

UNISA



Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring - a case study in a South African Bank

by

**Pravitha Jogie**

**Student Number: 32230532**

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF COMMERCE**

in the subject of

**BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SUPERVISOR: Professor Annemarie Davis**

**CO-SUPERVISOR: Dr Catherine Le Roux**

## DECLARATION

**Name:** Pravitha Jogie

**Student Number:** 32230532

**Degree:** Master of Commerce in Business Management

**Title of the dissertation as appearing on the copies submitted for examination:**

Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring – a case study in a South African Bank.

I declare that this dissertation, “Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring – a case study in a South African Bank”, is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or cited have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for examination at Unisa or for obtaining a qualification at another higher education institution.



Signature

02 February 2022

Date

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My thanks to those who made it possible for me to complete this qualification: Professor Annemarie Davis and Dr Catherine Le Roux for your insight, guidance, expertise, tolerance, and support. It would not have been possible without you.

My employer who granted permission for this research study and for creating an environment that supports learning and development.

The participants of the study, without whom this research study would not have been possible.

My husband, for your unwavering support as always.

## **ABSTRACT**

Middle managers are implementers and agents of organisational change and, at the same time, are affected by organisational change. Their roles during organisational restructuring result in anxiety and uncertainty, impacting their well-being. Middle managers need effective coping practices to manage the conflicting demands of their roles and to deal with their own stress and well-being effectively. When middle managers do not have effective coping practices to deal with stressors linked with restructuring, their well-being, productivity, and performance are affected, thereby affecting the change outcome.

This study explored the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a South African bank from a strategy-as-practice perspective. Qualitative case study data was gathered using semi-structured virtual interviews with 13 participants and was thematically analysed and interpreted. The findings revealed that middle managers engage in internal and external coping practices that either foster resilience and positivity towards change or result in negativity. The departure point for this study was the practice domain situated in the strategy-as-practice research perspective. Practice theory offers a means to introduce efficiencies in everyday activities, resulting in a more efficient and successful organisation. It was not until the strategy-as-practice domain explored what “the doing of strategy” entails that research recognised the actual practical application of strategy. Middle managers have been the focus of a vast amount of research; however, little research has been done on the coping practices of middle managers during strategic organisational restructuring. There appear to be fewer studies on coping practices from an organisational perspective in the business management sector than in other sectors. Therefore, to reduce the current knowledge gap, it is beneficial to explore coping practices in the business management sector. The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has brought about different organisational challenges that have increased employee stress. Employees are facing greater challenges than ever before whilst trying to ensure they are emotionally, mentally, and physically well enough to be high-performing employees. It is important for business management studies to have an all-round focus on employees by not

concentrating exclusively on business practices but also practices that help employees execute business practices well. The study findings offer knowledge for understanding the coping practices of middle managers and the role that these practices play in the success of strategic organisational restructuring.

**Key words:** strategy-as-practice perspective, middle managers, organisational restructuring, coping practices

'n Ondersoek na die hanteringsmeganismes van tussenbestuurders gedurende organisatoriese herstrukturering – 'n gevallestudie in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse bank

## **OPSOMMING**

Tussenbestuurders is implementeerders en agente van verandering in hul organisasies en hulle word terselfdertyd deur organisatoriese verandering geraak. Hul rolle gedurende organisatoriese herstrukturering gee aanleiding tot angstigheid en onsekerheid, wat 'n uitwerking op hul welstand het. Daarom het tussenbestuurders doeltreffende hanteringsmeganismes nodig om die botsende eise van hul rolle te bestuur en om hul eie stres en welstand doeltreffend te hanteer. Indien tussenbestuurders nie oor doeltreffende meganismes beskik om stressore wat met herstrukturering verband hou te hanteer nie, het dit 'n uitwerking op hul welstand, produktiwiteit en prestasie en word die veranderingsuitkoms sodoende beïnvloed. Hierdie studie het die hanteringsmeganismes van tussenbestuurders gedurende organisatoriese herstrukturering in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse bank ondersoek vanuit 'n strategie-as-praktyk-perspektief. Kwalitatiewe gevallestudiedata is ingesamel deur middel van halfgestruktureerde virtuele onderhoude met 13 deelnemers, waarna die data tematies ontleed en geïnterpreteer is. Die bevindinge het getoon dat tussenbestuurders interne en eksterne hanteringspraktyke beoefen wat óf veerkragtigheid en positiwiteit teenoor verandering kweek, óf tot negatiwiteit lei. Die vertrekpunt vir hierdie studie was die praktykdomein wat in die strategie-as-praktyk-navorsingsperspektief gesetel is. Praktykteorie bied 'n manier om nuttigheidswaardes in daaglikse aktiwiteite te vestig, wat 'n meer doeltreffende en suksesvolle organisasie tot gevolg het. Eers toe die strategie-as-praktyk-domein ondersoek het wat die "uitvoering van strategie" behels, het navorsing die praktiese toepassing van strategie in werklikheid erken. Alhoewel tussenbestuurders die fokus van velerlei navorsingsprojekte was, is daar nog min navorsing gedoen oor tussenbestuurders se hanteringsmeganismes gedurende strategiese organisatoriese herstrukturering. Daar blyk minder studies oor hanteringsmeganismes vanuit 'n organisatoriese perspektief in die sakebestuursektor as in ander sektore te wees. Om dus die huidige kennisgaping te oorbrug, is dit voordelig om hanteringsmeganismes in die sakebestuursektor te

bestudeer. Die ongekende COVID-19-pandemie het verskillende organisatoriese uitdagings meegebring, wat werknemers se stres laat toeneem het. Werknemers word met groter uitdagings as ooit tevore gekonfronteer terwyl hulle probeer om emosioneel, geestelik en fisies goed genoeg te vaar om hoëprestasiewerknemers te wees. Dit is belangrik vir sakebestuurstudies om 'n algemene fokus op werknemers te hê, deur nie eksklusief op sakepraktyke te fokus nie, maar ook op praktyke wat werknemers help om sakepraktyke behoorlik toe te pas. Die studiebevindinge dien as kennis om die hanteringsmeganismes van tussenbestuurders, en die rol wat hierdie praktyke in die sukses van strategiese organisatoriese herstrukturering speel, te verstaan.

Sleutelwoorde: strategie-as-praktyk-perspektief, tussenbestuurders, organisatoriese herstrukturering, hanteringsmeganismes

Tshekatsheko ya maano a go dira mošomo ao a šomišwago ke balaodi ka nako ya kagoleswa ya mokgatlo – thuto ya nyakišišo ka pankeng ya Afrika Borwa

## KAKARETŠO

Balaodi ba magareng ke baphethagatši ebile ke bakgontšhadiphetogo ba mokgatlo, gomme le bona ba angwa ke diphetogo tše tša mokgatlo. Mešomo ya bona ka nako ya kagoleswa ya mokgatlo e ba šia tlalelong le dipelaelong, gomme se se ama maphelo a bona. Balaodi ba magareng ba hloka mekgwa ya go šogana le mathata go laola dinyakwa tšeo di thulanago le mešomo ya bona le go laola kgatelelo ya bona ya monagano le go phela gabotse mmeleng. Ge balaodi ba magareng ba hloka mekgwa ya go šoma gabotse ya go šogana le mathata go lokiša dilo tša go ba fa kgatelelo ya monagano yeo e amantšhwago le kagoleswa, go phela botse mmeleng ga bona, tšweletšo, le mošomo di a amega, gomme se se ama dipoelo tša diphetogo. Nyakišišo ye e nyakišiša mekgwa ya go šogana le mathata ya balaodi ba magareng ka nako ya kagoleswa ya mokgatlo ka pankeng ya Afrika Borwa ka tšhomišo ya maano a go dira mošomo. Datha ya khwalithethifi ya thuto ya nyakišišo e kgobokeditšwe ka ditherišano tša inthanete tša go beakanywa seripa tša go dirwa le batšeakarolo ba 13 gomme datha e sekasekilwe le go hlalošwa go ya ka maemo a bjale. Dikutullo di bontšha gore balaodi ba magareng ba šomiša mekgwa ya go šogana le mathata ya ka gare le ya ka ntle yeo e hlohleletšago kgotlelelo le go amogela diphetogo goba dipoelo ka gare ga maemo a go se amogelege. Nyakišišo ye e theilwe godimo ga mokgwa wa go dira dinyakišišo ka go sekaseka maano a go dira mošomo. Teori ya tirišo e fa mokgwa wa go tsebiša mafokodi ka mešomong ya letšatši le letšatši, yeo e dirago gore go be le katlego mokgatlong. Nyakišišo e bontšhitše tšhomišo ya “leano la go dira” morago ga go sekaseka leano la tirišo. Palo ye kgolo ya nyakišišo ya thuto ye e be e lebišitšwe go balaodi ba magareng, le ge go le jwalo dinyakišišo tše mmalwanyana di dirilwe ka maano a go šoma ao a šomišwago ke balaodi ba magareng ka nako ya go beakanyaleswa leano la mokgatlo. Go bonala go na le dinyakišišo tše mmalwanyana ka mekgwa ya go šogana le mathata go tšwa go ntlhakemo ya mekgatlo ka lekaleng la taolo ya dikgwebo go feta ka makaleng a mangwe. Bjalo, go fokotša tlhalelo ya bjale ya tsebo, go bohlokwa go nyakišiša mekgwa ya go šogana le mathata a taolo ka



lekaleng la taolo ya kgwebo. Leuba la COVID-19 la moswananoši le tlišitše mathata a go fapanafapana mekgatlong ao a okeditšego kgatelelo ya monagano mo go bašomi. Bašomi ba lebane le mathata a magolo le go feta peleng, mola ba leka go netefatša gore maikutlo, megopolo le mebele ya bona di dutše maemong a mabotse a go ba bašomi ba go šoma gabotse kudu.

Go bohlokwa gore dinyakišišo tša taolo ya kgwebo di lebantšhe mahlakore ka moka a bašomi ka go se šetše fela mekgwa ya kgwebo eupša gape di akaretše mekgwa yeo gape e thušago bašomi go dira mošomo wa kgwebo gabotse. Dikutullo tša nyakišišo di fa tsebo ya gore go kwešišwe mekgwa ya go šogana le mathata ya balaodi ba magareng le karolo yeo mekgwa ye e e ralokago mo katlegong ya kagoleswa ya leano la mokgatlo.

Mantšu a bohlokwa: tšhomišo ya maano go dira mošomo, balaodi ba magareng, kagoleswa ya mokgatlo, mekgwa ya go šogana le mathata

## Table of Contents

DECLARATION.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xiv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xv
DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS .....	xvi
CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH ORIENTATION.....	2
1.1 Introduction .....	2
1.2 Background and context .....	3
1.3 Problem statement.....	6
1.4 Purpose of this study.....	7
1.5 Research questions .....	8
1.5.1 Primary research question.....	8
1.5.2 Secondary research questions .....	8
1.6 Importance and benefits of this study.....	8
1.7 Delimitations.....	9
1.8 Research design and methodology.....	10
1.9 Dissertation overview .....	10
1.10 Chapter conclusion .....	11
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
2.1 Introduction .....	14
2.2 The strategy-as-practice perspective .....	15
2.2.1 Theoretical orientation .....	18
2.2.2 Practices and practitioners.....	19
2.2.3 Practices as a research focus.....	22
2.2.4 Practices and practitioners in organisational change.....	23
2.3 Organisational change .....	25
2.3.1 Organisational change background .....	25
2.3.2 The need for organisational change.....	27
2.3.3 Types of organisational change .....	29
2.3.4 Organisational restructuring.....	32

2.4 Middle managers.....	35
2.4.1 Middle managers as change agents .....	36
2.4.2 Middle managers and organisational restructuring .....	38
2.4.3 Challenges of organisational restructuring .....	40
2.4.4 Middle managers coping with organisational restructuring challenges .	44
2.4.5 Outcome of coping practices .....	49
2.5 The South African banking industry .....	49
2.5.1 Banking in Africa .....	50
2.5.2 Banking in South Africa.....	52
2.5.3 Challenges in the banking sector .....	53
2.6 Chapter conclusion .....	54
<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>58</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	58
3.2 Problem statement summary .....	58
3.3 Research process .....	59
3.4 Research questions .....	61
3.4.1 Primary research question .....	61
3.4.2 Secondary research questions .....	61
3.5 Research approach: qualitative.....	61
3.6 Research design: single case study.....	63
3.7 Research paradigm: interpretivist.....	64
3.8 Research context .....	65
3.8.1 Strategising in the bank .....	66
3.8.2 Organisational analysis: middle manager role .....	67
3.8.3 Insider perspective.....	69
3.9 Participant sampling and selection.....	70
3.9.1 Participants .....	70
3.9.2 Purposeful sampling .....	72
3.9.3 Sample selection and size .....	73
3.10 Data gathering.....	73
3.10.1 Data gathering method: semi-structured virtual interviews .....	74
3.10.2 Semi-structured interview guide.....	74
3.10.3 Data transcription.....	76

3.11 Data analysis.....	77
3.12 Rigour and trustworthiness .....	77
3.12.1 Validity .....	77
3.12.2 Reliability .....	79
3.12.3 Authenticity .....	80
3.13 Research ethics .....	80
3.14 Chapter conclusion .....	82
CHAPTER 4: DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS .....	85
4.1 Introduction .....	85
4.2 Background to data gathering and analysis .....	85
4.3 Profile of participants.....	87
4.3.1 Participant demographics .....	87
4.3.2 Virtual interview context and background .....	88
4.3.3 Participant virtual semi-structured interviews.....	91
4.3.4 Interview recordings and transcripts .....	94
4.3.5 Context of the organisational restructure: background to the participant interviews.....	95
4.3.6 Participants' role and interview summary.....	95
4.4 Data analysis.....	101
4.5 Themes and sub-themes .....	103
4.6 Presentation of themes .....	105
4.6.1 Theme1.....	108
4.6.2 Theme 2.....	111
4.6.3 Theme 3.....	123
4.6.4 Theme 4.....	130
4.6.5 Theme 5.....	133
4.7 Summary of findings .....	140
4.5.1 Finding 1 Theme 1 .....	142
4.5.2 Finding 2 Theme 2.....	142
4.5.3 Finding 3 Theme 3.....	143
4.5.4 Finding 4 Theme 4.....	144
4.5.5 Finding 5 Theme 5.....	145
4.6 Chapter conclusion .....	145
CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RESEARCH CONCLUSION .....	147

5.1 Introduction .....	147
5.2 Observations of research questions and findings.....	147
5.2.1 Linking the research questions to the themes and findings .....	148
5.2.2 Linking the research questions to the literature, themes, and findings	151
5.3. Research questions, findings, and conclusions .....	156
5.3.1 Primary research question: .....	156
5.3.2 Secondary research questions .....	156
5.4 Benefits of this study .....	164
5.5 Recommendations .....	165
5.5.1 Recommendations for change management .....	165
5.5.2 Recommendations for future studies .....	167
5.6 Contribution to the strategy-as-practice domain.....	167
5.7 Research limitations.....	168
5.8 Researcher’s personal reflection.....	169
5.9 Dissertation conclusion .....	170
5.10 Chapter conclusion .....	173
REFERENCES.....	175
APPENDICES .....	203
Appendix A: Research Ethics Clearance .....	203
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form .....	205
Appendix C: Participant Virtual Consent .....	206
Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet .....	207
Appendix E: Interview Guide .....	211
Appendix F: Permission Letter .....	215
Appendix G: Turnitin Receipt .....	216

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Chapter 1 Overview.....	1
Figure 2. 1 Chapter 2 Overview.....	13
Figure 3.1 Chapter 3 Overview.....	57
Figure 3.2 Qualitative Research Process of this Study .....	60
Figure 3.3 Illustrative Organogram of Africa Regions Technology Division .....	66
Figure 3.4 Illustrative Case Study Business Unit Organogram of the Bank.....	67
Figure 3.5 Middle Manager Relations and Direction of Influence .....	68
Figure 4.1 Chapter 4 Overview.....	84
Figure 4.2 Participants Years of Experience .....	88
Figure 4.3 Qualitative Research Data Analysis according to Saldaña (2021) ....	102
Figure 4.4 Linking the Research Questions to Themes and Sub-themes .....	104
Figure 4.5 Linking the Research Questions to the Themes and Findings .....	106
Figure 4. 6 Interrelatedness of Themes and Findings .....	141
Figure 5. 1 Chapter 5 Overview.....	146
Figure 5. 2 Linking the Research Questions to the Themes and Findings .....	149

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Participant Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	71
Table 4.1 Timeline of Data Gathering and Analysis .....	89
Table 4.2 Volume of Interview Data .....	94
Table 4.3 Summary of Participant Interview and Role.....	100
Table 5.1 Linking the Research Questions to the Literature, Themes, and Findings .....	155

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
FNB	First National Bank
FSR	Financial Sector Regulation
HR	Human Resources
IP	Intellectual Property
IT	Information Technology
LRA	Labour Relations Act
MIS	Management Information Systems
NDA	Non-Disclosure Agreement
SAP	Strategy-as-practice



## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

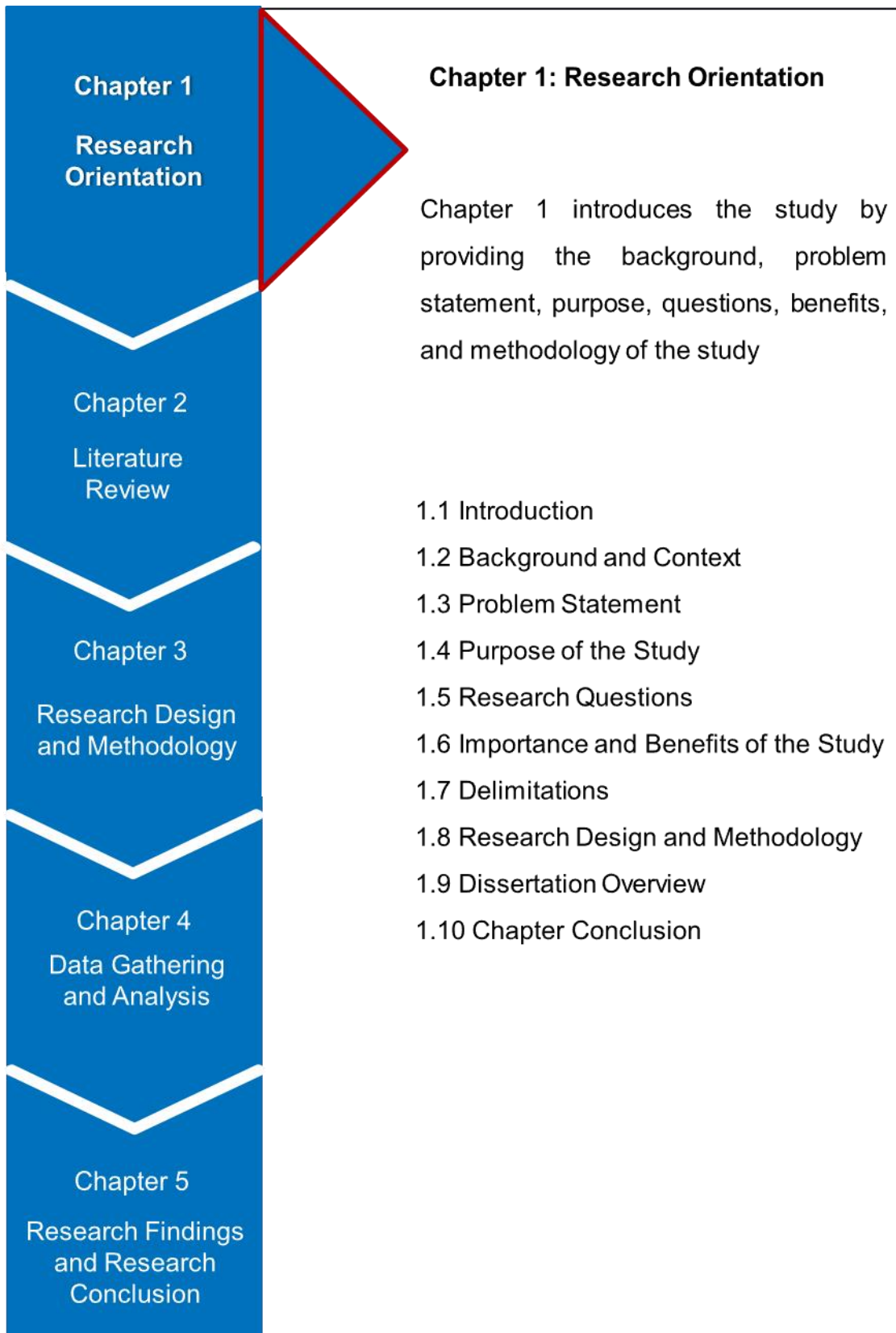
The key terms used in this studied are defined as:

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Banking industry	The banking industry is comprised of banks that offer banking services to individuals and corporates.
Coping	The specific proactive efforts, both behavioural and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, eliminate, or minimise stressful events or their impact, despite the outcome (Mazzola, Schonfeld & Spector, 2011:103; Roming & Howard, 2019:833 ).
Financial sector	The South African financial sector comprises financial institutions that offer banking, investment, insurance, wealth and asset management, tax, and lending services.
Middle manager	A middle manager is a manager who reports to a manager and has managers reporting to them (Jansen Van Rensburg, Davis & Venter, 2014:173).
Middle manager strategic role	Middle manager strategic role includes the formulation and implementation of strategic change.
Middle manager line role	Middle managers line manager role consists of the responsibility of managing subordinates.
Middle manager change agent role	Middle manager change agent role includes the responsibility to influence the change implementation by preparing, equipping, and supporting employees to adapt to, and adopt the strategic change.
Organisational change	Organisational change entails directing (and redirecting) resources according to a policy or plan of action, and possibly also reshaping organisational structures and systems so that they create and address technological

	opportunities and competitive threats (Heyden, Fourné, Koene, Werkman & Ansari, 2017:961).
Organisational restructuring	Incorporates intentional change to internal operations and structure of an organisation that may result in decreased positions and/or employees, regardless of the strategies used to achieve the change (Harney, Fu & Freeney, 2018:237; Sitlington & Marshall, 2011:119).
Practices	Practices are defined as a socially situated grouping of activities that are routine and underpin a systematic approach to strategising (Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl & Whittington, 2016; Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007; Campbell-Hunt, 2007). The definition is a seminal definition from a strategy-as-practice perspective, the focus of the study.
Strategising	Strategising is the detailed processes and practises that constitute the day-to-day activities of organisational life, and which relate to strategic outcomes. (Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003:3). The definition is a seminal definition from a strategy-as-practice perspective, the focus of the study.
Strategising process	The strategising process is made up of the set of activities undertaken in the strategising process (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). The definition is a seminal definition from a strategy-as-practice perspective, the focus of the study.
Strategy	From a strategy-as-practice perspective, strategy has been defined as a situated, socially accomplished activity that delivers strategic outcomes (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007:7). The definition is a seminal

	definition from a strategy-as-practice perspective, the focus of the study.
Strategy-as-practice perspective	The strategy-as-practice perspective is concerned with the doing of strategy, who does it, what they do, how they do it and the tools used in doing the strategy (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). The definition is a seminal definition from a strategy-as-practice perspective, the focus of the study.
Strategy practitioner	From a strategy-as-practice perspective, practitioners are actors that are involved in strategy work and do the work of strategising (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). The definition is a seminal definition from a strategy-as-practice perspective, the focus of the study.

**Figure 1.1 Chapter 1 Overview**



## **CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH ORIENTATION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Change is a daily occurrence in any organisation. The level and pace of change may differ from industry to industry, but the impact of change should not be underestimated. Dealing with organisational change, either in terms of planning for change, implementing change, or monitoring change, can be disconcerting to those involved.

As far back as the 1990s it was recognised that middle managers were caught in the middle of change and seen as the 'purveyors of change and as recipients of change' (McConville & Holden, 1999:419). Literature confirms that middle managers are required to take on a central role as the change agent and not only as the implementer of change (Conway & Monks, 2011; Huy, 2011; Currie & Procter, 2005). Given the nature of organisational change, the role of middle managers in organisational change is evolving. As organisations become more agile, middle managers become increasingly relational, and more influential in connecting top-level managers and lower-level employees.

In the context of the current study, the current complex global economy causes disruptions to the financial sector, which in turn causes disruptions to banking organisations. For banks to keep abreast of the disruptions, change is no longer a single, planned event, but a regular occurrence, with simultaneous change events, resulting in complexity and demands that are difficult to manage. For organisations to survive and succeed in a dynamic change environment, agility is key.

Middle managers are uniquely positioned to play a pivotal role as agents and facilitators enabling the organisation to respond to changes (Gilbert, 2009). However, the nature of middle managers' roles in organisational change, particularly organisational restructuring, is characteristically accompanied by stress and anxiety triggered by job insecurity, uncertainty, role conflict and work overload, which impacts middle managers' well-being (Jimmieson, Terry & Callan, 2004). For middle managers to successfully manage the stress and pressure of the conflicting

demands of organisational restructuring, effective coping practises that help them build resilience to positively embrace change are essential. If effective coping practices are lacking, it could lead to negativity, causing further stress that impacts on their well-being and organisational performance. The aim of this study was to explore how middle managers cope with organisational restructuring change in the banking industry in South Africa.

Chapter 1 provides a background to this study and an overview of the banking industry in South Africa. The chapter also provides some introductory comments on the role of middle managers during organisational restructuring and how they cope with the stress and uncertainty of organisational restructuring. This chapter also provides the problem statement and the research questions.

## **1.2 Background and context**

This study is situated in the context of one of the big five banks within the financial sector of South Africa. The selected case organisation experienced organisational restructuring within its Africa Regions Technology Division when it outsourced its technology production support function to a vendor. This resulted in retrenchment of employees and a subsequent restructure of its existing departmental structure.

Change is a daily occurrence in the current banking environment and is driven by market conditions. In 2018 the South African banking environment saw the divesture of Barclays Plc from Barclays Africa Group Limited (Regina, 2018) and the separation of Old Mutual as the majority shareholder in Nedbank (Old Mutual PLC, 2018). The first quarter of 2019 saw disruptions within the banking industry with the launch of Discovery Bank (Gore, 2019), and the launch of five new banks in South Africa (Calvey & Romagny, 2019). These changes required banks to revisit their strategies in order to compete and survive in this changing environment.

Added to the competitive environment, the Financial Sector Regulation (FSR) Act became effective on 1 April 2018 (FSR Act, 2017), introducing new regulation in South Africa. The FSR Act is responsible for maintaining stability in the financial

system and ensuring responsibility for market conduct and consumer protection. On the other hand, the new legislation added to the regulatory burden for banks.

These imminent threats from new banking sector entrants, coupled with regulation and global financial turbulence caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitate significant organisational change if banks are to remain competitive and compliant. To counter these threats and comply fully with regulation, banks are compelled to change their traditional approach to doing business, and to reorient themselves to meet the challenges.

The purpose of the restructure for the case bank was to improve cost savings and operational efficiencies to align with changes to the macro environment. However, whilst the restructure was in progress, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world, resulting in a national lockdown in South Africa. The national lockdown caused an economic downturn that resulted in job losses as organisations sought to curb losses and costs. The bank had to look inward to rise to the challenges stemming from a changing macro environment and economic downturn.

Research reveals that a traditional organisational hierarchy hinders the agility and pace at which organisations realign for change. Realigning to compete is driving banks to downsize and adopt leaner structures designed to create more customer value using fewer resources (McConville & Holden, 1999). Literature reveals that when organisations adopt a downsizing strategy, the employees most impacted by leaner structures are middle managers (Chen, Berman & Wang, 2018; Hermkens, Dolmans & Romme, 2017; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006; Balogun, 2003).

Middle managers are in a pivotal position in the organisation as the intermediary between top management and lower levels (Heyden et al., 2017; Balogun, 2003). As the interface between top and bottom, middle managers are positioned to act as the intermediaries for the change. As change intermediaries, middle managers participate in the strategising and implementation of the strategic organisational change.

During organisational restructuring middle managers are required to take on greater responsibility and to do more with fewer resources. The degree of complexity of the middle manager's role in the change process increases significantly when middle managers are responsible and accountable for the implementation of the change while performing their own day-to-day activities (Thomas & Dunkerley, 1999). Consequently, middle managers must deal with the uncertainty resulting from the conflicting roles in the change process (Gatenby et al, 2015). This uncertainty results in stress, which middle managers must cope with while at the same time remaining productive, thereby impacting their well-being. To manage their well-being and be productive at the same time, middle managers must make use of coping practices to deal with the change and uncertainty associated with role conflict, work overload, job security, and pressure that increases along with the pace of change (Walinga & Rowe, 2013).

The pace of change and the level of complexity that organisations are exposed to in the contemporary business environment have increased substantially due to technological advancements, globalisation, economic downturns, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic. The banking industry, an essential component of the business environment, is facing a radical shift due to additional challenges in terms of new competition, regulatory compliance, changes in consumer expectations, and customer retention. These challenges require changing business models to adapt.

In addition, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on humans and business globally, resulting in an economic downturn, which in turn gave rise to modified operating models, resulting in job loss as organisations sought to curb losses and costs. These challenges forced banks to embark on rightsizing, downsizing, and restructuring, resulting in a heightened threat of job loss and consequently, widespread uncertainty and anxiety amongst employees.

One may argue that if the stress of organisational change is not managed it will affect the well-being of employees. Therefore, this study set out to explore how middle managers cope with the stressors triggered by organisational restructuring in a South African bank.



### **1.3 Problem statement**

Little is known about how middle managers cope with the uncertainty of organisational restructuring (Dixon, 2021; Harney et al., 2018; Smollan, 2017; Smollan, 2015). Middle managers are tasked with implementing organisational restructuring while they frequently struggle with the stress, heightened by the uncertainty and anxiety, of the change process. The accompanying roles they are required to perform during the restructure causes conflict and heightens the anxiety that middle managers are already beset with, resulting in greater stress (Dixon, 2021; Gatenby et al., 2015).

Coping with restructuring is of the utmost importance to middle managers' well-being and to the outcome of the change (Gatenby et al., 2015). In acknowledging the need to cope, the body of knowledge on the coping practices of middle managers during organisational change is limited (Smollan, 2017; Smollan, 2015). Accordingly, there is a gap in terms of how middle managers cope during organisational restructuring, particularly in a South African bank context.

The effects of organisational restructuring are a focus of general research. Moreover, research on the effects of organisational restructuring on employee well-being is increasing. However, calls for further research on this topic, including the effects of downsizing of different groups of workers, have been made (Balogun, 2007; Gatenby et al., 2015). Thus, a gap exists in the literature on organisational restructuring and its effects on employees (Stouten et al., 2018).

The researcher consulted databases between 1998-2000, such as Scopus, Ebscohost, Emerald, Business Source Premier and Google Scholar and could not locate specific published research that is recent, nor in the current context. This suggests that research into organisational restructuring is not keeping pace with the scale of organisational restructuring taking place in these challenging times.

The role of middle managers is considered key to the success or failure of the change (Stouten et al., 2018; Gatenby et al., 2015). This study aims to advance the body of knowledge on the consequences of organisational restructuring on middle

managers' attitudes and behaviour, and more specifically, the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring (Smollan, 2015). To address the knowledge gap of middle managers' coping practices, the study aimed to gather rich data, grounded in the lived experiences of middle managers in the context of this study. A qualitative approach in a single case organisation was adopted to gain further insight into the limited understanding of the social phenomenon of middle managers' coping practices (Stouten et al., 2018; Smollan, 2017; Gatenby et al., 2015; Smollan, 2015, Chia & Holt, 2006)) during organisational restructuring in a South African bank.

#### **1.4 Purpose of this study**

The purpose of this study was to discover coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring that could be useful for employees to build resilience when experiencing organisational change. The study identified internal and external coping practices that middle managers use when faced with stress and uncertainty that impacted their well-being during the restructure. These coping practices may result either in positive or in negative outcomes. Positive outcomes assist middle managers to build the necessary resilience to manage their well-being and improve their work performance. On the other hand, negative outcomes result in increased stress or in creating a different stressor.

The banking environment is a highly competitive, demanding, and dynamic environment. Peart (2019) stated that undue stress results in burnout that impacts employees' productivity and jeopardises the profitability of organisations. For banks to survive and remain competitive in a constantly disruptive and dynamic economic environment, they need resilient employees who can manage the stress and uncertainty of the challenging environment. This study identified coping practices that middle managers could potentially apply to assist them when dealing with organisational restructuring in a bank.

## **1.5 Research questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions. The questions needed to be broad and open-ended to enable an in-depth exploration of the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in the selected case organisation. The primary and secondary aims of this study were articulated as research questions.

### **1.5.1 Primary research question**

1.5.1.1 What are the coping practices of middle managers during strategic organisational restructuring in a selected organisation?

### **1.5.2 Secondary research questions**

1.5.2.1 How do middle managers cope during organisational restructuring?

1.5.2.2 What are the outcomes of the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring?

## **1.6 Importance and benefits of this study**

This study attempted to offer a better understanding of how middle managers cope during organisational restructuring in a South African bank. This study intends to offer a better understanding of the micro-level practices of middle managers, using the strategy-as-practice perspective. Exploring middle managers' practices using the strategy-as-practice perspective adds to the body of knowledge on middle managers, strategy, strategising practices, and organisational change (Dixon, 2021; Harney et al., 2018; Smollan, 2017; Smollan, 2015). In doing so, the researcher aims to provide potential benefits, both academically and practically within an organisational environment in South Africa.

This study is beneficial in guiding middle managers that are looking to expand their knowledge and improve their ability to cope with the impacts of organisational restructuring (Dixon, 2021; Harney et al., 2018; Smollan, 2017; Smollan, 2015). Middle managers having a repository of background coping skills lends itself to this study of coping practices of middle manager practitioners during organisational

restructuring, and will contribute to understanding the coping practices of middle manager practitioners during organisational restructuring.

Within the strategy-as-practice perspective, strategy is viewed as something that humans do and not something that the organisation has (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007). The practical outcomes of this study, using the strategy-as-practice perspective, enhance the understanding of who does the strategising, what is done as part of the strategising activities, how the strategising activities are performed (Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl & Whittington, 2016), and what tools are used to execute the organisational restructuring strategy (Lundgren & Blom, 2016; Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009).

Banks may leverage such research when strategising to continuously improve their readiness for strategic organisational change, specifically organisational restructuring. This study highlights the need for banks to understand, support, develop, and prepare their critical staff to cope with organisational restructuring when implementing strategic change directives from top management.

The literature revealed that research on how middle managers cope in a South African bank is limited (Gatenby et al., 2015). From a middle management perspective, this study attempts to add to the existing body of knowledge of middle managers, particularly in a South African context, by focusing on middle managers' coping practices during strategic organisational change in the bank. The findings of this study could possibly lead to further research on middle manager coping, such as gender coping practices or cultural coping practices.

### **1.7 Delimitations**

In this study, the context is limited to a single South African bank. The bank is one of five major banks in the country. Participants included only middle managers that were employed in the bank. The bank has several employees at middle management level as it is viewed as a critical role in the bank. Only middle managers involved in strategising for organisational restructuring were considered for participation, as per the inclusion and exclusion criteria stipulated in Section 3.9.1.

No other managers or employees formed part of this study. The research was conducted in a single bank and whilst the findings cannot be generalised, they may be potentially transferable to other contexts.

### **1.8 Research design and methodology**

The research design is “the logic that links the data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn to the initial questions of a study” (Rowley, 2002:18). This study was a qualitative single case-study research study. The research design was framed on the interpretivist approach to social research where middle managers told their own stories that reflected their actual lived experiences of organisational restructuring. Rich, in-depth insights and meaning were gained from the stories told by the middle manager participants. The most appropriate means of obtaining the human stories of middle manager coping practices during organisational restructuring were from first-hand descriptions by middle managers. Middle managers provided individual accounts of their experiences, thereby demonstrating similarities related to the problem. Hence, a single case study strategy was applied at a point in time, using virtual semi-structured interviews to obtain first-hand qualitative data from middle managers who met the inclusion criteria. Data analysis consisted of the identification of themes and sub-themes from the data gathered from 13 middle manager participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. ATLAS.ti version 9, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software package was used to analyse the data, create codes, and identify themes and sub-themes to answer the research questions.

### **1.9 Dissertation overview**

This dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 provides the Research Orientation. The study is introduced and positioned by summarising the context, problem, purpose, benefits, research questions, and methodology applicable to this study.

Chapter 2 presents the Literature Review. The main aspects of this study, including the strategy-as-practice framework, are analysed. The focus is on practice and

practitioners, middle managers and their roles during organisational restructuring, the negative and positive impacts of organisational restructuring, and the coping practices of middle managers.

Chapter 3 details the Research Design and Methodology approach to exploring the research problem and research questions. The qualitative, single-case study method and design, based on the Interpretivist research paradigm as applied in this study, is discussed. The chapter describes the process of selecting the 13 middle manager participants and the virtual semi-structured interviews as the data-gathering instrument. The trustworthiness and authenticity of the data are discussed. Chapter 3 concludes with the research ethics that were adhered to for this study.

Chapter 4 presents the process of gathering data from the 13 middle manager participants, describes the informed consent, interview guide and virtual semi-structured interview recordings and transcriptions as they transpired. Next, the data analysis and coding process (Saldaña, 2021), as applied to this study, was detailed, resulting in five themes with sub-themes for this study.

Chapter 5 presents the interpretations, findings, recommendations, and conclusions. The chapter ends with a personal reflection of the researcher, and the overall research conclusion.

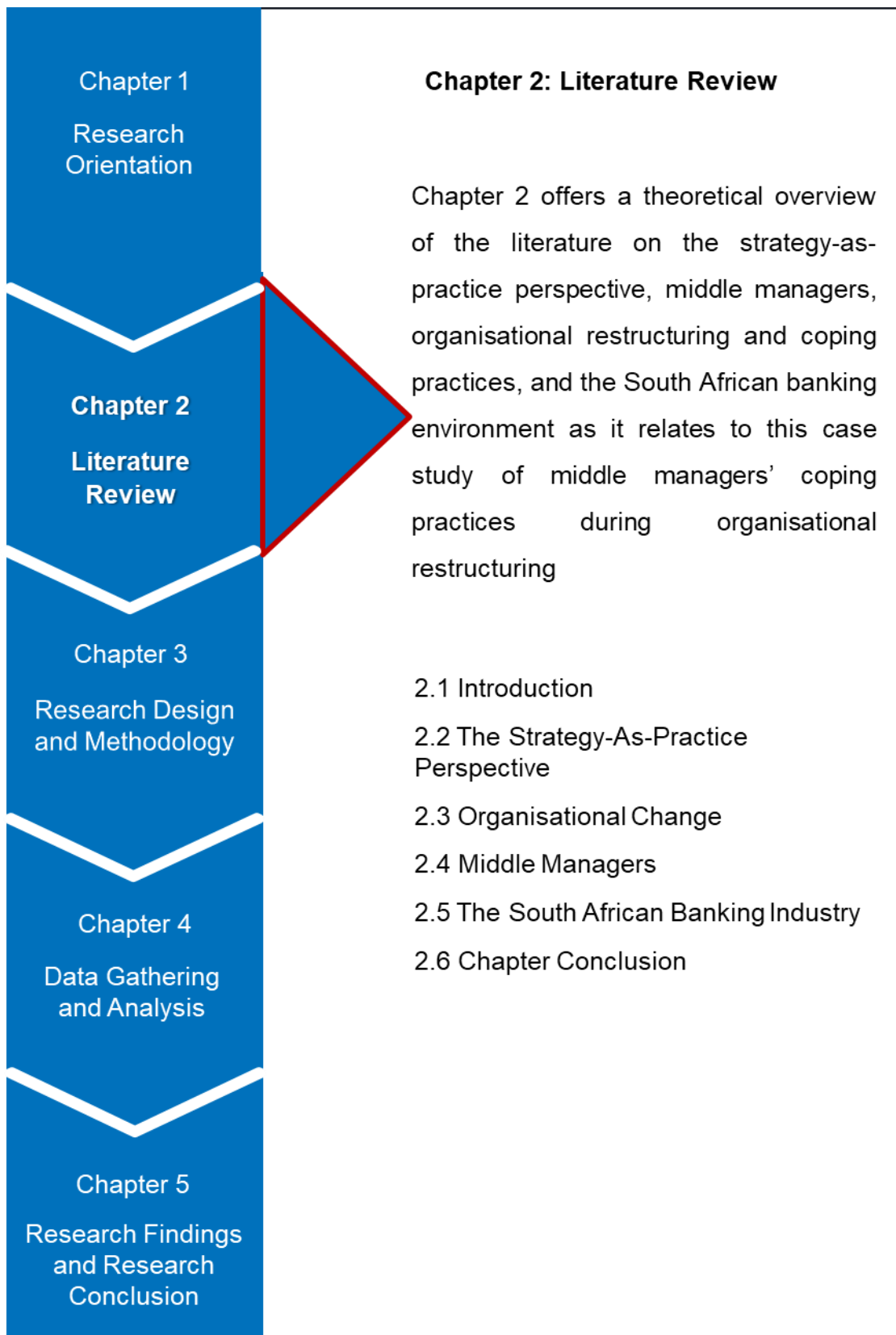
### **1.10 Chapter conclusion**

Chapter 1 introduced the research study by providing a summary of the background and research context, problem statement, purpose, research questions, research importance and benefits, limitations, and design and methodology for this study. This study aimed to explore the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a South African bank. An overview of the dissertation was also provided.

The following chapter will offer a review of the literature related to the main concepts of this study, including the theoretical framework of strategy-as-practice, with a focus on practices. Each chapter includes a visual diagrammatic representation of the

dissertation with a highlighted focus on that specific chapter. Figure 2.1 offers the positioning of Chapter 2 within the dissertation.

**Figure 2. 1 Chapter 2 Overview**





## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Within organisational restructuring, the middle manager is not only an agent of change, but also a receiver of the change. Middle managers are defined as managers who report to other managers, but also have managers reporting to them. By virtue of their position within organisations, middle managers serve as change agents for strategic organisational change and are the implementers, receivers, and agents of strategic change. Furthermore, they can influence the change implementation and change outcome. However, they also have to cope with the challenges of the change that affect them and their positions, roles, and realities.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature pertaining to the main concepts of this study. This chapter offers a review of the strategy-as-practice perspective, which represents the perspective used to interrogate the coping practices of middle managers. Organisational change is explored, with a focus on organisational restructuring. For the current study, the strategy-as-practice perspective enables the exploration of the micro-level strategising and coping practices of middle managers during strategic organisational change in a selected case organisation.

This chapter offers a review of the theoretical progression of the strategy-as-practice perspective and the relevance of practice theory. The purpose of this chapter is to present the theoretical focus on the topic that confirms the unanswered questions in the literature. This chapter positions the study in the existing body of knowledge. This is done through the lens of the historical background, theoretical framework, and current trends and developments on the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring. The literature study demonstrates the relatedness of the theory to the detailed practices of strategic organisational change. Specifically, this refers to organisational restructuring, and the strategy practitioners role; that is, middle managers coping practices during organisational restructuring.

## **2.2 The strategy-as-practice perspective**

This section offers a background and overview of the strategy-as-practice perspective, which begins with the strategy-as-practice alignment to process theory, and its current alignment to practice theory. The perspective from which practices are viewed in relation to organisational restructuring is discussed. This section highlights some of the studies on strategising practices of organisational change.

The strategy-as-practice perspective draws on the approach of exploring strategy from a micro-level perspective which is situated in practices of strategy work (Begkos, Llewellyn, & Walshe, 2019) . This study utilises the strategy-as-practice perspective to explore the micro-level practices of strategic organisational change performed by middle manager practitioners. More specifically, it is utilised to explore the coping practices of middle manager practitioners during organisational restructuring within a South African bank.

Mainstream strategic management research traditionally viewed strategy as something that an organisation has, focusing mainly on top management, or on the macro level of strategy (Balogun, Huff & Johnson, 2003; Johnson et al., 2003; Johnson, Langley, Melin & Whittington, 2007). Departure from the traditional notion of what strategy is, resulted in management researchers challenging this traditional view. In line with the strategy-as-practice perspective, management researchers (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2010; Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski, 2005) encouraged the exploration of the human element of strategising, placing emphasis on who does the strategising. Strategy practitioners are the human element of strategising represented by middle managers in this study.

Strategy is increasingly being viewed as something people do, in other words, as a practice (Whittington, Yakis-Douglas, Ahn & Cailluet, 2017) instead of something an organisation has. Strategy-as-practice scholars have moved away from the economics-based view of strategy to increasingly focus on the socially situated aspect of strategy. This has been done by focusing on the detailed activities of practitioners and the social context within which strategising occurs (Elbasha &

Wright, 2017; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Whittington, 2007; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Chia & Holt, 2006).

Strategy-as-practice is premised on the analysis of three main components of strategising: (1) practices; (2) praxis; (3) practitioners, and how strategising is carried out incorporating all three components (lasbech & Lavarda, 2018; Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007). The emphasis is on micro-level social practices of the strategising process, performed by strategy actors or practitioners (Kohtamäki, Whittington, Vaara & Rabetino, 2021; Burgelman, Floyd, Laamanen, Mantere, Vaara & Whittington, 2018; lasbech & Lavarda, 2018; Whittington, 2012; Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl & Vaara, 2010; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson et al., 2003). The strategy-as-practice perspective focuses on who does the strategising, what they do, how they do it, and what artefacts and tools they use in the strategising process (Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Whittington, 2006; Rouleau, 2013). The idea of strategy as a social practice was a significant point for strategy research as it highlighted the role of humans in strategy research (Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Chia & Holt, 2006; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2003). The practice approach emphasises the human element, which comprises the strategy practitioners, and their individual strategising practices (Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2007).

Although process research has made great strides in incorporating the human element into strategising, it lacked the detailed activities of managerial practices and their interactions when strategising (Jarzabkowski, 2005). Research has also overlooked the situational nature of strategy and structure because the focus was primarily on a macro-level context. In contrast, the practice perspective focuses on practitioners and their socially situated micro-level practices (Chia & Holt, 2006). However, existing diversity in strategy-as-practice research can be linked together. This will assist in obtaining a greater understanding of micro-level practices in a macro level environment in support of enhanced understanding of practices and processes (Kohtamäki et al., 2021).

Although strategy-as-practice research has provided great insights into the study of social practices, researchers suggest that the practice domain of research can be broadened (Kohtamäki et al., 2021; Burgelman et al., 2018; Elbasha & Wright, 2017; Chia & Holt, 2006). In their review of Jarzabkowski and Spee's (2009) study on strategy-as-practice domains, Stander and Pretorius (2016) highlight the increase in studies that focus on particular groups of actors performing micro-level activities between 2009 and 2015. More recently, researchers have suggested that specialisation within strategy-as-practice streams can deepen insights and augment existing knowledge of practices. Kohtamäki et al. (2021) highlight the practice and process stream of strategy-as-process. Focusing on sociological factors within strategy-as-practice can further enhance the study of practices by exploring the cognitive and behavioural practices of practitioners within their strategic praxis (Lavarda, Scussel & Schafer, 2020).

In contrast, other researchers maintain a different view of micro-isolationism (Seidl & Whittington, 2014; Valmra, Metsla, Rannus & Rillo, 2006). Seidl and Whittington's (2014) study on the broadening and widening of strategy-as-practice research demonstrates how strategy-as-practice has incorporated macro-level and higher social level phenomena. The researchers maintain that the organisation does not operate in isolation from its external environment. Instead, the forces in the external environment impact and shape the organisation's strategy and processes. Hence, the authors deduce that even though the strategy-as-practice focus may seem to be on micro-level practices, these practices do not exist in isolation. Rather, these practices are situational and contextual to both the internal and external environment, and by implication, they incorporate both micro-level and macro-level perspectives (Seidl & Whittington, 2014; Whittington, 2007; Valmra et al., 2006). Of the three strategy-as-practice components, the more prominent focus has been on practices and practitioners (Stander & Pretorius, 2016), with practices enacted by certain types of practitioners being favoured. Recent analyses of strategy-as-practice research streams reveal that strategy-as-practice research has focused on the following six clusters and their interrelationships: 1) praxis, 2) sensemaking, 3) discursive, 4) sociometrical, 5) institutional and 6) process clusters (Kohtamäki et al., 2021).

Commonly studied practitioners have been top management, and more recently middle management (Ivancic, Jelenc & Mencer, 2021; Lavarda, Scussel & Schafer, 2020; Wei & Zhang, 2020; Asmuss, 2018; Chen et al., 2018; Arnaud, Mills, Legrand & Maton, 2016; Darkow, 2015; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Rouleau, 2005). The focus on practitioners has accentuated the importance of middle managers in the strategising process. This has been done by highlighting their role as the link between top management and the rest of the organisation in strategising and implementing the change strategy (Ivancic, et al., 2021). Middle manager practitioners are considered a key factor in the implementation of strategic change (Mantere, 2008).

### **2.2.1 Theoretical orientation**

Various theories were used in strategy research and were based on planning (1960s), policy (1970s), process (1980s), and practice (Whittington, 1996). In response to this, the strategy-as-practice research approach leaned towards practice theory with the focus on strategy as a social practice. This view of strategy as a social practice is aligned to strategy practitioners performing micro-level practices that make up strategising (Lavarda et al., 2020; Whittington, 2006; Chia & Holt, 2006; Jarzabkowski, 2005).

The practice approach evolved from the process perspective; however, the practice approach differs from the process perspective. Process addresses content and “how and why things evolve over time” (Whittington, 2007:1577). In contrast, practice addresses socially situated activities. The strategy process perspective presents a dynamic view of strategy as a process, with the manager as the central actor at the organisational level. The practice approach, on the other hand, focuses on strategy practitioners’ detailed actions and practices within the social situation (Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2007; Johnson et al., 2003). Strategy-as-practice researchers conceptualise strategy as a social practice within the broader ‘practice turn’ in social theory and management research (Whittington, 2006). According to this view, detailed activity, and the societal context or situation in which they are enacted, are related (Lavarda, et al, 2020; Jarzabkowski, 2005). Practice theory

highlights the merging of the “social world and the material world in the form of practices” (Tavakoli, Schlagwein & Schoder, 2017:167) and helps to make sense of the day-to-day activities of strategising (Jarzabkowski, 2005).

Practices are not viewed in isolation but are interrelated with the actors performing the activities; hence, the practices cannot be removed from the practitioners. Practitioners are part of a social system that allows them to make behavioural and cognitive decisions that add value to the activities they perform (Lavarda, et al., 2020). When practitioners apply their agency in performing activities, they are revealing the importance and dependence of their role in practices. Practitioners can distinguish what and how practices are adding value to the organisation and possibly resulting in better performance, and what practices do not add value (Whittington, 2006). Hence, this study focuses on the coping practices of middle manager practitioners during organisational restructuring.

Practice theory highlights the value in everyday practices when performed by skilled practitioners, and when the combination of practice and practitioner is used appropriately, it can lead to greater business value. For strategy-as-practice researchers, the focus on practices as enacted by strategy practitioners become even more significant as research continues to reveal greater insights into the benefits of strategising practices.

## **2.2.2 Practices and practitioners**

For this study, middle managers are recognised as the practitioners, and their coping practices during organisational restructuring are explored. The current study therefore focuses on the strategising that takes place at the nexus of the practitioners and their practices.

### **2.2.2.1 Practices**

The practice perspective is aligned to strategy-as-practice research. However, the term ‘practice’ is not consistently translated across strategy-as-practice scholars as there are various interpretations of the term (Lavarda et al, 2020). Strategy-as-practice research is premised on various “theoretical and methodological

influences” (Rouleau, 2013:560). The practice research domain does not have a collective understanding of the term ‘practice’, or how the concept is used in strategy-as-practice research (Lavarda, et al., 2020; Rouleau, 2013). To highlight this point, Rouleau (2013) provides five interpretations of practice: (1) practice as managerial activities, thereby providing a better understanding of managerial competencies associated with strategising; (2) practice as tools, which provide insight into the more informal practices of strategising; (3) practice as knowledge, which provides for the understanding of the context in which strategising takes place and the underlying aspects of strategising; (4) practices being used as organisational enablers to achieve organisational objectives leading to a greater understanding of the organisation; and (5) practice and its universal applicability to strategy (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Laine & Vaara, 2015; Jarzabkowski, Spee & Smets, 2013). The pluralistic and multidimensional nature of practices and the inconsistency in the application of the term practice is evident (Rouleau, 2013).

It has been suggested that recent strategy-as-practice research, by focusing mainly on the micro-level practices of strategy, fails to explore the value or the limitations of mundane practices in its social context (Elbasha & Wright, 2017). Nonetheless, strategy-as-practice research does provide value in positioning itself using practice theory. Strategies can be achieved through practice theory by providing practitioners with an understanding of the importance of looking deeper than the surface of practices (Whittington, 2018). What is obvious is that practices may be considered an everyday occurrence that happens almost mechanically, but the value of these practices should not be overlooked or underestimated. Highlighting simple, everyday routine practices in situations presents a different perspective of practices by revealing how things work and are accomplished. When used in a skilful manner, practices can yield advantages and successes in ways that are often overlooked. Whittington (2018) identified five principles with regard to practices: (1) value the ordinary; (2) see past markets; (3) embrace diversity; (4) allow for the bottom up; and (5) accept different forms of greatness. Whittington (2018) demonstrated how these principles can result in distinguishing the illustrious from the ordinary, resulting in remarkable success in strategic outcomes. Practice theory offers a means to

introduce efficiencies in everyday activities, resulting in a more efficient and successful organisation (Whittington, 2018).

Practice theory demonstrates that although top management makes decisions, it is equally important to include middle and lower-level employees in decision making, as they are able to make a valuable contribution to the success of the organisation (Whittington, 2018). This principle of allowing for bottom-up decision making is particularly relevant to middle manager strategy practitioners during organisational change. Strategising is no longer a top-down exercise only, but includes input from all levels of the organisation. This allows middle managers to contribute to organisational restructuring based on their detailed knowledge of micro-level practices of the organisation (Balogun, Jarzabkowski & Vaara, 2011). Practices are iterative, changing, adaptive and situational (Whittington, 2018), based on the situation that the organisation finds itself in at that point in time. During the organisational change process, middle managers adjust and adapt their coping practices based on the stressors they experience in their change situations (Harney, Fu & Freeney, 2018; Kral & Kralova, 2016; Oliva, Gebauer & Brann, 2012; Balogun, Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2007).

#### 2.2.2.2 Practitioners

Practice theory requires an integrated view of practices, which means that practices are not viewed in isolation, but are interrelated with the actors performing the activities. Consequently, the practices cannot be removed from the practitioners (Whittington, 2006). Practice theory highlights the value in everyday practices when performed by skilled practitioners. When the combination of practice and practitioner are used appropriately, it can lead to greater business value. This is especially relevant during organisational restructuring where middle manager practitioners are required to influence and shape the change implementation and outcome, whilst also coping with the challenges of the change.

Organisational restructuring presents its own set of challenges for the strategic change implementer. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:01) recommend including “emotions, motivations and identity” into exploring the practices of human actors and



the way their emotional behaviour shapes the strategic outcome. Human actors are not always cognisant of how their emotional behaviour may personally impact them or the strategic outcome (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Taking emotional behaviour into consideration in practices is aligned with having a “repository” of “background coping skills” that human actors automatically draw upon in their day-to-day activities (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009:19).

The idea of a repository of background coping skills lends itself to this study of coping practices of middle manager practitioners during organisational restructuring. Moreover, it will contribute to understanding the coping practices of middle manager practitioners during strategic organisational restructuring. Practitioners are key to the execution of practices. From a strategy-as-practice perspective, a repository of coping skills adds value to the process by improving the practices and calling upon their repository of skills and knowledge. Limited research exists in utilising strategy practices as an ‘everyday coping mechanism’ (Begkos et al., 2019:3; Chia & Holt, 2006), where actors freely react to organisational problems of a strategic nature. Such organisational problems that could utilise strategy practices as an everyday coping mechanism are problems related to strategic organisational restructuring.

### **2.2.3 Practices as a research focus**

The term practice “stems from a rich and distinguished practice tradition in the social sciences, associated with Bourdieu, Foucault and Giddens” (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016:272). In terms of this, practices were viewed as unintentional, but identifiable, and performed by actors based on their abilities in a given situation. Practices are a socially situated grouping of activities that are routine and underpin a systematic approach to strategising (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016; Campbell-Hunt, 2007; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Broad-ranging themes of practice that have been studied include tools and artefacts such as PowerPoint, SWOT analysis, Strategic plans, and Decision analysis. Other studies considered practices within organisational functions, such as Accounting, Board of Directors, Product development whilst some studies explored practices in context types such as retail, automotive,

telecommunications, utilities, universities. Practices were also investigated from an organisation type in terms of profit, not for profit, and size of organisations, like conglomerates. There is a need for further research towards a deeper understanding and knowledge of strategising practices, while emphasising the situational aspect of strategising practices. Routines may differ from organisation to organisation, but the practices can be applied and adapted to the demands of any situation (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016; Nordqvist & Melin, 2009; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006).

As research delves further into practices explored through the strategy-as-practice perspective, it becomes evident that practice research is broad across management fields (Kohtamäki et al., 2021; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Fenton & Langley, 2011). Several aspects of practices have been explored, including the nature of practices; how practices are viewed and used in different situations; how strategy tools can be customised for practitioners; how different strategising events are enacted and used to make sense of the strategy; and even how practices support and/or hinder strategising (Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Fenton & Langley, 2011). A recent study undertook an analysis of strategy-as-practice research streams. The study revealed the following six clusters and their interrelationships that strategy-as-practice research has focussed on: praxis, sensemaking, discursive, sociometrical, institutional, and process clusters (Kohtamäki et al., 2021). The study suggests that further research into diversities and linkages between process and practice can be beneficial in deepening insights and augmenting existing knowledge of practices (Kohtamäki et al., 2021; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Fenton & Langley, 2011).

#### **2.2.4 Practices and practitioners in organisational change**

Practices are situational and are performed by practitioners according to the current context the organisation finds itself in (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016). The prevailing conditions necessitate those practitioners performing the organisational practices adapt and cope according to stressors and changing conditions (Nguyen, 2016). This view of practices aligns with the behaviour required for organisational

restructuring. According to this, middle managers adapt strategic organisational practices and coping practices to align with the organisational restructuring strategy (Govender & Pretorius, 2015). These practices are necessary for a successful outcome of strategic change. For organisations to survive, they need to adapt to the changing environments in which they operate. This requires adjustments to their strategy, which in turn requires adjustment to the organisational structure and operating model to align with the new strategy (Harney et al., 2018; Kral & Kralova, 2016; Oliva et al., 2012).

New operating models must integrate defined and evolving practices, praxis, and practitioners (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016; Kamarudin, Starr, Abdullah & Husain, 2014). The strategy-as-practice perspective aligns to new operating models because of the combination of practices, praxis, and practitioners. The practice-based approach explores the detailed practices of the strategising process of strategy practitioners (Whittington, 2003; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). In this study, the strategy practitioner is the middle manager who reports to a manager and has managers reporting to them. Middle managers also perform the role of change agent (Marshak & Bushe, 2018) for the strategic organisational change. Additionally, the middle manager is both the implementer and receiver of the change (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007) and can influence and shape the change. However, they must also deal with the impact of the change.

The role of middle managers as the strategy practitioners implementing the strategic change, receiving the change, and championing the change, is significantly impacted by the organisational change, from an emotional and behavioural perspective. Organisational change is an event that affects the well-being of the middle manager practitioner (Jimmieson et al., 2004) and triggers stress because of changes to the middle manager's familiar work environment. Work stressors cause uncertainty and anxiety and results in a negative attitude towards the organisational change (Jimmieson, et al, 2004; Nguyen, 2016).

For middle managers, role conflict is one of the most critical challenges in their middle position as the link between upper and lower levels of the organisation.

Conflicting demands of middle managers' roles in the restructuring induce stress, considering that they must participate in the organisational restructuring strategy whilst motivating lower-level employees to support and adopt the change. In addition to this, middle managers experience their own anxiety (Dixon, 2021; Carlson et al., 2017; Gatenby et al., 2015).

## **2.3 Organisational change**

Present-day change is complex and widespread and requires thinking, acting, and seeing beyond the immediate environment (Kangas, Kujala, Heikkinen, Lonnqvist, Laihonen & Bethwaite, 2019). The authors maintain that change efforts across the organisation are the responsibility of all employees, including management, and therefore it requires a shared understanding of how all participants work together. Given that the organisational change environment is complex, there will be uncertainty. Middle managers must embrace uncertainty and anxiety and create a shared understanding of the situation.

The following section reviews the existing literature on organisational change and focuses on organisational restructuring. The section begins with a definition of organisational change, demonstrates why organisational change is needed, and reviews the nature of organisational change together with challenges that middle managers face during organisational restructure. This section reviews the existing literature on types of organisational change that organisations embark on and highlights organisational restructuring, the type of change that this study is based on, and concludes with how employees, specifically middle managers, experience and cope with the challenges and stressors of organisational restructuring.

### **2.3.1 Organisational change background**

Several aspects of organisational change have been studied. These include:

(1) Effects of change: organisational identity (Pina e Cunha, Giustiniano, Rego & Clegg, 2017); change fatigue (Camilleri, Cope & Murray, 2019); change recipients and their experiences (Oreg, Bartunek Lee, & Do, 2018); change uncertainties

(Putnam, Fairhurst & Banghart, 2016); and effects of cynicism on organisational change and organisational commitment (Erarslan, Kaya & Altindag, 2018; Aslam, Ilyas, Imran & Rahman, 2016; Wanous, Reichers & Austin, 2000).

(2) Leadership: change leadership (Abbas & Asghar, 2010); organisational change leadership as an ethical process (Burnes, Hughes & By, 2018); the importance of change leadership (informing, communicating, involving, and supporting) and change management (reasons and competencies for change) (Holten, Hancock & Bollingtoft, 2019); and the influence of leadership style on change employees attitude to change (Gilbert, 2021; Huynh, 2021; Luu & Phan, 2020).

(3) Middle managers: middle managers' attitudes towards change (Harunavamwe, Kanengoni & Mazorodze, 2013); changing organisational structure (Kral & Kralova, 2016); implications of downsizing (Datta, Guthrie, Basuil & Pandey, 2010); middle managers' work life balance (Parris, Vickers & Wilkes, 2008); and middle managers' judgments of the legitimacy of their top managers as change agents (Huy, Corley & Kraatz, 2014).

(4) Change characteristics: change types, change methods and change outcomes; (Cummings, Bridgman & Brown, 2016; Nguyen, 2016; Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015).

(5) Dealing with change: sensemaking (Hamilton, 2016; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011, 2007; Cameron & Greene, 2009); communicating change (Kamarudin et al., 2014).

In respect of the above, organisational change involves varying aspects with unique elements that may have a negative or a positive effect on employees.

Various definitions of organisational change highlight this complex phenomenon and its impact. Bamberger, Vinding, Larsen, Nielsen, Fonager, Nielsen, Ryom and Omland (2012), described organisational change as changes that are made to an organisation's core systems, and included modifying the organisation's structure, strategy, values and ways of doing things. This means that operational procedures, such as tasks and working hours are subject to change, as well as the system, including changes to the hierarchy, instituting a different organisational system, and downsizing. Stouten, Rousseau and De Cremer (2018:752) define organisational

change as “deliberate activities that move an organisation from its present state to a desired future state”.

The definitions reveal a common theme that something new will be formed, altering the existing state of the organisation and causing some impact to the organisational system. For the current study, organisational change is defined as the deliberate process in which the organisation changes its structure, strategy, operations, technology or culture. In doing so, the organisation must deal with the effects of these changes on the organisation and its employees, for a successful change outcome (Cunha, Neves, Clegg, Costa & Rego, 2018; Harney et al., 2018).

The study of organisational change draws on knowledge from other academic fields such as sociology, psychology, management, and economics. It provides a basis for thinking across boundaries and for a better, well rounded understanding of the change process from the perspective of employee behaviour, management responsibilities and challenges, leadership, organisational behaviour and change models, and approaches (Farkas, 2016; Lawrence, 2015; Cameron & Green, 2009). Organisational change is the way in which organisations deal with unplanned and unforeseen situations (Cummings & Worley, 2015). Such change is complex, with several changes occurring simultaneously, requiring organisations to respond in various directions across the organisation and structural boundaries (Cross, Ernst & Pasmore, 2013). According to Cross et al. (2013:81), “change must now be virtually continuous” and will require the ongoing “creation of direction, alignment, and commitment within and across organisational and structural boundaries”. Change is necessary for the organisation to stay aligned and remain competitive. This means that the change implementation across organisational boundaries and levels facing middle managers is complex and stressful (Glaser, Fourné & Elfring, 2015; Harunavamwe et al., 2013).

### **2.3.2 The need for organisational change**

When middle managers no longer see the need for change, they then experience strategic and cognitive inertia. Mekelenkamp (2015:4) defines cognitive inertia as “the danger that actors may become overly dependent on their mental models of

strategic phenomena". According to the author, this inertia results in management's failure to spot changes in the environment. This makes middle managers susceptible to strategic inertia. Mekelenkamp (2015:4), defines strategic inertia as "the habitual reliance on a (previously successful) organisational 'recipe' or success". Strategic inertia results in managers not being able to formulate a new strategy due to their reliance on the current strategy. They are too dependent on their outdated perception of the organisation's strategy (Healey, Hodgkinson, Whittington & Johnson, 2015), thereby placing the organisation at a disadvantage because they are unable to adapt to a new environment. Leadership has the option to remove or reassign these managers as part of organisational restructuring. Therefore, manager turnover rate is one of the crucial reasons for organisational change (Mekelenkamp, 2015). Dominguez-CC and Barroso-Castro (2017) assert that strategic organisational change is based on management's interpretations of external and internal events. This view holds that the organisation's capacity to counter its changing environment has a direct correlation to the "aptitude, experience, and competence, of its top managers" (Dominguez-CC & Barroso-Castro, 2017:48).

During the 1990s, Kotter (1996) found that the main driver of organisational change is a more challenging market environment. The main purpose of organisational change was to make essential changes to the organisation's operations to align with the challenging market environment. Appelbaum, St-Pierre and Glavas (1998) held a similar view of organisational change that related to the very basics of business. Since then other factors have contributed to the need for organisational change. Such factors include, but are not limited to compliance and regulation (Balogun, 2007); technology advancement (Aslam et al., 2016; Govender & Pretorius, 2015; Abdullah, Husain, Kamarudin & Starr, 2014); changing contexts (Ziaee Bigdeli, Baines, Bustinza & Guang Shi, 2017; Kotter, 2012); convergence of telecommunications, media and technology resulting in changing industry patterns (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006); and ethical leadership (Hussain, Lei, Akram, Haider, Hussain & Ali, 2018). More recently, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis has seen technology drive radical change. With organisations globally disrupted by the pandemic, a rush occurred for digital transformation of organisational operating

models to meet the challenge of working remotely (Mckinsey & Company, 2020; Molino, Ingusci, Signore, Manuti, Giancaspro, Russo, Zito & Cortese, 2020; Pandey & Pal, 2020; Savic, 2020).

Successful organisations focus on their customer needs. They provide sustained, superior service to their customers and know that the customer should be one of the main reasons for their existence. The organisation's strategy is customer focused (Kral & Kralova, 2016). The organisation is flexible enough to adapt their structures based on their customer focused strategy (Harunavamwe et al., 2013; Moran & Brightman, 2001). Customers have greater choice in the markets today, therefore organisations must have the ability and flexibility to respond to the fleeting nature of market demands. Hence, organisations need to react speedily to change (McCoy & Venter, 2016; Appelbaum et al., 1998).

According to Lee, Sharif, Scandura, and Kim (2017:502), despite their contributions, previous studies on organisational change have not been able to exactly pinpoint "how and why different forms of organisational change have different levels of organisational change intensity, which in turn may differentiate its impacts on employees' attitudes and outcomes". Accordingly, the current study aims to provide further insights into the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring.

### **2.3.3 Types of organisational change**

Bamberger et al. (2012:594) studied the impact of organisational change on mental health. In their systematic review of 17 studies, only six studies were found that related to organisational restructuring or downsizing. Two studies found an association between organisational change and negative health outcomes, while four studies found an association between job changes and mental health problems. In their study of organisational downsizing decisions on performance, Sitlington and Marshall (2011) found that uncertainty experienced during organisational restructuring impacted individuals' knowledge and resulted in demotivation, decreased job satisfaction and high staff turnover. The authors report other negative impacts of organisational restructuring, such as increased stress, pressure and



burnout experienced by staff, the loss of trust in leadership and colleagues, and communication breakdown. Teo, Pick, Newton, Yeung and Chang (2013) report that stress decreased job satisfaction and effective coping practices for dealing with stress mediated the negative impact of change related stressors. Middle managers are at the forefront of these challenges because of their middle position and the differing roles that they are expected to perform in the organisation (Marshak & Bushe, 2018; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007; Balogun, 2003). The broad, yet parallel nature of organisational change impacts is evident. Any change brings stress, which results in uncertainty and anxiety and will have a negative impact if change recipients lack the means of coping with the stress. For this study, only organisational restructuring will be reviewed, while recognising that there are several types of changes.

Organisations need to align their organisational landscape to deal with complexity and uncertainty in today's operational environment. If the organisation is not performing efficiently and optimally, then it needs to change according to the situation it finds itself in (Al Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). In today's rapidly changing business environment, long term strategies are no longer applicable as they soon become outdated, forcing the organisation to make changes in order to survive in a rapidly changing environment. To do this, managers need to determine what the drivers of change are and the type of change required for the situation in which the organisation finds itself.

The type of change required for a strategy has been found to be impacted by structure, context, culture, employee behaviour and leadership, size, product and market. The organisation must implement the type of change for the situation in which it finds itself. Al Haddad and Kotnour (2015:242) define change type as "the essential characteristics that describes the kind and form of change and the qualities that make change what it is". Appelbaum et al. (1998) describe strategic organisational change as emanating from either the external environment or from within the organisation, which changes the organisation's vision, mission and strategy.

It has been found that external determinants of change include technological advancement, regulations, and economic conditions. Internal determinants include a new vision or mission, implementation of new technology, change in leadership, and a merger or acquisition. Strategic organisational change can be carried out in either a reactive or proactive manner. In other words, management can anticipate the change and adapt the organisation accordingly, or they could ignore the signs and be forced to change (Appelbaum et al., 1998).

Change may take the shape of strategic change, life-cycle change, learning-based change, leader initiated change, transformational and transactional change (Smits & Bowden, 2015). Other types of change identified are planned change and generative change (Bushe & Marshak, 2018), and incremental and radical change (Farkas, 2016). Change is also classified at the level at which it occurs, in other words, the organisational level versus the industry level, and as continuous change vs discontinuous change (Al Haddad & Kotnour, 2015).

Al Haddad and Kotnour (2015) also distinguish between the scale of the change or the extent of the change. In other words, small versus large scale change. Large scale change requires change to the entire organisational system (Marshak, 2002; Nadler & Tushman, 1989) while small scale change takes place at organisational level. Change can further be differentiated by duration. In other words, short term versus long term change. Long term change requires strong leadership and management, and consideration must be given to the impact of change on employee behaviour.

Change can occur at an individual, team or group, and organisational level. Examples of some organisational level changes are restructuring, mergers and acquisitions, and technology implementation. Each level has its own underlying aspects; nonetheless, the change can simultaneously impact more than one level (Getachew & Zhou, 2018; Pettigrew, 2012). A further distinction is planned and emergent change. Bushe and Marshak (2016), report that the literature deals mostly with planned change, where a deliberate and systematic effort is made by top-level management to change something. In this case, the assumption is that the change

outcome is foreseen (Cummings & Worley, 2009). Emergent change, on the other hand, describes change where the outcome is unforeseen and unexpected (Bushe & Marshak, 2016).

The likelihood of a successful change outcome differs across organisations undergoing change. This is due to differences in strategies, structure, organisational systems and most importantly, employees (Al Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). Leadership must involve employees in the change (Al Haddad & Kotnour, 2015) as employee involvement has a positive impact on their attitude towards the change, which in turn, has a direct impact on the success of the change (Cameron & Green, 2009).

All types of change are associated with risk. Organisational change should follow a planned change method, aligned to the change implementation, in order to achieve the desired outcome for the organisation. The risks of poorly managed change include, but are not limited to, stress, confusion, anxiety, uncertainty, cynicism, decline in morale and productivity, and change fatigue. Change that is not planned and executed according to change management principles can have negative consequences for employee well-being (Nielsen, Dawson, Hasson & Schwarz, 2021).

#### **2.3.4 Organisational restructuring**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been wide ranging, and organisational restructuring has become particularly relevant in the current global COVID-19 pandemic situation that has severely affected economies and financial markets. For banking organisations in South Africa, the national lockdown resulted in an economic downturn that led to a reduction in income, requiring banks to implement cost-mitigating measures such as downsizing. Downsizing is one of the most common means for organisations to adapt to the changing environments in which they operate. For organisations to adapt they must adjust their organisational strategy, which in turn requires adjustments to the organisational structure and operating model to align with the new strategy (Harney et al., 2018; Kral & Kralova, 2016; Oliva et al., 2012; Balogun, 2007).

For this study, organisational restructuring encompasses the general concept of change to internal operations of the organisation. This includes the possibility of the reduction of staff, the change to roles and responsibilities, or a reduction in the levels of organisational hierarchy. To align the organisational fit and structure with the organisational strategy (Erkama & Vaara, 2010), organisational restructuring involves decisions about organisational structure, such as (functional, divisional, matrix, centralisation); levels of hierarchy, processes, people (roles and responsibilities, training, job specialisation); offering and customers (product, service, markets); and management (leadership, delegation, participation) (Appelbaum et al., 1998). This process can also be seen as the reconfiguration of the organisation's internal structure, initiated by a deliberate strategy by management (Harney et al., 2018; McKinley & Scherer, 2000; Bowman & Singh, 1993) as a measure for cost-cutting, improved performance, or strategic realignment (Harney et al., 2018; Sitlington & Marshall, 2011). However, in respect of cost cutting, the characteristics of organisational restructuring are no different across contexts. Evolving research indicates that the organisational environment has seen an increase in volatility with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, while change required to combat this volatility remains the same (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021; Karr, Loh & San Andres, 2020; Morgan, 2020; Srinivasan, de Homont & Hervé, 2020).

Literature on organisational restructuring is mainly from the perspective of employee well-being (Harney et al., 2018; Lemmer, 2018; Mathisen, Brønnick, Arntzen & Bergh, 2017; De Jong, Wiezer, de Weerd, Nielsen, Mattila-Holappa & Mockaño, 2016; Kamarudin et al., 2014; Erkama & Vaara, 2010; McKinley & Scherer, 2000; Marais & Schepers, 1996; Bartunek, 1984); middle managers (Harunavamwe et al., 2013; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; McCann, Hassard & Morris, 2004); job satisfaction (Marais & Schepers, 1996); and organisational performance (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Bowman, Singh, Useem & Bhadury, 1999). Organisational restructuring has been studied in various disciplines; including strategy, organisational design, change management, finance, economics sociology (Erkama & Vaara, 2010) and is applied to all types of organisations and industries. Although research in organisational restructuring and organisational downsizing has increased, "it is still

dwarfed by the magnitude of this phenomenon in the marketplace” (Datta et al., 2010:343). This suggests that research into organisational restructuring is not keeping pace with the scale of organisational restructuring taking place in these challenging times. As a group of employees, middle managers’ role is considered key to the success or failure of the change (Dixon, 2021). As such, the current study aims to advance the body of knowledge on the consequences of organisational restructuring on middle managers’ attitudes and behaviour.

De Jong et al. (2016) maintains that studies on the effects of organisational restructuring on employee well-being are increasing (Bamberger et al., 2012; Quinlan & Bohle, 2009). However, they call for further research on this topic, including the effects of downsizing different groups of workers. There is a vast amount of literature on general organisational change, but literature is limited when exploring specific types of organisational change (Camilleri et al., 2019; Day, Crown & Ivany, 2017; Holyoake, 2017; Shaw, 2017; Ziaee Bidgeli et al., 2017; Farkas, 2016; Kiitam, McLay & Pilli, 2016; Coleman, 2014; Vakola, Soderquist & Prastacos, 2007; Jimmieson et al., 2004). Hence, a gap exists in the literature on organisational restructuring and its effects on employees, which relates to this study of middle manager employees coping with change specific stressors, and employee learnings from coping practices (Smollan, 2017).

De Jong et al. (2016:93) define organisational restructuring as:

... an organisational change that is much more significant than commonplace changes. The changes should affect at least a whole organisational sector or an entire company in the forms of, for instance, closure, outsourcing, offshoring, sub-contracting, merging, delocalisation, internal job mobility, business expansion or other complex internal reorganisations and job cutting.

Organisational restructuring is referred to by terms such as downsizing, reorganisation, reengineering (Quinlan & Bohle, 2009) and turnover event (Laulie & Morgeson, 2021). The practices include outsourcing, privatisation, and the use of temporary workers. The organisation reduces the number of permanent employees by voluntary and enforced retrenchments, closing of branches, and outsourcing of

functions. Given the stressful nature of restructuring activities and its people impact, downsizing was viewed in such a destructive and negative light that “euphemistic terms” were coined. These terms include “rightsizing, reorganisation and decision by the organisation to focus on its “core activities” (Quinlan & Bohle, 2009:4).

Organisational restructuring results in the reduction of staff, increased workload, and a revised salary/bonus/performance scheme, particularly for middle managers because they are viewed as an unnecessary level in the organisation (Harunavamwe et al., 2013; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; McCann et al., 2004). Organisational restructuring leads to uncertainty and anxiety for middle managers in regard to their job security, roles and responsibilities, performance, and productivity (Stouten et al., 2018; Quinlan & Bohle, 2009), which has a negative impact on their well-being.

For organisations to survive, they need to adapt to the changing environments in which they operate. This requires adjustments to their strategy, which in turn requires adjustment to the organisational structure and operating model to align with the new strategy (Harney et al., 2018; Kral & Kralova, 2016; Oliva et al., 2012). New operating models must include defined and evolving practices, praxis, and practitioners (Kamarudin et al., 2014). The practice-based perspective of strategy-as-practice is aligned to defining a new operating model in that it explores the detailed activities of the strategising process (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2003).

## **2.4 Middle managers**

This section discusses middle managers, as practitioners, their role in the banking sector, their role in organisational restructuring, the challenges they experience, the cognitive and behavioural impact of the organisational restructuring and their coping practices during the restructuring.

In the banking sector, middle managers are people within the organisational structure that reports to a manager and has managers reporting to them. Middle managers in the bank are responsible for carrying out directives from top-

management whilst managing and supporting lower-level employees. Considering their crucial position and role in the organisation, middle managers are exposed to greater challenges from organisational restructuring and stress caused by these challenges. In addition, they must deal with increasing pressure to be more resilient to effectively cope with the change (Dixon, 2021). In this unprecedented time of change in the organisational environment, the role of middle managers is heightened. Considering their middle position, middle managers' role as change agent is a critical one. Depending on their emotional mindset and well-being, middle managers can have a positive or negative influence on the change (Kroon & Reif, 2021; Nielsen et al., 2021).

For change to be positive and successful, the well-being of middle managers must be prioritised. If stress is not reduced, it could have an adverse effect on employees, resulting in far reaching implications for the performance of the organisation (Harzer & Ruch, 2015). Middle managers' work stress is related to a lack of coping skills (Dixon, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to understand middle managers' coping practices to proactively help them deal with stress. This, in turn, takes care of their well-being and consequently results in them being more productive and positive and better able to perform their crucial role in organisational change (Kroon & Reif, 2021). It makes sense then that more research is necessary on how middle managers cope. This will allow for deeper insights into the negative impact of organisational restructuring on middle managers as the ones tasked with the implementation thereof. It will also allow for insight into the coping practices which they use to deal with the stress of organisational restructuring.

#### **2.4.1 Middle managers as change agents**

For this study, as the change agent (Marshak & Bushe, 2018) for strategic organisational change, the middle manager is the implementer, receiver, and agent of the strategic change (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). This means the middle manager can influence and shape the change implementation and change outcome. However, the middle manager must also cope with the challenges of the change. For this study, middle managers are defined as "a manager who reports to a

manager and has managers reporting to them” (Jansen Van Rensburg, Davis & Venter, 2014:173).

The two widely held views of middle managers during organisational change are a negative and a positive view. The negative view portrays middle managers as rigid, unresponsive, obstructive, and unadaptable to the changing organisational circumstances and structures (Gatenby, Rees, Truss, Alfes & Soane, 2015). The intermediary position of middle managers (Balogun, 2003) allows them to become so entrenched in organisational bureaucracy that they unconsciously block communication and information between the top and bottom levels of the organisation (Gatenby et al., 2015). Middle managers are perceived as deliberately resisting the adoption of strategic change by using their position as organisational gatekeepers to reject change. Conversely, the positive view portrays middle managers as having a supportive outlook to strategic organisational change. The intermediary position of middle managers is seen as ideally situated to influence and shape the organisation’s strategic change (Neumann, James & Vince, 2019; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994; Balogun, 2003). Balogun (2003:70) highlighted four key positive roles of middle managers during organisational change: “(1) undertaking personal change, (2) helping others through change, (3) implementing necessary changes in their departments, (4) keeping the business going.” These roles highlight the change agent role and other roles that middle managers are required to perform during organisational restructuring.

The two views of middle managers demonstrate the significant change agent role of middle managers in either championing the change or hindering the change. Research demonstrates the “important strategic role middle managers play in both the formulation and implementation of strategic change” (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011:953; Mantere, 2008; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Balogun, 2003; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994). A further complicating factor is the conflicting expectations of middle managers, who must support the change but are also receivers of the change. Yet the cognitive adjustment that middle managers must make during organisational change is often overlooked, as



the focus is mainly on the negative or positive attitude of middle managers (Balogun, 2007).

The role of the middle manager itself is greatly altered by organisational change, especially from a cognitive and behavioural perspective. Organisational change is an event that affects the well-being of the middle manager (Jimmieson et al., 2004) and triggers stress because of changes to the middle manager's familiar work environment. Middle managers experience conflict in their role as participants in strategising for organisational change, managing their activities and their subordinates, whilst also being the change agent who must motivate lower-level employees to support and adopt the change (Neumann et al., 2019). Middle managers must be able to cope with managing these conflicts, while also finding a balance between work and personal challenges.

#### **2.4.2 Middle managers and organisational restructuring**

Middle managers tend to be most impacted by organisational restructuring (Chen et al., 2018; Hermkens et al., 2017; Hayes, 2008). Middle manager numbers in organisations are considerably reduced due to organisational restructuring, downsizing, reengineering, cost-cutting, and reconfiguration of the organisation's internal structure to be flatter and less hierarchical (Hermkens, 2021; Harney et al., 2018). The reduction in middle manager numbers started as early as the 1980s and 1990s but the extent of the reduction of middle managers is still not clear (Hermkens et al., 2017; Hayes, 2008; Balogun, 2003). Although middle manager numbers in organisations have been reduced, research reveals that middle managers continue to play a key strategic role in organisational change (Hermkens, 2021; Kealy, 2013; Balogun et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994). According to Balogun (2007), this role may still be that of intermediary delegated with implementing the strategic plans of top management by conveying senior management's change instructions without question. However, this is not a fair reflection of middle managers' role in strategic organisational restructuring. The skills of middle managers are important during organisational restructuring, especially influencing, persuading, negotiating, and mediating (Kealy,

2013) skills required for implementing organisational change. Another critical skill that middle managers utilise during organisational restructuring is managing the emotions of subordinates. During organisational restructuring, employees experience anxiety, uncertainty, and mixed emotions involving fear, anger, excitement, and enthusiasm. Middle managers are closer to lower-level employees and are therefore more aware of their emotional needs, and in a position to offer support to lower-level employees (Guo, Huy & Xiao, 2017).

It is accepted that any organisational restructuring will have an impact on middle managers' well-being (Harney et al., 2018; Kealy, 2013). Accordingly, middle managers must make cognitive and behavioural changes (Balogun, 2007) to cope with the stressors resulting from the restructure. Middle managers must understand what the restructure means for them, and the impact it will have on their roles and responsibilities. According to Balogun (2007), any form of organisational restructuring requires a psychological adjustment for middle managers. Balogun (2007) asserts that restructuring requires a de-identification from the old and familiar and a reidentification with the new organisational identity.

For the middle manager as a subordinate, the new organisational structure creates a disconnect between the middle manager and top management. Middle managers are uncertain of how the new structure will work in the future. The more drastic the change, the more the emotional, mental, and physical adjustments that must be made by middle managers to adapt to the new ways of thinking, acting, and working (Balogun, 2007). Hence, organisational restructuring requires middle managers to perform effective sensemaking practices to understand the implication of the organisational restructuring on themselves, their subordinates, peers, and other internal working relationships (Neumann et al., 2019; Balogun, 2007).

In a review of 86 international studies prior to 2009, Quinlan and Bohle (2009) revealed that organisational restructuring increased job insecurity. Their analysis revealed that 73 (85%) of the studies demonstrated that organisational restructuring increased job insecurity. Quinlan and Bohle (2009) maintain that even though there is an increase in studies pertaining to organisational restructuring, further research

is recommended, especially on the health of employees. In a similar study on 39 papers published between 2000 and 2012 on the impact of organisational restructuring on employee well-being, De Jong et al. (2016) found that organisational restructuring in general had a negative impact on employee well-being. For middle managers to manage their well-being they must be able to cope with the challenges and stressors (Nguyen, 2016) of the organisational restructuring. Some of the factors they considered when examining the relationship between organisational restructuring and employee well-being were communication, provision of information, job insecurity, change acceptance, training, control, procedural justice, and job control. According to De Jong et al. (2016), further research is necessary to gain more insight into the impact of organisational restructuring on employee well-being. In a study of middle manager attitudes towards organisational change by Harunavamwe et al. (2013), it was reported that middle managers have positive attitudes towards technological change, innovative change, and total quality management, but displayed negative attitudes towards organisational restructuring. The current study aims to provide further insight into the impact of organisational restructuring on middle managers and will extend the study to understand the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring. The next section discusses how middle managers make sense of organisational restructuring.

### **2.4.3 Challenges of organisational restructuring**

It is inevitable that middle managers will be at the forefront of organisational restructuring based on their intermediary position in the organisation. Middle managers' role as change agent will continue to be important if organisations continue to restructure (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). As the implementer and receiver of the change, middle managers' well-being is impacted, and as a result they may display negative attitudes towards organisational restructuring (De Jong et al., 2016; Harunavamwe et al., 2013; Quinlan & Bohle, 2009). Consequently, middle managers find themselves in a state of uncertainty. Some of the challenges faced by middle managers are uncertainty, communication issues, and role conflict.

#### 2.4.3.1 Uncertainty

Organisational restructuring can be classified as a critical life event, which can result in a negative attitude and stressful reactions for middle managers due to the changing work environment (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017; Aslam et al., 2016). Considering change is often not a sequence of planned events, but is situational. This situation results in uncertainty as middle managers cannot predict what changes will occur. Thus, organisational change is viewed as a trigger event that can cause stress, uncertainty and negativity in middle managers (Jimmieson et al., 2004). Tensions arise when middle managers find themselves belonging to, or identifying with, new, or different organisational units resulting from the restructuring (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Van de Ven, 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011). When middle managers find themselves in a new organisational unit, or a changed functional structure or business unit, people, or structure, or organisational culture, values, and beliefs, they struggle to reconcile the old with the new.

#### 2.4.3.2 Communication and Support

It is important that top management supports and communicates with middle management during change as this keeps them informed of the change, reducing middle managers' uncertainty and anxiety. A lack of communication during the change process results in fear and speculation; giving rise to further anxiety and uncertainty (Day et al., 2017; Smollan 2015). Employees view the lack of communication from top management as a lack of commitment to the change and a lack of empathy for employees (Day et al., 2017; De Jong et al., 2016). When communicating, information shared by management must be consistent in relation to the change event, because if the information is not relevant or appropriate, middle managers face uncertainty and anxiety (De Jong et al., 2016; Kamarudin et al., 2014). Middle managers experience stress when management practices sensegiving by deliberately constructing and conveying a message that is misleading (Logemann, Piekkari & Cornelissen, 2019; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Uncertainty during change is normal and can be intensified by providing information from formal and informal channels that is misleading, resulting in distrust and

speculation (Day et al., 2017; De Jong et al., 2016; Jimmieson et al., 2004). Middle managers become cynical when the organisational restructuring is not understood or when top management are perceived to be unauthentic. Cynicism results from not being consulted and informed about the restructuring, leaving middle managers resentful and negative. This uncertainty leads to emotional stress and resistance to the change, which impacts negatively on the well-being of middle managers.

If top management and Human Resources (HR) are absent in the change process, middle managers view them as unsupportive, insincere, and unconcerned about the plight of the employees (Brown & Cregan, 2008), resulting in further stress.

#### 2.4.3.3 Role conflict

Conflicting and contradictory role tension is commonplace among middle managers during organisational restructuring (Glaser et al., 2015). Organisational restructuring places middle managers in conflicting situations where they are faced with contradictory and competing demands and roles. Performing these contradictory roles and activities lead to tension for middle managers (Carlson, Poole, Lambert & Lammers, 2017; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Middle managers participate in organisational restructuring strategy whilst having to influence lower-level employees to support the change. They simultaneously face anxiety and uncertainty due to possible job loss, combined with a lack of resources to effectively perform their roles, yet they must motivate and support subordinates to adopt the change.

The contradictory elements inherent in middle managers' role is one of the most critical challenges they face in their position as the link between the upper and lower levels of the organisation. In this role, they are required to balance strategic objectives with operational requirements (Gatenby et al., 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2007). This conflict places middle management in a complicated situation. They are seen by top management as the contributor to and implementer of the strategic change, and by lower-level staff as the agent of change, with the power to act on behalf of top management in implementing the change. The challenge for middle managers is to find ways to manage these conflicting roles and competing priorities

whilst coping with the resulting emotions and stress (Gatenby et al., 2015; Glaser et al., 2015).

Top-level managers and middle managers have differing perspectives on organisational change (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Wooldridge, Schmid & Floyd, 2008). When middle managers disagree with top-level managers on the need for, and manner of execution of change, it creates role conflict for middle managers. Middle managers may also differ in terms of the information timeline, skills, and capacity required to execute their roles in the strategic change, resulting in further conflict. It has also been found that middle managers may differ in the core values which affect their personal ethics when making decisions or supporting the change (Floyd & Lane, 2000). Conflict also arises when middle managers cannot reveal their own uncertainty to subordinates, but must encourage subordinates to support the change they may not agree with.

Other sources of role conflict include unclear expectations of new and additional roles resulting from the restructure, and an increased workload since middle managers assume more responsibility in their strategic, line manager, and change agent roles (Dixon, 2021; Neumann et al., 2019; Carlson et al., 2017; Glaser et al., 2015). New roles in the restructure, which require different knowledge and skills, have an impact on middle managers' self-esteem and confidence if they fear they may lack adequate skills to accomplish their new role. Middle managers also experience uncertainty over their future roles in the new structure, as it may not be in line with their chosen career paths. Another source of uncertainty occurs when middle managers no longer have the power, prestige, and sense of community, comfort, and stability (Aslam et al., 2016) that was established in the old work environment.

#### 2.4.3.4 Change fatigue

When middle managers experience change fatigue due to frequent organisational change which they view as insignificant or unsuccessful, they become cynical, leaving them with feelings of frustration, bitterness, and negative feelings toward the organisation (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017; Barton & Ambrosini, 2013; Brown &

Cregan, 2008). This cynicism also results from experience of frequent, previous, and failed organisational change efforts. The failed organisational change history leads to middle managers becoming cynical, which they use as a defensive mechanism to protect and prepare themselves for the next organisational change failure (Barton & Ambrosini, 2013; Brown & Cregan, 2008). These feelings are particularly prevalent in organisational restructuring, where middle managers job security, roles and responsibilities have been diminished. Middle managers openly express cynicism by questioning or criticising the sincerity of the organisational restructuring intent, expressing it with sarcasm, humour, and gestures such as “smirks, rolling eyes and knowing looks” (Brown & Cregan, 2008:669). Cynicism might be a way of helping middle managers to make sense of the organisational restructuring. In doing this, they rationalise by concluding that the change is a travesty, and that management is incompetent (Radaelli & Sitton-Kent, 2016; Barton & Ambrosini, 2013).

#### **2.4.4 Middle managers coping with organisational restructuring challenges**

Considering that restructuring poses a detriment to middle managers well-being, various resources can assist in alleviating the negative consequences (Harney et al., 2018; Hudson, 2016). If the human side of restructuring is not dealt with, it will not only impact the success of the change effort, but will severely impact the well-being of middle managers. Hence the need for coping practices to deal with the challenges of organisational change. Van den Brande, Bernstein, Reknes and Baillien (2018:5) describe coping as “the things people do to avoid being harmed by life-strains”. Smollan (2017:148) describes coping as a “dynamic process of adapting to changing circumstances”. Various means of coping with stressors are learnt from past experiences and are used at different stages of the change process (Smollan, 2017). The types of coping practices used are influenced by “personality, emotional intelligence and social identity” (Smollan, 2017:148), and by beliefs and attitudes (Vakola, 2013). In some instances, stressors require specific means tailored to individual middle managers, to either prevent or reduce stress.

There are several forms of stressors that middle managers must deal with during organisational restructuring (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017; Nguyen, 2016; Jimmieson, et al., 2004). These include anxiety and uncertainty, role conflict, increased workloads, job complexity, job insecurity, conflicting demands, inability to make sense of the change, lack of support and communication, career uncertainty, lack of self-efficacy for the new role, fear of failure, loss of control in an unfamiliar environment, and loss of productivity (Cunha et al., 2018; Harney et al., 2018; Vakola & Petrou, 2018; Lee et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2016; Mazzola, Schonfeld & Spector, 2011). The coping practices applied during stressful restructuring is based on internal and external means available to middle managers. Internally, middle managers rely on their personal, or inner strengths and activities to help them cope (Smollan, 2017), while externally middle managers use means that are perceptible. Some of the coping practices used by middle managers include mindfulness (Chen et al., 2018); sensemaking (Brown, Colville & Pye, 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2007); support (Harney et al., 2018); self-efficacy (Jimmieson et al., 2004); communication (De Jong et al., 2016; Kral & Kralova, 2016); and personality traits (Hudson, 2016).

#### 2.4.4.1 Sensemaking

Research into middle managers' role in strategic organisational change, highlights the need for middle managers' sensemaking competence in order to interpret, communicate, and implement the change (Neumann et al., 2019; Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Rouleau & Balogun, 2007). Central to middle managers' roles as change implementer, change agent and recipient, and line manager of subordinates and its related challenges, are middle managers sensemaking skills. These skills enable them to better understand and cope with a confusing and uncertain situation inherent in organisational restructuring (Neumann et al., 2019; Arnaud et al., 2016; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007), and helps them to help their subordinates understand the change (Balogun, 2011). This means that middle managers must figure out what is going on, create a frame of reference to relate to what is going on, create an awareness and understanding of an inherently confusing and uncertain organisational restructure, and determine how to manage the situation (Colville, Pye & Brown, 2016).



When middle managers accept the reason for the change, they are essentially placing their trust in top management. When this occurs, they have a shared sense of meaning, which engenders a sense of comfort regarding the organisational change (Huy et al., 2014). Balogun (2007:82) specifically refers to organisational restructuring when describing how middle managers make sense of the situation:

... how the middle managers build an understanding of what the new structure means for them, their work, roles, and responsibilities. In order to achieve this, it identifies the schemata, the mental maps or memory models individuals have about their organisation and their world more generally, prior to the restructuring, and how these mental models develop and change during the restructuring.

A key sensemaking competency for middle managers during organisational restructuring is the capacity to construct a message using language suited to the audience. The literature highlights the importance of language and discourse in organisational change sensemaking (Arnaud et al., 2016; Laine & Vaara, 2015; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Jacobs, van Witteloostuijn & Christe-Zeyse, 2013; Rouleau & Balogun, 2007; Rouleau, 2005; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). Another key sensemaking competency for middle managers is the ability of middle managers to leverage their networks across the organisation to help build alliances for the change (Rouleau & Balogun, 2007). This network helps middle managers mobilise support to influence recipients and entice them to buy into the cause. These recipients will then in turn influence their colleagues.

Middle managers' success in communicating a shared understanding of organisational restructuring is critical in interpreting and operationalising the strategic objectives of top management, resulting in a successful change outcome (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). This facilitates an acceptance of the organisational restructuring and encourages recipients to support, and participate in the process, thereby reducing the uncertainty and challenges experienced during organisational restructuring.

#### 2.4.4.2 Communication

Effective communication is critical when coping with the anxiety and uncertainty of organisational restructuring (Jimmieson et al., 2004; Amiot, Terry, Jimmieson & Callan, 2006). When middle managers feel that they are being listened to and consulted, they react positively to the change (Harney et al., 2018). Top management can support middle managers during the change process by listening, consulting, and communicating with them. This support displayed by top management has a positive effect on employee well-being and organisational outcomes (Harney et al., 2018). When top management do not communicate honestly and transparently, it leads to distrust, negativity and resistance by employees, which in turn hampers the change effort, thereby impacting the success of the change outcome (Kamarudin et al., 2014).

Middle managers must be in frequent touch with top management and participate in face-to-face meetings where information is communicated to the middle managers and in turn, feedback is provided by middle managers to top management (Stouten et al., 2018; Huy et al., 2014). This assists to remove structural and organisational boundaries and provides middle management with the opportunity to provide input. Making a meaningful contribution to the organisational restructure in this way empowers middle managers in the change process. Middle managers view this inclusiveness as positive and it motivates them to perform better and support the organisational restructure (Huy et al., 2014).

#### 2.4.4.3 Self-efficacy

In dealing with uncertainties during organisational restructuring, especially those related to role conflict and role uncertainty, middle managers have doubts about their ability to perform their new role. However, their positive belief in their self-efficacy and that they can succeed in their new role, motivates middle managers to persevere and support the new organisational structure (Nguyen, 2016). This belief in their self-efficacy helps middle managers to cope with the uncertainty of their ability to perform their role in the new structure, and to allay their fears of failure.

Consequently, middle managers are more likely to put in extra effort and support the change process.

Nguyen (2016:20) refers to change specific self-efficacy as “an individual’s perceived ability to handle change in a given situation and to function well on the job despite demands of the change.” Middle managers are uncertain of their new roles and responsibilities and even doubt their capabilities to effectively execute their new role in the new structure. They are no longer comfortable and secure with their knowledge, and must gain new knowledge for the new role (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Change specific self-efficacy in relation to organisational restructuring, fosters middle managers belief that they can perform their new role in the new structure. This self-belief helps middle managers cope when they experience doubts regarding their ability to perform their conflicting roles as implementer, receiver, and agent of change.

#### 2.4.4.4 Support

Support during organisational restructuring can be in the form of social and organisational support (Harney et al., 2018). Support from colleagues, peers, HR, and top management is critical in helping middle managers cope. Middle managers tend to be more positive and enthusiastic about the change when they view management as being legitimate (Huy et al., 2014) and supportive by being visibly involved and regularly communicating with staff (Stouten et al., 2018).

#### 2.4.4.5 Personality traits

Research highlights personality traits as one of the key factors related to how middle managers cope. Character strengths are positively valued characteristics or qualities of a middle manager’s personality. They are reflected in middle managers resilience, behaviour, thoughts, and feelings (Harzer & Ruch, 2015). Character strength is a key resource for coping with organisational change uncertainty and has a positive impact on job satisfaction, productivity, and job performance (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017).

### **2.4.5 Outcome of coping practices**

How middle managers cope with the uncertainty of organisational restructuring is of the utmost importance to their well-being and to the outcome of the change. If middle managers cope well, they are generally more resilient, enthusiastic, and positive, and will support the change. If middle managers do not cope well, they become negative, cynical, resist the change, and hinder the success of the organisational change. Any hinderance to the change has major consequences for the organisation's employees. If the organisation does not perform well, it could result in further organisational restructuring. However, if middle managers cope positively in the challenging situation, and are supported by sincere management, then they are likely to champion the change, which can potentially result in better organisational performance. The organisation will most likely reward employees for their role in contributing to the enhanced organisational performance.

The literature review has guided the topic focus, and through the context of the historical background, theoretical framework, and current trends and developments on the research topic, provided effective guidance on the fine-tuning of the research problem. The literature study demonstrates the relatedness of the theory to the detailed practices of strategic organisational change. Specifically, for this study, this refers to organisational restructuring, and strategy practitioner, or middle managers' role and their coping practices in organisational restructuring. Against this background, the remainder of this chapter offers the context in which the research is conducted.

### **2.5 The South African banking industry**

This study set out to explore the coping practices of middle managers in a specific context (organisational restructure), and this section offers an overview of the unique context within which this current study took place in a South African bank. The South African banking environment is highly competitive with five major banks, and more recently, strong new competitors such as Capitec (2017), Discovery Bank (2018), TymeDigital (2015) and Bank Zero (2018). The intense competition and volatile financial environment have compelled the five major established banks to

rethink their existing way of doing business in order to remain competitive in challenging times.

In addition to the above, tough global economic conditions are also impacting the South African economic environment. The impact on South African banks is evident in their recent strategies of separation (Absa/Barclays separation) and downsizing (Standard Bank closure of branches). The South African economy is at a critical stage, with economic growth at less than 1%, the unemployment rate at its highest, and investment concerns over the current political climate. Banks play a central role in the economy of the country, and they will now need to navigate a volatile environment. South African banks are well developed, with a sophisticated banking system that is highly regulated and on par with global banking standards. South African banks have seen challenging times, such as the global financial crisis of 2008. South African banks were some of the few in the world that survived the crisis without requiring financial bailouts. Hence, the choice of a South African bank as the context for this study, as this will provide an ideal case study and rich data on the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring. The next section discusses this current study's context.

### **2.5.1 Banking in Africa**

Research from an African perspective has been limited. The author highlights the appeal made at a strategy forum in 2000 for strategy researchers to “broaden their research agenda to embrace developments in these countries to advance the development of theory and practice” (Acquaah, 2007:1236). Acquaah (2007:1236) goes on to reveal that the 2005 special issue of the *Journal of Management Studies* did not contain a single paper on strategy in an African context. Research suggests there is limited research on Africa and its emerging economies (Fosu, 2013; Banya & Biekpe, 2017; Acquaah, 2007).

The question arises why strategy research on emerging economies has focused on Asia, Eastern Europe, and South America, and only limited research has emphasised the emerging economies of Africa and the Middle East (Xie, Reddy & Liang, 2017; Acquaah, 2007). A study by Kolk and Rivera-Santos (2016) analysed

139 articles with an African focus since 2010, with the aim of better understanding the extent of Africa as a research context. The analysis revealed a disproportion in relation to topics, theory, type of contribution, context approach, and publication patterns in comparison to other regional contexts. However, African research is growing due to the economic growth in some African regions and the participation of African firms in the global economy (Degbey, Eriksson, Rodgers & Oguji, 2021). Even though African firms have expanded internationally, most are concentrated within their sub-regions, while some have a pan-African presence within African countries (Degbey et al., 2021).

Banking standards in Africa may not be on par with developed regions (Nyantakyi & Sy, 2015; Fosu, 2013). However, recent financial sector reforms across the African continent have led to deregulation of the financial sector, privatisation, entry of foreign banks, and interest and exchange regulation (Oguji, Degbey & Owusu, 2021; Banya & Biekpe, 2017; Sufian & Kamarudin, 2016; Fosu, 2013). These reforms have led to increased competition (Banya & Biekpe, 2017) and significant levels of economic growth in the African financial sector, which is now recognised as one of the fastest developing sectors on the continent (Oguji et al., 2021; Degby et al.; 2021; Fosu, 2013). South Africa ranks 61st in the World Economic Forum global ranking index and is ranked 5th among countries in the Middle East and African regions (Schwab, 2018). The Global Competitiveness Index measures national competitiveness of 140 economies of the world. Morocco is the only other African country in the top 75.

Although there has been success across the sub regions in Africa, the Southern African region is the most successful. This region boasts the top banks in Africa, with a well-developed and sophisticated banking system and includes South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Angola, and Mauritius (Fosu, 2013). This has encouraged competition amongst African banks (Banya & Biekpe, 2017), but South African banks still dominate banking in Africa. For instance, 40.4% of total banking assets of the top 200 banks in Africa were held by South African banks (Sufian & Kamarudin, 2016; Mlambo & Ncube, 2011).

## **2.5.2 Banking in South Africa**

South Africa is the only African member country of the G8 and is the hub of economic development in the Southern African region (Sufian & Kamarudin, 2016). In comparison to the rest of Africa, South Africa has a well-developed financial sector that is highly regulated and supported by a sound legal system. Nonetheless, the South African banking sector is oligopolistic (Sufian & Kamarudin, 2016; Nyantakyi & Sy, 2015; Ifeacho & Ngalawa, 2014) and dominated by the five major banks: Standard Bank, Amalgamated Banks of South Africa Limited (ABSA), Nedbank, First National Bank (FNB), and Investec Bank (Sufian & Kamarudin, 2016; Chigada & Ngulube, 2015; Mutsonziwa, 2015; Ifeacho & Ngalawa, 2014). According to the South African Reserve Bank Prudential Authority Report 2020-2021, these five banks have held 90.1% of the total assets of the banking-sector as of 31 March 2021. The banking environment is highly competitive, thus forcing banks to ensure they are aligned to the rapidly changing environment (Chigada & Ngulube, 2015; Mutsonziwa, 2015). New entrants such as Tyme Bank and Discovery Bank have significantly changed the operating environment, indicating strong competition in the future (Buthelezi, 2019).

The South African banking environment did not escape the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic and was severely impacted by the economic downturn. Although banks played a role in the pandemic by providing financial relief to distressed customers and businesses during lockdown, banks did not escape the impact to profitability, credit management and volatility in the financial markets (KPMG, 2020). Uncertain conditions are expected to continue in the foreseeable future, forcing banks to introduce cost savings measures if they are to survive and remain profitable. Cost cutting measures that banks have resorted to include closure of branches, consolidation of real estate space, and continuous work from home. These cost-cutting measures inevitably result in impacts to employees in the form of downsizing, retrenchments, or contract terminations. The COVID-19 impact similarly provided an uplift in the use of digital technology in banking and working from home. Banks increased their digital capabilities to enable remote banking for customers and working from home for employees to reduce the risk of COVID-19

infections (Herath & Herath, 2020; Abdullah, Rahmat, Zawawi, Khamsah & Anuarsham, 2020; KPMG, 2020). However, the consequences of work from home resulted in difficulties for employees. COVID-19 in itself was viewed as a stressor, and this was exacerbated by work from home challenges, which included increased workloads, longer working hours, lack of social interaction, loss of productivity and work-life balance. These factors gave rise to additional anxiety and stress that impacted the well-being of employees, necessitating them to apply coping practices to manage their stress (Abdullah et al., 2020; Maykrantz, Nobiling, Oxarart, Langlinais & Houghton, 2021).

### **2.5.3 Challenges in the banking sector**

The financial industry environment is continuously changing due to the removal of barriers, the increased role of non-bank financial organisations, new entrants to the banking industry and increased globalisation and technological advancement. These factors affect the level and type of competition in the financial sector and are forcing organisations to adapt to the changes (Claessens, 2009; Buthelezi, 2019).

Unexpected competitors from non-bank sectors such as insurance and retail are also forcing established organisations to change the way they currently operate and adapt to more flexible structures (Claessens, 2009; Buthelezi, 2019). To formulate and implement strategic organisational change, banks must adapt and align with the dynamic changing organisational environment (Whittington et al., 2017; Ahearne, Lam & Kraus, 2014). In this dynamic and turbulent organisational environment that changes daily, banks must learn to recognise and adapt to relevant strategies to remain competitive. Many organisations approach such challenges by implementing significant organisational restructuring.

The almost daily changes to South African banks are driven by market conditions, as witnessed by the current happenings in the macro environment, such as the newly founded Discovery Bank, Bank Zero, and TymeDigital (Buthelezi, 2019). These new competitors are forcing established banks, which hold most of the banking market share, to revise and re-platform their technology and traditional



channels of doing business. Accordingly, established banks are focusing on digitisation, based on changing customer demands (Buthelezi, 2019).

The divestiture of Barclays Plc from Barclays Africa Group Limited in 2018 and the separation of Old Mutual as the majority shareholder in Nedbank in 2018 forced these banks to restructure to align with the changing environment. The disruption of the banking industry with the launch of Discovery Bank and five other new banks in South Africa in the first quarter of 2019 has compelled banks to change their strategies. The Financial Sector Regulation (FSR) Act on 1 April 2018 saw a new regulation coming into effect in South Africa. The Act makes provision for maintaining stability in the financial system and taking responsibility for market conduct and consumer protection, thereby adding to the regulatory operating burden for banks. These threats from established new banking sector entrants, together with the new regulation, have necessitated significant organisational change in order for banks to remain competitive and compliant. To counter these threats and comply fully with regulation, banks are compelled to change their traditional strategies and restructure the organisation to meet the challenges. Banks must look inward to rise to the challenges, as the traditional organisational hierarchy hinders the agility and pace at which they must realign for change. This is driving banks to downsize and adopt leaner structures designed to create more customer value while using fewer resources (McConville & Holden, 1999). The impact of this organisational restructuring was discussed in this literature review.

## **2.6 Chapter conclusion**

The middle manager is the change agent (Marshak & Bushe, 2018) for strategic organisational change, as the implementer, receiver, and agent of the strategic change (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). Thus, the middle manager can influence and shape the change implementation and change outcome, while also trying to cope with the challenges of the change. Hence the interest in middle managers as practitioners who need to influence, shape and cope with change. This study aims to supplement the existing body of knowledge with a deeper understanding and knowledge of strategising practices, while emphasising the situational aspect of

strategising practices. This chapter reviewed the literature from a strategy-as-practice perspective and its contemporary topics concerning practices and practitioners.

For this study, the practices were coping practices situated at the micro-level and were from the perspective of middle manager practitioners. The literature was also reviewed from the perspective of middle managers in strategic organisational restructuring. Challenges middle managers faced in the organisational restructuring process, and how middle managers coped with the stress resulting from the change was considered.

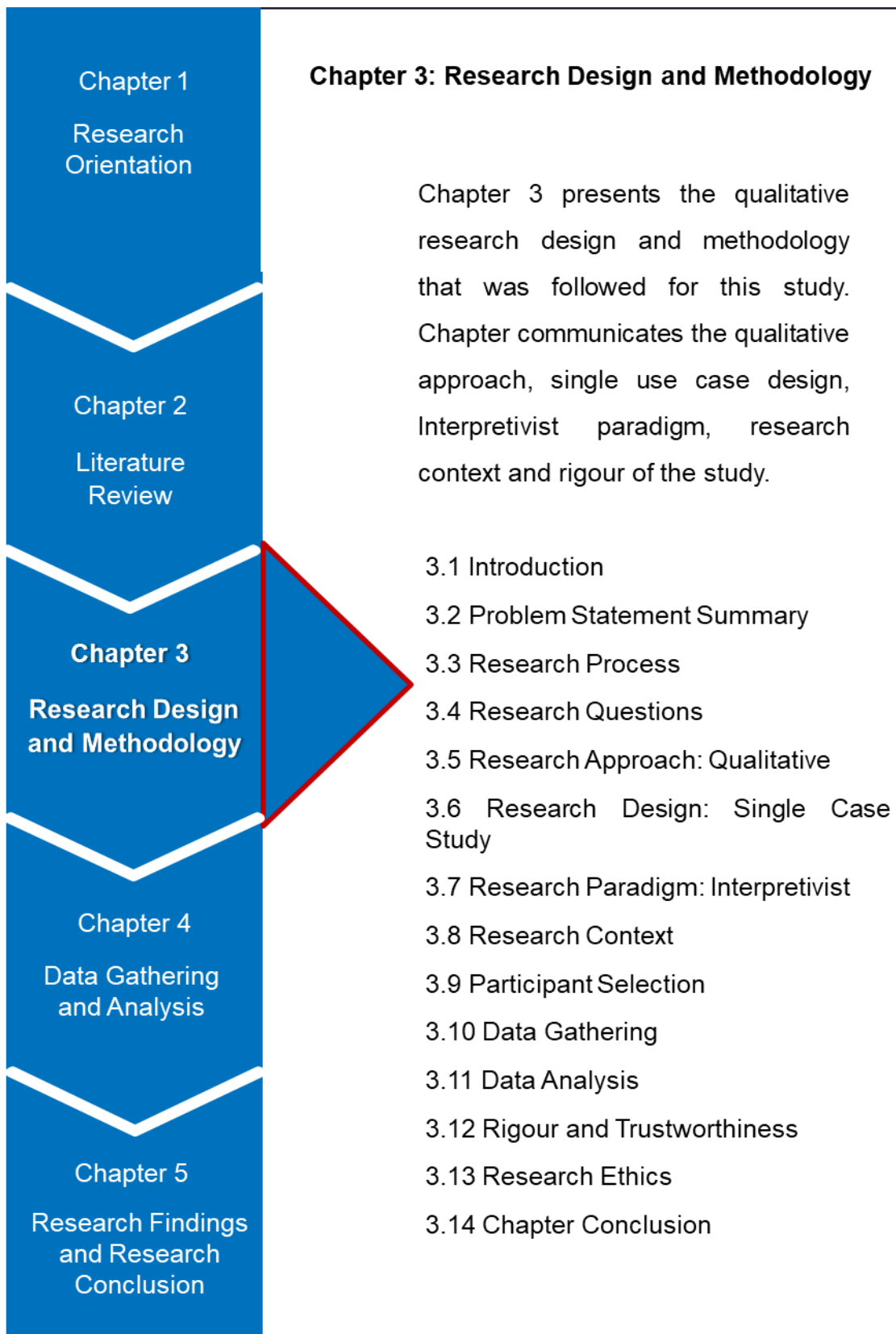
When the combination of practice and practitioner is used appropriately, it can lead to greater business value. This is especially the case during organisational restructuring, where middle manager practitioners must influence and shape the change implementation and change outcome, and at the same time cope with the challenges of the change. Having a repository of background coping skills lends itself to this study of coping practices of middle manager practitioners during organisational restructuring. This background will contribute to understanding the coping practices of middle manager practitioners during organisational restructuring.

For middle managers, organisational restructuring is accompanied by challenges, which have an impact on their role and well-being. Consequently, middle managers are required to make use of coping practices to cope with the challenges caused by the restructure. The importance of the role of middle managers in the organisation is recognised. This is especially the case during organisational restructuring where middle managers play an essential role in implementing and obtaining support for the organisational change.

From a strategy-as-practice perspective, researchers acknowledge the micro-level practices of strategising, referred to as coping practices in this study. There is scope for this to be further explored. The interconnectedness, interrelatedness, influence, and effect that middle managers, through their coping practices, have on

organisational restructuring and organisational change should be researched further. Figure 3.1 offers the positioning of Chapter 3 within the dissertation.

**Figure 3.1 Chapter 3 Overview**



## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter 3 builds on the previous chapters. Chapter 1 described the purpose of this study and the problem statement. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to expand on the position of this study, which is to explore the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a South African bank. This was done by reviewing the literature to obtain an understanding of the research phenomenon from the perspective of the scholars. Chapter 2 provided a foundation for the study on how middle managers cope during organisational restructuring. Chapter 3 offers the methodological framework that was adopted to answer the research questions. This chapter starts by offering more detail on the problem statement that informed the current study.

### **3.2 Problem statement summary**

How middle managers cope with the uncertainty of organisational restructuring is of utmost importance to their well-being and to the outcome of the change. Middle managers are tasked with implementing organisational restructuring. However, they struggle with stress, heightened by the uncertainty and anxiety of the change process. The accompanying roles which middle managers are required to perform in the course of the restructure cause conflict, and heighten the anxiety with which they are already beset. This impacts the well-being of middle managers, and if not managed, will result in emotional, mental, and physical problems. If stress is not reduced, it could have an adverse effect on employees, resulting in negative implications for middle managers productivity and performance, and subsequently on the success of the organisational change outcome. The problem that the current study set out to address is the knowledge gap on the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring and the consequences in a South African bank.

### **3.3 Research process**

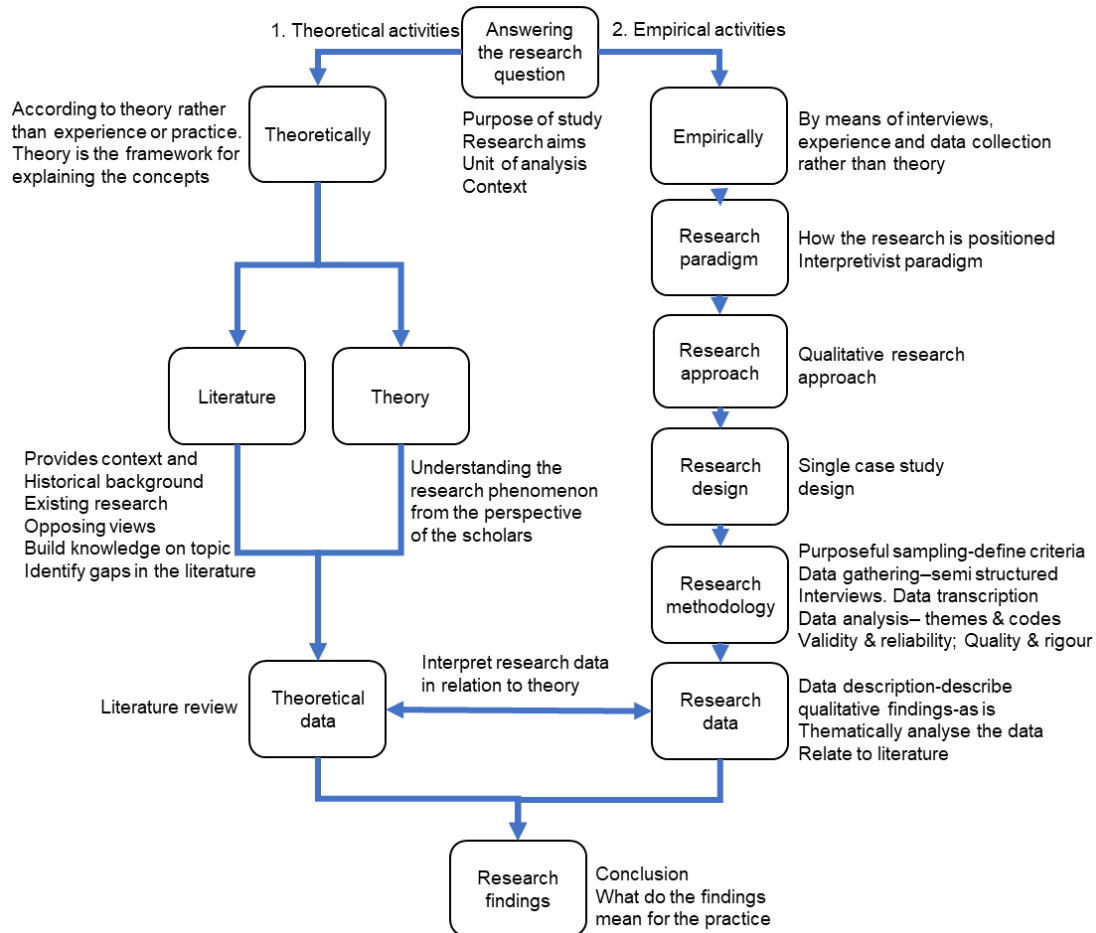
Figure 3.2 outlines the qualitative research process that guided this study. The problem addressed by this study deals with the knowledge gap on how middle managers cope during organisational restructuring. This study also obtained a deeper understanding of middle managers' coping practices in the context of a South African bank. Figure 3.2 presents the parallel paths of the research process that this study undertook: (1) the theoretical activities; and (2) the empirical activities of the qualitative research process. The theoretical and empirical activities progressed in parallel and linked when the research data was interpreted and understood in relation to the theory, thereby determining the resultant findings of this study.

**Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring - a case study in a South African bank**

**Qualitative Research Process**

**Problem statement:**

How middle managers cope with the uncertainty of organisational restructuring is of utmost importance to their well-being and outcome of change. Middle managers are tasked with implementing organisational restructuring, they struggle with stress heightened by the uncertainty and anxiety of the change process. The roles they are required to perform in the course of the restructure causes conflict and heightens the anxiety that middle managers are already beset with, resulting in greater stress. Literature suggests that little is known of the social phenomenon of middle managers coping practices during organisational restructuring in a South African Bank and calls for further studies.



**Figure 3.2 Qualitative Research Process of this Study**

Source: Author

Figure 3.2 diagrammatically presents the qualitative research process applied in this study. The research process followed theoretical activities and empirical activities, bringing together the theoretical and research data from which findings and conclusions were drawn to answer the research question. The diagram highlights the aspects and activities of the research process that were carried out for this study. The research process connects the findings to the research questions and provides the roadmap for answering the research questions.

### **3.4 Research questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring. The primary and secondary aims of this study were articulated as research questions.

#### **3.4.1 Primary research question**

3.4.1.1 What are the coping practices of middle managers during strategic organisational restructuring in a selected organisation?

#### **3.4.2 Secondary research questions**

3.4.2.1 How do middle managers cope during organisational restructuring?

3.4.2.2 What are the outcomes of the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring?

### **3.5 Research approach: qualitative**

The qualitative approach is described as “research about persons’ lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings as well as about organisational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations” (Rahman, 2017:103). Given that the purpose of this study was to explore how middle managers coped during organisational restructuring, the qualitative approach was considered appropriate to gather the deep, rich information required to explore the coping practices of middle managers.

Gaining the personal experiences of middle managers during organisational restructuring was deemed important. This served to gain further insight into the limited understanding of the social phenomenon of middle managers coping practices during organisational restructuring in a South African bank. The data gathered provided a deeper understanding and context of the phenomena, and of how middle managers made sense of their world and experienced the organisational restructuring events.



Exploring how middle managers experienced and made sense of the restructuring event required a pragmatic and flexible approach (Mills, Harrison, Franklin & Birks, 2017). Questions were designed to explore thoughts and feelings, to probe for more information on a specific topic, or to explore comments that were ambiguous or interesting. According to Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, Young (2018:2), “the level of structure of questions in qualitative interviewing has been found to influence the richness of data generated”. Asking open-ended questions as the interview progresses, yields richer information (Vasileiou et al., 2018; Morse, 2000). Hence, the qualitative semi-structured interview technique that is pragmatic and flexible was appropriate for this study to gather rich descriptions. This was important to determine how middle managers coped during a highly emotive organisational restructure, what the coping practices of the middle managers were, and what the outcomes of the coping practices were.

Qualitative analysis is intended to provide a subjective understanding of the social and cultural situation of the phenomenon of coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring. This allows for interpretation to obtain meaning of the individual personal experiences (Salkind, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Smaller sized samples are used to support the in-depth information analysis that is fundamental to a qualitative case study (Vasileiou et al., 2018; Mangan, Lalwani & Gardner, 2004; Morse, 2000). Therefore, a qualitative study was deemed suitable, as the study expected to gather in-depth information from a small number of middle managers about their experience of organisational restructuring.

Qualitative research on middle manager coping practices during organisational restructuring can only expand on existing knowledge. Comprehensive knowledge of middle managers’ organisational restructuring practices and processes will be beneficial in identifying the types of effects of restructuring on middle managers and ways they can proactively cope with the effects.

### **3.6 Research design: single case study**

For this study, a qualitative research approach and research paradigm was applied to guide the choice of an inductive, in-depth, single case study as the research design. This allowed for the gathering of in-depth data, and for performing the content analysis required to explore how middle managers coped during organisational restructuring. The single case study design is commonly used in exploratory studies where flexible and unstructured data gathering, such as qualitative studies, is required. In this study, the single case design supported the chosen qualitative approach, which is flexible and pragmatic (Mills et al., 2017), using semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data as explained in Section 3.3. Flexibility was required in the gathering of data, as the purpose of this exploratory study was to search for ideas and concepts and understand the actual situation of middle managers' coping practices during organisational restructure.

The 'how' and 'why' questions were critical to this study to explore what coping practices middle managers used during organisational restructure, and what the outcomes of the coping practices were. To answer these questions, the study used semi-structured interviews to gather data. To identify the coping practices, firstly the triggers that caused stress had to be identified. This data was gathered by asking participants 'how' and 'why', which led to participants revealing their coping practices. Secondly, the research had to uncover detailed processes and practices of the middle managers during the restructure. In this instance, the single case study made it possible to ask the 'how' and 'why' questions of the phenomenon within its situated context, and focused on a specific group of people (Yin, 2018; Yin, 2003).

Challenges were expected with the single case study if the scope of the study was too broad. To prevent a broad and general scope for the case study, boundaries had to be defined (Baxter & Jack, 2008) to determine what would and what would not be studied (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995). Confining the focus of the topic to coping practices during organisational restructuring in a single case organisation reduced the chance of the scope of the study being too broad.

Factors that can determine and alter boundaries of the study are time and activity (Stake, 1995); time and place (Creswell, 2018); and context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The following factors bound this study:

- Time—the organisational restructuring retrenchments during 2019 to 2020, which to an extent are still in effect due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Place or context—the organisational restructuring of the Africa Technology division of the bank.
- Activity—coping practices during organisational restructuring.

Single case studies may not be generalisable, but could possibly be transferable in that the research design and method could be transferred to other contexts, especially to other banks in the financial industry. For this study, a single case study was necessary to support the need for a practical, flexible, comprehensive, context related study that provided in-depth information on middle managers coping practices (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Tellis, 1997).

### **3.7 Research paradigm: interpretivist**

The research paradigm, or ‘worldview’ (Creswell, 2018:5), underpins how the personal experiences of the middle managers were understood and interpreted. A paradigm is viewed as “the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed” (Kuhn 1962, cited in Patel, 2015: para 1). Scientists’ paradigms are characterised by the following factors:

- Ontology – What is reality?
- Epistemology – How do you know something?
- Methodology – How do you go about finding it out? (Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Guba, 1990).

Paradigms represent “a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the “world”, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts” (Creswell, 2018, Guba & Lincoln, 1994:107).

This qualitative study aligns to the interpretivist paradigm in several ways. The interpretive method is synonymous with qualitative research in that it relies on the gathering of information and then attempts to derive theory relevant to the phenomenon under exploration by scrutinising the information. The interpretive method assumes that participants' social reality is not unique, but is shaped by their individual experience and the context of the phenomena. It involves understanding the world from the first-hand experiences of individuals, and is subjectively based on the personal beliefs, opinions, and feelings of the individuals (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Interpretivism accepts that there are many interpretations or "double hermeneutics" (Elshafie, 2013:7) and emphasises meaning over measurement, as meaning differs from individual to individual. Thus, the phenomenon is best understood, firstly, within the social setting and environment of which it is a part, and secondly, by bringing together participants' individual subjective interpretation of their experience to surface hidden meanings. In doing so, the interpretive method enabled this study to understand the 'how' of the phenomenon, which is aligned to answering the research question of this study of exploring how middle managers cope during organisational restructuring.

Given that this study attempted to understand the world from the perspective of the participants by interpreting the 'how', it can be considered interpretivist. To understand the 'how', an interpretive analysis focuses on language, signs, and meaning from the perspective of the participants. Although the interpretive method may be labour and resource intensive, it provided a framework that enabled simultaneous and iterative data gathering and analysis. Considering that interpretivism is based on the individual, subjective understanding of events of the participants who experienced them, this paradigm was deemed appropriate for this study.

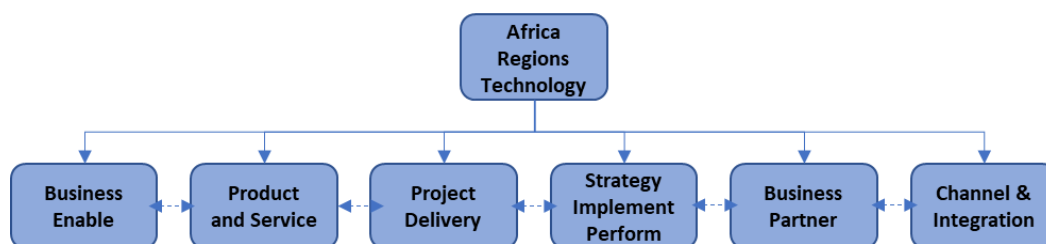
### **3.8 Research context**

The single case study of the bank was applied to gather rich data on middle managers' coping during organisational restructuring, as it focused on the same situation within the same organisation with a specific group of middle managers.

The case site was specifically chosen, based on the fit of the participants and organisational circumstance to adequately answer the research question, and not only for access and convenience. Having quicker and easier access to participants in their work environment also confirmed the concept of holism in case studies, where the individuals and their context are viewed as a whole and not as a collection of parts (Van Niekerk & May, 2012). This highlights the importance of context as a determinant of behaviour in single case studies. In addition, being in their work environment made recollection easier for participants. The organisational restructuring situation within the bank at that point in time offered the appropriate opportunity for the application of a single case study within its natural setting (Yin, 2018).

### 3.8.1 Strategising in the bank

To achieve the strategic objectives of organisational restructuring, the bank followed an integrative strategy process where the strategic conception and direction were defined at corporate level and cascaded to lower levels. The business level strategy determined the strategic initiatives that supported the strategic direction of the organisation and allocated resources accordingly. The operational level of the organisation determined how the strategic initiatives were implemented. The Strategy Business Units within each of the bank's organisational levels were responsible for the coordination and communication of the strategy process. Figure 3.3 is an illustrative organogram of the Africa Regions Technology Division within which the restructuring took place.



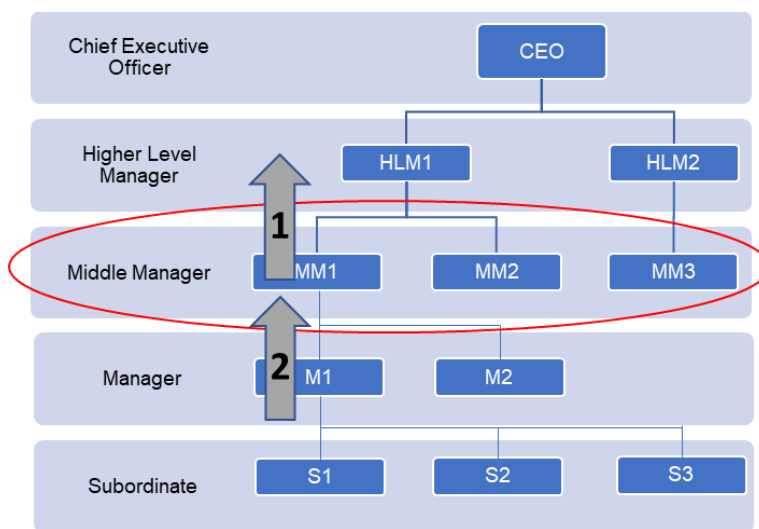
**Figure 3.3 Illustrative Organogram of Africa Regions Technology Division**

Source: Author

The Africa Regions Technology Division organogram highlights the strategy process within the division. Figure 3.3 depicts the business unit and the context within which this study took place.

### 3.8.2 Organisational analysis: middle manager role

This section positions the middle manager within the case organisation. Since the unit of analysis of this study was coping practices of middle managers, Figure 3.4 depicts the interactions and relations that middle managers performed across the bank.

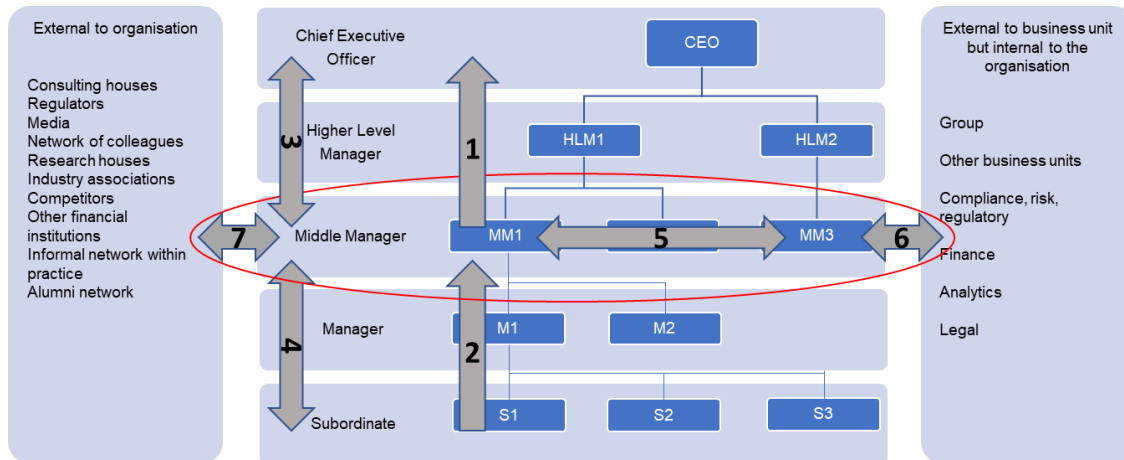


**Figure 3.4 Illustrative Case Study Business Unit Organogram of the Bank**

Source: Author

Figure 3.4 presents the case study business unit organogram in the bank and depicts the hierarchical position of the middle manager for this study. For the current study, middle managers are defined as a manager who reports to a manager and has managers reporting to them (Jansen Van Rensburg, Davis & Venter, 2014:173). The middle manager is situated in the middle of the hierarchy and reports upwards to the Higher-Level Manager as indicated by arrow 1. Middle Managers have Managers reporting to them as indicated by arrow 2. Middle managers play a key role as implementers of strategic change, change agents, and recipients of change.

Figure 3.5 presents the roles and relationships of middle managers in organisational restructuring.



**Figure 3.5 Middle Manager Relations and Direction of Influence**

Source: Author

Figure 3.5 presents the relational and influential directions of middle managers during the organisational restructure. Arrow 3 illustrates the bi-directional relation from middle manager to upper management levels. Arrow 4 illustrates the bi-directional relation from middle manager to lower management levels. Within the middle manager level, the lateral relations are illustrated by arrow 5. Arrow 6 and 7 illustrated the bi-directional relation from middle manager to the internal organisational environment and to the environment external to the organisation. Middle managers must coordinate these relations and associated activities.

Strategy practitioners are considered to be, “actors who shape the construction of practice through who they are, how they act and what resources they draw upon” (Burgelman et al., 2018:7). Based on the prevailing situation, middle managers also used their informal networks as a resource (Ahearne et al., 2014) and their knowledge of their organisational context and networks to influence others in the change process (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011).

### **3.8.3 Insider perspective**

The researcher is a middle management staff member of the participating bank and had been in its employ for five and a half years at the time of this study. The researcher had more than 20 years of experience within the banking industry in South Africa, including 10 years as a middle manager, and experienced organisational restructuring several times during this tenure.

Insider information into the organisation enabled the researcher to enhance the quality of the participant selection for this study, purposefully selecting middle managers with knowledge and experience of organisational restructuring. Similarly, understanding the organisational restructuring situation in the bank assisted in the design of the research and the interview questions. It also assisted in obtaining the information required to explore the coping practices of middle manager participants (Fleming, 2018).

It is important in social research, especially in case study methodology, that the researcher's role be clarified for the research to be credible (Unluer, 2012). In this study, the researcher is an insider in the organisation with first-hand, experience of the organisational restructuring. An insider is "more familiar to the group to be studied" (Saidin, 2017:850). As a member of the organisation and a peer of the participants, the researcher was familiar with, and understood the organisational and business unit culture and participated in the organisational restructure.

Contradictory outcomes of the insider perspective have been presented. An insider researcher could be biased and lose objectivity, whilst on the other hand, insider researchers could facilitate the research study within the organisation and bring rationality to the phenomenon under study (Fleming, 2018; Saidin, 2017). Outsiders encounter problems in understanding and explaining the concerns, on the grounds that outsiders cannot relate to the phenomenon under study or the organisational culture in which the phenomenon and study are situated (Saidin, 2017).

In terms of the current study, being an insider was advantageous. This was due to having first-hand, in-depth knowledge and understanding of the organisational



restructuring process, together with the organisational knowledge and business language. The researcher had a rapport with the participants, which facilitated the research process and protocols, making data gathering quicker and easier (Saidin, 2017).

The researcher was always aware of the responsibility to the organisation, being cognisant of the sensitivity and confidentiality of the data gathered from the participants. Therefore, the research ethics and guidelines as laid out by the University of South Africa were adhered to in carrying out this study, ensuring credible research. To limit insider bias, every effort was made to not relate own experiences of the restructure during participant interviews. Other measures to limit insider bias included participants' reviews of their interview transcripts to confirm and validate the completeness and correctness of the data. Additionally, multiple coders were used for data analysis to gain a different perspective of the data.

### **3.9 Participant sampling and selection**

Samples in qualitative case study research tend to be smaller because smaller sized samples are used to support the in-depth information analysis that is fundamental to a qualitative case study (Vasileiou et al., 2018; Mangan et al., 2004; Morse, 2000). This study aimed to gather in-depth information from a small number of middle managers about their experience of organisational restructuring according to the qualitative approach.

#### **3.9.1 Participants**

The participants in this study were middle managers within the case, who report to a manager, have managers report to them, and who are involved in strategising in a bank that is undergoing organisational restructuring. The participants were not limited to a gender, race, age, or education, but had to be employees of the organisation. Participants were selected from the bank as per the selection criterion in Table 3.1.

<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>
Currently employed at the bank in the Africa Regions Technology Division	Not employed at the bank  Employed at the bank but not in the Africa Regions Technology Division
Permanent staff and contractors	Non-permanent staff (contractors)
Meet the definition of middle manager as proposed for this study:  A middle manager is a manager who reports to a manager and has managers reporting to them (Jansen Van Rensburg, Davis & Venter, 2014).	Middle managers who do not report to a manager and do not have managers reporting to them i.e., participants who do not meet the definition of middle manager as defined for this study
Three or more years of middle management experience in the bank	Less than three years middle management experience in the bank
Middle managers with a minimum of two years strategic planning, design, or implementation experience	Middle managers with less than two years of strategic planning, design, or implementation experience
Involved in the current Africa Regions Technology Division organisational restructuring and downsizing at the bank	No involvement in the current Africa Regions Technology Division organisational restructuring and downsizing at the bank

**Table 3.1 Participant Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Source: Author

The inclusion criterion for this study constitutes important elements of the target sample that was specified to explore how middle managers cope with the uncertainties of organisational restructuring. The participating middle managers were chosen based on the research question of this study (Salkind, 2014). i.e., what

are the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a selected organisation? These middle managers provided their individual accounts and perspectives of how they experienced organisational restructuring.

### **3.9.2 Purposeful sampling**

Once permission was obtained from the bank for the research activity, a list of all middle managers within the Africa Technology Division was obtained from HR to identify the participants for the case study. The researcher identified and met with the gatekeeper of the division to confirm the list of middle managers. The list of possible participants was reviewed in line with the study's inclusion and exclusion criteria and a final list of possible participants was identified for the study. Purposeful or non-probability sampling was applied to support the case study. The purposeful sampling method enabled the careful and intentional selection of experienced middle manager participants. These participants therefore provided intimate knowledge, deep perspectives, and insights into their experiences of the bank's organisational restructuring and how they coped during this time. Purposeful sampling is a form of non-probability sampling where own judgment is used when carefully selecting members of the population to participate in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2013).

The sample size for this study was a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 15 participants. The final sample size of 13 participants was sufficiently broad and experienced to ensure that all possible data and themes related to the research study were uncovered. Based on their experience with qualitative studies, a 'general, numerical guideline' (Marshall & Rossman, 2013:12) was necessary, in order to plan the research study and protocols. However, an absence of firm guidelines in determining the sample size serves as a deterrent for future qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2013). In examination of qualitative studies of information systems and their sample size, Marshall et al. (2013) recommended that the research design specify a minimum sample size based on the expected depth of analysis of the phenomenon and purpose of the study.

### **3.9.3 Sample selection and size**

The process of identifying and selecting the sample for this study commenced in June 2019. Insider knowledge and experience enabled the researcher to build formal and informal networks within the organisation. These networks were leveraged to gain access to participants and information related to middle managers and their experience of organisational restructuring. This organisational information was used to enhance the quality of the participant selection for this study by purposefully selecting middle managers with related levels of knowledge and experience of organisational restructuring.

The target population included all individuals who are middle managers that have been employed for more than three years at Africa Regions Technology. In addition, they had to have experienced organisational restructuring, were either permanent or contract employees, and had more than two years of strategic planning, design, or implementation experience. They also had to have other managers reporting to them. The target population was identified from the approximately 95 employees of the Africa Regions Technology division. From a total of approximately 95 staff members, 16 individuals met the defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Together with the researcher's insider knowledge of the participants, the 16 individuals were purposively identified as suitable for this study.

Only middle managers involved in the strategic organisational restructure were selected as participants, thereby ensuring that trustworthy data were obtained. Of the 16 identified individuals, 13 accepted the request for participation in this study. The 13 participants were considered the final sample for the study, which was sufficiently broad and experienced to ensure that all possible data and themes related to the research study were uncovered.

### **3.10 Data gathering**

In alignment with the qualitative research, semi-structured virtual interviews were used as the primary method of data gathering for this study. Semi-structured interviews, as a means for gathering in-depth data, were appropriate for the

interpretivist paradigm on which this study is premised. The interpretivist paradigm entails understanding the world from the first-hand experiences of individuals involved, and is subjectively based on their personal beliefs, opinions, behaviours, and feelings (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Interpretivism was appropriate for this qualitative case study because it emphasised meaning over measurement, as the meaning of coping during organisational restructure differed from middle manager to middle manager.

### **3.10.1 Data gathering method: semi-structured virtual interviews**

In alignment with the case study method, face-to-face semi-structured interviews on-site at the bank were originally intended. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the semi-structured face-to-face interviews had to be amended. In line with the University's revised research protocols for human participants to mitigate the risks of face-to-face contact, this study had to amend the approach to data gathering from face-to-face interview to virtual interviews. Online virtual semi-structured interviews were conducted in English, with 13 participants identified as part of the purposeful sampling. Interviews were conducted in English, as all participants were competent in English. Thirteen (13) participants ensured the data gathered covered the depth and breadth of the middle manager coping practices during organisational restructuring, and ensured that saturation was reached at Interview 12 (Mason, 2010).

Saturation is reached when no new data is gathered from the sample. Subsequent interviews did not provide new themes. The semi-structured interview technique was considered appropriate for this study because it started with pre-determined open-ended questions. Open-ended questions allow for probing in order to further explore participants' thoughts and feelings, or comments that are ambiguous or interesting.

### **3.10.2 Semi-structured interview guide**

The chosen qualitative case study design guided the choice of data gathering instrument. A semi-structured interview guide developed, based on the central research question and the research primary and secondary research questions in

Section 3.4. The structure of the interview guide was aligned to the research questions and categorised into: 1) Biographical information and work history; 2) Impact of organisational restructuring; 3) Coping with organisational restructuring; and 4) Close of interview. In total, the interview comprised of 14 open-ended questions. A copy of the interview guide is included in Appendix E. The interview guide and questions were finalised prior to the data gathering.

The open-ended questions gave the researcher the opportunity to explore responses that led to further interesting and unforeseen areas of inquiry into the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring. A list of questions and key points were created and posed in the interview. The questions were in English and were worded in the business language that the participants understood. All participants were asked the same questions and in the same sequence. Additional questions were asked when the researcher felt that further elaboration or information was needed where comments were interesting and relevant to this study, or where they were unclear.

The aim and purpose of the interview was introduced and explained. The bank's consent and participants' consent to the virtual interviews was confirmed, and participants' confidentiality and their responses were reiterated, and agreement to record the interviews was confirmed. This was to ensure that all ethical requirements were adhered to. Interviews were recorded and saved as digital audio MP4 file format.

The questions were formulated with the aim to gather rich data to answer the research questions described in Section 3.2, and were informed by the existing body of knowledge. The questions were relevant and appropriate to explore middle managers' coping practices during organisational restructuring. Questions were grouped according to the research questions, and followed a logical sequence. The interview guide ensured easy navigation of the questions and notes document so that when a participant answered a question as part of another question, it could be easily accessed without delay. The researcher was always cognisant of the length of the interview to limit participants' data costs and kept the length of the interview

to the minimum. In addition, the interviews were conducted virtually via MS Teams, Zoom, and iPhone Facetime. This allowed for more open discussion and presented less scope for misunderstandings or misinterpretation in comparison to written communication. Hearing participants speak, enabled the researcher to identify afflictions and other emotions in the tone of voice and experience free, open, and honest responses.

### **3.10.3 Data transcription**

Data familiarity was accomplished by carefully listening to the audio recordings of the interviews a few times before data transcription of the digital audio MP4 files. Listening carefully to the data enabled the researcher to first understand the data without any preconceived expectations and interpretations of the data (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020). The recordings were transcribed verbatim into MS Word and PDF format documents by an independent external transcriber for detailed analysis and coding. Transcripts were closely examined for evidence that would uncover possible unexpected and hidden phenomena in the data (Lester et al., 2020). The transcriber signed a non-disclosure agreement for the confidentiality of the participants and their associated data. The audio recordings were saved in individual participant folders on a password-protected laptop and on the transcriber's password-protected laptop. The participant folders were titled according to the participant number assigned to the participant as per the deidentification criteria applied by this study.

It was critical for the analysis and interpretation of the data that the text captured how things were said. The meanings of the words influenced how things were said and what was said; therefore, transcriptions were detailed (Lester et al., 2020). The textual transcribed data was matched with the corresponding context data of the interviews and the reflective notes made during interviews. Reflective notes were not a source of data to be used for data analysis but were used to limit insider bias and make sense of the process. Subjective notes were written down of the researcher's experience of the interview, the participants, and the interview itself. In

reviewing the reflective notes with the interview transcriptions, the researcher easily recalled feelings and emotions of the interview and participants.

### **3.11 Data analysis**

The primary data gathered from the interviews was analysed using qualitative data analysis by means of coding and thematic analysis according to Saldaña (2021). Data was coded and categorised by themes using the research questions as a guide. Data analysis software added value and refinement to the coding process, together with an audit trail for transparency of the analysis process (Smit, 2005). Smit (2014) describes ATLAS.ti as a powerful workbench for the qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio, and video data. Chapter 4 describes the data analysis process for this study.

### **3.12 Rigour and trustworthiness**

Validity and reliability convey the rigour and trustworthiness of the study. This study applied the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as a check for validity (Amin, Nørgaard, Cavaco, Witry, Hillman, Cernasev & Desselle, 2020).

#### **3.12.1 Validity**

##### **3.12.1.1 Credibility**

When the multiple data sources are combined in the data analysis process rather than analysed individually, the results allow for greater understanding of the data and the findings are more credible with confidence in the findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Anney, 2014). To obtain this credibility and confidence, the qualitative case study method uses several data sources for data gathering. This case study used semi-structured virtual interviews and interview notes as the primary source of data. The recorded interviews were transcribed and scrutinised, crosschecked, and matched to the interview notes of each participant. In addition, participants were requested to review their respective interview transcript for completeness and



correctness. To further ensure credibility, authentic, verbatim quotes extracted from the interviews were used when describing themes and sub-themes.

#### 3.12.1.2 Dependability

Dependability was demonstrated by a systematic and transparent research process. The revised data gathering protocols as presented to the Research Ethics Committee was adhered to. The researcher engaged with supervisors and was guided on the research process, particularly on the acceptable number of participants for the qualitative case study.

#### 3.12.1.3 Confirmability

The researcher documented the detailed processes of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation of the data. The researcher made reflective notes about the interview data for each participant, coded and themed the data. The researcher represented and described the details of how and why the data is themed and coded in a diagrammatic representation of the Saldaña (2021) qualitative research data analysis. The actual interview data of one of the main themes identified was used, thereby ensuring that the data reflects the actual event and experience of this study.

#### 3.12.1.4 Transferability

Results from case study analysis are not generalisable (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena & Nigam, 2013; Lavarda, Canet-Giner & Peris-Bonet, 2010) but are potentially transferable. Given that this is a single case study, all participants were from the same case organisation. Consequently, this study's generalisability was reduced.

#### 3.12.1.5 Trustworthiness

The researcher used the following criteria to address validity as emphasised by Creswell (2018):

**Member checking** – To address the trustworthiness of the data, participants were provided with a copy of their interview transcript and were requested to check the accuracy and correctness of the data from the transcription. Participants confirmed

the interview data was correct, and no corrections were made to the interview transcripts.

**Rich thick descriptions** – Detailed descriptions and interpretations of the context of the organisational restructure situation and individual participant interviews were provided by the researcher. This was to convey to the reader the nature, setting, actions, and feelings about the organisational restructure so that the reader would have a measure of the organisational restructure experience of the participants.

**Peer debriefing** – Is a qualitative technique that allows a qualified peer researcher to review and assess aspects of the qualitative research process to improve the credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Given, 2008). The researcher used the guidance and support of highly qualified supervisors to confirm that the researcher appropriately applied and interpreted the qualitative method, data gathering, analysis, interpretation of findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

**Multiple coders** - Multiple coders ensured the data was viewed from multiple and different lenses thus expanding the view of the data. It helped to ensure trustworthiness and reliability of the findings and rich data analysis that may not have been achieved with a single coder (Church, Dunn & Prokopy, 2019).

### **3.12.2 Reliability**

Reliability is demonstrated by the consistency and stability of the approach (Creswell, 2018). All participants were interviewed using the same interview guide (Appendix E) and questions were asked in the same sequence to identify consistent data. This reinforced the trustworthiness of the process. Data collected was saved in participant folders using the participant's number. The researcher maintained detailed tracking of participants and interviews whilst also confirming the recorded interviews with the interview transcripts. Participants were also requested to check the transcripts of their interviews.

The interview transcripts were manually checked by the researcher for words and themes, and common words and themes were identified across all interviews as part of data coding and analysis in a repeatable process across participants. This

repeatable process allowed the researcher to ensure that information for all participants was recorded and stored and that information was not missed.

### **3.12.3 Authenticity**

This research study is relevant to the situation that most organisations are experiencing in today's times, as described in Chapter 2. The restructure and retrenchments in this study initiated a rationalisation of costs and new ways of working across the bank, which translated into non-renewal of contracts for contract workers, reduction in working hours, forced leave, increased workloads, sharing of staff due to non-replacement of staff who exited, a reduction in the pipeline of new initiatives, outsourcing, and basic cost cutting measures.

Employees experienced considerable anxiety and uncertainty when the bank embarked upon retrenchments, leaving staff feeling extremely uncertain about the future in the organisation. Given this challenging and unpredictable organisational environment, exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring is beneficial. This is due to the insight it provides into how staff at the forefront of organisational restructuring deal with the inherent challenges and complexities of organisational restructuring, and what coping practices they engaged in.

### **3.13 Research ethics**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a national state of disaster was declared in South Africa, and the entire country was placed on Alert Level 5. Under Alert Level 5 drastic measures were taken to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus and save lives. In accordance with Alert Level 5 restrictions, the University issued a Position Statement on Research Ethics dated 09 April 2020. The University supported the continuation of research activities where possible, guided by the principles and activities supported by the Policy on Research Ethics. The policy included protection for the participants, the researcher, and research support staff from any COVID-19 risks of harm while conducting research.

To mitigate the risks of regular contact, the protocols for data gathering in public spaces or in locations where social distancing cannot be practiced had to be revised. As described in Section 3.10.1, aligned to the University of South Africa's revised protocols for face-to-face data gathering, the researcher adopted a revised approach to data gathering which entailed virtual interviewing via MS Teams, Zoom and iPhone Facetime online platforms.

As mentioned in Sections 3.8.3 and 3.10.2, measures were also taken to ensure ethical research practices were adhered to, such as informed consent from participants and ensuring confidentiality of participants and their information by de-identifying participants with a participant number. Voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were provided with an electronic copy of the Participant Information Sheet summarising the study and information on why the research was being done and what the middle managers' involvement would be as a participant in this study.

Once participants confirmed the date, time, and electronic medium for the interview, the researcher scheduled the interview and included the participant consent forms and interview guide. Given the COVID-19 work-from-home situation, participants had limited access to printers and scanners and could not send signed consent responses in writing. Hence it was agreed that participant consent would be in the form of the virtual interview meeting acceptance.

The researcher signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) to ensure that all data gathered was stored securely with encryption on a password-protected laptop. The banking industry is a highly competitive industry, and any use of unauthorised information is considered a breach, therefore it was imperative to obtain the bank's permission to conduct research and adhere to the NDA, where participants' identity and the bank's identity were not disclosed. According to Unluer (2012), it is important for researchers in qualitative research to clarify their role. As stated earlier, this research study offers an insider perspective as the researcher is a middle management staff member of the participating bank. The researcher ensured that no issues of bias or perceptions of conflict existed as none of the participants

reported to the researcher. The advantage of insider information was that as a member of the organisation, the researcher understood the 'rich and complex' nature of the organisation (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). The researcher saw first-hand struggles that middle managers faced in coping with the complexity and demands of their roles during the organisational restructuring. Knowledge of the problems faced assisted the researcher in identifying common themes and patterns when interpreting the data and findings of this study.

No financial cost was incurred by participants apart from data costs. The ERC granted approval to proceed with data gathering via virtual interviews on condition that the data costs for virtual interviews should be considered. The researcher obtained agreement from identified participants regarding the cost of data for the virtual interview prior to commencement of interviews. Individual correspondence was sent to participants requesting their concerns regarding data costs for the virtual interviews. None of the identified participants raised concerns with regard to data costs. Confirmation was received that data gathering could proceed via virtual interviews. No reimbursements, gifts, services, or incentives were offered to participants as an incentive to participate in this study.

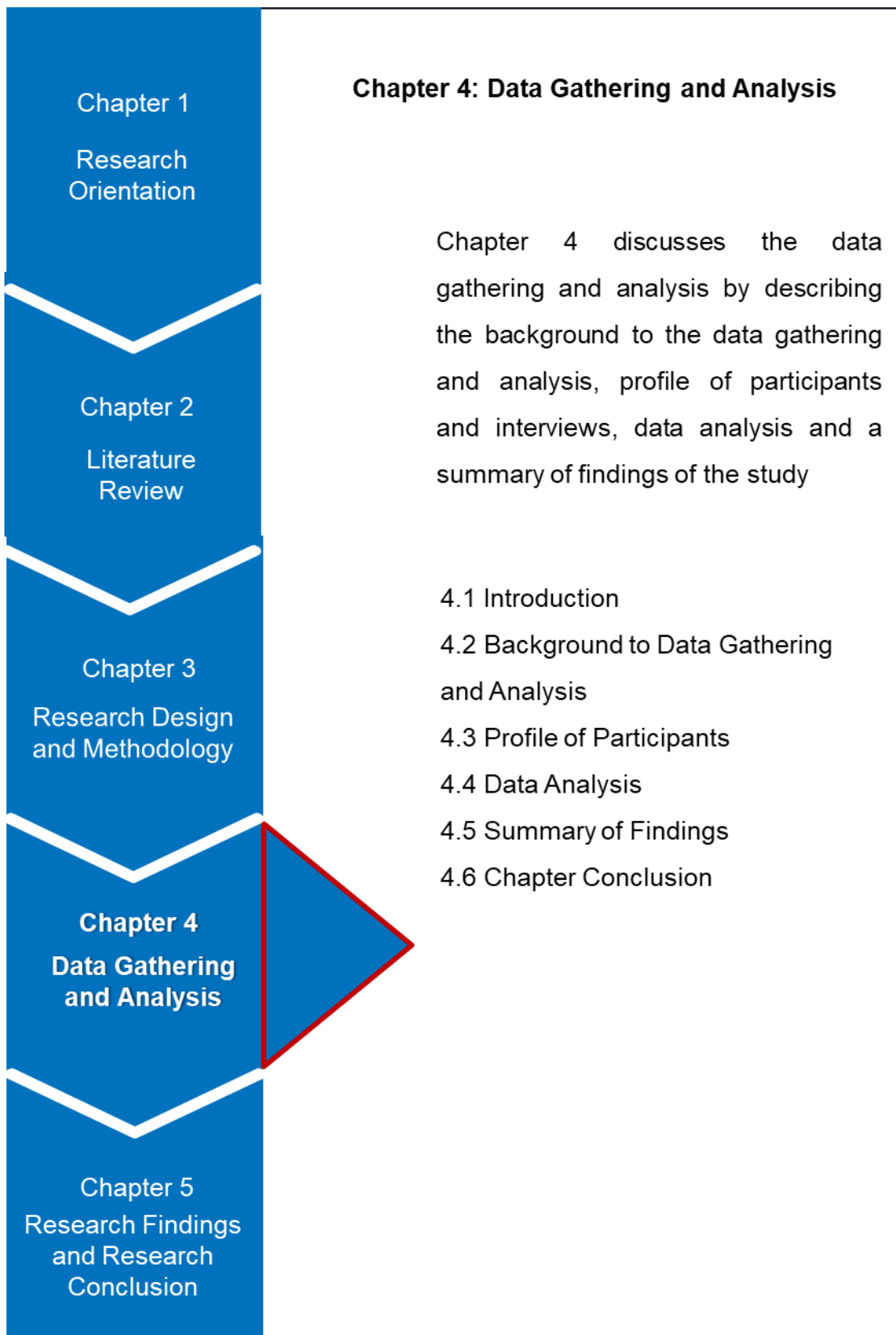
The researcher committed to undertaking precautions to dispose of or permanently de-identify personal information when no longer needed for the purpose of research. All records of computer-based information will be kept for a minimum of five years as per the university's requirements and will be deleted thereafter. Transcriptions will be stored for a period of five years in a locked cupboard for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a private password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

### **3.14 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter described the research methodology and design that that was applied to this research study. The research process diagram provided a high-level outline of the process to answer the research question. The qualitative research approach and research paradigm discussed in the previous sections were used as the guide

for selecting the most appropriate research design for this study, which was a single case study. Inclusion and exclusion criteria and purposeful sampling were applied to select a sample of sixteen middle managers for this study. Thirteen of the identified participants agreed to participate in the research. Virtual semi-structured, in-depth interviews were completed as the means to gather the primary source of data for this study. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed in readiness for data analysis. All required ethics and research protocols and conduct was adhered to, to ensure participants experienced no harm, discomfort or confidentiality or privacy breach during this study. The following chapter will discuss the findings of this study. Figure 4.1 offers the positioning of Chapter 4 within the dissertation.

**Figure 4.1 Chapter 4 Overview**



## **CHAPTER 4: DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring. From the onset, the current study accepted, through a review of the literature, that middle managers are exposed to and experience stress during organisational restructuring. While middle managers are tasked with the implementation of the organisational restructuring, they also experience stress, conflict, and anxiety. Yet, little is known about the coping practices of these managers. The current study is situated in a South African bank that embarked on efforts of rightsizing, downsizing, and restructuring. To gather rich data on the lived realities of these managers, the current study used qualitative, virtual, semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 3 offered a detailed account of the research design chosen to gather, analyse, and interpret the data towards answering the research questions. The researcher used ATLAS.ti version 9, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software package to analyse the responses from 13 participants. During the qualitative analysis, the ATLAS.ti tool enabled the co-coder and researcher to explore the complex phenomena hidden in the data.

This chapter describes the data analysis and findings. The chapter starts with a summary of the participants and their role in context to the organisational restructuring. The chapter then describes the findings of the case study, structured in themes and sub-themes as extracted from the data, and concludes with a detailed description of the findings.

### **4.2 Background to data gathering and analysis**

This section offers details of the participants and describes the context in which the interviews took place. Such descriptions offer richer accounts on the restructuring process as experienced by the participating managers. Responses to the interview questions were situated in the lived realities of the participants at a given point in time.



As stated in Chapter 3, the target population comprised 95 staff members. Sixteen (16) of these individuals met the inclusion criteria, and together with the researcher's insider knowledge of the participants, were purposively identified as suitable participants for this study. To protect the identity of the 16 participants, participant numbers were created to de-identify participants to disguise their identity. The participants were numbered based on the alphabetical order of their surname. From the onset, attempts were made to de-identify participants, and numbers were used from identification of the potential sample, through to the data gathering, transcription, analysis, and reporting. Even though the real identities of the participants were known to the researcher, the transcriptions were recorded and analysed using only the assigned numbers in an attempt to protect participants' identity and limit potential researcher bias.

The researcher met with the gatekeeper, the executive personal assistant to the Africa Regions Technology head in the case organisation and presented a background to this study. Contact details of the identified participants who met the inclusion criteria were provided by the gatekeeper. It was agreed that all interactions related to the 16 participants would be via email to ensure documented and auditable proof of the participant selection process. During November 2019, an introductory email was sent informing the 16 identified middle managers of the authorised study, purpose, and description of this study and inviting the middle managers to participate in the study.

Efforts to ensure confidentiality of the participants' information and data were highlighted to reduce any fears of repercussions, such as victimisation, that the 16 identified participants may have had. The participants were reassured of the efforts towards confidentiality and agreed to participate in the study. However, in June 2020, a revised request to participate was resent in accordance with the University's revised COVID-19 human participant data gathering protocols. For the safety of participants during COVID-19, the revised protocols recommended human participant data collection to be performed via virtual interviews. The participants agreed to virtual interviews. Of the 16 identified participants, three (3) declined, and 13 agreed to be interviewed for this study.

The 13 participants were considered the final sample for this study. Informed consent is critical to research ethics and the university's ethics policy. This ensures that human participants choose to participate in the study voluntarily, with prior, full knowledge of what it means for them to participate in the study. Participants' consent was obtained prior to them participating so that they understood what the research entailed and what they were consenting to. The informed consent for this study can be found in Appendix B. All participants consented to participate in this case study and were informed of the topic during the participant selection process.

### **4.3 Profile of participants**

#### **4.3.1 Participant demographics**

This section describes the demographics of the participants. Six (6) female and 7 males participated in this study. The demographics for this study were diverse in terms of race and gender: 4 African (2 Male and 2 Female), 4 White (3 Female and 1 Male), 3 Indian (3 Males), and 2 Coloured (1 Female and 1 Male) participants. Of the 13 participants, 11 were permanent staff members of the bank and 2 were contract staff. Together the 13 participants had 107 years of work experience in the Africa Regions Technology Division, averaging 8.23 years of experience per participant. Figure 4.2 graphically presents the participants' years of middle manager experience and strategy planning, design, or implementation experience.



**Figure 4.2 Participants Years of Experience**

Source: Author

The total number of years of middle management experience amongst the participants amounted to 78 years with an average of six years per participant. The total number of years of strategic planning, design, or implementation experience of the 13 participants at the time of the interviews was 83 years with an average of 6.38 years per participant. The number of years of experience of participants in terms of the criteria required for this study, demonstrated that the participants had the necessary middle manager or strategic activities experience and that their selection was deliberate based on their experience.

#### **4.3.2 Virtual interview context and background**

##### Timeline of Data Gathering

Table 4.1 presents a chronology of the organisational restructure and research study activities as they progressed for this study.

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Activities</b>
March 2016	Holding company separation announcement
April 2018	Bank restructure commences
October 2018	Final separation announcement
June 2019	Africa Regions Technology, a division of the banks' Group Technology Division commenced restructure.
November 2019	Permission to conduct research
25 November 2019	Final restructure event in which this case study is situated took place
May to September 2020	Revised Ethics approval
June to August 2020	Revised request to participate was resent to participants in accordance with the University's revised COVID-19 human participant data gathering protocols
July 2020	Interview preparation: Online videos, Interview pilot
September 2020 to February 2021	Data gathering beginning and end
October to November 2020	Annual technical operations for the bank's Africa Regions
January 2021	Data analysis beginning
September 2021	Research findings and reporting

**Table 4.1 Timeline of data gathering and analysis**

Source: Author

Data was gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic, about six months after the introduction of national lockdown restrictions to curb the spread of the Corona virus. At that time, the rules associated with revised human participant data gathering protocols for COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, and the University of South Africa directives, were observed. In adherence to the revised data gathering protocols,

virtual interviews were approved as the means for data gathering. The Participant Consent (Appendix B) and Interview Guide (Appendix E) were sent to participants and consent for participation in the interviews was obtained virtually. Data was gathered through agreed virtual interviews conducted digitally via MS Teams, Zoom, and iPhone Facetime. Interviews were scheduled for one hour, including the time taken to introduce and reiterate the consent, confidentiality, and interview information communicated in the introductory email correspondence. Participants were asked if they agreed to the recording of the interview and all participants agreed.

Interviews took place from September 2020 to February 2021. The six-month timeframe for interviews was due to the nature of the technology business unit and the bank's operational environment. As the technical division of Africa operations, the business unit supports the Africa Regions IT systems. Consequently, the business unit had to complete all system enhancements and fixes between mid-October and end-November. This was to ensure that the bank's IT systems were available and stable for the year-end seasonal trading period where high volumes of transactions were expected. Hence, the period from mid-October to end-November was not a convenient time to schedule interviews for the selected participants of this study, who are technical resources in the Africa Regions division. Participants were part of the team responsible for ensuring the systems were stable and available for year-end trading. As a result, several interviews were postponed and rescheduled for early December 2020 and January 2021.

Another contributing factor to the delayed interview timeframe was the bank's year-end technical freeze, which commenced from December 2020 to mid-January 2021. During year-end freeze, no system activities were allowed, thereby creating idle time for most technical staff who were encouraged to go on leave in that period. Interviews could not be scheduled during the year-end freeze period as most participants were on leave at that time and opted not to be interviewed virtually while on leave.

### **4.3.3 Participant virtual semi-structured interviews**

As explained in Chapter 3, the participant interview guide was used to gather data during the semi-structured interviews. The primary data gathering method for this study was semi-structured virtual interviews as per the qualitative case study approach. Once the interviews were confirmed, the middle manager participants were contacted via email to arrange a suitable date, time, and digital medium for the interview. Several interviews had to be rescheduled due to factors such as participants' work commitments, personal commitments, load-shedding, connectivity issues, and in two instances the participants felt they were not ready for the interview.

Once participants confirmed the date, time, and digital medium for the interview, interviews were scheduled via email. The interview meeting request included the participant consent forms and interview guide. It was agreed that acceptance of the meeting implied consent to participate in the virtual interview and for recording of the interview. The wording of the agreement was, 'By accepting, you are giving consent for participation in the virtual interview and for the recording of the interview for the purpose of this research study' (Appendix C). Participants agreed to participation and recording of the virtual interviews.

For the researcher, the process of interviewing participants and recording the interview was somewhat overwhelming. The researcher drew guidance from highly experienced supervisors, researched the Internet, and watched online video resources in preparing for the qualitative interviews. Interview preparation and practice were done prior to the actual virtual interviews. The researcher practiced three pilot interviews with non-participating individuals who were not employed at the bank, including the recording and playback of the interview. The pilot interviews were reviewed and adjusted to refine the actual interview processes. Notes were made as part of the pilot interviews, which eased the actual process. These pilot interviews were not conducted with any of the selected participants.

The semi-structured interview followed the categories of pre-determined questions, but probing questions were also asked to obtain further information or clarity on an

ambiguous or interesting topic that was under discussion. Open-ended questions provided the means to gather in-depth descriptive data, whilst participants freely expressed their thoughts and feelings. The researcher used an interview notes template to make notes, write down observations throughout the interview, and make reflexive notes while listening to the views of the participants. There were many similarities that all participants experienced, but participants also had different views and perspectives that were described in accordance with their individual realities. Participants experienced the phenomenon of organisational change from different perspectives, based on their role, their temperament, and even based on whether they were permanent staff or contract employees. It is these deeply personal and unique lived experiences that this study aimed to obtain. This revelation enabled the researcher to take a step back from her own views, thoughts, and biases concerning the organisational restructuring and her own coping practices. It also enabled her to rethink her view of the phenomenon and recognise that her own reality was somewhat impaired.

For the first two interviews, the researcher experienced some anxiety. Adjustments were made to the rate of speech, volume, and from a formal tone to a more conversational tone. This adjustment helped put both the participant and the researcher at ease. The questions were asked in the same sequence, and as the interviews proceeded, it became apparent at what point to ask probing questions. It also became clear what type of probing questions would elicit deeper descriptions of participants' thoughts and feelings. Some participants appeared to find the discussion of the topic somewhat cathartic. The interviews ended up being much longer because the participants felt comfortable talking to the researcher, who they knew. Consequently, they spoke longer, provided more information, and did not have reservations about what they wanted to say. Table 4.2 outlines the interview data. Given that the researcher was an insider who understood participants' use of conversational business language, the interview was smoother as there was no need to ask for clarity or explanations of business specific idioms. Participants referred to the researcher by first name or nickname as they already had a rapport as work colleagues. This indicated that they trusted the researcher because of the shared experience.

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Interview Duration</b>	<b>No. of pages of Transcribed Data</b>	<b>Interview Medium</b>
Participant 1	17/09/2020	01:00:08	19	Virtual interview iPhone Facetime
Participant 2	08/10/2020	43:21	13	Virtual interview Zoom
Participant 4	20/11/2020	1:07:35	10	Virtual interview Zoom
Participant 5	18/02/2020	01:05:15	11	Virtual interview iPhone Facetime
Participant 6	16/09/2020	01:14:09	21	Virtual interview Zoom
Participant 7	23/11/2020	01:23:51	28	Virtual interview Zoom
Participant 8	09/12/2020	29:01	14	Virtual interview Zoom
Participant 9	15/09/2020	47:26	17	Virtual interview Zoom
Participant 10	25/11/2020	50:32	24	Virtual interview MS Teams
Participant 12	16/09/2020	1:07:35	21	Virtual interview Zoom
Participant 13	02/10/2020	43:42	14	Virtual interview Zoom
Participant 15	27/11/2020	40:21	11	Virtual interview Zoom
Participant 16	07/10/2020	1:02:11	26	Virtual interview Zoom
<b>Total Interview Time:</b>		<b>12:38:26</b>		



Average Interview Time:	56:15:24
Total No. of pages:	229
Average No. of pages	18

**Table 4.2 Volume of Interview Data**

Source: Author

#### **4.3.4 Interview recordings and transcripts**

With permission from participants, interviews were digitally recorded. Transcribing the recordings meant that the interview conversation between the researcher and participant were documented verbatim from the audio recording by a professional transcriber. In preparation for the interviews, the transcriber advised the most optimal method for recording and transcribing the interviews. Interviews were recorded and audio files generated as MP4 files for each participant. The MP4 files were uploaded via Google Drive to a folder created and titled for each participant. A main folder was created for the purpose of the transcribing, with sub folders for each participant. The folders were titled with the participant number. Access to the folder was shared with the transcriber who signed a non-disclosure agreement to keep participant information confidential. The transcriptions were provided in MSWord and PDF format and uploaded to the Google Drive folder created for each participant. The transcription was downloaded and saved to each participant's folder and stored on a password-protected laptop. The 13 transcribed interviews amounted to 240 pages of data to be used for data analysis.

The total number of pages of transcribed data from 13 interviews amounted to 229 pages. The total recorded time taken for the 13 semi-structured interviews was 12 hours, 28 minutes, and 26 minutes. Each interview transcript was reviewed before member checking was conducted. Participants were requested to review their respective transcripts. None of the participants made amendments to their interview transcripts. The review was performed to confirm and validate the completeness and correctness of the data in preparation for the data analysis.

#### **4.3.5 Context of the organisational restructure: background to the participant interviews**

This section presents a context within which the organisational restructuring took place as a backdrop to the participants' behaviour and demeanour during the interviews. The bank's organisational restructuring commenced after its holding company announced a reduction in shareholding of the bank in March 2016 (refer to Table 4.1). The announcement initiated an immediate restructuring within the bank, even though separation was finalised in October 2018. The actual restructure process commenced within individual bank clusters and their component divisions. The Africa Technology Division, a division of the bank's Group Technology Division commenced its restructure in June 2019. The final restructure event in which this case study is situated took place on 25 November 2019.

The final restructure consisted of the retrenchment of the technical support department of Africa Regions Technology. This department provided first level technical support to countries that make up the Africa Regions. Included in the restructure was the outsourcing of the technical support function to an offshore vendor. The impacted staff members were put into a Section 189 process of the Labour Relations Act (LRA) that permits employers to dismiss employees for operational requirements. Affected staff members were given three months to find a job within the bank; however, if at the end of three months they did not find a job, they would be retrenched.

#### **4.3.6 Participants' role and interview summary**

This section tables the participants' role and summarises their individual interviews. Interviews took place virtually because participants were working remotely in adherence to the bank's COVID-19 protocols. The virtual interviews followed the University's revised Research Ethics protocols for semi-structured interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic. All virtual interview protocols were adhered to. Table 4.3 summarises the participants' interviews.

**Interview ① Participant 9: IT Manager**

Participant 9 offered confident views and was frank and forthright in his opinions, thoughts, and observations of the restructuring. At times, his responses were cynical, humorous, reflective, thoughtful, and he was eager to talk. His experience of previous change and restructuring may possibly have left him with change fatigue. Participant 9 was a permanent employee who was initially not impacted by the restructure but after subsequent changes he and his subordinates were included in the Section 189 process. He did not find redeployment within the bank and was retrenched.

**Interview ② Participant 6 – Development Manager**

Participant 6 was somewhat cautious and reticent in the beginning of the interview but was more eager to share her experience as the interview progressed. The interview seemed to draw out feelings and experiences that she had forgotten about. She was personally and emotionally affected by the job losses and the way in which the restructuring happened. Participant 6 experienced two restructures within six months. The interview allowed her to recollect and put into perspective her restructure experience. Participant 6 was moved to another team.

**Interview ③ Participant 12: Production Support Manager**

Participant 12 was a contracted consultant from outside South Africa and had no prior knowledge of the current research but was eager to participate. Participant 12 and his offshore team of consultants replaced the team of retrenched permanent employees. After the restructure his role was elevated from operational level to strategic level. This was a thought-provoking interview. Participant 12 viewed the restructure outcome as an opportunity and blessing, was grateful for the faith shown in him and held the bank's leadership in high regard for making this difficult decision. He was aware of the general perception of impacted staff who viewed the outsourcing as a controversial decision, but due

to cultural differences he seemed unaware of the gravity of this decision. Participant 12 remains with the bank

**Interview ④ Participant 1 – Lead Consultant**

Participant 1 is at the late stage of her career, is experienced, and is a high performer. She is affable, which resulted in her establishing relationships with teams and individuals across the division. Participant 1 leveraged those established relationships to collaborate and deliver promptly. Despite the challenges, she continued to deliver diligently by finding workarounds to the prevailing situation. Participant 1 also valued the relationships from a personal perspective and found the sudden loss of colleagues a difficult and sensitive issue to deal with. Participant 1 has a temporary reporting manager.

**Interview ⑤ Participant 13 – Governance and Support Manager**

Participant 13 was eager to participate and experience the interview process as she is engaged in the early stages of her own Master's studies. She was formal and reticent and had to be probed for detailed information. She tended to be vague and generic and was inclined to providing 'politically correct' answers and euphemisms. Her role did not require interaction with the wider team, leaving her feeling removed from staff impacted by retrenchment. Participant 13 was hesitant to reveal much of her personal and emotional experience of the restructure. In the restructure she was allocated an additional portfolio without clarity of the role and its responsibilities. Participant 13 reporting line did not change.

**Interview ⑥ Participant 16 – Lead Consultant**

Participant 16 was based in Cape Town. Her experience of previous change and restructuring perhaps resulted in change fatigue. She was cynical, humorous, and forthright, did not consider herself a team player, was independent, and disliked micro-management. Participant 16 was at the late stage of her career, experienced, and a high performer. She believed quality of deliverables reflected her brand, therefore, was displeased when her performance was affected by the

restructure, resulting in disruptions to her established work pattern, relations, and networks she leveraged for delivery. She was emotionally upset by the job losses and the way the restructuring process was executed. Participant 16 has a temporary reporting manager.

**Interview ⑦ Participant 2 – Project Manager**

Participant 2 had an indirect reporting line to Africa Technology Division, hence was not directly impacted by the restructure but the restructure deeply upset him. As a Project Manager, Participant 2 interacted with staff across the division and formed personal relationships with colleagues during his tenure. Participant 2 spoke freely about his emotions and coping practices, was open and honest in his responses. He was impacted when resources assigned to his project were retrenched, resulting in delayed timelines, budget increases, lack of capacity, scant knowledge transfer, loss of IP and continuity whilst having to manage his personal stress and anxiety of his team. Participant 12 moved to another division within the bank

**Interview ⑧ Participant 4 – MIS Manager**

Participant 4 was calm and measured in his interview even though he was emotionally and directly impacted by the restructure. As MIS Manager, he was dependent on colleagues for information and context, but lost his network when colleagues were retrenched. Participant 4 needed to create new working routines and establish new relationships to manage delivery of MIS. He was personally impacted when his role was lowered in the hierarchy of the department's structure, resulting in him reporting to a peer, resulting in delays in decision making from more levels of hierarchy. Participant 4 resigned and is no longer with the bank.

**Interview ⑨ Participant 7 – Analyst Programmer Lead**

Participant 7 was a permanent staff member who was directly impacted in the restructure with retrenchment that surprised and stunned him but was the only retrenched participant that found another job in the bank but not as part of affected

employees redeployment programme. This was a very significant interview that revealed deep emotional and personal experience of the impact of job loss during organisational restructuring. He was frank and forthright, providing in-depth information about his feelings, experience, stressors, and coping. Participant 7 spoke freely about the personal, physical, and emotional effects of retrenchment that left him with self-doubt and paranoia, but also with the sense that the retrenchment was the best thing that happened to him as it took him out of his comfort zone. Participant 7 was retrenched.

#### **Interview ⑩ Participant 8 – Development Manager**

Participant 8 appeared reluctant to reveal too much information regarding the constant threat of contract termination to consultants in the bank, but spoke freely of stress and challenges of consultants that resulted from the restructure. He felt the need to constantly prove himself so that his role would not be questioned or deemed redundant in ongoing restructuring of the bank. Participant 8's role was impacted, with additional responsibility in a competitive environment and obstacles he faced by gaps left after employees were retrenched. As a consultant he felt under constant threat of losing his job. Participant 8 had to reapply for his role and was placed successfully in the same role but with a new line manager.

#### **Interview ⑪ Participant 10 – Reporting Specialist**

Participant 10 was at the late stage of her career, nearing retirement. She had one of the longest tenures in the bank, was older, mature, and calm. She had extensive organisational knowledge including experience of several restructures, thus knew how to handle stress from restructuring. Participant 10 maintained working relations and networks with colleagues, including those who were retrenched and leveraged networks to manage challenges of gaps left after the retrenchment. During her tenure she built long relationships with colleagues, was emotional, empathetic, and stressed by the unexpected retrenchment of colleagues. Participant 10 reports to a new line manager in a temporary structure.

<b>Interview 12 Participant 15 – IT Manager</b>
Participant 15 was older, mature, experienced and had ‘been around the block’. He experienced many restructures in his career, knew what to expect and how to handle them. His tacit knowledge of the system environment and organisational environment made him a key go-to person when colleagues needed advice or information. He was not too concerned about possible job loss from the restructure as he was almost at retirement date. His new role in the restructure included greater strategy participation. Participant 15 was stressed and displeased at the way retrenchments occurred, particularly the lack of communication and support. Participant 15 reported to a new line manager but has since retired.
<b>Interview 13 Participant 5 Business Support Manager</b>
Participant 5 became very emotional during her interview whilst recalling her experience of the restructure which was exacerbated by the recent loss of a loved one. The emotional recollections made her distraught and unable to proceed. The researcher immediately terminated the interview and arranged a later date suitable to her. Participant 5 had a long tenure in the bank, is older, experienced, outspoken, passionate, and empathetic. She was frank and forthright in her interview. She was upset, emotional, and distressed over colleagues that lost their jobs, the possibility of more staff losing their jobs, and that she herself might lose her job. Participant 5 has a temporary reporting manager.

**Table 4.3 Summary of Participant Interview and Role**

Source: Author

Table 4.3 provides a brief description of the 13 interviews as personally experienced and from the context of the participants’ role and experience of the organisational restructure.

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

The responses from 13 participants were analysed for qualitative content, using the coding strategies by Saldaña (2021). The researcher and co-coder were guided by the research and interview questions. Together the co-coder and researcher engaged in data reduction, coding, and decoding analytic processes to analyse and interpret each of the qualitative data forms (Saldaña 2021:26-55). These processes unfolded through concurrent and iterative research processes: data collection, transcription of audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, and data analysis. Coding terminology and procedures, according to Saldaña (2021:26-55) were applied. The researcher and co-coder specifically used descriptive codes and a few in vivo codes, which was created inductively (data-driven) and deductively (theory-driven).

Coding is the procedure of associating code words with sections of data or quotations, which is the association between a quotation in the text and a specific code. Figure 4.3 depicts the coding process of actual middle manager data and coding according to Saldaña (2021) as applied in the analysis of the data for this study. In linking data, collecting, and interpreting the data, coding is the basis for developing the analysis. The co-coder and researcher clustered codes into five groups or themes and sub-themes. Multiple coders ensured the data was also viewed from different lenses, thus expanding the view of the data and trustworthiness and reliability of the findings. The next section describes and discusses the research findings as per the five themes interpreted from the data.

Figure 4.3 depicts the actual analysis and coding of middle manager data for the current study. Code words related to middle managers were identified, categorised, and sub-categorised to create the themes and sub-themes for middle manager roles. A thematic code list, or a codebook of 243 codes, was created, which was reduced to 28 codes, five categories (themes), with 18 sub-categories (sub-themes), and 575 quotations across the 13 interview data sets.



Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring – a case study in a South African Bank

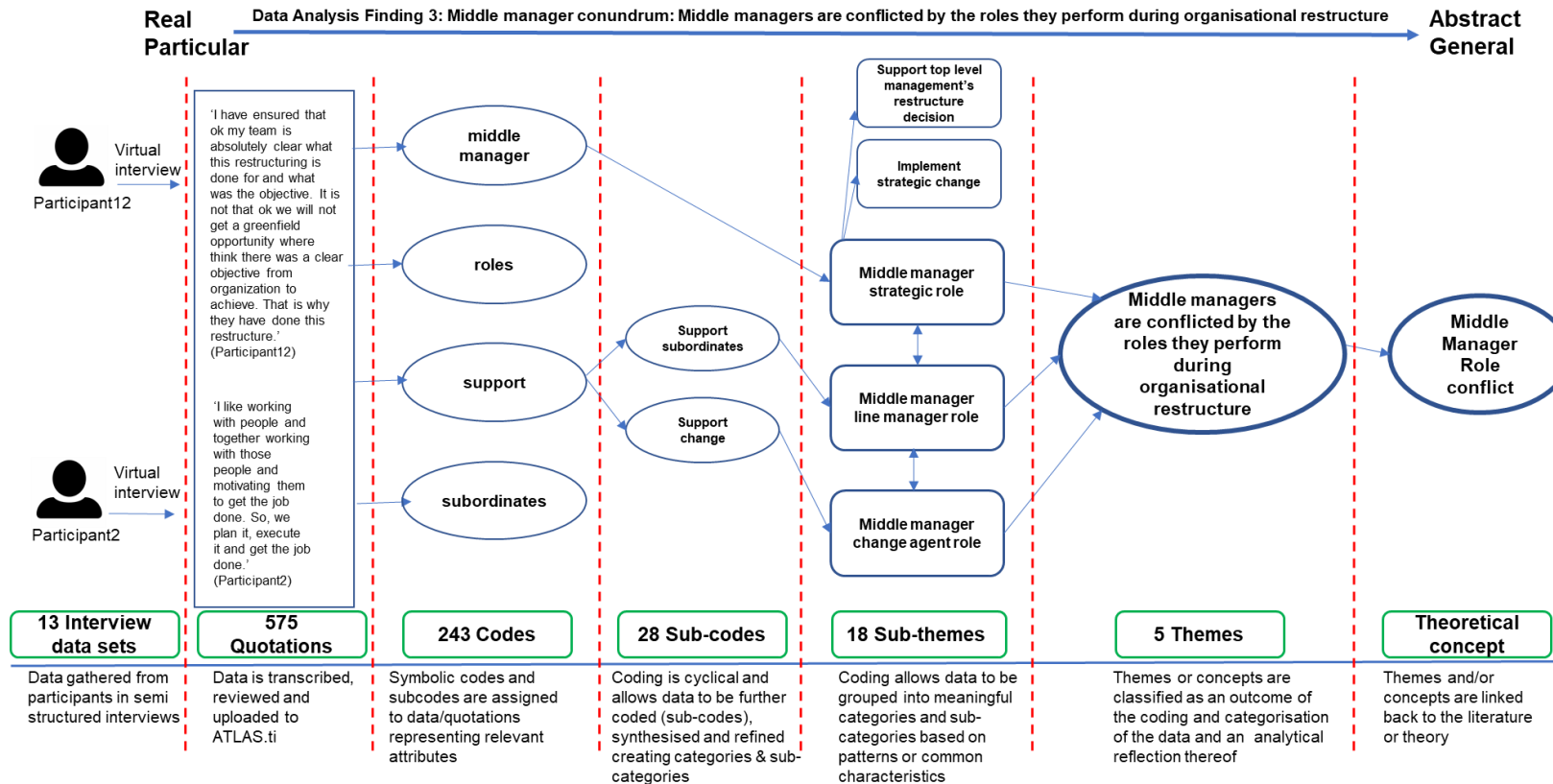


Figure 4.3 Qualitative Research Data Analysis according to Saldaña (2021)

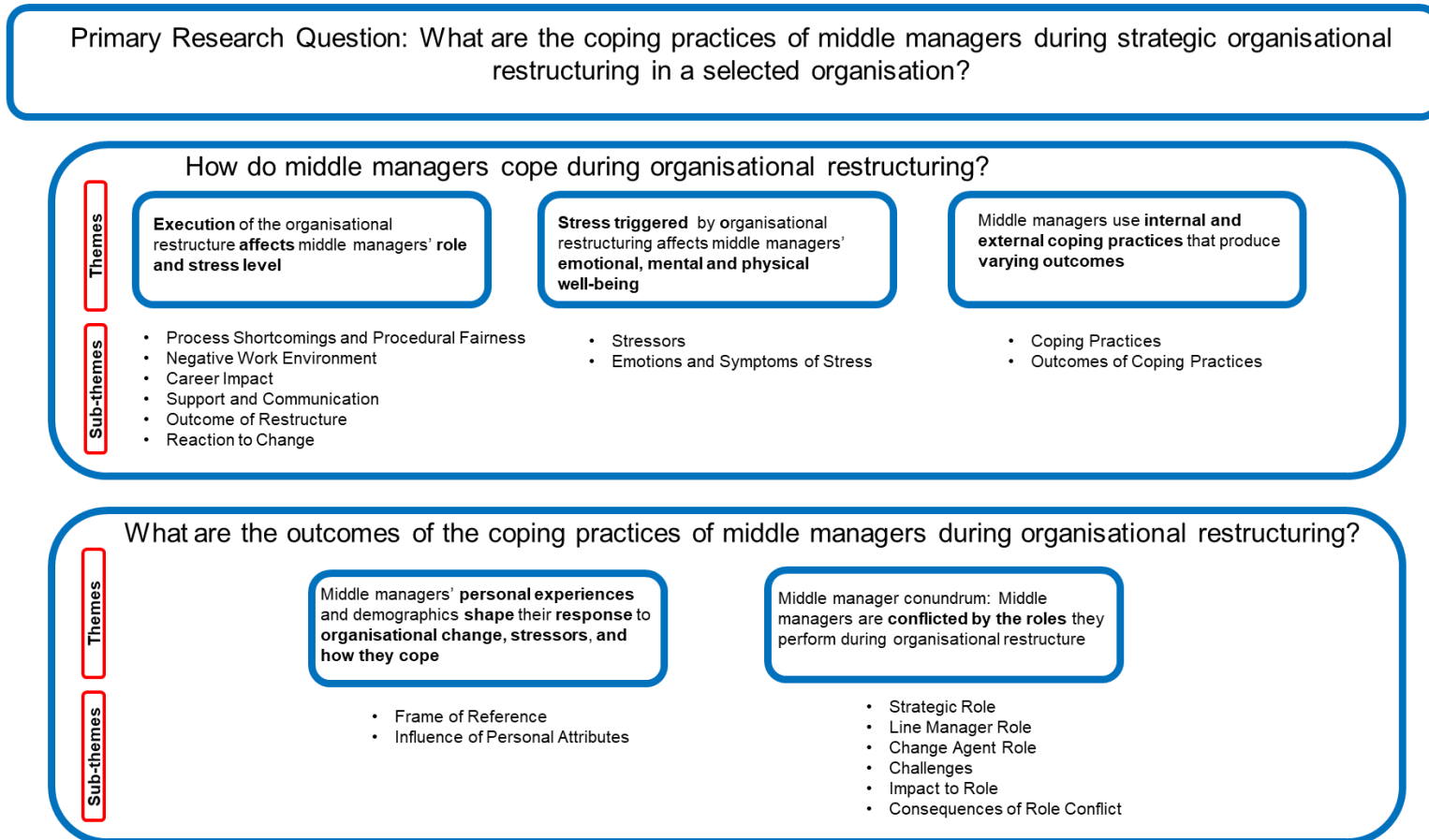
Source: Author

#### **4.5 Themes and sub-themes**

The purpose of this study was to explore the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructure. This section presents five themes and related sub-themes that were identified from the responses of the 13 participants. The themes and sub-themes were identified in attempting to answer the primary and secondary research questions. The five themes and related sub-themes are diagrammatically depicted in Figure 4.4.

Themes and sub- themes emerged from the coding process. Codes unfolded through iterative processes of coding the data where phrases or sentences were highlighted and given a code to describe the subject. This process was performed for all responses. New codes were created as the process unfolded. Once completed, all data of similar subjects were grouped together. Codes provided a consolidated view of main ideas and common meanings that repeated throughout the data. Patterns were identified and themes were created. Codes were initially clustered into 4 categories in relation to the literature. An initial code list or a codebook of 243 codes, which was reduced to 28 sub-codes, five categories or themes with 18 subcategories or sub-themes and 575 quotations across the 13 sets of interview data.

## Linking the Research Questions to Themes and Sub-themes



**Figure 4.4 Linking the Research Questions to Themes and Sub-themes**

Source: Author

Figure 4.4 illustrates how the themes and sub-themes identified for this research are linked to the research questions. The themes are interrelated and influence each other.

#### **4.6 Presentation of themes**

This section presents the findings of this study as themes. Five (5) main themes and 18 sub-themes were identified from analysis and interpretation of the data. The section begins with a diagrammatic representation of the five main themes and 18 sub-themes that answer the research questions. The five themes are then tabled individually by theme, sub-theme, and related code. The themes and sub-themes are elaborated upon below the corresponding table.

Figure 4.5 presents the themes and sub-themes that answer the research questions. The diagram displays the interrelatedness of the themes to answer the research questions.

Linking the Research Questions to the Themes and Findings

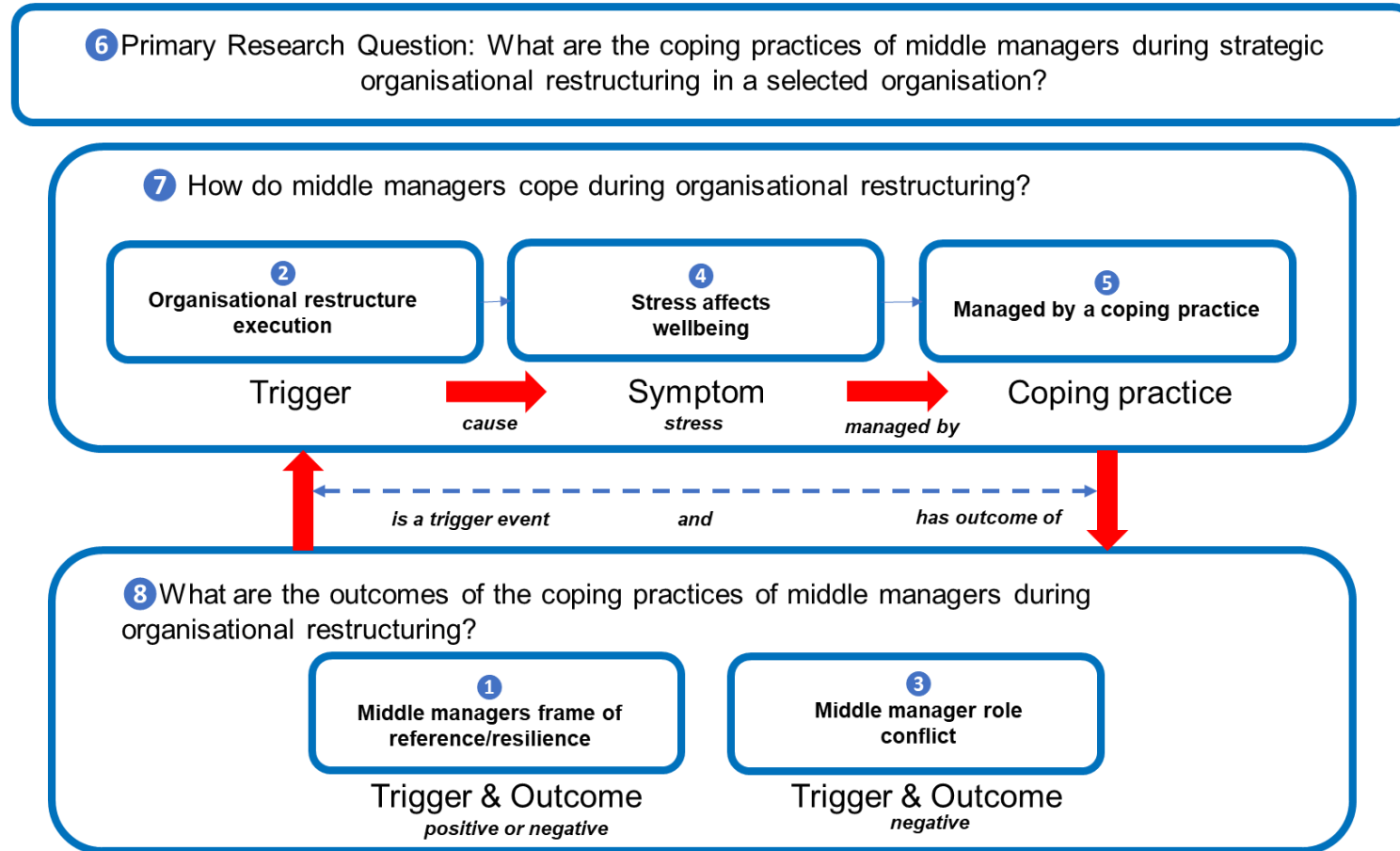


Figure 4.5 Linking the Research Questions to the Themes and Findings

Source: Author

Figure 4.5 presents the relationship between the themes that answer the research question. Stress is a human reaction or physiological response that the body experiences when loaded with high demands, pressure, or challenging situations. Feelings of stress are triggered by external happenings in one's life, such as being under pressure, experiencing change, worrying, or overwhelming responsibility. These external happenings, or causes of stress, are referred to as stressors. The body's reaction to the stressors results in symptoms or negative effects depending on how individuals perceive the stressor. Individual symptoms or negative effects are influenced by perceptions of the stressor, including association to past experiences, negative or positive attitude, how the stressor was dealt with in the past, resilience, amount of pressure, and support that is received. It is important to understand and identify the triggers of stress so that it can be appropriately dealt with. Therefore, it makes sense to find ways of coping practices to relieve stress to mitigate the negative effects.

For middle managers to cope, there must be a trigger event that results in symptoms that must be managed. In this scenario, organisational restructuring is made up of trigger events or stressors (restructure process, leadership behaviour, role conflict) that result in stress (job insecurity, uncertainty, anxiety). In this instance of organisational restructure, the negative symptoms must be managed for the sake of the middle managers' well-being. Coping is a practice that middle managers engage in to help them deal with the stress caused by the organisational restructure.

The next section tables the five themes, their related sub-themes, and codes that were identified from the thematic analysis of the data. Sub-themes are common elements linked to the main theme and codes describe the sub-themes.

### 4.6.1 Theme1

Middle managers' personal experiences and demographics shape their response to organisational change, stressors, and coping.

① Theme	Sub-themes	Codes
Middle managers' personal experiences and demographics shape their response to organisational change, stressors, and coping	Frame of Reference	Past experiences  Change perception  Attitude and outlook  Behaviours and responses
	Influence of Personal Attributes	Age  Tenure  Gender  Culture differences  Career stage

#### 4.6.1.1 Frame of reference

For this research, frame of reference is defined as the experience, tacit knowledge, and perspective of the middle manager. Findings for the current research confirm frame of reference as an enabler that allowed participants to process the organisational restructure based on their past experiences, values and beliefs, and personal outlook. These were situated in their attitude, outlook, behaviour, and

responses towards change, based on their personal perspectives of their change experiences.

During data analysis, content that referred to experience, perceptions, career and life stage, attitude, behaviour and responses were grouped under this sub-theme. Data reveals that the frame of reference which middle managers related to, and which described their restructuring and coping experiences, consisted of their past change experiences and their perceptions of those change experiences. Middle managers' perceptions of change were based on how they experienced previous change initiatives, which were either positive or negative. By nature, organisational restructuring is perceived as a negative experience. However, previous experience equipped middle managers to recognise the stressors (Section 4.4.6.1) triggered by the organisational restructure and prepared them with ways to cope, or towards coping practices (Section 4.4.7.1). Several of the participating middle managers have been part of organisational restructuring processes previously.

Participant 15 experienced many restructures in his career and always had a positive experience in contrast to Participant 9 who also had several restructuring experiences but had a negative perception of organisational restructuring. Participant 5, who also had many years of change experience, agreed with Participant 9 that the organisational restructuring related to this study was not what they had expected.

*'As I mentioned earlier, I've been around the block. I'm not sure if this is personal, but I felt less stress after a while.'* **(Participant 15)**

*'Well having been in organisations for many, many years. Like including the organisation that I'm in currently. Whenever any person who has been in corporate hears those words, their first thoughts is mostly negative. Especially when they had past experiences where it has impacted them negatively.'* **(Participant 9)**.

This difference in perspective is personal. The participants confirmed they had previous experiences with organisational restructuring and the data revealed that the previous experiences resulted in current positive and negative views on previous experiences.



#### 4.6.1.2 Influence of personal attributes

For this research, personal attributes included references to age, tenure, career stage, and cultural differences. It was evident from the data that personal attributes influenced how middle managers experienced the change. Data revealed that participants with more years of work experience and tenure were able to make quicker sense of the change, know what to expect, and prepare for it. Participating older middle managers, in their late career stage and closer to retirement, considered the organisational restructure as 'business-as-usual', exhibiting signs of change fatigue. These participants explained that because they had experienced a great deal of changes in their careers, this restructure was viewed as just another change and they were less emotionally and mentally affected by it. Participant 15, who was older, had many years of experience and was almost at retirement, felt unaffected by the change due to several previous change experiences. However, he considered that he should be prepared for the possible outcomes of the restructure.

*'I've been around the block for a while. So, I've been through many of these restructuring and take-overs and stuff. And you become sort of immune to it, you know. It's one of those, what happen will happen and if one door closes another door will open, you know. That's for me, obviously a young person today they would, because they're not as mature as I am. They would obviously handle it differently.'* **(Participant 15)**

On the contrary, Participant 9, who had also experienced several organisational restructures and viewed them as a regular occurrence, was surprised by the outcomes of this restructure. Most of the participating managers described feelings of change fatigue. Experienced middle managers appeared to be calm and measured in their responses to organisational change. Data illustrates they assessed the situation before responding and did not react without fact and detail. Based on their responses to the interview questions, their experience afforded them the ability to assess the situation, as well as understand the rationale before reacting. Participant 15 and Participant 1 reacted to the change in a calm, measured, and unemotional way. Participant 15 commented:

*'I'll first sit back, assess it... Let things evolve a bit...before just rushing out and reacting... I'll continue doing that... I'm not just going to be reactive.'* **(Participant 15)**

In contrast, Participant 5, Participant 10, and Participant 16's responses were emotional and volatile. On the other hand, Participant 9's stance was that the organisation continues nevertheless, hence the people that remain after the restructure must continue to do what needs to be done for the organisation to operate despite the restructured situation.

*'...we have to pick ourselves up and move on. If we've survived, got to get up now and go on, pick the pieces up and get the organisation going again.'* **(Participant 9)**

#### 4.6.2 Theme 2

Execution of the organisational restructure affects middle managers' role and stress level.

Middle managers stated that the actions or inactions of the restructure processes and procedures caused stress.

② Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Execution of the organisational restructure affects middle managers' role and stress level	Process Shortcomings and Procedural Fairness	Non-conformity to organisational and industry procedure for organisational restructure  People issues
	Negative Work Environment	Mistrust, suspicions  Rumours and speculation  Self-preservation  Non-collaboration  Conflict amongst teams

② Theme	Sub-theme	Code
	Career Impact	Misalignment to career path and growth  Skills deficiency  Succession Planning
	Support and Communication	From leadership, for change management
	Outcome of Restructure	Conflicting negatives and positives  Role and job impact  Continuous change  Positives  Negatives  Affecting productivity
	Reaction to Change	Reflect on change  Rationalise the change  Wait and see what happens or do nothing  Resist the change  Reset the mindset or frame of reference or outlook

#### 4.6.2.1 Process Shortcomings and Procedural Fairness

The data revealed that the way the organisational restructure was perceived in terms of process shortcomings and procedural (un)fairness was a major contributor to the stress and coping practices of the middle managers during restructuring. Participating middle managers highlighted the perceived lack of attention to people issues, the perceived lack of participation from HR, perceived lack of consultation and communication with staff, and the perceived absence of change management as shortcomings that caused difficulty in dealing with the restructure. Together with the process shortcomings, the perceived procedural (un)fairness of the retrenchment procedure used to arrive at the restructuring retrenchment decision resulted in greater anxiety for middle managers.

Participants' comments reveal their feelings about how the restructure process was executed and about people issues associated with HR during organisational restructuring.

*'... from a kind of general business support or HR support or anything else like that, I don't think there was anything provided necessarily because of the restructure. I think, the formal aspects in doing all of these things is missing...the formal, the HR process that comes with it, that hasn't happened. So, a lot of sense still to be made. My understanding is that the, you know there is usually a lot more hand holding from HR, not only for a line manager perspective but also from the team which I personally haven't seen ... I don't know if then therefore internally things are done slightly differently,...I personally have not engaged with HR on the restructure.'* **(Participant 13)**

Participant 6 stated that there was no active involvement from HR. Participant 13 concurred, because in her previous role in HR she participated in organisational restructures, and was therefore knowledgeable of the support and regulatory roles required of HR in organisational change.

*'Having said that, it still does not change how it was done. That is inexcusable. One can position it in any which way, it's not on...'* **(Participant 5)**

*'Yes, the how. ...how they did it is based on whatever information they have that I don't have in the position that I'm sitting in right now. So, yes, I might not have wanted it to happen that way, the how, because it directly impacted me.'* **(Participant 7)**

The perceived absence of change management support during the organisational restructuring meant that, according to the participating middle managers, they did not have organisational support for the restructure. Thus, they had to establish their own coping practices when dealing with the organisational restructuring difficulties. Participants highlighted the lack of support and communication as illustrated by the following quotes:

*'... look at how we inform the staff of these restructuring you know. And not just like the big bang. That's not the way to do it. You need to inform them of the restructuring and why it's happening.'* **(Participant 15)**

*'...but then with the restructure the underlying, the support structure wasn't there. No, it was very stressful, it was very uncertain.'* **(Participant 16)**

#### 4.6.2.2 Negative work environment

Data revealed that the work environment that resulted from the restructure was typical of the stressful nature associated with organisational change. Participants spoke of a work environment fraught with mistrust, suspicions, rumours and speculation, self-preservation, non-collaboration, and conflict amongst staff who generally work together. Participant 4 and Participant 7 related the occurrence of employees whispering in the corridors, in an atmosphere rife with suspicion and distrust.

*'... you could actually see that people were talking in small groups around the corners. Everyone was feeling very anxious that people were... there was that level of trust was no longer there. Everyone was suspicious of everyone so; people were thinking is it us that are just being taken out of or is it an effort to remove everyone. So, you could actually see that level of trust was diminishing and when you hear people talking could feel that then the reality seems to go through this now. Around the coffee areas, around everywhere. People were talking in small corners; you could actually see that the level of trust and the level of suspicion was starting to creep in...'* **(Participant 4)**

*You will definitely see it differently. And you could hear people in the corridors, they were not, there is, the fear of me being next, is there...'* **(Participant 7)**

Participant 8 concurred, and added that speculation without facts was causing further anxiety. Participant 10 and Participant 8 stated that some employees had more information than others; which gave them a sense of power over other employees.

*'I think the rumours and suspicious were even worse. You know, people didn't know but were speculating that all contractors will be let go...'* **(Participant 8)**

*'There's certain people that know certain things, there's things that get said but you don't get that message directly from management you must always get it from some other department.'* **(Participant 10)**

Participant 10 felt that colleagues could not be trusted and chose not to talk to them.

Participant 5 stated that the negative prevailing atmosphere was expected because there was no communication forthcoming from management, which resulted in people speculating without facts. Participant 4, Participant 8, Participant 7, Participant 15, and Participant 1 stated that anxiety was causing peers and colleagues to be territorial, protecting their area of responsibility and themselves.

*'Maybe because they were also worried and trying to protect themselves from the same thing happening, you know. So, sort of territorial and a reaction obviously.'* **(Participant 15)**

*'But I think everyone is anxious about themselves. I think that would be what they think. I think it was anxious because they also know whether they going to be affected or not. So, I think no one is completely safe or is completely untouchable. So, I would assume that everyone is thinking, what's in it for me, what is not in it for me. So, I would assume that everyone is quite nervous as where they already stand.'* **(Participant 4)**

According to the descriptions, there appeared to be a sense of disengagement. People who participated in meetings did not want to share information or collaborate, whilst some declined meetings. Participant 9 agreed that it was difficult to collaborate and get information from colleagues who were looking out for their

own interests and were therefore fearful and chose to work on their own. He also revealed that meeting attendees were no longer participative. Participant 12 observed the friction in the tone of colleagues' voices, and where meetings were held virtually, attendees' body language and demeanour displayed disinterest.

#### 4.6.2.3 Career Impact

It was evident from the data that due to the perceived lack of consultation in the restructure, middle managers were restructured to roles and divisions that were not aligned to their career path, growth, or skillset. Other job impacts that were evident included lowering staff in the hierarchy of the structure, not having the right skills for the restructured role, and no succession planning for remaining staff. Participant 1 revealed that the type of work that she did now was that of lower-level employees. Previously her work consisted of innovation and improvements. Participant 13 was concerned that her performance scorecard was aligned to a role that lacked growth, and she was not consulted on the expectations of the role.

*'...someone will suddenly say something, but this is what I expected, but of all the times we spoke about this, this never came up and I say this, because I've been through one, you kind of just get the sense that there's always more being expected from you whether documented or undocumented...' 'm not sure the expectations of the extent to which it's supposed to have extended. Which is again I think the concern I raised with regards to getting kind of year-end feedback... from a kind of growth perspective of the role...'*

**(Participant 13)**

Participant 1 felt that it was not fair that new employees were appointed without giving existing employees the opportunity to apply for senior roles. The lack of succession planning was a concern.

Data revealed the restructure also provided positive career and job impacts. Participant 12 experienced career advancement due to the restructure. As the beneficiary of the change, he was entrusted with the strategy, implementation, and daily operations of production support for Africa Regions. Participant 8's extent of responsibility was expanded, giving him exposure to new technology, tools, and

methods. Participant 15's role now included strategic responsibilities with engagement in higher-level decision-making forums.

#### 4.6.2.4 Support and Communication

The data revealed that the perceived lack of support and communication from leadership was a major stressor experienced by middle managers. Their middle role between top management and lower-level employees required them to operationalise the restructuring as per top management's decision, in addition to their existing responsibilities. All middle managers agreed that the lack of communication and change management support heightened their uncertainty and anxiety.

*'I think, a lack of support from human resources... also a lack of communication from the leadership because they were not engaging the staff and you know, we had to find our own sounding boards where we had to deal with it on our own and talk to our peers and whatever it may be...'* **(Participant 9)**

*'The worst thing for me was the communication. There was none. There was no communication. And there was no support. There was absolutely no communication. Nothing. So, you encountered the problem as it happened.'* **(Participant 16)**

#### 4.6.2.5 Outcome of Restructure

The data uncovered varying personal outcomes of the organisational restructuring. Participants indicated conflicting negatives and positives, role, and productivity effects, besides the general positives and negatives of organisational restructuring. Remarkably, data indicates that positives appeared to have several variants. Participating middle managers acknowledged positives from a personal perspective, but also experienced conflicting positives and negatives. Participant 7, who was retrenched, revealed conflicting positive and negative consequences from his retrenchment based on the introspection he used as a coping practice. Participant 7 stated that the retrenchment was his worst experience as it made him feel 'disposable'. Conversely, he made sense of the change by also describing it as his best experience as it motivated him to upskill, reskill, and make himself relevant



for today's job market. Similarly, Participant 8, as a contractor, was negative about his possible job loss, but was motivated to upskill and reskill.

Participant 1 displayed mixed feelings where conflicts of positive and negative were experienced. Negative feelings related to the lack of support from leadership, but positivity was displayed in the commitment and dedication of employees, who continued to be productive despite the uncertainty and anxiety.

Participant 12 related both positively and negatively when making sense of and coping with the restructure. He believed that if the change did not make sense, he would question the reason and benefits of the change. However, he was prepared to pilot the change without resisting, while keeping a positive mindset.

Middle managers' jobs and roles were impacted by the restructure. Their roles were altered, where they were accountable for functions they were not trained for or skilled at.

*'I was told, you are taking on the PM's job, it's not your job, we are marking you down because you're not supposed to do that....Then I was told afterwards, it wasn't your job, why did you do it? Why didn't you report it? Why did you do it? So, you working 14 hours a day but you doing the wrong thing. It was a bit demoralising...'* **(Participant 16)**

Data revealed that some middle managers now had a wider span of control, increasing their workload.

*'...is a significant change in terms of it's no longer our responsibility, so obviously the whole work pattern we had has been impacted because we are no longer responsible for delivering IT services although we were a conduit into the group team, we are no longer expected to speak on behalf so the guys in group have a direct communication to the countries although because of relationships we've built and the trust we have they still sent us emails to say we need help with this.'* **(Participant 6)**

Evidence indicates that continuous and unplanned change resulting from the restructure added to the already existing uncertainty and insecurity from the restructure.

*'It worries me, because my job is always at stake now because I don't know whether it's over it's very difficult for me to continue working, thinking that there is any job certainty we don't know if it's over... it could continue for a very long time.'* **(Participant 8)**

*'But I still don't feel safe or that my job is secure. I speak to many people in ....and outside, within the bank, they all say this is not over especially now with COVID-19. We should be expecting more of this.'* **(Participant 5)**

Participant 9, Participant 4, Participant 2, and Participant 7 related positive outcomes of the restructure. Participant 9 and Participant 2 both stated that a positive outcome of the change was letting go of people who were not productive, especially those who had not adapted to the changing times. Participant 4 concurred and added that change could be a time of opportunity. Participant 2 believed that the change resulted in a structure where work was done where it best made sense. Participant 7 believed that the change brought matters such as complacency to the surface, forcing people to face these concerns.

In contrast, Participant 16, Participant 2, and Participant 6 held the view that the organisational restructure resulted in negative outcomes. The negatives included loss of valuable IP accumulated over years that could not be replaced, skilled and knowledgeable staff members were retrenched, and the change was sowing confusion and instability. Participant 16 was adamant that nothing positive resulted from the restructure, as expressed below:

*'I don't think there was for me... There is nothing positive about this restructure. Nothing!'* **(Participant 16)**

In contrast, some middle managers were hesitant to pronounce on the change outcome and were still waiting for proof of positivity. Participant 8 stated:

*'So maybe the positives we still yet to see. We're going forward whether we as a business we actually get to turn the corner and actually the business becomes more profitable. So that we still have to see. I think it's still early stages to actually make a final decision.'* **(Participant 8)**

Middle managers' anxiety and uncertainty, and the effect of the restructure on their roles and responsibilities impacted on their productivity and performance. Participant 2, Participant 4, and Participant 8 concurred on delays resulting from the loss of internal networks that were leveraged for delivery. Participant 4 was particularly impacted, as he had to now seek new sources to gather information that he previously obtained from a single source. All participants believed the stress they were experiencing impacted their productivity, and hence their performance.

#### 4.6.2.6 Reaction to Change

Data revealed that participants' reactions to the change manifested in the following actions: reflect, rationalise, wait-and-see what happens or do nothing, resist, reset the mindset.

- **Reflect on the change**

Data revealed that upon reflection, Participant 4 concluded:

*'I realised that there are certain things in life you can't change. If management one day decides that it's your turn to be restructured, so be it, but the thing is what you can change on my side is to try to be the best person in terms of doing extra courses, upscaling myself and always be on a continuous journey to improve myself.'* **(Participant 4)**

Participant 9's reflection was based on his role:

*'... it helped me to see my role in the wider system and what is expected of me and what my peers expect of me and what the leadership expects of me...because if you can see your importance and you can see your role, then you know exactly what to do and what is expected of you...'* **(Participant 9)**

- **Rationalise the change**

In rationalising the change, Participant 12 believed that if the change did not make sense, he would question the reason and benefits of the change. However, he was prepared to pilot the change without resisting, keeping a positive mindset.

- **Wait and see what happens or do nothing**

Data revealed that participants resigned themselves to the change and the organisation and work had to continue, nonetheless.

*'...we have to pick ourselves up and move on. If we've survived, got to get up now and go on, pick the pieces up and get the organisation going again.'* **(Participant 9)**

Eight participants displayed change fatigue, where they displayed a sense of apathy towards the restructuring.

*'... here we go again. It's the same thing over and over. Can you just make up your mind about what you want? ...I'm fed up.'* **(Participant 5)**

*'You just accept it.'* **(Participant 1)**

- **Resist the change**

Data revealed that resistance to change was manifested in either passive or active behaviour.

Participant 9 displayed passive resistance to change by withdrawing and being non-participative.

*'... in many ways some moved on and others were just stuck in the past... lots of negative energy... people come to work but they don't talk anymore, they just focused on their laptop getting their work done and, or even in meetings people are not very active in meetings as well...And I think there is a lot of fear as well, people are afraid about their jobs as well.'* **(Participant 9)**

Participant 16 displayed active resistance to change by being defiant. She continued to do what she did previously, while aware that her actions would have consequences.

*So, when the restructure happened, it was almost as if I didn't care. My attitude was, tell me what to do and we'll do it and if you don't tell me, then I'll make a plan and do it. So I wasn't that involved in, what's the new process, what's the new. I just let it go. I just*

*thought here we go again, it's not going to impact what I do every day, I must just make it work, so let's just do it. Let's see what happens now.'* **(Participant 16)**

- **Reset the mind-set or frame of reference or outlook**

Participant 5 reflected on the change and made a conscious decision to change her behaviour.

*'...I asked myself what is the situation asking of me? I decided that I will focus only on what I can control. I don't have control over the decisions that management make. I can only control what is in my space. I made a conscious decision when I am unsure about something, I will ask... I made a conscious decision to stop the speculation and not listen to the rumour mongering. I will wait for management to provide clarity and guidance.'* **(Participant 5)**

Participant 7 viewed the bank in a different light. He appeared disillusioned and seemed to no longer trust the organisation because of his retrenchment experience.

*The bank brand, because previously you've got an idea...the bank is a great place to work... And this happens, you see it differently. There is no two ways about that. You will definitely see it differently.'* **(Participant 7)**

The data revealed participants' personal feelings towards the restructure. Survivor guilt, gratitude for having a job, self-preservation, sadness for those who lost their jobs, and mindset, were some of the personal effects that were evident among participants. It was evident that Participant 16, Participant 6, Participant 4, and Participant 5 displayed initial resistance to the restructure, but later had a change of attitude after engaging in coping practices. Participant 8, Participant 9, and Participant 5 experienced guilt about not being retrenched, and pity for those who were, responding by avoiding interaction with the retrenched employees.

COVID-19 played a significant role in the personal outlook of participants towards the end of the restructure period. The advent of COVID-19 and the national lockdown caused an economic downturn that resulted in wide job losses across industries and organisations. Participants became aware of widespread job losses in the bank, the financial industry, and the country in general. This awareness of

widespread job losses triggered a heightened threat of the possible loss of their jobs, causing all thirteen participants to reveal how grateful they were for having a job against the backdrop of COVID-19.

*I think because of the time we're in, with COVID, as kind of a backdrop ...whereas in other context restructuring does sometimes mean reapplying for position and potentially leading to a loss of a job. So, in the context of COVID I was comfortable with it, just because of a, you still have a job perspective. Had it been at any other time, I guess, it would have been a little more anxious...'* **(Participant 13)**

#### 4.6.3 Theme 3

Middle manager conundrum: Middle managers are conflicted by the roles they perform during organisational restructure

Middle managers performed three roles in the organisational restructure. In their strategic role, they participated in the formulation and were responsible for the implementation of the organisational change. In their line manager role, middle managers managed and supported their subordinates with work operations whilst managing the team's delivery and productivity. As part of the change agent role, middle managers were tasked with the responsibility to influence the change implementation by preparing, equipping, and supporting employees to adapt and adopt the strategic change. However, in executing these roles, middle managers were faced with conflict between these roles that caused additional stress, and having to fulfil conflicting expectations as demonstrated by the participants' comments.

③ Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Middle manager conundrum: Middle managers are conflicted by the roles they	Strategic Role	Support top management's restructure decision Implement change
	Line Manager Role	Manage subordinates Manage capacity and demand

③ Theme	Sub-theme	Code
perform during organisational restructure		Support staff
	Change Agent Role	Implement change Obtain buy-in for change Provide support
	Challenges	Loss of personal authority, power, networks, and relationships Finding new ways of working– impact to productivity and performance Conflicts
	Impact to Role	Lack of clarity of individual and team roles Misalignment of role to new structure Positives
	Consequences of Role Conflict	Stressors related to role  Performance management

#### 4.6.3.1 Strategic Role

For this research, middle managers' strategic role includes the formulation and implementation of strategic change. In their strategic role, middle managers provided input and improvements to top management's restructuring decision and were tasked with implementing the restructure. By participating in the strategic

planning process, Participant 9 motivated the strategic change objectives to lower-level staff.

*'I think being involved in the strategic planning, you know you build good networks with some of the exec's and they also have conversations with you generally about stuff and you have to connect the dots in terms of what is coming...one of the key things about my job that I can talk about that is really important is having a team I think, clear communication is very important in terms of the strategy. So, people are clear in terms of what they are expected to do and being part of a strategy planning process, I have a good view and there is nothing lost in translation or there is no broken telephone, as they say, the message that comes from the top so that's the one thing....So, it's important to, for me, to have a collaborative, very good collaborative skills with other stakeholders and my peers to ensure that we are aligned in terms of the strategy and we all on the same page'* **(Participant 9)**

Likewise, Participant 12 provided input to the strategic change objectives and structured his team to support the objectives.

*'I have ensured that ok my team is absolutely clear what this restructuring is done for and what was the objective. It is not that ok we will not get a greenfield opportunity where think there was a clear objective from organisation to achieve. That is why they have done this restructure.'* **(Participant 12)**

When middle managers fail to spot changes in the environment, they become susceptible to strategic inertia. Data reveals that middle managers did not spot the change under discussion coming, and were taken by surprise. However, upon reflection, several participants felt that the change was beneficial for reasons such as new processes, work residing where it best makes sense, and removing 'dead wood', a term used for employees who were not productive or adding value.

#### 4.6.3.2 Line manager role

For this research, middle managers' line manager role consisted of the responsibility of managing their teams. As line manager, middle managers managed and supported subordinates with work operations whilst managing delivery and productivity.



Participant 9 continued to manage the performance of his team even though he was anxious about the change situation. He supported his team by not outwardly displaying his anxiety because he did not want the team to be stressed, which would have resulted in decreased productivity.

*I'm expected to be positive in this whole thing because your staff are negative, and your staff are down and depressed. Some of them will tell you, you know you will have a meeting on Teams, and someone will say, well I can't attend because I've got to deal with a crisis, or I've got to deal with a personal issue whatever. You finding more of that. People not being part of meetings whatever because they would withdraw from the system a bit more, they want to share less. I think, it's more traumatic for them to actual be, to put up this brave front on a Teams meeting when they feel the way they do emotionally... it doesn't feel good, I think the people impact is a major thing and many people have been with the company for many, many years and been loyal to the company and impact their productivity as well, so it's difficult to manage the people that are left, they also impacted because they seem to think, okay, when is the next wave coming, it's going to happen again and it's always on their minds. They never going to be as productive as you want them to be.'* **(Participant 9)**

Similarly, Participant 5 managed the performance of the team by managing their capacity and workload whilst she was coping with conflicting demands and added pressure. Interestingly, Participant 5 felt the need to protect her team at all costs and had honest, transparent communications with her team. In managing his team, Participant 2 worked together with the team to plan and execute the work because he had confidence in his team's ability to deliver. On the other hand, Participant 12 had to assess the skill level of his team to deliver on the change objectives. The assessment resulted in Participant 12 having to coach and upskill his team to ensure timely and quality deliverables.

#### 4.6.3.3 Change agent role

For this research, middle managers' change agent role includes the responsibility to influence the change implementation by preparing, equipping, and supporting employees to adapt to, and adopt the strategic change. As evidenced from the data, as change agents, middle managers were expected to facilitate the restructure and

obtain buy-in for the change. Their key task appeared to be support for staff in the difficulty they experienced during the restructure, whilst managing increased workloads, enabling new ways of working, and continuous delivery. Middle managers were ideally situated in the middle to act as change agents and assist in easing the process. This was due to them being close to the attitudes and behaviours of lower-level staff, and to their understanding of the dynamics of the division. Both Participant 9 and Participant 5 supported employees by answering questions as best they could to help ease their fears and uncertainty.

*'They will come to you and ask you questions about these things and sometimes you may not be able to give them all the information they need to make them feel comfortable.'* **(Participant 9)**

Participant 16 supported subordinates by showing empathy and would have discussions with them at night when not disturbed by work. Similarly, Participant 9 also believed it was necessary to be empathetic to subordinates to help them adapt to, and adopt the change. He spent time with them explaining the benefits of the change and the possible opportunity, not only for them, but also for him, to upskill and reskill.

The following section deals with the challenges experienced by middle managers in executing their strategic, line manager, and change agent roles.

#### 4.6.3.4 Challenges

Evidence from the data demonstrates how the personal authority, power, personal networks, and relationships that middle managers leveraged were reduced in the restructure. The restructure removed this leverage, leaving them “scrambling” to get the job done by any means. In relating their challenges, both Participant 4 and Participant 2 lamented the loss of leverage of their personal networks and relationships to get the job done, and of the disruption to their routines.

*'...resulted in a little bit of a delay, because you building up the relationship with people, you will get to a point where those people will bend over backwards for you and now with a new team you can't rely on those relationships anymore.'* **(Participant 2)**

Participant 16, Participant 12, Participant 5, and Participant 4 agreed that the restructure required middle managers to find new ways of working. Finding new ways of working delayed their delivery, thereby impacting on their productivity and performance. Both Participant 8 and Participant 6 were anxious because they had new line managers who had no knowledge of their established performance level. They experienced additional uncertainty since they not only had to prove their performance again, but were appraised by a manager who had no knowledge of their past performance.

Middle managers revealed the challenges they experienced. Participant 12 had to wear different hats relating to the different roles he had to perform. He had to have difficult conversations in providing feedback to top-level management, and required their support. Participant 9 found it conflicting being in the middle, supporting top-level management and lower-level employees, but still managing various responsibilities and attempting to maintain his performance, whilst having to cope with uncertainty and anxiety of possible job loss. Participant 8 found the atmosphere negative, hostile, competitive, and uncollaborative. Colleagues he previously worked with were no longer participating in meetings or sharing information. Participant 5 experienced conflict with her strategic, line manager, and change agent roles. She believed that she did not fully participate in formulating the strategic change, but was expected to implement the change. She was further conflicted when implementing the change. She felt she did not have a choice in accepting the change and had to persuade her staff to buy into the change. Added to this, the restructure resulted in the loss of leverage of her personal network, but increased her workload. All participants agreed that the lack of clear and transparent communication added to their uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety.

#### 4.6.3.5 Impact to role

It was evident that participating middle managers experienced difficulty with the clarity of their roles and responsibilities in the new structure. Their roles were misaligned to their skills and experience and within their restructured teams. Acting in different roles without clarity of the role and its responsibilities challenged middle

managers, causing conflict. Participant 1 had to fill in the gaps left by the restructure and did not have the necessary skills to perform the role. By contrast, some of Participant 6's responsibilities were removed from her, but those responsibilities were not reassigned to another role. She found herself having to perform the responsibilities because staff did not know who performed the job in the new structure. Participant 5 expected clarity of roles and responsibilities to be included in performance agreements, and was concerned that performances were being appraised against roles that were changed and not agreed to.

On the other hand, middle managers experienced varying positives to their roles. Participant 15's role was elevated to a greater strategic role. He was now involved in higher-level decision-making forums representing his manager. He also preferred his new manager's relaxed style of working, compared to the previous manager's micro-management. Participant 9 agreed with the new way of working that lessened his workload due to prioritisation of initiatives. In addition, the restructure forced him to focus and understand what was expected of his role, which helped him to make sense of the situation and better cope with the challenge. Participant 12 was given more responsibility and a bigger team and was empowered to make important decisions without having to consult his manager. The nature of his role also changed from purely technical, to include people management. He viewed this as an opportunity to learn something new and different.

#### 4.6.3.6 Consequences of role conflict

Data revealed that the outcome of the role challenges and conflicts caused disquiet to middle managers. This disquiet resulted in a negative impact on middle managers productivity and performance, leaving them concerned about their work reputation and brand. Participant 8 was impacted when he had to manage his team, together with an increased workload by doing the work himself. He found collaboration very difficult since people were protective of their roles. In contrast, Participant 16 was penalised for taking on more than her role. She felt demoralised that her initiative to do more than was asked of her was not appreciated. Participant 16 was also concerned that her increased workload and shortage of resources resulted in a

lower standard of quality, given that she had to comply with regulatory timelines causing her to rush her delivery. This consequently damaged her reputation for delivering superior quality and service. Participant 9 stated that productivity and quality declined because middle managers state of confusion over their roles caused further stress that hampered their ability to be productive.

#### 4.6.4 Theme 4

Stress triggered by organisational restructuring affects middle managers' emotional, mental, and physical well-being

Data revealed the restructure trigger event caused stress for middle managers from different aspects of the restructuring process. They experienced anxiety from the way the restructure was executed, particularly the procedure and process of the restructure. The role and responsibility of leadership was another major source of anxiety, while the middle managers role conflict caused additional stress.

④ Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Stress triggered by organisational restructuring affects middle managers' emotional, mental, and physical well-being	Stress	Stress caused by organisational restructure procedure and process Stress caused by middle manager role conflict
	Emotions and Symptoms of Stress	Cognitive symptoms Emotional symptoms Behavioural symptoms Physical symptoms Conflicting emotions

##### 4.6.4.1 Stressors

It was evident that stressors are the trigger events that resulted in challenges, conflicts, and difficulties that middle managers experienced during the organisational restructure (Section 2.4.4). Middle managers experienced anxiety as

a result of the way in which the organisational restructure and restructure process was executed. Participant 2 and Participant 8 revealed that they felt anxious and confused and were surprised and unaware of what was transpiring.

*'Personally, as I said, just feeling for those people who were losing their jobs and going through anxiety myself. Those were the impacts on me personally...the head of the... was calling teams one by one into a boardroom to explain what was happening, but before that actually happened, there wasn't much communication at all until we were called into a room... nobody actually knew what was going on. So, there was a lot of uncertainty amongst the people and people were worried.'* **(Participant 2)**

The perceived lack of communication about the restructure and awareness of the situation caused anxiety and uncertainty. Participant 10 and Participant 8 both perceived the final restructure announcement as sudden and surprising, leaving employees with a fear of job loss.

*'I'm also concerned about the way the restructure happened. There was no prior consultation. We were only told on the day who was impacted. There was no communication, it was very negative ... I think for me, personally, it was a very bad experience. The whole area was upset and shocked. I think the rumours and suspicious were even worse. You know, people didn't know but were speculating that all contractors will be let go. This was very worrying for me.'* **(Participant 8)**

Data revealed that the perceptions of employees were based on fear of the situation because they had received no prior communication regarding the restructure. Participants perceived the change implementation process as unclear, and mentioned that no organisational change management support was offered, leading to perceptions that the human side of the restructure was overlooked, which gave rise to greater anxiety.

Participant 1 revealed similar perceptions concerning the lack of organisational support and unclear change implementation process. All participants perceived the lack of communication, support, and engagement, as a major stressor during the restructure.

*'...I wish...can be more involved with us because I think he depends on his management structure to filter down communications, but that never happens. It never happens. And we spoke about all these things in those meetings at the beginning of the year, but obviously that was a complete disaster, and nothing came of that...'* **(Participant 1)**

Data revealed that the negative impact of leadership in the change process was significant and resulted in a major source of concern, as participants viewed leadership as non-participative in the change. The lack of visibility, communication, motivation, and empathy from leadership caused additional apprehension. Participant 9 believed leadership should lead by example by 'rolling their sleeves up to help', which did not happen. Participant 1 wished that leadership were more involved in what was happening, however, leadership were detached from the process and displayed no empathy towards employees, especially those that were retrenched. Participant 10 felt that leadership were communicating with select employees because some people had more information on the restructure than others.

The middle managers' conflicting roles caused apprehension. Participant 5 was challenged when she had to support her team with an increased workload whilst also encouraging them to adopt the change. She provided emotional support to help her team cope with their anxiety and uncertainty, even though she needed support to help her cope with her own anxiety and uncertainty. As the change agent, she had to keep up appearances. In a similar situation, but different position, Participant 8 had to provide support to his team from a line manager role, and persuade them to adopt the change from a change agent role, even though he was extremely anxious that as a contractor, his contract may not be renewed as part of the bank's continued downsizing.

#### 4.6.4.2 Emotions and Symptoms of Stress

Data revealed that the emotions experienced by middle managers were the responses to the stress that they experienced due to the restructure. Symptoms of stress exhibited by middle managers were cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and physical. Participant 7 experienced depression, felt helpless, and at times could not

get out of bed. He disengaged and did not want to talk to or see people. Participant 16, in addition to her existing medical condition related to her heart, was physically ill with a stomach ulcer, and experienced high blood pressure. Like all participants, Participant 6 constantly experienced negative emotions, such as worry, anxiety, frustration, confusion, uncertainty, concern, and fear. She outwardly projected these negative emotions by snapping at her family, including her children. Participant 6's stress manifested as health problems, and she experienced headaches and heart palpitations. Middle managers also exhibited conflicting emotions about the restructure. Participant 9 was conflicted in his strategic, line manager, and change agent role:

*'One word comes to mind, conflicting. It's very conflicting for me because I'm a very principled person and I live by the values I live by so that was conflicting for me. My conscience is being asked to put on a brave front but inside I know I should be talking about this issue to start. But I think you have to realise...that reasoning can produce more negative energy. So that's conflicting for me, but you know it has to be done. You're seen as a leader, the only way you going to pick the productivity out and to start to get positivity energy out is to start to be inspirational and motivational with people even though its conflicting with your emotions.'* **(Participant 9)**

Participant 13 and Participant 6 experienced conflict with their role and responsibilities, either giving up responsibilities, or taking up new ones but not knowing who should be taking on these responsibilities. Participant 2 was emotionally conflicted, considering that although he worked in the division, he did have a reporting line in the structure. He was relieved that he would not lose his job, but at the same time was troubled by close colleague losing their jobs, and the lack of empathy shown towards them. Middle managers experienced various conflicts during the restructure that caused apprehension and varying emotions.

#### **4.6.5 Theme 5**

Middle managers use internal and external coping practices that produce varying outcomes.



It was evident that middle managers faced immense stress in an organisational restructure fraught with uncertainty and anxiety. They exercised varying means to help them deal with adversity. These coping practices were best suited to how stressed they felt in their situation or at that point in time. Middle managers chose to apply coping practices that were internal, or external to them as individuals. Internal coping practices were personal practices related to their mental and emotional state, including internal thoughts, feelings, and well-being; while external coping practises were externally focused.

⑤ Theme	Sub-themes	Code
Middle managers use internal and external coping practices that produce varying outcomes	Coping Practices	Internal coping practices External coping practices
	Outcomes of Coping Practices	Dealing positively with restructure Adapting to change Dealing with uncertainty Heightened awareness of job position Well-being

#### 4.6.5.1 Coping practices

It was evident from the data that anxiety caused by the organisational restructure had a major impact on the well-being of middle managers, resulting in emotional, mental, and physical health problems. Coping practices were the strategies middle managers used to deal with the anxiety and uncertainty. Data revealed that coping practices helped middle managers make sense of the restructure, adapt to the change, and take care of their emotional, mental, and physical health. In relating coping practices theoretically to the study, practices may be considered everyday occurrences that happen almost mechanically, but the value of these micro-level practices; such as talking, walking, reading, or praying, should not be underestimated. These simple, everyday activities or coping practices in the

organisational restructure situation demonstrates how everyday micro-level practices, when enacted in a particular manner or context, can yield benefits and successes in ways that are often considered ordinary.

From a strategy-as-practice perspective, the coping practices of middle managers are aligned to strategy practitioners performing micro-level practices that make up strategising. Strategy-as-practice conceptualise strategy as a social practice where detailed activity, and the societal context or situation in which they are enacted, are related. To relate the strategy-as-practice perspective of strategy, practices, and practitioners to the coping practices: the coping practices that middle manager practitioners engage in are the detailed activities of the social practice and the organisational restructure's internal processes that cause uncertainty and anxiety, and the societal context or situation within which the coping practices are enacted. Coping practices cannot be executed in isolation, but must be enacted by middle manager practitioners; hence, the practices cannot be removed from the practitioners.

- **Internal coping practices**

Data revealed that internal coping practices were based on middle managers' personal values, experience of past change, self-awareness, and resilience. Middle managers practiced mindfulness as one of the key coping practices to help them relax, be calm, and think rationally to manage their mental well-being. Participant 8 engaged in meditation and prayer. Likewise, Participant 12, Participant 9, Participant 10, Participant 1, and Participant 2 sought solace from religious practices, prayer, and meditation. Participant 9 and Participant 5 used quiet, alone time as one of their coping practices. Cognitive coping practices were used by Participant 5, Participant 1, Participant 9, Participant 10, Participant 15, and Participant 16. Participant 5 was mentally stressed and made a conscious decision to not speculate, but to deal with the situation at hand for her own sanity and peace of mind. Similarly, Participant 1 mentally accepted the situation, adapted to the change, and actively participated in implementing the change. Participant 9 and Participant 16 displayed resigned acceptance by embracing the change, thinking positively, and not resisting. Interestingly, these participants were older and had

experience of organisational change. It was evident that their previous experience provided a greater sense of self-awareness, which they proactively applied to anticipate and mentally prepare themselves to deal with the expected stress resulting from the organisational restructure. All participants revealed that talking to themselves, reasoning, and rationalising helped them to cope with the mental confusion and anxiety. Being resilient was one of the most critical internal coping practices of middle managers. Participant 6 stated:

*'You have to dig in deeper to find the strength to persevere, to remain hopeful you know to remain focused to have that endurance and resilience it's something internal.'*

**(Participant 6)**

It was evident that making sense of and rationalising the change improved how middle managers coped with the uncertainty of the restructure. Participant 7 rationalised that his retrenchment was not because there was something wrong with him, but was a decision made by the organisation, which he did not have control over. Participant 13, Participant 2, and Participant 15 rationalised that considering the business performance and strategy, it made sense to restructure. Participants disclosed that having a 'bigger picture' view helped them understand the need for the change, and at the same time, eased the process of adapting and adopting the change.

- **External coping practices**

Data revealed that personal activities helped practitioners cope. Coping practices that participants engaged in were hobbies, reading, listening to music, watching movies, woodwork, studying, and gardening. It was evident that external coping practices were based on resources that middle managers had access to. External sources of coping included social support from colleagues, peers, team, subordinates, extended family, and religious organisations, such as churches and temples, and professional social support, such as professional counselling. Participants had networks that they called upon, while some had access to external lifestyle sources that included gyms, sports clubs like golf, running, and cycling clubs or social establishments like bars and cinemas, which they utilised to help them cope. Middle managers also applied their own external coping practices like running,

hiking, outdoor family activities, walking their dogs, being outdoors in nature and completing training courses externally or within the bank.

All middle managers engaged in the external coping practice of talking to their colleagues and peers. Middle managers revealed that talking to colleagues and peers helped them cope, especially when they realised that others were experiencing similar emotions. Participant 6, Participant 4, Participant 5, and Participant 13 indicated that talking to their manager helped them make sense of the situation, even though it did not provide clarity on their roles and responsibilities. Participant 5 also spoke to her subordinates not only to help her cope, but also to help them cope, and to support them in her role as line manager. All participants indicated that talking to family and engaging in family activities was one of their greatest sources of strength and support when they experienced difficulties during the restructure. Participant 1 revealed that hiking with her family allowed her to cope with her mental and physical difficulties. Participant 9 engaged in activities of playing golf, having a drink with friends, and family activities. Participant 2 sought professional help by speaking to a counsellor to help him cope. Similarly, Participant 10 sought counselling from her priest and had support from the women's book club in her church. Participant 5 engaged in outdoor activities of walking her dog and running. Participant 16 utilised her external network within the bank to help with pressured deliverables.

*'I have a very good network. Personally. At work. So, there is people that I know has my back and I have their back and that's how we do it.'* **(Participant 16)**

#### 4.6.5.2 Outcomes of coping practices

Data revealed that the coping practices used by middle managers during the restructure helped them to deal positively with the restructure and its uncertainty and adapt to the change. It also provided them with a heightened awareness of their job position and improved mental health. Participants recognised the positives from the coping practices, they felt better, and experienced fewer negative emotions, which improved their emotional, mental physical well-being.

*'I'm coping a lot much better because I've spoken to people about processes, I've actually embraced the change ...' (Participant 6)*

Data revealed that once the initial shock and distress of the restructure decreased, participants' thought patterns became clearer; allowing them to rationally and objectively assess the situation. Participant 7 found that coping helped him to be less complacent, and he made a considerable effort to upskill himself. Similarly, Participant 8 and Participant 4 used upskilling and reskilling as a coping practice, allowing them to expand their skills and be less restricted as specialists.

*'...it has also helped me to mobilise myself, you know, to upskill myself so I stay relevant for today's jobs.' (Participant 8)*

Coping practices taught middle managers to be more resilient. It allowed them to develop the ability to adapt quickly and become more flexible in terms of the requirements of the restructure.

*'...I asked myself what is the situation asking of me? I decided that I will focus only on what I can control...I made a conscious decision when I am unsure about something, I will ask... I made a conscious decision to stop the speculation and not listen to the rumour mongering. I will wait for management to provide clarity and guidance.' (Participant 5)*

Participant 5 summed up the positive outcome of coping on her emotions and mental state. Coping improved the negative emotions, productivity, mental and physical well-being, attitude, and resilience of middle managers.

*'... if you going to have a negative attitude about the change, if you going to get sort of bogged down in the emotions of it ...and let it drag you down, it's going to impact your own performance ....So, it's about sort of acknowledging the emotional turmoil but being able to work through it because if you can't work through it and accept and move on then it's going to sort of stress you out for longer, and longer until eventually you're not going to be a good fit for that area...and it comes down to an attitude change obviously in the beginning it is negative but to work through that negativity and to change your perspective to look forward rather than backwards...when you're deep, deep in that situation it's difficult to see clearly and when you've got somebody experienced to talk*

*to, they can help you see past the immediate issues that might be clouding your vision.'*  
**(Participant 2)**

Middle managers experienced a heightened awareness of their job position. They saw the value in their role as middle managers in the restructure and the demands of their role. Participants had to reset priorities and take on more responsibility. They displayed leadership by getting on with what the business needed, irrespective of their difficulties and challenges. Middle managers demonstrated their versatility, performing roles outside of their job position.

*'It helped me to focus, it helped me to also communicate effectively with my staff, it helped me to see my role in the wider system and what is expected of me and what my peers expect of me and what the leadership expects of me...because if you can see your importance and you can see your role, then you know exactly what to do and what is expected of you and it makes your leadership easier as well.'* **(Participant 9)**

On the contrary, some coping practices appeared to be maladaptive. One of the participants revealed he used alcohol to cope with his stress. Several participants used medication to cope with health issues like headaches, depression, ulcers, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, and anxiety caused by stress of the restructure. If not administered or controlled, such coping practices could lead to health risk behaviours, such as side effects of prolonged use of medication or substance abuse. Data revealed that Participant 4, Participant 5, Participant 6, and Participant 7 coped by withdrawing. They wanted to be left alone. However, this led to problems where they distanced themselves from family, teams, and colleagues. Participant 6 found herself having outbursts and scolding her children when they disturbed her, and being curt with her family members when they attempted to intervene. Participant 4 used upskilling as a coping practice, but spending a considerable amount of time upskilling caused him to neglect his family. Consequently, he did not participate in family time or take time to help his children with their schoolwork.

In the case of Participant 7, who was retrenched as part of the outsourcing decision, even though he internally rationalised that his retrenchment was not personal, it

triggered much self-doubt and paranoia. The experience caused a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence. He felt incompetent, and as a result, was consumed with upskilling and reskilling himself, which he felt would prevent him from being a candidate for retrenchment in future. Participant 8 and Participant 10 experienced a breakdown in trust, where discussions they considered private and confidential were discussed amongst colleagues. Participant 8 experienced hostility from colleagues and as a result chose to internalise his thoughts and feelings of the restructure. Participant 6 revealed that initially when she spoke to colleagues and peers, it helped her cope, but found she was absorbing their negativity, which prevented her from feeling better.

It is evident that coping practices are a critical part of middle managers managing their health and well-being when faced with a stressful situation. Job loss is inherent in organisational restructuring and is considered one of the most stressful situations that humans face. As evidenced, middle managers applied various coping practices when faced with uncertainty and anxiety from organisational restructure.

#### **4.7 Summary of findings**

The themes described above, and depicted in Figure 4.6 are interrelated with the findings of this study in answering the research question of how middle managers cope during organisational restructure. Middle managers' personal attributes and work experience influenced how they experienced the restructure and how they coped. The experience of the restructure, together with leadership behaviour and the middle manager's role conflict during the restructure, were trigger events that led to the stress middle managers experienced. Middle managers' coping practices helped them to deal with the anxiety. Coping practices resulted in middle managers experiencing a more positive outlook and finding it easier to adapt to the restructure. Middle managers regarded the misalignment of leadership behaviour as a change in the bank's organisational culture.

## Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring – a case study in a South African Bank

### Interrelatedness of Themes and Findings

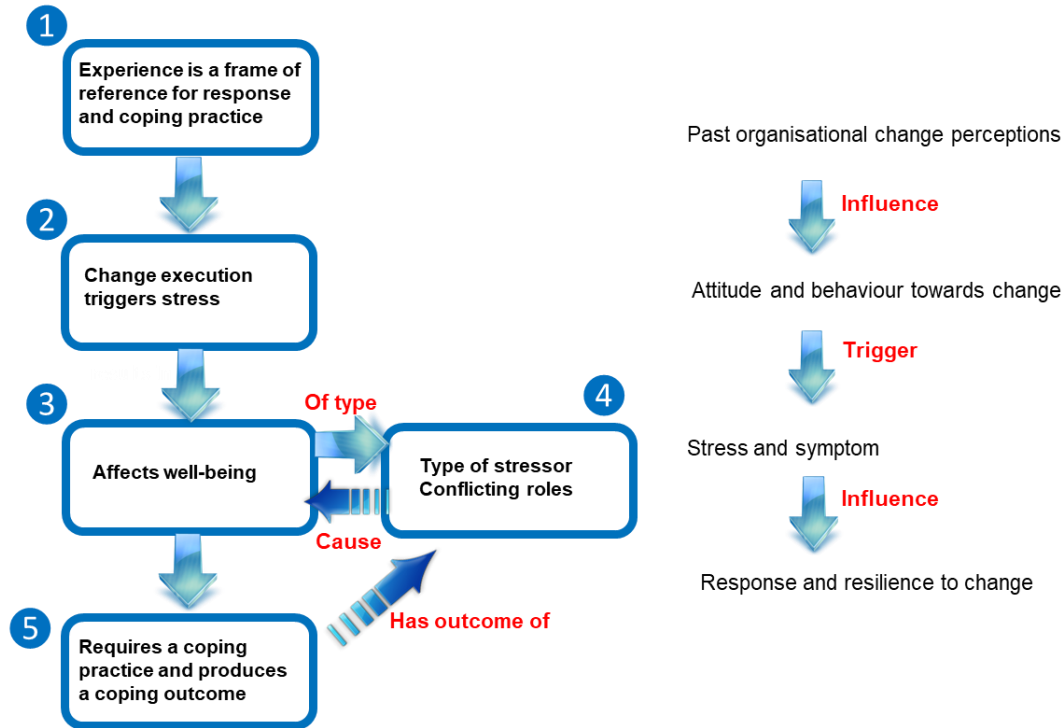


Figure 4. 6 Interrelatedness of Themes and Findings

Source: Author



Figure 4.6 depicts how the themes and findings of this study relate to how middle managers cope with organisational restructuring. The arrows reflect direct influence on the processes. Past organisational change perceptions influence change recipients' attitudes and behaviour toward the change, which triggers stress and symptoms that influence the types of coping practices used in coping with the stress. Role conflict is a type of stressor resulting from the change process, and is also an outcome of the coping practice that can cause additional stress during the change process.

#### **4.5.1 Finding 1 Theme 1**

Middle managers' personal experiences and demographics shape their response to organisational change, stressors, and coping.

Sub-themes

**Frame of Reference:** The frame of reference from which middle managers related to, and described their restructuring and coping experiences, consisted of their past change experiences and perceptions of those change experiences. Middle managers' personal responses were situated in their attitude, outlook, behaviour, and responses towards change that was based on their personal perspectives of their change experiences.

**Influence of Personal Attributes:** Middle managers' personal attributes that influenced how they experienced the change, included their age, tenure, career stage, and cultural differences.

#### **4.5.2 Finding 2 Theme 2**

Execution of the organisational restructure affects middle managers' role and stress level.

Sub-themes

**Process Shortcomings and Procedural Fairness:** The organisational restructure process shortcomings and procedural (un)fairness was a major contributor to the

anxiety and coping practices of middle managers during the organisational restructure.

**Negative Work Environment:** Was typical of the stressful nature of organisational restructure. It was fraught with mistrust, suspicions, rumours and speculation, self-preservation, non-collaboration, and conflict amongst staff.

**Career Impact:** Middle managers revealed that due to the lack of consultation in the restructure, staff were restructured to roles and divisions that were not aligned to their career path, growth, and skillset.

**Support and Communication:** The perceived lack of support and communication from leadership was a major stressor experienced by the middle managers and led to uncertainty. Having increased support during change and restructuring would have assisted middle managers to better cope with the uncertainty experienced.

**Outcome of Restructure:** Participants indicated conflicting negatives and positives, role, and productivity effects. Other outcomes were continuous and unplanned change resulting from the restructure and general positives and negatives of organisational restructure.

**Reaction to Change:** Participants' individual feelings towards the restructure included survivor guilt, gratitude for having a job, self-preservation, and resistance to change.

#### **4.5.3 Finding 3 Theme 3**

Middle manager conundrum: Middle managers are conflicted by the roles they perform during organisational restructure.

Sub-themes

**Strategic Role:** In their strategic role, middle managers were required to support top management's restructure decision and had the responsibility to implement the restructure.

**Line Manager Role:** Middle managers managed and supported their subordinates' line functions whilst continuing to perform their roles.

**Change Agent Role:** Middle managers facilitated the restructure and had to obtain buy-in for the change. They had to support staff in their difficult experience during the restructure, while also enabling new ways of working and continuous delivery.

**Challenges:** Middle managers' loss of personal authority, power, personal networks, and relationships impacted their leverage to get the job done.

**Impact to Role:** The lack of role clarity and the misalignment of skills and experience with roles in the new structure.

**Consequences of Role Conflict:** The outcome of the role challenges and conflicts caused much stress to middle managers.

#### **4.5.4 Finding 4 Theme 4**

Stress triggered by organisational restructuring affects middle managers' emotional, mental, and physical well-being.

Sub-themes

**Stress:** Stress is the symptom of the trigger events that result in challenges, conflicts, and difficulties that middle managers experienced with the organisational restructure.

**Emotions and Symptoms of Stress:** Emotions experienced by middle managers were the responses that underlie the stress that they experienced due to the restructure. Symptoms of stress exhibited by middle managers were cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and physical.

#### 4.5.5 Finding 5 Theme 5

Middle managers use internal and external coping practices that produce varying outcomes.

Sub-themes

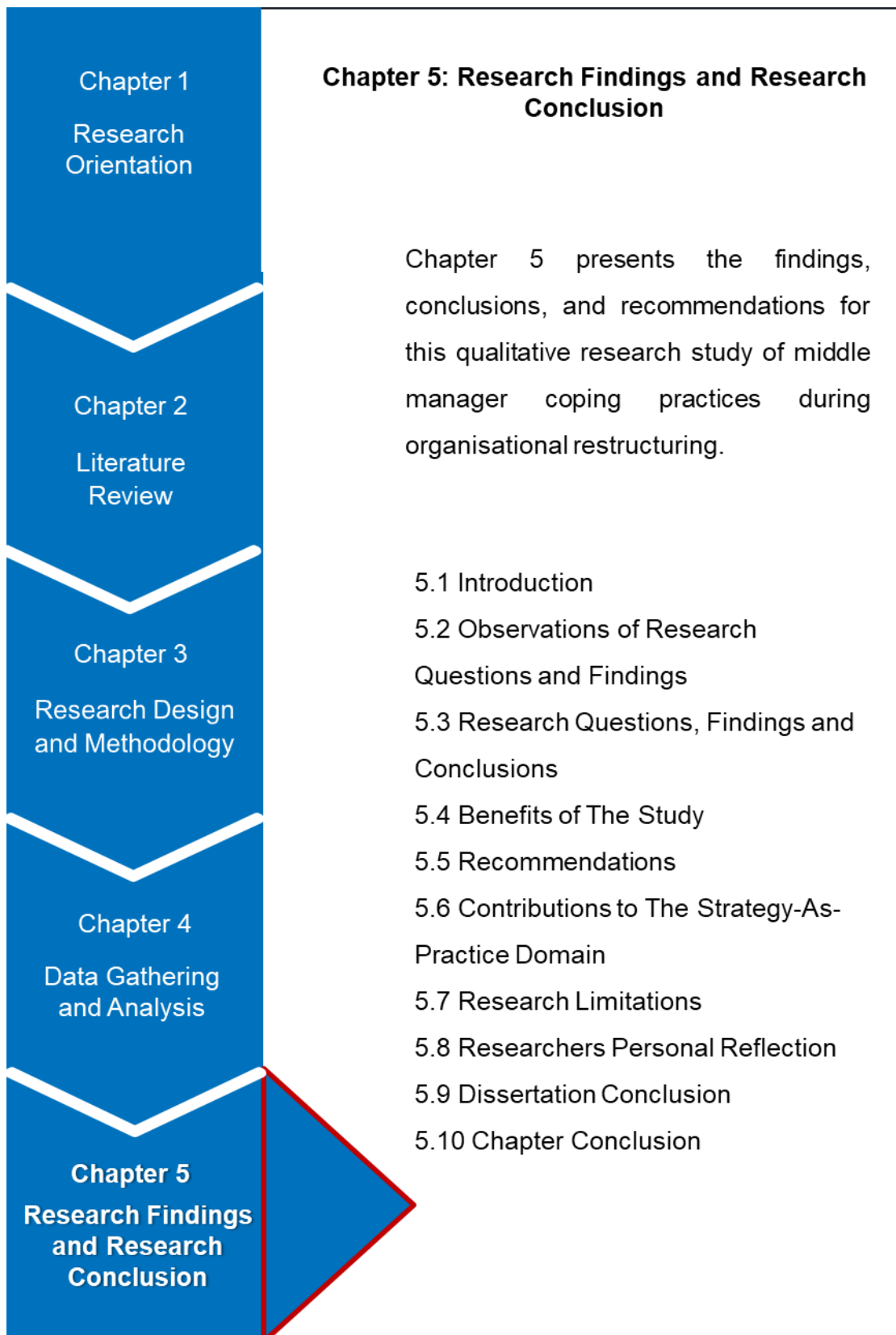
**Coping Practices:** The strategies middle managers utilised to deal with the challenges and difficulties experienced with the organisational restructure. Middle managers engaged in coping practices that were internal or external to them as individuals.

**Outcomes of Coping:** The coping practices used by middle managers helped them to deal with the restructure and the uncertainty positively and to adapt to the change, whilst providing them with a heightened awareness of their job position.

#### 4.6 Chapter conclusion

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the data analysis using data collected from 13 middle manager participants. A summary of the data, analysed using the Saldaña (2021) coding method, was presented. The chapter profiled the participants and their interviews. Data analysis revealed five main themes and sub-themes to answer the research question of how middle managers coped during the organisational restructure. A detailed discussion of the themes and sub-themes was presented with supporting evidence extracted verbatim from participants' interviews. The chapter highlighted the relationship between the themes, and how they are applied to answer the research question. The relationship between the themes and findings were presented. The chapter concluded with a summary of the findings. Chapter 5 will present the interpretation, conclusions, and recommendations of this study. Figure 5.1 offers the positioning of Chapter 5 within the dissertation

**Figure 5.1 Chapter 5 Overview**



## **CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RESEARCH CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This research study undertook to explore the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring within a South African bank. Chapter 1 offered the background to the study and emphasized the research problem that underpinned the purpose and benefit of this study whilst the research questions were set out to achieve the objective of this study. Chapter 1 further summarised the research methodology. Chapter 2 provided a theoretical background, which comprised a review of the literature and related concepts and issues of middle management, organisational restructuring, and coping. Chapter 3 described the research methodology adopted to gather the data for this study. Chapter 4 presented the detailed analysis and findings of the data. Chapter 5 deals with the research conclusions based on the research findings as described in the previous chapter. This chapter also puts forward recommendations for future studies.

### **5.2 Observations of research questions and findings**

This qualitative study explored the coping practices of participants who were middle managers during organisational restructuring in a South African bank. The primary and secondary aims of this study were articulated as research questions, as outlined in Section 5.3. Thirteen (13) middle managers were interviewed in virtual semi-structured interviews to uncover their personal experience of organisational restructuring. Findings confirmed coping practices as internal and external ways, habits, customs, traditions, or routines, which middle managers performed. These practices offered them support for the emotions that can be described as the feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical discomfort that middle managers experienced during the restructure. These findings concur with the literature review (Dixon, 2021). In addition to exploring the coping practices, the findings also revealed several outcomes and relationships among the findings that offer responses to the sub-questions. Findings revealed that events during the restructure triggered stressors, causing symptoms that needed coping practices based on the severity of stress and stage of the restructure. The coping practices led to both

positive and negative outcomes. Positive outcomes increased middle managers' resilience, and hence reduced stress levels as the events of the restructure unfolded. Conversely, negative outcomes of coping triggered additional stress for middle managers.

### **5.2.1 Linking the research questions to the themes and findings**

Figure 5.2 diagrammatically illustrates how the research questions and high-level answers (or themes) that respond to these questions are interrelated. As presented in Chapter 4, the rich data was analysed and presented in five overarching themes that offered insight into the coping practices of middle managers. The findings revealed that events during the restructure trigger stress with symptoms, which in turn realises an outcome that is managed by coping practices.

Linking the Research Questions to the Themes and Findings

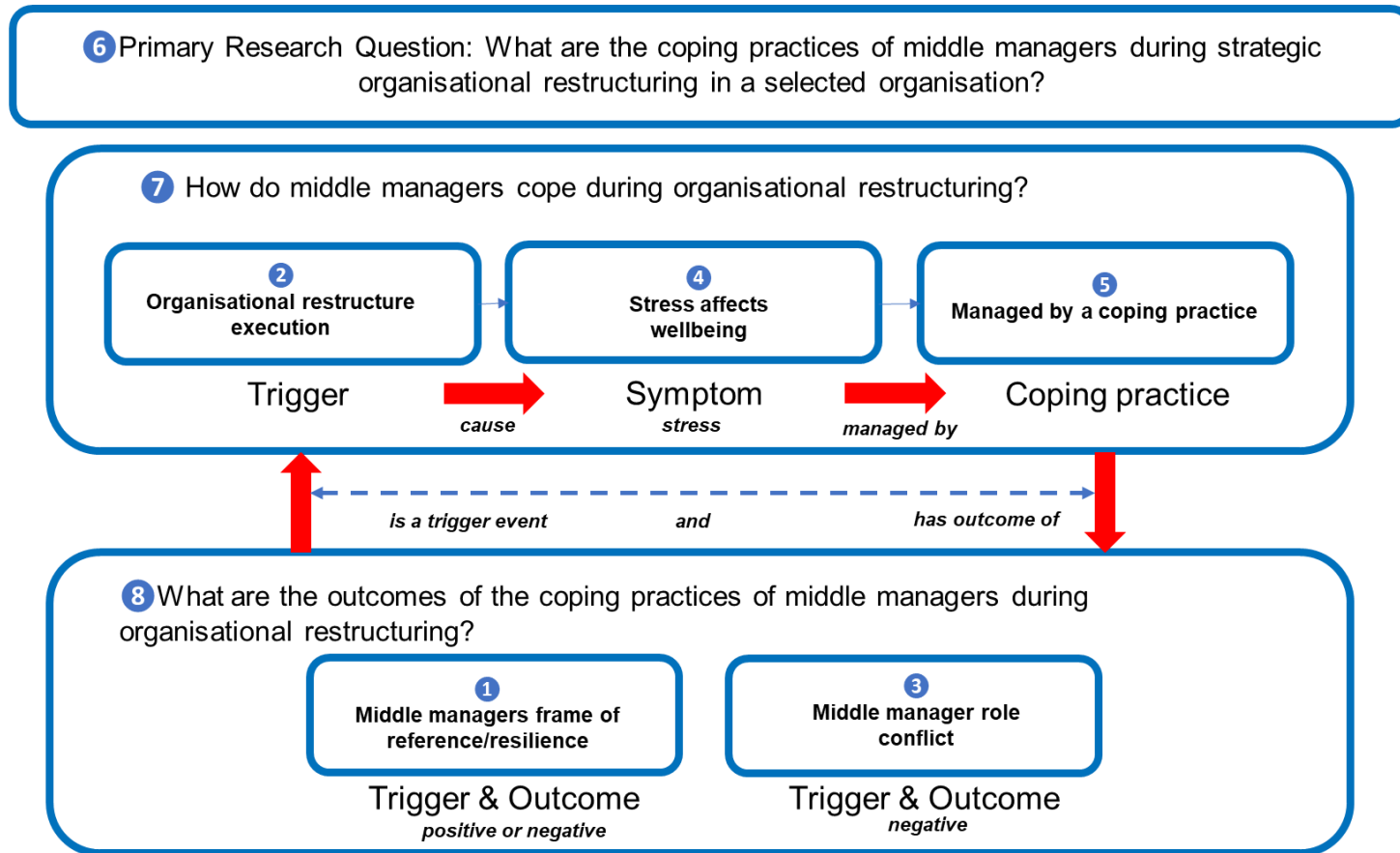


Figure 5. 2 Linking the Research Questions to the Themes and Findings

Source: Author



Figure 5.2 demonstrates the relationship between the findings and their related themes that answer the research questions. For ease of reference, the findings and questions are numbered and referenced within the text. Findings confirm that middle managers' experiences of change are used as a frame of reference for, and during the organisational restructure. This frame of reference (①) guided middle managers in identifying the restructure events (②) that triggered stress (④). Middle managers experienced varying intensities of stress, which affected their well-being emotionally, mentally, and physically. This was dependant on their past change experiences and the resilience that they may have built from the change experiences. The types of stress and symptoms determined the coping practices (⑤) middle managers engaged in. The coping practices resulted in positive and negative outcomes (③) and acted as further triggers, while also being used as a frame of reference during the restructure. However, findings confirmed that middle managers did not foresee some restructure events, which resulted in levels of stress they were not prepared for, and as such, did not know how to cope (Lee et al., 2017). The literature concurs that coping practices are used to cope with stress triggered by events from the organisational change that cause anxiety and uncertainty (Smollan, 2015).

Hence, coping practices during strategic organisational restructuring are linked to the stressors that result from the events of the organisational restructure. For middle managers to engage in coping practices, a trigger event occurs that causes stressors, together with symptoms that must be managed. In this case, organisational restructuring trigger events (restructure process, leadership behaviour, role conflict) caused stressors (job insecurity, uncertainty, anxiety) and related symptoms. For most middle managers in this case of organisational restructuring, the symptoms were negative and had to be managed for the sake of the middle managers' emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. However, this is not unexpected, as the restructuring was associated with job loss, insecurity, and role conflict for middle managers (Carlson et al., 2017; Glaser et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski et al, 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Rouleau & Balogun, 2007). To deal with the symptoms and emotions, middle managers had to engage in coping practices to manage their well-being. Findings confirm the view of Chen et al. (2018) that coping practices result in positive and negatives outcomes. These outcomes in

themselves are triggers that either result in additional stress or improved resilience within the organisational restructuring process

### **5.2.2 Linking the research questions to the literature, themes, and findings**

In Chapter 2, the literature pertaining to the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a South African bank was reviewed. The review of the literature was based on the main concepts of the research study, which are the strategy-as-practice research perspective, particularly practices and practitioners, middle managers who signify practitioners, coping skills or mechanisms which indicate practices, organisational change with a focus on organisational restructuring, and the context of this study, which is the South African banking sector.

In Chapter 4, the research findings were ascertained from themes and sub-themes identified from analysis of participant responses. Table 5.1 presents the relatedness of the literature review of Chapter 2 to the themes and findings of Chapter 4, and links to the research questions of this study.

Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a South African bank			
Research Questions		Literature	Finding and Theme
Primary	Secondary		
What are the coping practices of middle managers during strategic organisational restructuring in a selected organisation?	How do middle managers cope during organisational restructuring?	Chapter 2: 2.2.9; 2.2.8, 2.2.7 Harney et al. (2018) Hussain et al. (2018) Stouten et al. (2018) Day et al. (2017) De Jong et al. (2016) Kral & Kralova (2016) Al Haddad and Kotnour (2015) Smollan (2015) Harunavamwe et al. (2013) Oliva et al. (2012) Sitlington and Marshall (2011) Balogun (2007)	<b>Theme 2:</b> Execution of the organisational restructure affects middle managers' role and stress level

Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a South African bank			
Research Questions		Literature	Finding and Theme
Primary	Secondary		
		Chapter 2: 2.4.3, 2.2.8, 2.2.3, 2.2.5 Dixon (2021) Aslam et al. (2016) Kamarudin et al. (2014) Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) Rouleau and Balogun (2007)	<b>Theme 4:</b> Stress triggered by organisational restructuring affects middle managers' emotional, mental, and physical well-being
		Chapter 2: 2.4.4, 2.2.6 Chen et al. (2018) Harney et al. (2018) Smollan (2017) De Jong et al. (2016) Hudson (2016) Kral & Kralova (2016) Brown et al. (2015)	<b>Theme 5:</b> Middle managers use internal and external coping practices that produce varying outcomes

Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a South African bank			
Research Questions		Literature	Finding and Theme
Primary	Secondary		
		<p>Jimmieson et al. (2004)</p> <p>Rouleau and Balogun (2007)</p>	
	<p>What are the outcomes of the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring?</p>	<p>Chapter 2: 2.4</p> <p>Dixon (2021)</p> <p>Kroon and Reif (2021)</p> <p>Nielsen et al. (2021)</p> <p>Martínez-Martí &amp; Ruch (2017)</p> <p>Smollan (2017)</p> <p>Harzer and Ruch (2015)</p> <p>Vakola (2013)</p>	<p><b>Theme 1:</b> Middle managers' personal experiences and demographics shape their response to organisational change, stressors, and coping.</p>
		<p>Chapter 2: 2.4.3</p> <p>Dixon (2021)</p> <p>Carlson et al. (2017)</p> <p>Gatenby et al. (2015)</p>	<p><b>Theme 3:</b> Middle manager conundrum: Middle managers are conflicted by the roles they</p>

Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a South African bank			
Research Questions		Literature	Finding and Theme
Primary	Secondary		
		Glaser, et al. (2015) Jarzabkowski et al. (2013) Smith & Lewis (2011) Rouleau and Balogun (2007)	perform during organisational restructure

**Table 5.1 Linking the research questions to the literature, themes, and findings**

Source: Author

### **5.3. Research questions, findings, and conclusions**

Section 5.2.1 and Figure 5.1 demonstrate how the research questions link to the themes and findings. This section presents the findings and conclusions as related to the research questions.

#### **5.3.1 Primary research question:**

**What are the coping practices of middle managers during strategic organisational restructuring in a selected organisation? ⑥**

The primary research question sought to qualitatively explore how middle managers cope during strategic organisational restructuring. The secondary research questions supported the main question by exploring actual coping practices middle managers engaged in during organisational restructuring and outcomes of these coping practices.

#### **5.3.2 Secondary research questions**

**5.3.2.1 How do middle managers cope during organisational restructuring?**

**⑦**

At this stage of the research, it is important to reflect on the term 'practice', as it reveals various interpretations of the concept. A review of the concept does not indicate a single, collective understanding of the term, practice, or how the concept is used in strategy-as-practice research (Rouleau, 2013). The interpretations of practices were illustrated earlier in the literature review, concerning Rouleau's (2013) interpretation of the term 'practice', from strategy-as-practice literature. Rouleau (2013) provides interpretations of practice from strategy-as-practice, which takes into consideration the following practices as managerial activities to better understand managerial competencies associated with strategising. Practice as tools provides insight into informal practices of strategising. Practice as knowledge provides for the understanding of context in which strategising takes place and the underlying aspects of strategising. As such, practices are used as enablers to achieve organisational objectives, leading to a greater understanding of the

organisation, and the universal applicability of practice to strategy. The importance of reflecting on the term 'practice' provides a theoretical context of the findings regarding coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring.

## **Findings**

**Finding 2:** Execution of the organisational restructure affects middle managers' role and stress level. ②

**Finding 4:** Stress triggered by organisational restructuring affects middle managers' emotional, mental, and physical well-being. ④

**Finding 5:** Middle managers use internal and external coping practices that produce varying outcomes. ⑤

## **Conclusions on the coping practices**

Organisational restructuring has its own set of challenges for the strategic change implementer. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:01) recommend bringing "emotions, motivations and identity" into the exploration of practices by the human actors executing the practices. Human actors are not knowingly aware of how their emotional behaviour may personally impact them or shape the strategic outcome (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Coping practices are means that middle managers use to reduce emotions related to anxiety and uncertainty to effectively manage difficulties experienced with organisational restructuring. Therefore, it is crucial to understand middle managers' coping practices to proactively help them manage their well-being, and consequently results in them being more productive and positive. The stress experienced by middle managers was triggered by several events related to the organisational restructure. These included how the restructure was executed, the lack of organisational support, particularly from leadership, and the conflicting roles middle managers had to perform, which caused anxiety for them (literature references in Table 5.1). Coping practices are essential when dealing with the anxiety triggered by a changing situation, because they help middle managers build resilience to deal with the difficulty and the negative emotions that arise.



Stress from change is inevitable; therefore, it is necessary that the organisation has a process in place to support employees through the change transition (Stouten et al., 2018). Findings confirm the view of Stouten et al. (2018) and Smollan (2015) that organisational restructuring change is fraught with challenges and obstacles. Furthermore, if support for the restructure process is not provided, particularly for the administrative and human elements of the change, it is particularly distressing and disorganised (Smollan, 2017; Kral & Kralova, 2016). Support from the organisation, especially from HR and leadership is viewed by middle managers as an important aspect of organisational restructuring that helps them cope with uncertainty.

Middle managers expect leaders to demonstrate desired behaviours by being empathetic to the plight of the employees, to be participative, and most importantly to regularly communicate honestly and transparently (Vakola & Petrou, 2018). Literature confirms that the lack of communication during change is a severe stressor for middle managers (Harney et al., 2018; Smollan, 2017; Kamarudin et al., 2014; Sitlington & Marshall, 2011; Datta et al., 2010), resulting in fear and speculation, thereby causing further anxiety and uncertainty. Distress is increased when leaders display behaviour that is not in line with organisational culture. Middle managers believe that leaders embody the values that contribute to organisational culture. When leadership imposes behaviour that is not aligned to the values of the organisation, these competing values influence how middle managers identify with the organisation and its culture (Higgs & Rowland, 2011).

Middle managers perceive the restructuring process as procedurally unfair when legitimate consultation or expected disclosure related to the change do not occur (Lee et al., 2017; Datta et al., 2010). When middle managers feel like they have been treated unfairly, they go into fight or flight mode, resulting in stress and anxiety. Middle managers experience strong emotional reactions (Jimmieson et al, 2004), which has an impact on their self-esteem and performance.

Findings confirm the views of Datta et al. (2010) that restructuring change is more difficult than other types of organisational change and causes greater uncertainty

and anxiety due to the direct impact on employees. Intense anxiety has a more severe impact on well-being, and hence, will need more effective means of coping. Coping practices used by middle managers include mindfulness (Chen et al., 2018); sensemaking (Brown et al., 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2007); support (Harney et al., 2018); self-efficacy (Jimmieson et al., 2004); communication (De Jong et al., 2016; Kral & Kralova, 2016); and personality traits (Hudson, 2016).

Middle managers use internal and external coping practices that are individual and personal, but not exclusive, to reduce the stress that impacts their well-being. Internally, middle managers rely on their inner personal strengths and activities to help them cope (Smollan, 2017), while externally middle managers use means that are physically evident. Coping practices lead to specific outcomes dependent on the individual's attitude and behaviour. Internal coping practices were personal practices related to middle managers' emotional, mental, and physical state. These include internal thoughts, feelings, and well-being (prayer, meditation, yoga, watching movies, listening to music, reading, studying, sensemaking, personal values, past change experience, resilience, self-awareness). External coping practises were externally focused on activities (talking, gyming, hiking, running, gardening, cooking and baking, golf, walking the dog, woodwork, family activities, studying), networks (social, peers, work colleagues, book clubs, sports clubs), relationships (friends, family, colleagues), professional (counsellors, priests), and religious institutions (temple, churches), in addition to balance of work-life integration that involves upskilling, cross-skilling, family, and home life activities. Middle managers seek support from family and colleagues. In addition, middle managers practice selfcare and mindfulness and make use of tools that enable them to continually thrive in difficult situations.

### **5.3.2.2 What are the outcomes of the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring? ⑧**

#### **Findings**

**Finding 1:** Middle managers' personal experiences and demographics shape their response to organisational change, stressors, and coping. ①

**Finding 3:** Middle manager conundrum: Middle managers are conflicted by the roles they perform during organisational restructure. ③

### **Conclusions on the outcomes of the coping practices**

The coping practices of middle managers are pivotal to shaping the success of the strategy and the success of the organisational restructure. This is due to middle managers being the change agent (Marshak & Bushe, 2018) of the strategic organisational change, and an implementer, and receiver of the change (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). Coping practices result in outcomes that either help to reduce the anxiety experienced by middle managers, or exacerbate the anxiety. Reduced anxiety promotes positive attitudes and behaviours towards the organisational restructure, while exacerbated anxiety leads to a negative attitude, leaving middle managers lonely and isolated.

Middle managers use learned coping practices based on past organisational change experience, by recognising signs and symptoms of the stressors and emotions caused by the organisational restructure. Middle managers identify coping practices that work for them, based on similar experiences and situations, and acknowledge what is within their sphere of control. Insofar as middle managers can cope, they tend to get on with the job and do what it takes to deliver value and maintain their performance levels in the organisation.

Coping practices that were intended to help middle managers cope, but instead resulted in negativity arose from middle managers talking to colleagues who maintained a negative outlook, were pessimistic and resistant to change. When middle managers seek clarity or information but encounter colleagues who are speculating and do not know the truth, it causes further confusion. Middle managers' differences in values, experience, education, and culture in relation to organisational restructure tend to increase anxiety. The organisational restructure environment can be hostile, giving rise to conflict due to a lack of resources, competitive pressures, and performance pressures. This can further intensify the anxiety of middle managers, necessitating the need for coping practices to help middle managers

manage their well-being and not negatively impact their performance and productivity.

The efficacy of the coping practices depends on the resilience and outlook of middle managers. Their attitude and behaviour towards organisational restructuring influences the level of stress they experience. The more negative middle managers are, the more stressed they become, and consequently need more support during stressful times (Smollan, 2017). However, a lack of support and effective coping practices makes the coping practices less effective. Character strength is a key component of resilience for coping with organisational change uncertainty, and has a positive impact on job satisfaction, productivity, and job performance (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017).

Middle managers who were more resilient, processed the organisational restructuring in a mature manner by acknowledging the situation, making sense of the situation, and dealing with the difficulties, or coping in their own personal ways. A key sensemaking competency for middle managers during organisational restructuring is the capability to construct a message using language suited to the audience. Literature highlights the importance of language and discourse in organisational change sensemaking (Arnaud et al., 2016; Laine & Vaara, 2015; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Jacobs, van Witteloostuijn & Christe-Zeyse, 2013; Rouleau & Balogun, 2007; Rouleau, 2005; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). Another key sensemaking competency for middle managers is the ability of middle managers to leverage their networks across the organisation to help build alliances for the change (Rouleau & Balogun, 2007). This network helps middle managers mobilise support to influence recipients and entice them into the cause, and in turn, the recipients will influence their colleagues.

Middle managers had a positive attitude to change once they made sense of the change. They tended to get on with the job, acknowledging that the bank has a responsibility to its customers and must continue to operate despite the change. Middle managers' resilience enables them to bounce back, be more flexible, and adapt to changing situations. Middle managers that maintain and demonstrate a

positive outlook despite the uncertainty and negativity, survive the upheaval of the restructure. Those who have a positive outlook tend to display fewer physical symptoms of stress. They use personal resources to cope, and value their emotional, mental, and physical well-being. Middle managers' resilience allows them to be flexible and to quickly adapt to the changing situation, as they have inner strength, are optimistic, and display grit by getting the job done despite challenging and contradictory roles.

In contrast, when middle managers are rigid in their approach, they cannot adapt to the change and are therefore not resilient. Their belief system or values are self-limiting and do not allow them to be flexible. Hence, they struggle to adapt to the organisational restructure roles they are required to perform, or they just do not adapt to the change. They tend to be negative, cannot optimally function in their roles, and experience greater challenges, which they struggle to cope with, leaving them overwhelmed. The worry they experience manifests as physical symptoms, such as aches, pains, headaches, palpitations, muscle spasms, and abdominal pains. These psychosomatic conditions are real, and result from their emotional and mental stress. If not managed, the psychosomatic conditions will severely impact the emotional, mental, and physical well-being of the middle managers.

It is essential to effectively cope to withstand the restructuring situation so that middle managers can let go of negative feelings associated with the organisational restructure. This includes managing the contradictory expectations of their strategic, line, and change agent roles. Resilience is generally accepted as how quickly the middle managers can bounce back or recover from a difficult situation. The efficacy of the coping practices depends on the resilience of the middle managers.

Stress affects cognitive functions or mental processes that middle managers use to carry out tasks (Oreg et al., 2018; Smollan, 2017). The cognitive adjustment that middle managers must make during organisational change is often overlooked, as the focus is mainly on the negative or positive attitude of middle managers (Balogun, 2007). Middle managers in this study were mentally impacted by the challenges of their conflicting roles during the organisational restructure, and they struggled to

concentrate or perform tasks simultaneously. Middle managers' ability to develop suitable action plans amid the restructure confusion was hampered. Their flexibility to develop new ways of handling their jobs and adapting to the restructure demands hindered their ability to perform their role productively (Dixon, 2021). Some were easily influenced by speculation and pressure from the changing environment. Stress negatively impacted middle managers' ability to make decisions and manage work and personal time, causing middle managers to struggle with work-life balance and resulting in difficulties spilling over into their personal lives. Hence, it was critical to middle managers to be able to cope and adapt to the stressors that were triggered by various aspects from the start to the end of the organisational restructure (Smollan, 2017).

The strategy practitioner is the middle manager who is also the change agent (Marshak & Bushe, 2018) of the strategic organisational change. As such, the middle manager is both the implementer and receiver of the change (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007) and can influence and shape the change, but must also deal with the impact of the change. Findings confirm the views of Carlson et al. (2017); Jarzabkowski et al. (2013); and Smith and Lewis (2011) that middle managers experience conflict from the roles they perform, and struggle with competing demands and values. The conflict that is experienced is twofold. Firstly, the strategic, line manager, and change agents roles middle managers perform are in conflict because it requires middle managers to support a change initiative they may not agree with. At the same time, they have to obtain support for the change from subordinates who might be facing possible job losses. Secondly, middle managers apply sensemaking as a coping practice during restructure. Conflict arises when strategic demands from top management are in contradiction with middle managers' values and beliefs of transparency and honesty, knowing staff are impacted by the restructure, but are expected to encourage, support, and implement restructuring resulting in job losses (Dixon, 2021).

Coping practices increase middle managers' resilience because they help middle managers learn how to manage the uncertainty, negativity, and difficult organisational restructuring situation. In learning to manage the challenging

situation, middle managers become more positive, less resistant to change, and eventually more productive in their role.

#### **5.4 Benefits of this study**

This study provides important information that is potentially transferable to other banks and their middle manager employees in the wider financial industry context, despite being a single case design. Like the case organisation, other banks in South Africa are subject to similar challenges in the macro environment and are currently restructuring or planning future restructures. This study could assist middle managers in other banks to understand the consequences and impact of organisational restructuring and help them prepare accordingly. As the financial industry experiences the current COVID-19 pandemic climate, the new normal of work from home has impacted the work culture, making long hours, competitiveness, high performance, and lack of social and personal interaction the new norm in leading challenges for middle managers. Banks have realised that the emotional, mental, and physical well-being of staff is critical if the organisation is to succeed in these unprecedented times. Meaningful information from this study is potentially insightful for identifying and managing stressful change situations, which middle managers (Flotman, 2021) and banks face in this current COVID-19 climate. This study could potentially assist in creating an awareness of the coping practices and their outcomes for middle managers when dealing with stressors of organisational restructuring in a bank. Additionally, it could offer insight into how middle managers manage expectations from a top-down and bottom-up perspective by managing their own expectations, the expectations of their peers and staff, and the expectations of top managers.

This study also provides a view that, while practices may be considered an everyday activity that happens almost mechanically, the value of these practices should not be underestimated. The benefit of highlighting simple, everyday coping practices in an organisational restructure situation demonstrates the value of micro-level practices, as it reveals how middle managers do certain activities that reduces their anxiety, helps them become more resilient, and hence reduces the negative impact

on their well-being. Taking care of their well-being results in middle managers being less stressed, more positive, and productive, and hence able to contribute positively and efficiently to the activities of the organisational change for a successful outcome.

In a wider financial industry context, the findings of this study could assist middle managers to prepare for organisational restructuring. Research suggests that middle managers' commitment to the change has the potential to improve the effectiveness of the change implementation (Noureddin, 2018). Given their crucial position and role in the organisation, middle managers are exposed to greater challenges from organisational restructuring and stress caused by these challenges. In addition, middle managers must deal with increased pressure and the need to be more resilient in order to effectively cope with the challenges associated with change (Dixon, 2021). Middle managers within banks in the financial industry can potentially identify with the commonality of the change event or situation, change process and practices of restructuring, possible stressors that could result, and the coping practices adopted by middle managers in this study context. Middle managers could identify what has potentially worked or not worked and use this in their own situation. As COVID-19 continues to impact middle managers with continuous change (Flotman, 2021) in the form of downsizing as banks scramble to cut costs in the current challenging macro-economic environment, the possibility of job loss remains an ever-constant threat for middle manager employees.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

### **5.5.1 Recommendations for change management**

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has created uncertainty in the business world. Organisational leaders are unsure how to deal with the challenges that have arisen as a result of the pandemic and are trying to remain sustainable. At the same time, employees are dealing with uncertainty of potential job losses and a complicated new normal, work from home situation that has impacted their work-life balance. In this time of uncertainty, organisations will continue operating in the new normal routine and will make operational changes that will have an impact on employees,



and by implication middle managers. As demonstrated in this study, this uncertainty causes a great deal of worry for employees. It is imperative in these challenging times that organisations prioritise the well-being of their employees so that they are resilient and productive to support the organisation in this difficult time. For this to happen, organisational leaders must manage the change process with sensitivity and empathy, whilst also ensuring the well-being of employees. This study provides insight into how anxiety amongst employees can be reduced during organisational restructuring. It also equips organisations with knowledge of what coping practices could be effectively used to support employees to be more resilient and continue to be productive during uncertainty.

When change is not well planned and executed, it can lead to chaos, resulting in greater apprehension, considering that employees do not know what, when, why and how work needs to be done. The resultant confusion and disorganisation increases middle managers' anxiety. Conversely, a well planned and executed change process can significantly reduce the uncertainty of an organisational restructure. According to Wippermann (2017), change models such as Kotter's popular eight-step model offer an easily understood change model, providing a step-by-step framework for implementing change that leaves no room for confusion or ambiguity, can stabilise the change process and reduce the uncertainty experienced during organisational change.

Other recommendations from this study include:

When planning for organisational change, it is recommended that a communication plan is prepared that includes continuous feedback between top-level management and all employees, updates, and fact sharing on progress during the restructure.

At the same time, succession planning is important to ensure operations continue to run smoothly.

It is also recommended more frequent performance feedback to reduce the possibility of being appraised by a new line manager, and employees having to prove their performance to a new line manager.

It is further recommended that roles be clarified before, during, and after the restructuring process to avoid confusion over roles.

Finally, the introduction of wellness programmes or counselling to specifically help employees with organisational restructuring is recommended.

### **5.5.2 Recommendations for future studies**

Case studies on organisational restructuring potentially provide a wider perspective on the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring. It would be useful to view coping practices from a gender lens, or even explore coping practices of top management, as they are also exposed to severe stress. This is possibly more so than most other employees, considering their level of accountability and responsibility in the organisation. This study was limited to a single case organisation in the banking industry and to middle managers participants only. However, while other banks in the South African financial sector may not have the same organisational restructure situation, they have similar processes and operations. It is common practice for employees to move jobs between banks, considering that banks prefer employing individuals from within the banking industry, with common banking knowledge. Hence, similar future studies could take place in multiple banking organisations in the banking industry.

### **5.6 Contribution to the strategy-as-practice domain**

The departure point for this study is the practice domain situated in the strategy-as-practice research perspective. Practices are one of the three fundamental building blocks of the strategy-as-practice perspective, and Practice theory offers a means to introduce efficiencies in everyday activities, resulting in a more efficient and successful organisation (Whittington, 2018). The strategy-as-practice perspective defines practices as “the social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy work is done” (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009:2; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008:282).

The focus in this study has primarily been on strategy, but it was not until the strategy-as-practice domain explored what the doing of strategy is, that research

recognised what the actual practical application of strategy is. As a research domain within the strategy-as-practice research perspective, middle managers have been the focus of a vast amount of research; however, the coping practices of middle managers in a strategic organisational restructure is few. Coping practices have been comprehensively studied in the healthcare sector; however, there appear to be fewer studies from an organisational perspective. It is therefore beneficial in reducing the knowledge gap, to explore coping practices in the business management sector (Smollan, 2017). Today's unprecedented times of COVID-19 has brought about different organisational challenges, which has increased employee stress. If organisations are to survive this difficult macro environment, they will need their employees to be productive and high performing. Employees are facing greater challenges than ever before with working from home as parents and householders, whilst ensuring they are emotionally, mentally, and physically well to be high performing employees. It is important for business management studies to also have an all-round focus on employees, not just business practices, but practices that help them do the business practices well.

### **5.7 Research limitations**

The main limitation to this study was that the study was situated in a single case organisation and therefore cannot be generalised to similar organisations in the financial sector. However, the study will be useful for information purposes for such organisations in the financial industry.

Although the participant selection was purposeful, the reluctance by some participants to reveal too much information for fear of a perceived punitive sanction (victimisation and job loss) within the culture organisation limited the depth of the information revealed. Some participants were afraid that if they revealed too much, they would be targeted for staff reduction as part of the continuous change the bank has embarked upon given the COVID-19 impact. The impact of COVID-19 on the mental state of participants could possibly have been a limitation. These impacts of covid on participants could include; dealing with the loss of a loved one, family

members sick in hospital, adjustments to the new way of work, lack of socialisation with work colleagues, therefore participants may not have been inclined to talk.

Another limitation was that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, research protocols had to be amended from data collection by means of face-to-face interviews, to virtual interviews for the safety of participants. This limited the researcher's ability to observe participants' body language cues, behaviour, and make eye contact. In addition, the researcher could not prevent unforeseen interruptions in participants' homes. Total privacy and interruptions during interviews could not be guaranteed.

### **5.8 Researcher's personal reflection**

As I write this, I can almost see the end, something that seemed so far away at a point in this journey. So, what was this journey like? This was a difficult journey. A single paragraph makes it look simple, from the first word to the last word but the journey in between is something that cannot be easily put into words. I started the journey as an eager student embarking on a personal, life goal, which ended as my greatest learning experience. I faced self-doubt and inner turmoil and questioned my ability to complete this course. Did I have it in me to achieve this qualification? Could I live up to the high standards of my most excellent supervisors? I most certainly did not want to disappoint them.

The transition from Honours to Masters was challenging. I did not understand the technical terms and had to refresh the basics from the Honours course. I had a mental block regarding the literature, I had to dig deep. But it eventually all came together. I had my moment of realisation during data analysis and interpretation. I thoroughly enjoyed the data analysis. Seeing how it all linked together, the information and knowledge that resulted from the data when viewed from a research perspective was so rewarding. I can only sum it up as 'there is a method to this madness'. Some of the work felt strange and questionable at the beginning but I can now see why. This course has made me aware of how much knowledge lies beneath a conventional event such as an organisational restructure when viewed through a research lens.

From a personal perspective, the journey made me look inward at my role as a middle manager, not only in the organisational restructure, but generally in the organisation. I now view my role in a new light; I see the importance of middle managers, the challenges of the middle manager's role that I identify with, and the effect that the middle manager role has in the success or breakdown of change in the organisation. This study has revealed to me how influential middle managers are, and the responsibility I have as a middle manager in organisational restructuring and within the organisation itself. I have a heightened awareness of the challenges I experienced during the restructure, the harmful effects of stress and coping practices that I now know I can apply to proactively identify and deal with the stress of organisational change.

The journey was not without challenges; personal, work and family challenges. Juggling several responsibilities made studying even more difficult. I considered quitting at one point when faced with extreme personal and family difficulties. The COVID-19 pandemic tested my resolve, but I persevered, nonetheless. I am almost there; I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. In retrospect, I would not change this journey; it has given me a newfound appreciation of higher academics, the academic course, and the academic teacher.

## **5.9 Dissertation conclusion**

This study set out to better understand the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a case study. The study was guided by these secondary research questions:

- How do middle managers cope during organisational restructuring?

and

- What are the outcomes of the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring?

The interview guide for semi-structured interviews guided the formulation and grouping of questions to gather rich data to answer the research questions. Based on the data analysis, interpretation, and findings presented above, the primary conclusion can be drawn that middle managers make use of internal and external coping practices to cope with the stressors of organisational restructuring to take care of their wellbeing. To support the primary conclusion the following secondary conclusions are drawn:

1: Middle managers' personal experiences and demographics shape their response to organisational change, stressors, and coping.

Middle managers had a frame of reference when assessing their current change experience. Their perspective of the change is shaped by their experience of previous change, and personal attributes; such as, age, tenure, career stage, and cultural differences. Those who had previous experiences of change were quickly able to make sense of the change, manage expectations, and prepare themselves for the change. Middle managers prepared themselves for the stress of the change and knew what coping practices they could use to cope.

2: Execution of the organisational restructure affects middle managers' role and stress level.

Middle managers identified the perceived process shortcomings and procedural (un)fairness, lack of support and communication, negative work environment, career misalignment, loss of productivity, and increase in workload as triggers of stress in addition to the typical organisational restructure stress associated with job loss, uncertainty, and anxiety. Middle managers needed to have coping practices to deal with the stress and anxiety caused by how the restructure process was executed.

3: Middle manager conundrum: Middle managers are conflicted by the roles they perform during organisational restructure.

Middle managers perform strategic, line manager, and change agent roles during organisational restructuring that have conflicting demands. The roles and responsibilities were not explained or agreed on, resulting in a negative impact to

their performance and productivity, and causing further uncertainty and anxiety. Middle managers were required to perform tasks that conflicted with their personal values, especially when they did not agree with or support the change but had to perform the tasks as part of their role. They experienced stress from increased workload, longer hours, loss of subordinates and networks, and work-life balance. The stress impacted middle managers well-being, which they needed to deal with through coping practices.

4: Stress triggered by organisational restructuring affects middle managers emotional, mental, and physical well-being.

Stress was triggered by events and resulted in challenges, conflicts, and pressure. Middle managers were challenged by various stressors that were triggered by the organisational restructure. The organisational restructure itself was a trigger event that led to severe stress that emotionally, mentally, and physically impacted the well-being of middle managers. Middle managers experienced emotions that are inherent to stress, and displayed cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and physical symptoms of stress that required coping.

5: Middle managers use internal and external coping practices that produce varying outcomes.

Coping practices are the strategies middle managers used to deal with the stress. Coping practices helped middle managers make sense of the restructure, adapt to the change, and take care of their emotional, mental, and physical health. Middle managers used internal coping practices like sensemaking, mindfulness, prayer, meditation, and hobbies that were grounded in their personal values, past experiences, self-awareness, positive thinking, and resilience. External coping practices were perceptible personal activities that middle managers engaged in to reduce their stress. Middle managers engaged in hobbies, sports, family activities, talking, counselling, woodwork, studying or gardening. External coping practices were dependent on resources that middle managers had access to.

In summary, an organisational restructure is a stressful event that triggers further stress from the activities performed during the restructure, and from the outcomes of those activities, Middle managers perform various roles during organisational restructuring, resulting in conflicting demands that cause further stress and are themselves subject to the change. Their stress is exacerbated, further impacting their well-being. Middle managers prepare themselves with coping practices for the change by having a frame of reference from experience, thereby making them more resilient. Middle managers engage in coping practices to cope with the emotional, mental, and physical problems from organisational restructuring, which is necessary to manage their health, work-life balance, performance, and productivity.

Following from the secondary conclusions above, this study concludes that middle managers indeed make use of coping practices to cope with stressors in the context of organisational restructuring in a South African bank. It can also be concluded that not all middle managers use coping practices to deal with stress, they also do not always know how to effectively use coping practices. Some middle managers do not recognise the harmful effects of stress on their well-being and consider it normal experience. In some instances, middle managers are so change fatigued that they choose to do nothing, whilst others deny that they are stressed.

Middle managers do and will continue to play a key role in organisational change, and should therefore proactively seek to manage and protect their well-being by engaging in coping practices that will enable them to be more productive and value-adding employees, especially during stressful organisational times.

### **5.10 Chapter conclusion**

This study explored the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a South African bank. To gather data on the in-depth, lived experiences of middle managers who experienced the stressors of organisational restructuring whilst having to cope with the anxiety and uncertainty, this study applied the qualitative single case study method using virtual face-to-face interviews with 13 participants. Five themes were identified that linked to, and answered the primary and secondary research questions. This study found that middle managers'



stress during organisational restructuring is triggered by how the change process is executed, the leadership behaviour, and the conflict experienced from the competing roles that middle managers must enact during organisational restructuring. This study provides benefits and contributions to the strategy-as-practice research domain, and recommendations for future studies, whilst limitations have also been identified.

Findings confirm that middle managers use internal coping practices. The following coping practices emerged from this study: personal practices related to middle managers emotional, mental and physical state, including internal thoughts, feelings, and well-being (prayer, meditation, yoga, watching movies, listening to music, reading, studying, sensemaking, personal values, past change experience, resilience, self-awareness, upskilling and cross skilling); and external coping practices, which were externally focused, such as activities (talking, gyming, hiking, running, gardening, cooking and baking, golf, walking the dog, woodwork, family activities, studying), networks (social, peers, work colleagues, book clubs, sports clubs), relationships (friends, family, colleagues), professional (counsellors, priests), and religious institutions (temple, churches). These practices assisted middle managers to cope with organisational restructure change that impacted their well-being. To deal with this stress, middle managers used means that were internal and external to them. This study found that middle managers' coping practices were individual and personal but not exclusive, and that coping practices also lead to specific outcomes dependent on the individual middle managers' attitude and behaviour.

## REFERENCES

- Abbas, W. and Asghar, I., 2010. The role of leadership in organisational change: relating the successful organizational change with visionary and innovative leadership. Masters' dissertation. University of Gävle, Norway.
- Abdullah, A.N., Husain, K., Kamarudin, M.F. and Starr, K., 2014. Communicating Change in Organisational Restructuring: A Grounded Theory Case Study. Paper presented at the International Conference on Communication and Media, Langkawi, Malaysia, 18-20 October.
- Abdullah, N.A.A., Rahmat, N.H., Zawawi, F.Z., Khamsah, M.A.N. and Anuarsham, A.H., 2020. Coping with post COVID-19: Can work from home be a new norm? *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, 5(6), pp. 61-81.
- Acharya, A.S., Prakash, A., Saxena, P. and Nigam, A., 2013. Sampling: why and how of it? *Indian Journal of Medical Specialities*, 4(2), pp. 330–333.
- Acquaah, M., 2007. Managerial social capital, strategic orientation, and organisational performance in an emerging economy. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(12), pp. 1235–1255.
- Ahearne, M., Lam, S.K. and Kraus, F., 2014. Performance impact of middle managers' adaptive strategy implementation: The role of social capital: Middle Managers' Adaptive Strategy Implementation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 35(1), pp. 68–87.
- Al-Haddad, S. and Kotnour, T., 2015. Integrating the organisational change literature: a model for successful change. *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 28(2), pp. 234–262.
- Amin, M.E.K., Nørgaard, L.S., Cavaco, A.M., Witry, M.J., Hillman, L., Cernasev, A. and Desselle, S.P., 2020. Establishing trustworthiness and authenticity in qualitative pharmacy research. *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy*, 16(10), pp.1472-1482.

- Amiot, C.E., Terry, D.J., Jimmieson, N.L. and Callan, V.J., 2006. A longitudinal investigation of coping processes during a merger: Implications for job satisfaction and organizational identification. *Journal of Management*, 32(4), pp. 552-574.
- Anney, V.N., 2014. Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria. Doctoral thesis. University of Waikato, New Zealand.
- Antwi, S.K. and Hamza, K., 2015. Qualitative and quantitative research paradigms in business research: A philosophical reflection. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 7(3), pp. 217-225.
- Appelbaum, S.H., St-Pierre, N. and Glavas, W., 1998. Strategic organisational change: the role of leadership, learning, motivation and productivity. *Management Decision*, 36(5), pp. 289–301.
- Arnaud, N., Mills, C.E., Legrand, C. and Maton, E., 2016. Materialising Strategy in Mundane Tools: the Key to Coupling Global Strategy and Local Strategy Practice? Materialising Strategy in Mundane Tools. *British Journal of Management*, 27(1), pp. 38–57.
- Aslam, U., Ilyas, M., Imran, M.K. and Rahman, U.-U.-, 2016. Detrimental effects of cynicism on organisational change: An interactive model of organisational cynicism (a study of employees in public sector organisations). *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 29(4), pp. 580–598.
- Asmuss, B., 2018. Strategy as practice. *The International Encyclopedia of Strategic Communication*, (eds R.L. Heath and W. Johansen), pp.1-5.
- Balogun, J., 2003. From blaming the middle to harnessing its potential: Creating change intermediaries. *British Journal of Management*, 14(1), pp. 69–84.
- Balogun, J., 2007. The Practice of Organisational Restructuring: *European Management Journal*, 25(2), pp. 81–91.

- Balogun, J., Jarzabkowski, J. and Seidl, D., 2007. Strategy as Practice. In Mark. Jenkins, Veronique. Ambrosini (Eds.), *Strategic Management: A Multiple Perspective Approach*, 2nd ed. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Balogun, J. and Johnson, G., 2004. Organisational Restructuring and Middle Manager Sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(4), pp. 523 – 549.
- Balogun, J. and Johnson, G., 2005. From intended strategies to unintended outcomes: The impact of change recipient sensemaking. *Organisation Studies*, 26(11), pp. 1573-1601.
- Balogun, J., Huff, A.S. and Johnson, P., 2003. Three responses to the methodological challenges of studying strategising. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(1), pp.197-224.
- Balogun, J., Jarzabkowski, P. and Vaara, E., 2011. Selling, resistance and reconciliation: A critical discursive approach to subsidiary role evolution in MNEs. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42(6), pp. 765–786
- Bamberger, S.G., Vinding, A.L., Larsen, A., Nielsen, P., Fonager, K., Nielsen, R.N., Ryom, P. and Omland, Ø., 2012. Impact of organisational change on mental health: a systematic review. *Occup Environ Med*, 69(8), pp. 592-598.
- Banya, R.M. and Biekpe, N., 2017. Bank competition and economic growth: Empirical evidence from selected frontier African countries. *Journal of Economic Studies*, 44(2), pp. 245–265.
- Barton, L.C. and Ambrosini, V., 2013. The moderating effect of organisational change cynicism on middle manager strategy commitment. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(4), pp. 721–746.
- Bartunek, J. M., 1984. Changing interpretive schemes and organisational restructuring: The example of a religious order. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 29(3), pp. 355–372.

- Baxter, P. and Jack, S., 2008. Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), pp. 544–559.
- Begkos, C., Llewellyn, S. and Walshe, K., 2019. Strategising in English hospitals: accounting, practical coping and strategic intent. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 32(5), pp. 1-33.
- Bowman, E.H. and Singh, H., 1993. Corporate restructuring: Reconfiguring the firm. *Strategic Management Journal*, 14(S1), pp. 5–14.
- Bowman, E.H., Singh, H., Useem, M. and Bhadury, R., 1999. When does restructuring improve economic performance?. *California Management Review*, 41(2), pp. 33-54.
- Brannick, T. and Coghlan, D., 2007. In Defence of Being “Native” The Case for Insider Academic Research. *Organisational Research Methods*, 10(1), pp. 59–74.
- Brown, A.D., Colville, I. and Pye, A., 2015. Making sense of sensemaking in organization studies. *Organization Studies*, 36(2), pp. 265-277.
- Brown, M. and Cregan, C., 2008. Organisational change cynicism: The role of employee involvement. *Human Resource Management*, 47(4), pp. 667–686.
- Burgelman, R.A., Floyd, S.W., Laamanen, T., Mantere, S., Vaara, E. and Whittington, R., 2018. Strategy processes and practices: Dialogues and intersections. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(3), pp. 31–558.
- Burnes, B., Hughes, M. and By, R.T., 2018. Reimagining organisational change leadership. *Leadership*, 14(2), pp.141-158.
- Bushe, G.R. and Marshak, R.J., 2016. The dialogic organization development approach to transformation and change. *Practicing Organization Development*, 4, pp. 407-418.

Bushe, G.R. and Marshak, R.J., 2018. Valuing both the journey and the destination in organisation development. In *Enacting Values-Based Change* (pp. 87-97). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Buthelezi, L. 2019. SA's banks: What to watch out for in 2020 as digital rivalries ramp up [online]. South Africa: news24. Available from: <<https://m.fin24.com/Companies/Financial-Services/sas-banks-what-to-watch-out-for-in-2020-as-digital-rivalries-ramp-up-20191227-2>> Accessed on: 18 September 2021.

Calvey, P. and Romagny, P. 2019. New banking sector entrants challenge the status quo [online]. South Africa: Business Day. Available from: <<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/2019-09-11-new-banking-sector-entrants-challenge-the-status-quo/>>

Cameron, E. and Green, M., 2009. *Making Sense of Change Management: a complete guide to the models, tools and techniques of organisation change*, 2nd Ed, Kogan Page Publishers, London.

Camilleri, J., Cope, V. and Murray, M., 2019. Change fatigue: The frontline nursing experience of large-scale organisational change and the influence of teamwork. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 27(3), pp. 655–660.

Campbell-Hunt, C., 2007. Complexity in practice. *Human Relations*, 60(5), pp. 793-823.

Carlson, E.J., Poole, M.S., Lambert, N.J. and Lammers, J.C., 2017. A study of organizational responses to dilemmas in interorganizational emergency management. *Communication Research*, 44(2), pp. 287-315.

Chen, C. A., Berman, E.M. and Wang, C.-Y., 2018. Middle Managers' Upward Roles in the Public Sector. *Administration and Society*, 49(5), pp. 700–729.

Chia, R. and Holt, R., 2006. Strategy as practical coping: A Heideggerian perspective. *Organization studies*, 27(5), pp. 635-655.

Chigada, J. and Ngulube, P., 2015. Knowledge management practices at selected banks in South Africa. *SA Journal of Information Management*, 17(1), pp.1-10.

Church, S.P., Dunn, M. and Prokopy, L.S., 2019. Benefits to qualitative data quality with multiple coders: Two case studies in multi-coder data analysis. *Journal of Rural Social Sciences*, 34(1), pp.1-14.

Claessens, S., 2009. Competition in the Financial Sector: Overview of Competition Policies. *The World Bank Observer*, 24(1), pp. 83–118.

Coleman, J., 2014. Improving the success rate of organisational change with the 3-part habit routine, Master of Business Administration, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.

Colville, I., Pye, A. and Brown, A.D., 2016. Sensemaking processes and Weickarious learning. *Management Learning*, 47(1), pp. 3–13.

Conway, E. and Monks, K., 2011. Change from below: the role of middle managers in mediating paradoxical change. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 21(2), pp. 190-203.

Creswell, J.W., 2018. Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, 5th ed. Sage Publications Thousand Oaks, California.

Cross, R., Ernst, C. and Pasmore, B., 2013. A bridge too far? How boundary spanning networks drive organisational change and effectiveness. *Organisational Dynamics*, 42(2), pp. 81–91.

Cummings, S., Bridgman, T. and Brown, K.G., 2016. Unfreezing change as three steps: Rethinking Kurt Lewin's legacy for change management. *Human Relations*, 69(1), pp. 33-60.

Cummings, T. and Worley, C., 2015. Organization development and change (10th ed.). Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.

Cunha, M.P. e, Neves, P., Clegg, S.R., Costa, S. and Rego, A., 2018. Paradoxes of organisational change in a merger context. *Qualitative Research in Organisations and Management: An International Journal*, 14(3), pp. 217-240.

Currie, G. and Procter, S.J., 2005. The antecedents of middle managers' strategic contribution: The case of a professional bureaucracy. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(7), pp.1325-1356.

Darkow, I. L., 2015. The Involvement of Middle Management in Strategy Development- Development and Implementation of a Foresight-Based Approach. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 101(1), pp. 10–24.

Datta, D.K., Guthrie, J.P., Basuil, D. and Pandey, A., 2010. Causes and effects of employee downsizing: A review and synthesis. *Journal of Management*, 36(1), pp. 281-348.

Day, A., Crown, S.N. and Ivany, M., 2017. Organisational change and employee burnout: The moderating effects of support and job control. *Safety Science*, 100 (Part A), pp. 4-12.

De Jong, T., Wiezer, N., de Weerd, M., Nielsen, K., Mattila-Holappa, P. and Mockało, Z., 2016. The impact of restructuring on employee well-being: a systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Work & Stress*, 30(1), pp. 91–114.

Degbey, W.Y., Eriksson, T., Rodgers, P. and Oguji, N., 2021. Understanding cross-border mergers and acquisitions of African firms: The role of dynamic capabilities in enabling competitiveness amidst contextual constraints. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 63(1), pp. 77-93.

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S., 2011. Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 4th ed., (pp.1-20). Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.



Dixon, S.M., 2021. The Stress Coping Skills Middle Managers Need for Century Life: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Doctoral dissertation. Colorado Technical University, Colorado.

Domínguez-CC, M. and Barroso-Castro, C., 2017. Managerial change and strategic change: The temporal sequence. *Journal of Management & Organisation*, 23(1), pp. 46–73.

Elbasha, T. and Wright, A., 2017. Reconciling structure and agency in strategy - as-practice research: Towards a strong-structuration theory approach. *M@n@gement*, 20(2), pp. 107-128.

Elshafie, M., 2013. Research Paradigms: The Novice Researcher's Nightmare. *Arab World English Journal*, 4(2), pp. 4–13.

Erarslan, S., Kaya Ç. and Altindag, E., 2018. Effect of organisational cynicism and job satisfaction on organisational commitment: An empirical study on banking sector. *Suleyman Demirel University Journal of Faculty of Economics & Administrative Sciences*, 23(Special Issue in memory of Geybulla Ramazanoğlu), pp. 905-922.

Erkama, N. and Vaara, E., 2010. Struggles over legitimacy in global organizational restructuring: A rhetorical perspective on legitimation strategies and dynamics in a shutdown case. *Organisation Studies*, 31(7), pp. 813–839.

Farkas, F., 2016. Hard and Soft Approaches of Strategic Organisational Change Management. *Strategic Management*, 21(2), pp. 13–22.

Fenton, C. and Langley, A., 2011. Strategy as practice and the narrative turn. *Organization Studies*, 32(9), pp.1171-1196.

Financial Sector Regulation Act No. 9 of 2017

Fleming, J., 2018. Recognizing and Resolving the Challenges of Being an Insider Researcher in Work-Integrated Learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 19(3), pp. 311-320.

- Flotman, A.P., 2021. Work as Meaningful and Menacing Phenomenon for South African Middle Managers During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Role of Self-Transcendence in Cultivating Meaning and Well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(650060), pp. 1-11.
- Floyd, S.W. and Lane, P.J., 2000. Strategizing Throughout the Organization: Managing Role Conflict in Strategic Renewal. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), pp. 154-177.
- Floyd, S.W. and Wooldridge, B., 1994. Dinosaurs or dynamos? Recognizing middle management's strategic role. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 8(4), pp. 47-57.
- Flyvbjerg, B. 2006., Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), pp. 219–245.
- Fosu, S., 2013. Banking competition in Africa: sub regional comparative studies. *Emerging Markets Review*, 15, pp. 233-254.
- Gatenby, M., Rees, C., Truss, C., Alfes, K. and Soane, E., 2015. Managing Change, or Changing Managers? The role of middle managers in UK public service reform. *Public Management Review*, 17(8), pp. 1124–1145.
- Getachew, D.S. and Zhou, E., 2018. Multilevel organisational change readiness: Towards comprehensive view in developing countries context. *The International Journal of Organisational Innovation*, 10(4), pp. 201–209.
- Gilbert, J. (2009). The sandwich generation: the emerging role of middle managers in organizational change. Paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2009—North America, Orlando, FL. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- Gilbert, L.L., 2021. The Mediating Impact of Organisational Trust: Overcoming Organisational Hindrance in Managing Organisational Success. *European Journal of Research Development and Sustainability (EJRDS)*, 2(2), pp. 104-115.

Gioia, D.A. and Chittipeddi, K., 1991. Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 12(6), pp. 433-448.

Given, L.M. ed., 2008. The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods, Volumes 1 and 2. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.

Glaser, L., Fourné, S.P. and Elfring, T., 2015. Achieving strategic renewal: The multi-level influences of top and middle managers' boundary-spanning. *Small Business Economics*, 45(2), pp. 305-327.

Golsorkhi, D., Rouleau, L., Seidl, D. and Vaara, E., 2010. Introduction: What is strategy as practice? Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Gore, A. 2019. Discovery's entry into banking: why, and why now? [online]. South Africa: Discovery. Available from: <<https://www.discovery.co.za/corporate/news-adrian-gore-discovery-entry-into-banking>>

Govender, N.M. and Pretorius, M., 2015. A critical analysis of information and communications technology adoption: The strategy-as-practice perspective. *Acta Commercii*, 15(1), pp. 1-13.

Guba, E.G., 1990. The paradigm dialog. In Alternative Paradigms Conference, March, 1989, Indiana U, School of Education, San Francisco, CA, US. Sage Publications, Inc.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S., 1994. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2(163-194), p. 105.

Guo, Y., Huy, Q.N. and Xiao, Z., 2017. How middle managers manage the political environment to achieve market goals: Insights from China's state-owned enterprises. *Strategic Management Journal*, 38(3), pp. 676-696.

Hamilton, W., 2016. Framing vision: An examination of framing, sensegiving, and sensemaking during a change initiative. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 40(7), pp. 625-631.

- Harney, B., Fu, N. and Freeney, Y., 2018. Balancing tensions: Buffering the impact of organisational restructuring and downsizing on employee well-being. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 28(2), pp. 235–254
- Harunavamwe, M., Kanengoni, H. and Mazorodze, T., 2013. An Investigation on the Middle Managers' Attitudes towards Organisational Change within the Automotive Industry. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 36(2), pp. 175–185.
- Harzer, C. and Ruch, W., 2015. The relationships of character strengths with coping, work-related stress, and job satisfaction. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, p.165.
- Hayes, A., 2008. The Impact of Cuts to Middle Management on Control Environments-The Importance of Effective Monitoring of Controls; Brainstorming for Management Override. *Journal of Government Financial Management*, 57(3), pp. 60-62.
- Healey, M.P., Hodgkinson, G.P., Whittington, R. and Johnson, G., 2015. Off to Plan or Out to Lunch? Relationships between Design Characteristics and Outcomes of Strategy Workshops: Design Characteristics and Outcomes of Strategy Workshops. *British Journal of Management*, 26(3), pp. 507–528.
- Herath, T. and Herath, H.S., 2020. Coping with the new normal imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons for technology management and governance. *Information Systems Management*, 37(4), pp. 277-283.
- Hermkens, F., 2021. Middle management a reinforcement of change?. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 23(2. Ser. III), pp. 20-28.
- Hermkens, F., Dolmans, S. and Romme, G., 2017. The role of middle managers in becoming Lean: A systematic review and synthesis of the literature. *Journal of Economics, Management and Trade*, pp. 1-17.
- Herzig, S.E. and Jimmieson, N.L., 2006. Middle managers' uncertainty management during organisational change. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 27(8), pp. 628–645.

Heyden, M.L., Fourné, S.P., Koene, B.A., Werkman, R. and Ansari, S., 2017. Rethinking 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' roles of top and middle managers in organizational change: Implications for employee support. *Journal of management Studies*, 54(7), pp. 961-985.

Higgs, M. and Rowland, D., 2011. What does it take to implement change successfully? A study of the behaviors of successful change leaders. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 47(3), pp. 309-335.

Holten, A.L., Hancock, G.R. and Bollingtoft, A., 2019. Studying the importance of change leadership and change management in layoffs, mergers, and closures. *Management Decision*, 58(3), pp. 393-409.

Holyoake, N., 2017. Work-Applied Learning for organisational change: A comparative assessment against other change approaches. *Action Learning*, 23(1), pp. 125-157.

Hudson, K., 2016. Coping complexity model: coping stressors, coping influencing factors, and coping responses. *Psychology*, 7(03), pp. 300-309.

Hussain, S.T., Lei, S., Akram, T., Haider, M.J., Hussain, S.H. and Ali, M., 2018. Kurt Lewin's change model: A critical review of the role of leadership and employee involvement in organizational change. *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*, 3(3), pp. 123–127.

Huy, Q.N., 2011. How middle managers' group-focus emotions and social identities influence strategy implementation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 32(13), pp. 1387-1410.

Huy, Q.N., Corley, K.G. and Kraatz, M.S., 2014. From support to mutiny: Shifting legitimacy judgments and emotional reactions impacting the implementation of radical change. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(6), pp. 1650-1680.

Huynh, T., 2021. The influence of transformational leadership dimensions on intrapreneurial behaviour through mediators. *Management Science Letters*, 11(7), pp.2099-2114.

lasbech, P. and Lavarda, R., 2018. Strategy as Practice and the Role of Middle Manager in Organisations: The future of the field. *Revista de Administração da UFSM*, 11(4), pp. 1125-1145.

Ifeacho, C. and Ngalawa, H., 2014. Performance Of The South African Banking Sector Since 1994. *Journal of Applied Business Research (JABR)*, 30(4), pp. 1183-1196.

Ivancic, V., Jelenc, L. and Mencer, I., 2021. The strategy implementation process as perceived by different hierarchical levels: The experience of large Croatian enterprises. *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management, and Innovation*, 17(2), pp. 99-124.

Jacobs, G., van Witteloostuijn, A. and Christe-Zeyse, J., 2013. A theoretical framework of organisational change. *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 26(5), pp. 772–792.

Jansen Van Rensburg, M. J., Davis, A. and Venter, P., 2014. Making strategy work: The role of the middle manager. *Journal of Management and Organization*, 20(02), pp. 165-186.

Jarzabkowski, P., 2005. *Strategy as practice: An activity based approach*. Sage.

Jarzabkowski, P. and Kaplan, S., 2010. Taking “strategy-as-practice” across the Atlantic. In *The Globalization of Strategy Research*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 27, pp. 51-71.

Jarzabkowski, P., Kaplan, S., Seidl, D. and Whittington, R., 2016. On the risk of studying practices in isolation: Linking what, who, and how in strategy research. *Strategic Organisation*, 14(3), pp. 248–259.

Jarzabkowski, P. and Balogun, J., 2009. The practice and process of delivering integration through strategic planning. *Journal of Management Studies*, 46(8), pp. 1255-1288.

- Jarzabkowski, P., Balogun, J. and Seidl, D., 2007. Strategising: the challenges of a practice perspective. *Human Relations*, 6(1), pp. 5-27.
- Jarzabkowski, P. and Kaplan, S., 2015. Strategy tools-in-use: A framework for understanding “technologies of rationality” in practice. *Strategic Management Journal*, 36(4), pp. 537-558.
- Jarzabkowski, P., Lê, J.K. and Van de Ven, A.H., 2013. Responding to competing strategic demands: How organising, belonging, and performing paradoxes coevolve. *Strategic Organisation*, 11(3), pp. 245-280.
- Jarzabkowski, P. and Spee, A.P., 2009. Strategy-as-practice: a review and future directions for the field. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 11(1), pp. 69-95.
- Jarzabkowski, P., Spee, A.P. and Smets, M., 2013. ‘Material artifacts: Practices for doing strategy with stuff’. *European Management Journal*, 31(1), pp. 41–54.
- Jarzabkowski, P. and Whittington, R., 2008. A strategy-as-practice approach to strategy research and education. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17(4), pp. 282-286.
- Jarzabkowski, P. and Wilson, D.C., 2006. Actionable Strategy Knowledge: *European Management Journal*, 24(5), pp. 348–367.
- Jimmieson, N.L., Terry, D.J. and Callan, V.J., 2004. A longitudinal study of employee adaptation to organisational change: the role of change-related information and change-related self-efficacy, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 9(1), pp. 11-27.
- Johnson, G., Langlely, A., Melin, L. and Whittington, R., 2007. Strategy as practice: research directions and resources. Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, G., Melin, L. and Whittington, R., 2003. Micro-strategy and strategising: Toward an activity-based view. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(1), pp. 3-22.

Johnson, R.B. and Onwuegbuzie, A.J., 2004. Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), pp.14-26.

Kamarudin, M.F., Starr, K., Abdullah, A.N. and Husain, K., 2014. Communicating Change in Organisational Restructuring: A Grounded Theory Case Study, in: *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Presented at The International Conference on Communication and Media 2014 (i-COME'14), Langkawi, Malaysia, pp. 496–501.

Kangas, A., Kujala, J., Heikkinen, A., Lonqvist, A., Laihonen, H. and Bethwaite, J., 2019. *Leading change in a complex world*, First. ed. Tampere University Press, Tampere, Finland.

Karr, J., Loh, K. and San Andres, E., 2020. COVID-19, 4IR and the future of work. *Asia-Pacific Economy Cooperation, Policy Support Unit Brief*, (34).

Kealy, T., 2013. Do Middle Managers Contribute to their Organisations Strategy? *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 5(1), pp. 108-116.

Kiitam, A., McLay, A. and Pilli, T., 2016. Managing conflict in organisational change. *International Journal of Agile Systems and Management*, 9(2), pp. 114–134.

Kohtamäki, M., Whittington, R., Vaara, E. and Rabetino, R., 2021. Making connections: Harnessing the diversity of strategy-as-practice research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 24(2), pp. 1-23.

Kolk, A. and Rivera-Santos, M., 2016. The State of Research on Africa in Business and Management: Insights from a Systematic Review of Key International Journals. *Business and Society*, 57(3), pp. 415–436.

Kotter, J. P., 1996. *Leading Change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Kotter, J.P., 2012. How the most innovative companies capitalise on today's rapid-fire strategic challenges and still make their numbers; accelerate! *Harvard Business Review*, 90(11), pp. 44-58.



KPMG. 2020. Global Banking M&A outlook H2 2020. Standing firm on shifting sands.

Kral, P. and Kralova, V., 2016. Approaches to changing organisational structure: The effect of drivers and communication. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(11), pp. 5169–5174.

Kroon, D.P. and Reif, H., 2021. The Role of Emotions in Middle Managers' Sensemaking and Sensegiving Practices During Post-merger Integration. *Group & Organization Management*, 0(0), pp. 1-143.

Laine, P.M. and Vaara, E., 2015. Participation in strategy work. Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Laulie, L. and Morgeson, F.P., 2021. The end is just the beginning: Turnover events and their impact on those who remain. *Personnel Psychology*, 74(3), pp. 387-409.

Lavarda, R., Scussel, F.C. and Schäfer, J.D., 2020. The Role of the Controller in the Perspective of Strategy as Practice: A theoretical essay. *Journal of Accounting, Management and Governance*, 23(3), pp. 364-382.

Lavarda, R. A. B., Canet-Giner, M. T. and Peris-Bonet, F. J. P., 2010. How middle managers contribute to strategy formulation process: Connection of strategy process and strategy practices. *RAE*, 50(4), pp. 358-370.

Lawrence, P., 2015. Leading Change – Insights Into How Leaders Actually Approach the Challenge of Complexity. *Journal of Change Management*, 15(3), pp. 231–252.

Lee, K., Sharif, M., Scandura, T. and Kim, J., 2017. Procedural justice as a moderator of the relationship between organizational change intensity and commitment to organizational change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 30(4), pp. 501-524.

Lemmer, G.S., 2018. The impact of restructuring on the morale of staff at a cultural organisation. Doctoral dissertation. North-West University, Potchefstroom.

- Lester, J.N., Cho, Y. and Lochmiller, C.R., 2020. Learning to do qualitative data analysis: A starting point. *Human Resource Development Review*, 19(1), pp. 94-106.
- Logemann, M., Piekkari, R. and Cornelissen, J., 2019. The sense of it all: Framing and narratives in sensegiving about a strategic change. *Long Range Planning*, 52(5), pp.1-17.
- Lundgren, M. and Blom, M., 2016. Textual objects and strategizing: the influence of documents as active objects on strategic recursiveness. *Journal of Change Management*, 16(3), pp. 223-244.
- Luscher, L.S. and Lewis, M.W., 2008. Organizational change and managerial sensemaking: Working through paradox. *Academy of Management Journal*, 51(2), pp. 221-240.
- Luu, D.T. and Phan, H.V., 2020. The effects of transformational leadership and job satisfaction on commitment to organisational change: a three-component model extension approach. *The South East Asian Journal of Management*, 14(1), pp. 106-123.
- Maitlis, S. and Christianson, M., 2014. Sensemaking in Organisations: Taking Stock and Moving Forward. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 8(1), pp. 57–125.
- Mangan, J., Lalwani, C. and Gardner, B., 2004. Combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies in logistics research. *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management*, 34(7), pp. 565–578.
- Mantere, S., 2008. Role Expectations and Middle Manager Strategic Agency. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(2), pp. 294-316.
- Marais, E.N. and Schepers, J.M., 1996. The effect of organisational restructuring on job satisfaction, career aspirations, and stress levels of employees. *Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 22(3), pp. 1-6.

Martínez-Martí, M.L. and Ruch, W., 2017. Character strengths predict resilience over and above positive affect, self-efficacy, optimism, social support, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(2), pp. 110-119.

Marshak, R.J., 2002. Changing the language of change: How new contexts and concepts are challenging the ways we think and talk about organisational change. *Strategic Change*, 11(5), pp. 279-286.

Marshak, R.J. and Bushe, G.R., 2018. Planned and Generative change in Organisation Development. *OD Practitioner*, 50(4), pp. 9-15.

Marshall, B., Cardon, P., Poddar, A. and Fontenot, R., 2013. Does Sample Size Matter in Qualitative Research? A Review of Qualitative Interviews in is Research. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 54(1), pp. 11–22.

Marshall, C. and Rossman, G.B. 2016. Designing qualitative research. 6th ed. London: Sage.

Mason, M., 2010, August. Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. In *Forum qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(3), Article 8.

Mathisen, G.E., Brønnick, K., Arntzen, K.J. and Bergh, L.I.V., 2017. Identifying and managing psychosocial risks during organisational restructuring: It's what you do and how you do it. *Safety Science*, 100(Part A), pp. 20-29.

Maykrantz, S.A., Nobiling, B.D., Oxarart, R.A., Langlinais, L.A. and Houghton, J.D., 2021. Coping with the crisis: the effects of psychological capital and coping behaviors on perceived stress. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 14(6), pp. 650-665.

Mazzola, J.J., Schonfeld, I.S. and Spector, P.E., 2011. What qualitative research has taught us about occupational stress. *Stress and Health*, 27(2), pp. 93-110.

- McCann, L., Hassard, J. and Morris, J., 2004. Middle Managers, the New Organisational Ideology and Corporate Restructuring: Comparing Japanese and Anglo-American Management Systems. *Competition & Change*, 8(1), pp. 27–44.
- McConville, T. and Holden, L., 1999. The filling in the sandwich: HRM and middle managers in the health sector. *Personnel Review*, 28(5/6), pp. 406–424.
- McCoy, S. and Venter, P., 2016. Corporate brands as catalysts in times of change: Lessons from a South African bank. *Journal of Brand Management*, 23(1), pp. 38-54.
- McKinley, W. and Scherer, A.G., 2000. Some unanticipated consequences of organisational restructuring. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(4), pp. 735–752.
- McKinsey & Company. 2020. How COVID-19 has pushed companies over the technology tipping point and transformed business forever. Insights October 2020.
- Mekelenkamp, Y.B.S., 2015. Managerial seniority and strategic development. Bachelor's thesis. University of Twente, Enschede. pp. 1-11.
- Mills, J., Harrison, H., Franklin, R., and Birks, M., 2017. Case study research: foundations and methodological orientations. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 18(1), pp. 1-17.
- Mlambo, K. and Ncube, M. 2011. Competition and efficiency in the banking sector in South Africa. *African Development Review*, 23(1), pp. 4-15.
- Molino, M., Ingusci, E., Signore, F., Manuti, A., Giancaspro, M.L., Russo, V., Zito, M. and Cortese, C.G., 2020. Wellbeing costs of technology use during Covid-19 remote working: An investigation using the Italian translation of the technostress creators scale. *Sustainability*, 12(15), p. 5911.
- Moran, J.W. and Brightman, B.K. 2001. Leading organisational change. *Career Development International*, 6(2), pp. 11-118.

Morgan J. 2020. Covid 19 Business Impact Study-Global Perspective. A Global Events Industry Perspective. University of Westminster. Tourism and Events Research Group.

Morse, J. M., 2000. Determining sample size. *Qualitative Health Research*, 10(1), pp.3-5.

Mutsonziwa, K., 2015. What Matters to South African Bank Customers? A Case Study of four Main South African Banks. *PRIMA: Practices and Research in Marketing*, 6 (1 and 2), pp. 1-13.

Mutsonziwa, K., 2015. Customers speak for them-selves: A case of Customer Satisfaction in the four Main South African Banks. *International Journal on Customer Relations*, 3(1), pp. 1-15.

Nadler, D.A. and Tushman, M.L., 1989. Organizational frame bending: Principles for managing reorientation. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 3(3), pp. 194-204.

Neumann, J.E., James, K.T. and Vince, R., 2019. Key tensions in purposive action by middle managers leading change. *In Research in Organizational Change and Development*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

Nguse, S. and Wassenaar, D., 2021. Mental health and COVID-19 in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 51(2), pp. 304-313.

Nguyen, N.D., 2016. Examination of the antecedents, reactions, and outcomes to a major technology-driven organisational change. Master's thesis. Minnesota State University, Minnesota.

Nielsen, K., Dawson, J., Hasson, H. and Schwarz, U.V.T., 2021. What about me? The impact of employee change agents' person-role fit on their job satisfaction during organisational change. *Work & Stress*, 35(1), pp. 57-73.

Nordqvist, M. and Melin, L., 2010. The promise of the strategy as practice perspective for family business strategy research. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 1(1), pp. 15–25.

Noureddin, L., 2018. Enabling Organizational Change: How First-level Managers Influence and Commit to Implementing and Sustaining Change in a Healthcare System. Doctoral dissertation. Grand Canyon University, Phoenix.

Nyantakyi, E.B. and Sy, M., 2015. The Banking System in Africa: Main Facts and Challenges. *Africa Economic Brief*, 6(1), pp. 1–16.

Oguji, N., Degbey, W.Y. and Owusu, R.A., 2021. International joint ventures research on Africa: A systematic literature review, propositions, and contextualization. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 63(1), pp.11-26.

Old Mutual PLC. 2018. Nedbank Unbundling [online]. South Africa: Old Mutual. Available from <<https://www.oldmutual.com/investor-relations/old-mutual-plc/nedbank-unbundling>>

Oliva, R., Gebauer, H. and Brann, J.M., 2012. Separate or integrate? Assessing the impact of separation between product and service business on service performance in product manufacturing firms. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, 19(4), pp. 309-334.

Oreg, S., Bartunek, J.M., Lee, G. and Do, B., 2018. An Affect-Based Model of Recipients' Responses to Organisational Change Events. *Academy of Management Review*, 43(1), pp. 65–86.

Pandey, N. and Pal, A., 2020. Impact of digital surge during Covid-19 pandemic: A viewpoint on research and practice. *International Journal of Information Management*, 55, p. 102171.

Parris, M.A., Vickers, M.H. and Wilkes, L., 2008. Caught in the middle: Organizational impediments to middle managers' work-life balance. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 20(2), pp. 101-117.

- Patel, S. 2015. The research paradigm – methodology, epistemology, and ontology – explained in simple language. Academia.
- Peart, N. 2019. Making Work Less Stressful and More Engaging for Your Employees. Harvard Business Review.
- Pettigrew, A.M., 2012. Context and Action in the Transformation of the Firm: A Reprise: Context and Action in the Transformation of the Firm: A Reprise. *Journal of Management Studies*, 49(7), pp. 1304–1328.
- Pina e Cunha, M., Giustiniano, L., Rego, A. and Clegg, S., 2017. “Heaven or Las Vegas”: Competing institutional logics and individual experience. *European Management Review*, 16(3), pp. 781-798.
- Putnam, L.L., Fairhurst, G.T. and Banghart, S., 2016. Contradictions, Dialectics, and Paradoxes in Organisations: A Constitutive Approach. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 10(1), pp. 65–171.
- Quinlan, M. and Bohle, P., 2009. Overstretched and unreciprocated commitment: reviewing research on the occupational health and safety effects of downsizing and job insecurity. *International Journal of Health Services*, 39(1), pp. 1-44.
- Radaelli, G. and Sitton-Kent, L., 2016. Middle Managers and the Translation of New Ideas in Organisations: A Review of Micro-practices and Contingencies: Middle Managers and New Ideas. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 18(3), pp. 311–332.
- Rafferty, A.E. and Jimmieson, N.L., 2017. Subjective Perceptions of Organisational Change and Employee Resistance to Change: Direct and Mediated Relationships with Employee Well-being: Organisational Change and Well-being. *British Journal of Management*, 28(2), pp. 248–264.
- Rahman, M.S., 2017. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language" Testing and Assessment" Research: A Literature Review. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(1), pp. 102-112.

Regina. 2018. Barclays Africa: The tough sell and Absa [online]. South Africa: African Business. Available from <<https://african.business/2018/03/economy/barclays-africa-the-tough-sell-and-absa/>>

Roming, S. and Howard, K., 2019. Coping with stress in college: an examination of spirituality, social support, and quality of life. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 22(8), pp. 832-843.

Rouleau, L. 2005. Micro-practices of strategic sensemaking and sensegiving: How middle managers interpret and sell change every day. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(7), pp. 1413-1441.

Rouleau, L., 2013. Strategy-as-practice research at a crossroads. *M@n@gement*, 16(5), pp. 547-565.

Rouleau, L. and Balogun, J., 2007. Exploring middle managers' strategic sensemaking role in practice. Advanced Institute of Management Research Paper No. 55.

Rouleau, L. and Balogun, J., 2011. Middle Managers, Strategic Sensemaking, and Discursive Competence: Middle Managers and Strategic Sensemaking. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48(5), pp. 953–983.

Rowley, J., 2002. Using case studies in research. *Management Research News*, 25(1), pp.16–27.

Saidin, K., 2017. Insider researchers: Challenges & opportunities. International Seminar on Generating Knowledge Through Research, Proceedings of the International Consortium of Education and Culture Research Studies.

Saldaña, J., 2021. The coding manual for qualitative researchers. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.

Salkind, N., 2014. Research methodology for the economic and management sciences. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education International.



- Savic, D., 2020. COVID-19 and work from home: Digital transformation of the workforce. *Grey Journal (TGJ)*, 16(2), pp. 101-104.
- Schwab, K., (2018). World Economic Forum. Insight Report. The Global Competitiveness Report.
- Seidl, D. and Whittington, R., 2014. Enlarging the strategy-as-practice research agenda: Towards taller and flatter ontologies. *Organisation Studies*, 35(10), pp. 1407-1421.
- Shaw, D., 2017. Managing people and learning in organisational change projects. *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 30(6), pp. 923–935.
- Sitlington, H. and Marshall, V., 2011. Do downsizing decisions affect organisational knowledge and performance?. *Management Decision*, 49(1), pp. 116-129.
- Smit, B. 2005. Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software: Friend or Foe. *South African Computer Journal*, 2005(35), pp. 107-111.
- Smit, B. 2014. Teaching ATLAS.ti™ in South Africa: Reflections on Doctoral Preparedness, *Journal of Social Sciences*, 40(2), pp. 213-217.
- Smith, W. K. and Lewis, M. W., 2011. Toward a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organising. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), pp. 381–403.
- Smits, S.J. and Bowden, D.E., 2015. A Perspective on Leading and Managing Organisational Change. *Economics and Business Review*, 1(15)(2), pp. 3–21.
- Smollan, R.K., 2015. The personal costs of organizational change: A qualitative study. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 39(1), pp. 223-247.
- Smollan, R.K., 2017. Learning to cope with stressful organisational change. *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion*, 8(2), pp. 148-167.
- Smollan, R.K., 2017. Supporting staff through stressful organizational change. *Human Resource Development International*, 20(4), pp. 282-304.

Srinivasan, N., de Homont, P. and Hervé, Y., 2020. Assessing the transfer pricing treatment of COVID-19 restructuring. *International Tax Review*.

Stake, R. E., 1995., The art of case study research. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.

Stander, K. and Pretorius, M., 2016. The next step in the strategy–as–practice evolution: A comparative typology matrix. *Acta Commercii*, 16(1), pp. a328.

Stensaker, I. and Falkenberg, J., 2007. Making sense of different responses to corporate change. *Human Relations*, 60(1), pp. 137-177.

Stouten, J., Rousseau, D.M., and De Cremer, D., 2018. Successful Organisational Change: Integrating the Management Practice and Scholarly Literatures. *Academy of Management Annals*, 12(2), pp. 752–788.

Sufian, F. and Kamarudin, F., 2016. The impact of globalisation on the performance of Banks in South Africa. *Review of International Business and Strategy*, 26(4), pp. 517–542.

Tavakoli, A., Schlagwein, D. and Schoder, D., 2017. Open strategy: Literature review, re-analysis of cases and conceptualisation as a practice. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 26(3), pp. 163-184.

Taylor, J. R. and Robichaud, D., 2004. Finding the organisation in the communication: discourse as action and sensemaking. *Organisation*, 11(3), pp. 395–414.

Tellis, W., 1997. Application of a Case Study Methodology. *The Qualitative Report*, 3(3), pp. 1–17.

Teo, S.T., Pick, D., Newton, C.J., Yeung, M.E. and Chang, E., 2013. Organisational change stressors and nursing job satisfaction: the mediating effect of coping strategies. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 21(6), pp. 878-887.

Thomas, L. & Ambrosini, V., 2015. Materialising Strategy: The Role of Comprehensiveness and Management Controls in Strategy Formation in Volatile Environments: Materialising Strategy. *British Journal of Management*, 26(S1), pp. S105–S124.

Thomas, R. and Dunkerley, D., 1999. Careering Downwards? Middle Managers' Experiences in the Downsized Organisation. *British Journal of Management*, 10(2), pp. 157–169.

Unluer, S., 2012. Being an insider researcher while conducting case study research. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(58), pp. 1–14.

University of South Africa. 2020. COVID-19 Guidelines: Implications of Alert Levels for Researchers and Postgraduate Students. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Vaara, E. & Whittington, R., 2012. Strategy-as-Practice: Taking Social Practices Seriously. *Academy of Management Annals*, 6(1), pp. 285–336.

Vakola, M., 2013. Multilevel readiness to organizational change: A conceptual approach. *Journal of Change Management*, 13(1), pp. 96-109.

Vakola, M. and Petrou, P. (Eds.), 2018. Organisational change: psychological effects and strategies for coping. Routledge, New York.

Vakola, M., Soderquist, K.E. and Prastacos, G.P., 2007. Competency management in support of organisational change. *International Journal of Manpower*, 28(3/4), pp. 260–275.

Valmra, E., Metsla, E., Rannus, R. and Rillo, M. 2006. Towards a practical model of strategy-as-practice. *Working papers in Economics, School of Economics and Business Administration, Tallinn University of Technology*, 18(138), pp. 23–24.

Van den Brande, W., Bernstein, C., Reknes, I. and Baillien, E., 2018. The Moderating Effects of Coping Mechanisms and Resources in the Context of Workplace Bullying, Emotional Abuse and Harassment, in: Gao, W. (Ed.), *Metrology*. Springer Singapore, Singapore, pp. 1–24.

- Van Niekerk, A. and May, M., 2012. Exploring how middle managers experience the impact of senior management on their integrity. *South African Journal of Labour Relations*, 36(2), pp. 42-61.
- Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S. and Young, T., 2018. Characterising and justifying sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: systematic analysis of qualitative health research over a 15-year period. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 18(1), pp. 1-18.
- Walinga, J. and Rowe, W., 2013. Transforming stress in complex work environments: Exploring the capabilities of middle managers in the public sector. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 6(1), pp. 66-88.
- Wanous, J.P., Reichers, A.E. and Austin, J.T., 2000. Cynicism about Organisational Change: Measurement, Antecedents, and Correlates. *Group & Organisation Management*, 25(2), pp. 132–153.
- Wei, Z. and Zhang, L., 2020. How to perform strategic change? A strategy as practice perspective. *Chinese Management Studies*, 14(3), pp. 811-832.
- Whittington, R., 1996. Strategy as practice. *Long Range Planning*, 29(5), pp. 731–735.
- Whittington, R., 2003. The work of strategising and organising for a practice perspective. *Strategic Organisation*, 1(1), pp. 117–125.
- Whittington, R., 2006. Completing the practice turn in strategy research. *Organisation Studies*, 27(5), pp. 613-634.
- Whittington, R., 2007. Strategy practice and strategy process: family differences and the sociological eye. *Organisation Studies*, 28(10), pp. 1575-1586.
- Whittington, R., 2012. Big strategy/small strategy. *Strategic Organisation*, 10(3), pp. 263-268.

Whittington, R., 2018. Greatness Takes Practice: On Practice Theory's Relevance to "Great Strategy." *Strategy Science*, 3(1), pp. 343–351.

Whittington, R., Yakis-Douglas, B., Ahn, K. and Cailluet, L., 2017. Strategic Planners in More Turbulent Times: The Changing Job Characteristics of Strategy Professionals, 1960–2003. *Long Range Planning*, 50(1), pp. 108–119.

Willis, J. W., 2007. Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.

Wippermann, F., 2017. Instigating the Permanent Change of Business Models. *Business Management Dynamics*, 6(9), pp. 25-38.

Wooldridge, B., Schmid, T. and Floyd, S.W., 2008. The middle management perspective on strategy process: Contributions, synthesis, and future research. *Journal of Management*, 34(6), pp. 1190-1221.

Xie, E., Reddy, K.S. and Liang, J., 2017. Country-specific determinants of cross-border mergers and acquisitions: A comprehensive review and future research directions. *Journal of World Business*, 52(2), pp.127-183.


Yin, R.K., 2003. Designing case studies. *Qualitative Research Methods*, 5(14), pp. 359-386.

Yin, R. K., 2018. Case Study Research and Applications. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks, California.

Ziaee Bigdeli, A., Baines, T., Bustinza, O.F. and Guang Shi, V., 2017. Organisational change towards servitisation: a theoretical framework. *Competitiveness Review*, 27(1), pp. 12–39.

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: Research Ethics Clearance**



**UNISA DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT RESEARCH ETHICS  
REVIEW COMMITTEE**

08 September 2020

Dear Mrs Pravitha Jogie

ERC Reference #: 2020\_CEMS\_BM\_102  
Name: Pravitha Jogie  
Student #: 32230532  
Staff #: N/A

**Decision: Approved with minor corrections to the satisfaction of the supervisor**

---

**Researcher(s):** Mrs Pravitha Jogie  
E-mail address: [REDACTED]  
Telephone #: [REDACTED]

**Supervisor (s):** Prof Annemarie Davis  
E-mail address: [REDACTED]  
Telephone #: Tel: [REDACTED]

**Working title of research:**

**Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring – a case study in a South African bank**


**Qualification:** M Com

---

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA Department of Business Management Ethics Review Committee for the above-mentioned research.

The **low risk application** was reviewed in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the UNISA Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment on 7 September 2020.

**The application is Approved with minor corrections to the satisfaction of the supervisor.**

  
University of South Africa  
Pretoria Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Johannesburg  
10158, South Africa

The following *Suggestions and comments issues* emanating from the review are recommended by the Business Management Ethics Review Committee.

1. Some conflict of interest. *"The researcher acknowledges that this insider knowledge and background may be viewed as a possible risk due to insider bias" (p 11). "The researcher is employed in a middle manager position by the case organisation in which the research will take place" (p 15). "The participants who will be recruited for this study are also of middle manager level in the organisation and hence are the researcher's peers and not subordinates" (p 23).*
2. It is not clear how (a) the researcher will ensure that participants must have a minimum of 3 years or more middle management experience in the bank (p 21); and (b) how the researcher will ensure that participants have a minimum of 2 years strategy experience (p 21). The reviewer proposes that these are specified in the interview guide.
3. The issue of data (and related costs) for participants should be considered by the researcher. As stated in section 4.6.5 (p 21), *"As a result of the COVID impact, virtual interviews will be conducted using available applications such as MS Teams or Skype"*.

*It is your responsibility to ensure that the proposed research adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Research Ethics Policy.*

Yours sincerely,



Chairperson: Prof Thea Visser

E-mail address: [REDACTED]

Telephone #: Tel: [REDACTED]



University of South Africa  
Pretorius Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane  
P.O. Box 17003, Pretoria, 00017, South Africa

## Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

### Research Participant Consent Form

**Title of the research study:** Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring – a case study in a South African Bank.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the details of the study explained to me. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time for any reason without penalty or to decline to answer any questions in the study without any consequences.

I agree to take part in the interview and that the interview will be recorded. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point.

I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Participant Information Sheet.

I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study. I agree that the information will remain anonymous so that I cannot be identified.

I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Participant Information Sheet.

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participants contact details:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's contact details:** \_\_\_\_\_



# Appendix C: Participant Virtual Consent

Attendee responses: 1 accepted, 0 tentatively accepted, 0 declined.

## Research Interview

 Send Update

Title: Research interview with Pravitha Jogie

Required:

Optional:

Start time: Fri 2020/10/02 08:30  All day  Time zones

End time: Fri 2020/10/02 09:30 [Make Recurring](#)

Location: [Link provided](#) [Room Finder](#)

 Participant Information Sheet.docx 24 KB

 Research Participant Consent Form\_PS.docx 21 KB

Dear [REDACTED]

Many thanks for making the time for the discussion. Please find attached the documents as discussed. I attached the Participant Information Sheet and the Participant Consent Sheet for reassurance that this research is sanctioned both by [REDACTED] and the University of South Africa (UNISA). The documents are for information purposes only as regards the academic nature of this research.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the university has prescribed guidelines for research interviews in-line with the COVID-19 precautions. These include the chosen medium, Zoom, via which this virtual interview will take place.

Below is the meeting link:

Pravitha Jogie is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/77163386289?pwd=VmRlWklsTjRlR0ZlMkRlZUJlZ0hHNDZ0>

Meeting ID: 771 6338 6289

Passcode: 3lpmg4

**By accepting, you are giving consent for participation in the virtual interview and for the recording of the interview for the purpose of this research study.**

I appreciate your assistance and participation in this research study.

Regards!

Pravitha

## **Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet**

Participant Information Sheet

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Title of the research study:** Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring – a case study in a South African Bank.

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Pravitha Jogie, and I am doing research at the University of South Africa (UNISA), College of Economic and Management Sciences, in fulfilment of a Master of Commerce Degree in Business Management. This is an invitation for you to take part in the research study to explore the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in the Bank.

This Participant Information Sheet provides information on why the research is being done and what your involvement will be as a participant in this study.

Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please feel free to ask questions if something is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the aim of the study?

The aim of the study is to explore how middle managers cope during organisational restructuring. In doing so, the study aims to discover what are the coping practices of middle managers and what are the outcomes of these coping practices of middle managers.

Why have I been invited to participate in the study?

The participants chosen for this study are middle managers who have been involved in strategising during organisational restructuring. This criterion was used due to the fact that studies have demonstrated that middle managers are the most targeted groups of employees during organisational restructuring. Middle managers are the group of employees situated at the centre of the hierarchical organisation and are

therefore most impacted when meeting the organisational restructuring objectives of flatter structures, reduced hierarchies, and downsizing

What is my role in this study?

Your role as a participant of this study will be to take part in a one-on-one, semi-structured, virtual interview, scheduled at your convenience. The duration of the interview will be approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The interview will be recorded with your prior permission.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Your participation is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to agree to take part in the study. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and without providing a reason. You can choose not to answer a question or stop the interview at any time.

What are the benefits of taking part in this study?

The study will largely provide the organisation and the academic body of knowledge with insights into how middle managers cope during organisational restructuring. The study will provide an understanding of how middle manager deal with uncertainty and stress of organisational restructuring, how they make sense of it and what they do to cope during this stressful time.

Are there any expected inconveniences with participating in the study?

The possible inconvenience envisaged could be the time of the requested interview or possibly you, as the participant, may experience some level of discomfort with a question posed. You can choose not to answer a question or stop the interview at any time. There is also no risk or physical injury to participating in this study.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Participants identities will be kept confidential, all personal identification will be removed from the data. The participants will be de-identified with the use of

participant numbers. Participant numbers will be assigned to participants and only the researcher will have access the master list of participants.

The participants interview data will only be viewed by the people responsible for making sure that the research is done properly, including the researcher's supervisors, the external co-coder and transcriber of the data, who will sign confidentiality agreements, and the university's Research Ethics Committee.

How will the data be stored and ultimately destroyed?

The physical documents containing the interview questions and answers and the researcher's reflection notes will be kept for five years as required by legislation and will be stored in a locked cupboard. All electronic information will be stored on a password protected laptop. Physical documents no longer required will be shredded and placed in a bin designated for confidential documents and electronic documents will be permanently deleted from the computer.

Will I receive payment or any other incentives for participating in this study?

No, there will be no payment or incentive in any form offered for participating in the study.

Has the study received ethical approval?

This study is in the process of applying for approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the University of South Africa. A copy of the letter will be provided on request once approval has been granted.

How will I be informed of the findings/results of the research?

If you would like to be informed of the research findings, please contact the researcher:

Name: Pravitha Jogie

Cell phone number: [REDACTED]

Email address: [REDACTED]

Should you have questions, concerns, or comments regarding the research study you may contact the researcher's supervisor:

Prof Annemarie Davis – Email: [REDACTED]

Dr Catherine Le Roux – Email: [REDACTED]

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Pravitha Jogie

## **Appendix E: Interview Guide**

### Interview Guide

Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring - a case study in a South African Bank

P. Jogie 32220532

### Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to read the participant information sheet and for participating in this research study. As indicated in the Participant information Sheet, if you feel uncomfortable at any stage please let me know. Your participation is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to take part in the study. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and without providing a reason. You can choose not to answer a question or stop the interview at any time.

I assure you that the information shared here and your identity as a participant will be confidential and only used for the purpose of this Master's degree research. Participants identities will be kept confidential, all personal identification will be removed from the data

### Research Questions

Research topic: Exploring the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring – a case study in a South African Bank.

Research questions:

#### 1.1.1 Primary research question

1.1.1.1 What are the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring?

#### 1.1.2 Secondary research questions

1.1.2.1 How do middle managers cope during organisational restructuring?

1.1.2.2 What are the outcomes of the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring?

Interview Questions

Part:	Interview questions	Possible probing questions
<p>Part 1</p> <p>Biographical information and work history</p>	<p>Tell me about your position at the Bank</p> <p>What is it that interests you about your role?</p> <p>Please tell me a little about what you do in your job.</p>	<p>Tell me more about that</p> <p>What led you to . . .</p> <p>What eventually happened?</p>
<p>Part 2</p> <p>Impact of organisational restructuring</p>	<p>What are the first words, thoughts and feelings that come to mind when you hear the term organisational change / organisational restructuring? (positive and negative)</p> <p>The Bank's Africa Technology region is currently undergoing a restructure and downsizing - tell me about your experience of this restructure and downsizing?</p> <p>What was it like? How did you cope with the change and uncertainty?</p> <p>Tell me about your daily routines and what has changed for you since the announcement of the restructure.</p>	<p>Looking back, what would you do differently now, if anything?</p> <p>What was the outcome?</p> <p>What was the situation?</p> <p>Was this what you expected?</p> <p>What did you do?</p>

	<p>Share with me what has changed in your immediate work environment because of the restructuring.</p> <p>What did you find difficult during the process?</p> <p>How did you deal with that difficulty?</p> <p>Looking back, can you share what you consider positive about the restructuring?</p>	<p>How did others see it?</p> <p>What did everyone else do?</p> <p>How did that make you feel?</p>
<p>Part 3 Coping with organisational restructuring</p>	<p>What impact did restructuring have on you from a work perspective?</p> <p>How did the restructuring affect you from a personal perspective?</p> <p>How did you deal with the impact of the restructuring?</p> <p>How did you make sense of what was going on during restructuring?</p> <p>Thinking back to your interactions with people across organisational levels, what were some of the things that you observed that made you aware of how staff in general felt during restructuring?</p>	



	<p>Tell me about changes between you and your subordinates because of the restructuring? What changed?</p> <p>Tell me about changes between you and your manager because of the restructuring?</p> <p>Were there any means of support provided to you to help you deal with what was going on?</p> <p>When you think of the restructuring effort, what message would you give to top management based on your experience as a middle manager?</p>	
<p>Part 4 Close of interview</p>	<p>In hindsight, what would you have done differently as a middle manager?</p> <p>Would you like to add anything else that you feel is relevant that was not discussed?</p>	

## Appendix F: Permission Letter



13 November 2019

Pravitha Jogie

[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
2196

### Request for permission to conduct research in [Redacted]

Dear Pravitha Jogie

I confirm the receipt of your request for permission to conduct research in [Redacted] for your Master's dissertation which involves 'the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring'.

The research request is approved based on the following conditions:

1. The name of [Redacted] will not be mentioned in any publication or in the published research report.
2. Participants information will remain confidential.
3. Any external party that has access to the research data will sign Non-Disclosure Agreements.
4. The University of South Africa's Ethics Policy will be adhered to.

Upon completion of the study, a copy of the full research report must be provided to [Redacted].

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted]  
Chief Information Officer: Rest of Africa

Group Technology | Rest of Africa |

[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

## Appendix G: Turnitin Receipt



### Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

Submission author: Pravitha Jogie  
Assignment title: Revision 2  
Submission title: Turnitin\_Dissertation\_Draft v5\_Pravitha Jogie\_32230532  
File name: Turnitin\_Dissertation\_Draft\_v5\_Pravitha\_Jogie\_32230532.docx  
File size: 1.4M  
Page count: 174  
Word count: 47,432  
Character count: 276,649  
Submission date: 21-Jan-2022 12:11PM (UTC+0200)  
Submission ID: 1745332796

#### ABSTRACT

How middle managers cope with the uncertainty of organisational restructuring is of the utmost importance to their well-being. Middle managers are tasked with implementing organisational restructuring and they struggle with stress, which is heightened by uncertainty and anxiety caused by the restructure. They play an important role as implementers and agents of organisational change, but are also subject to the change.

However, the nature of middle managers' roles during organisational restructuring is accompanied by stress and anxiety triggered by the change process, job insecurity, uncertainty, role conflict, and work overload, which impacts middle managers' well-being. This role middle managers perform in the course of the restructure causes conflict and heightens the anxiety that they are already faced with, resulting in greater stress.

For middle managers to effectively manage the uncertainty and anxiety that impacts on their well-being, they must have effective coping practices. If middle managers do not have effective coping practices to deal with the uncertainty and anxiety of the restructuring, it will affect their well-being, resulting in emotional, mental, and physical health problems, in addition to productivity and performance issues in executing their roles, consequently impacting the outcomes of the change.

This study explored the coping practices of middle managers during organisational restructuring in a South African Bank from a strategic-practice perspective. The study focused on practices and job attitudes, and addressed the gap in the literature on how middle managers cope. Qualitative data was gathered using semi-structured virtual interviews from 13 middle managers in a case study. Thematic coding was the basis for analysing, interpreting, and clustering the data into common themes and sub-themes. The study found that middle managers' personal experiences and demographics are used as a frame of reference that shapes their response to organisational change, decisions, and coping. Further findings revealed how the