrachtigen. Daarmee wordt de centrale rol van *supervisors* in het vormen van percepties van HR-systeemsterkte verder benadrukt (Nishii & Paluch, 2018).

Competence-based employability

Dit proefschrift positioneert *relational leadership* van *supervisors* als een contextueel antecedent van *competence-based employability* van *nurses* (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) in de Nederlandse ouderenzorg, en versterkt daarmee contextuele benaderingen van *employability* ontwikkeling (Akkermans et al., 2024). Hoewel eerder onderzoek antecedenten onderzocht zoals werkplekleren (Froehlich et al., 2014) en leiderschapsbenaderingen waaronder transformationeel leiderschap (Böttcher et al., 2018) en Leader–Member eXchange (Park, 2020), is *relational leadership* relatief minder onderzocht als antecedent van *competence-based employability*. In antwoord op oproepen om leiderschapsperspectieven sterker te integreren in *employability* onderzoek (Rus et al., 2024) specificeert dit proefschrift hoe *relational leadership* op interactioneel niveau—via dagelijkse uitwisselingen tussen *supervisors* en *nurses*—samenhangt met *nurses' competence-based employability.*

Daarnaast draagt dit proefschrift bij aan een interactionele, werkgever–werknemer-benadering van *employability* ontwikkeling door leiderschaps- en HRM-perspectieven te verbinden. Uitgangspunt is dat *employability* zich ontwikkelt via interacties waarin leidinggevenden, als organisatie- en HR-agenten, kansen voor ontwikkeling mede vormgeven door informatie- en hulpbronnenuitwisseling (Akkermans et al., 2024). Dit proefschrift laat zien hoe *relational leadership* door *supervisors* wordt uitgevoerd binnen *supervisor–nurse dyads* en hoe dit verbonden is met dagelijkse uitvoering van *employability*-relevante HR-praktijken vanuit een *people management* perspectief (Studie

3; Hoofdstuk 4). Daarmee wordt inzichtelijk hoe *relational leadership* kan bijdragen aan *employability* ontwikkeling in alledaagse werkinteracties.

De multidimensionale aard van *competence-based employability* wordt bovendien benut om dimensie specifieke routes te onderzoeken. Door de dimensies van Van der Heijde en Van der Heijden (2006)—vakinhoudelijke expertise, anticipatie en optimalisatie, persoonlijke flexibiliteit, organisatiegevoel en balans—als uitkomstmaten te hanteren, wordt zichtbaar hoe specifieke dimensies van *relational leadership* (Carifio, 2010) zich verhouden tot verschillende *employability* facetten. In lijn met de bevindingen uit het literatuuronderzoek (Studie 1; Hoofdstuk 2) wijzen de empirische studies erop dat de relatie tussen *relational leadership* van *supervisors* en *employability* van *nurses* zowel direct als indirect kan zijn, maar dat *supervisors' relational leadership* in dit proefschrift vooral indirect samenhangt met *nurses' competence-based employability*.

Ten slotte specificeert dit proefschrift uitwisselingsmechanismen waarlangs *relational leadership* kan bijdragen aan *competence-based employability* in de ouderenzorg. Eerdere studies verklaren leiderschapseffecten op *employability* vaak vanuit uitwisselingsperspectieven, met name SET (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) en LMX-theorie (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), waarin wederkerigheid en ervaren steun centraal staan. Studie 2 (Hoofdstuk 3) wijst op een indirecte, sequentiële route waarbij *supervisors' relational leadership nurses' competence-based employability* ondersteunt via percepties van steun en ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden. Over studies heen komt empowerment als bijzonder consistent naar voren: Studie 2 laat de rol van empowerment in dit mechanisme zien, terwijl Studie 3 convergerend kwalitatief bewijs biedt dat alle vijf dimensies bijdragen aan *competence-based employability*, met empowerment als meest consistent benadrukte dimensie. Theoretisch kan empowerment centraal zijn omdat het ontwikkelingsgerichte uitwisselingen versterkt en *supervisors* ondersteunt bij het identificeren en aanbieden van ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden die competentieontwikkeling faciliteren (bijv. Froehlich et al., 2014).

Self–Other Agreement in percepties van relational leadership

Dit proefschrift draagt bij aan *Self–Other Agreement*-onderzoek naar leiderschapspercepties (bijv. Lee & Carpenter, 2018) door *Self–Other Agreement* toe te passen op *relational leadership* van *supervisors* en de perceptuele afstemming tussen *supervisors* en *nurses* expliciet te toetsen over de vijf dimensies van Carifio (2010). Daarmee wordt duidelijk dat afstemming kan verschillen per dimensie, in plaats van uniform te functioneren op constructniveau. Dit benadrukt de meerwaarde van een dimensie specifieke benadering van *Self–Other Agreement*.

Daarnaast verbreedt dit proefschrift de empirische basis van *Self–Other Agreement*-onderzoek door bewijs te leveren vanuit de Nederlandse ouderenzorg, en draagt het

bij aan internationalere en contextgevoeligere theorievorming in een literatuur die vaak door VS-gebaseerde studies is gedomineerd (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014). Door te focussen op *supervisor–nurse dyads* in de ouderenzorg ontstaat bovendien inzicht in perceptuele afstemming in een context die kampt met hoge werkdruk en complexe zorgprocessen.

Verder ontwikkelt dit proefschrift theorievorming over antecedenten van *Self–Other Agreement* door demografische (on)gelijkheid te conceptualiseren als dyadische eigenschap van *supervisor–nurse dyads* die mede verklaart wanneer perceptuele afstemming waarschijnlijker is. In lijn met *Relational Demografy Theory* (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) en *similarity–attraction* argumenten (Byrne, 1971) suggereren de bevindingen dat leeftijds- en geslachtsgelijkheid kunnen fungeren als signalen die gedeelde interpretaties van *relational leadership* faciliteren, en daarmee *Self–Other Agreement* in leiderschapspercepties ondersteunen.

Praktische implicaties

Naast theoretische implicaties biedt dit proefschrift praktische aanknopingspunten voor beleid en praktijk in de ouderenzorg, waaronder verpleeghuizen en wijkverpleging, gebaseerd op bewijs uit de Nederlandse context. Tegen de achtergrond van arbeidsmarktknelpunten en toenemende, complexere zorgvragen suggereren de bevindingen dat *competence-based employability* van *nurses* kan worden versterkt via *relational leadership* in dagelijkse interacties, mits ondersteunend *people management* structureel wordt ingebed in het dagelijkse werk. Dit impliceert dat HRM-afdelingen en leidinggevenden moeten bevorderen dat *nurses* concrete steun voor ontwikkeling ervaren en toegang hebben tot betekenisvolle mogelijkheden voor competentieontwikkeling. Een psychologisch veilig klimaat, waarin leren, reflectie en het uitspreken van zorgen en ideeën worden aangemoedigd, vormt hierbij een belangrijke randvoorwaarde. Het versterken van *competence-based employability* kan *nurses* helpen om met hedendaagse werkgerelateerde uitdagingen om te gaan (Stoffers, 2023), bijdragen aan duurzame kwaliteit van zorg (Van de Voort et al., 2025) en ondersteunend zijn aan bredere doelen binnen het zorgsysteem (World Health Organization, 2025).

Een centrale praktische implicatie is dat HRM gericht investeert in de ontwikkeling van *relational leadership* van leidinggevenden om *nurses' competence-based employability* te versterken. In de praktijk vraagt dit om HRM-strategieën die ontwikkeling van *relational leadership* verankeren in routinematig *people management* en ondersteunende HR-praktijken. Dit kan bijvoorbeeld door regelmatige ontwikkeltrajecten aan te bieden waarin leidinggevenden gestructureerd reflecteren op concrete interacties met *nurses*, bijvoorbeeld via blended learning met virtuele leer- of oefenlabs, aangevuld met coaching en mentoring (Leclerc et al., 2022). Ook videofeedback, peerfeedback en korte vragenlijsten kunnen hierbij ondersteunend zijn (Nakamura et al., 2025).

Daarnaast kan *Self–Other Agreement*, bijvoorbeeld via 360-gradenfeedback, helpen om inzichtelijk te maken hoe *relational leadership* wordt ervaren door zowel leidinggevenden als *nurses* en zodoende om ontwikkelgebieden te identificeren (zie bijvoorbeeld Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). Bij de interpretatie van *Self–Other Agreement* uitkomsten is het van belang rekening te houden met dyadische kenmerken, zoals leeftijds- en geslachtsgelijkheid, omdat deze samen kunnen hangen met (on)overeenstemming in leiderschapspercepties en met hoe leiderschapseffectiviteit wordt geïnterpreteerd. Feedbackprocessen vragen bovendien om structurele opvolging via gerichte ontwikkelinterventies waarin verschillen in perceptie worden gebruikt als input voor reflectie, coaching en duurzame gedragsverandering, aangezien opvolging cruciaal is voor duurzame leiderschapsontwikkeling (Cummings et al., 2021).

Omdat *relational leadership* wordt uitgevoerd in dagelijkse interacties, kan HRM de impact versterken door HRM condities te ontwikkelen die leren en ontwikkeling in het dagelijks werk mogelijk maken. Vanuit een strategisch HRM-perspectief vraagt dit om afstemming tussen beoogde HR-praktijken en de dagelijkse uitvoering daarvan, met ruimte voor maatwerk afhankelijk van situationele eisen en individuele ontwikkelbehoeften (Jacobsen & Knies, 2021; Nishii & Wright, 2007). In het bijzonder vraagt de ouderenzorg om het bevorderen van psychologische veiligheid, waarin het uitspreken van zorgen en reflectie worden gestimuleerd, omdat dit leer- en communicatiegedrag ondersteunt in complexe zorgcontexten (Ito et al., 2022). Concreet betekent dit dat beleid en routines eerlijkheid en inclusie moeten bevorderen, en dat zichtbare steun van leidinggevenden en collega's aanwezig is in de directe werkomgeving (Faraj & Yan, 2009; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; O'Donovan & McAuliffe, 2020). Deze condities kunnen worden versterkt via teamontwikkeling en laagdrempelige ondersteuning van mentale gezondheid (Peddie et al., 2025).

Ten slotte kan *employability*-ontwikkeling worden ondersteund door informele leermogelijkheden op de werkplek (Froehlich et al., 2023) te combineren met formeel leren en gedragsmatig job crafting, in het bijzonder challenge-seeking gedrag dat helpt om leren te vertalen naar de dagelijkse praktijk (Sartori et al., 2023).

Beperkingen en richtingen voor toekomstig onderzoek

Hoewel dit proefschrift belangrijke inzichten oplevert, moeten enkele beperkingen worden vermeld. Beperkingen op het niveau van afzonderlijke studies zijn in de betreffende hoofdstukken besproken; hier worden de overkoepelende beperkingen en bijbehorende richtingen voor vervolgonderzoek beschreven.

Een eerste beperking betreft de theoretische afbakening van *relational leadership* als conceptueel kader. *Relational leadership* benadert leiderschap als een sociaal en collectief proces (Clarke, 2018). Om analytische focus te behouden, is *relational leadership*

in dit proefschrift primair onderzocht binnen de relatie tussen *supervisors* en *nurses*. Dit vormt een theoretische limitatie, omdat de bevindingen mogelijk niet één-op-één generaliseerbaar zijn naar relationele processen in andere configuraties, zoals peerrelaties, teamniveauprocessen of interprofessionele relaties. Toekomstig onderzoek kan toetsen of vergelijkbare verbanden tussen leiderschap en inzetbaarheid ook in dergelijke configuraties optreden.

Een tweede beperking betreft het interpretatiekader. De bevindingen zijn vooral geduid vanuit SET (Blau, 1964) en een *people management* perspectief (Knies et al., 2020). Hoewel deze benadering een samenhangende interpretatie mogelijk maakt, legt zij nadruk op wederkerigheid en op de rol van leidinggevenden in de uitvoering van HRM/*people management*, waardoor alternatieve mechanismen mogelijk onderbelicht blijven. Vervolgonderzoek kan SET vergelijken of integreren met andere theoretische kaders, zoals het Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) of Conservation of Resources (COR) theorie (Hobfoll, 1989), om complementaire of concurrerende verklaringsmechanismen te toetsen.

Een derde beperking betreft de theoretische duiding van verschillen in *Self–Other Agreement*. De verbanden tussen *Self–Other Agreement* en leeftijd en geslacht zijn voornamelijk geïnterpreteerd vanuit role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) en similarity–attraction theory (Byrne, 1971). Hoewel deze theorieën plausibele verklaringen bieden, kunnen alternatieve perspectieven aanvullende of betere verklaringen geven voor leeftijds- en geslacht gerelateerde verschillen in *Self–Other Agreement*. Toekomstig onderzoek kan deze relaties daarom ook benaderen vanuit bijvoorbeeld social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Methodologisch gezien betreft een belangrijke beperking de timing van dataverzameling. De empirische data zijn verzameld gedurende de COVID-19-periode, die uitzonderlijk belastend was voor zowel *supervisors* als *nurses* in de ouderenzorg. Deze omstandigheden kunnen percepties en ervaringen van *relational leadership* en *competence-based employability* hebben beïnvloed en kunnen mede verklaren waarom de respons in Wave 2 relatief laag was. Interpretatie van de bevindingen vraagt daarom om voorzichtigheid. Replicatie buiten periodes van uitzonderlijke druk is wenselijk om de robuustheid van de gevonden verbanden te toetsen.

Een aanvullende methodologische beperking betreft de reikwijdte van de *Self–Other Agreement* analyses. De dyadische benadering biedt inzicht voorbij single-source metingen, maar *Self–Other Agreement* is in dit proefschrift wel gekoppeld aan leeftijd en geslacht, en niet aan *competence-based employability*. Daardoor blijft onduidelijk of perceptuele overeenstemming samenhangt met *competence-based employability*. Vervolgonderzoek kan expliciet toetsen in hoeverre SOA voorspellend is voor *competence-based employability*.

Ten slotte is de empirische scope beperkt tot een relatief klein aantal ouderenzorgorganisaties. Dit beperkt de generaliseerbaarheid, maar levert tegelijkertijd rijke, context specifieke inzichten op in *relational leadership* en *competence-based employability*. Aangezien *employability*-ontwikkeling zich over tijd ontvouwt en contextafhankelijk is (Akkermans et al., 2024), is voorzichtigheid geboden bij generalisatie naar andere contexten. Toekomstig onderzoek kan de bevindingen repliceren in vergelijkbare ouderenzorgsettings met een longitudinaal ontwerp en het conceptuele model uitbreiden door psychologische veiligheid expliciet te toetsen als mechanisme dat *relational leadership* verbindt aan *competence-based employability*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Joost Hoedemakers obtained a Bachelor of Science in Social Work from Fontys University of Applied Sciences in 2004. Between 2008 and 2011, he completed the propaedeutic phase and undertook three years of study in the bachelor's program in Accountancy at Fontys University of Applied Sciences. He earned a Master of Science in Management from the Open Universiteit in 2018. Prior to his career as a lecturer, researcher, and strategic human resource management consultant—and co-owner of his own consultancy organization—he held several roles in the Dutch healthcare sector, particularly in disability care and psychiatric services.

Across these roles, he observed that healthcare professionals were often insufficiently equipped to meet care demands and that support and development were limited, particularly for newly promoted supervisors. This contributed to exhaustion, placed careers at risk, and could compromise the delivery of sustained high-quality care. These experiences sparked a scientifically grounded interest, with clear practical and societal relevance, in how relational leadership within supervisor–nurse relationships can strengthen nurses' employability, support career success, and sustain high-quality care in elderly care.

Since 2018, he has been affiliated with the Academy of Business Studies at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. He is involved in the bachelor's program (Employability and Quantitative Research Methodology), and in the master's program Personal

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