

**Implications and drivers of strategic leader indecision**

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## **Abstract**

Decision-making is one of the core strategic leadership functions across all organisational types. To that end, there is a large body of research on when and how leaders make decisions, but a paucity of academic literature on when and why strategic leaders are plagued by indecision. Further, understanding the drivers of strategic leaders' indecision is critical, given the implications for organisational success. Premised on the perceived challenge of strategic leaders' indecision, this exploratory research sought to understand the drivers and implications of indecision by upper echelon decision-makers of a regulated and complex organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Using a qualitative research design, data was collected through twenty one-on-one semi-structured, in-depth interviews with upper-echelon leaders within a regulated and complex organisation. Thematic analysis yielded findings clustered along three broad themes of drivers of indecision, reasons for indecision and implications for indecision for an organisation. The study revealed that indecision resulted from hierarchy, complexity, lack of trust, and fear of failure. This happened because of fear of accountability, avoidance of conflict, geographic jurisdiction, and power influence. The findings revealed the financial and non-financial implications of indecision. The study showed ways to mitigate indecision—namely, bold and courageous leadership, and leadership transformation.

The study contributes to the upper echelon and behavioural decision-making literature by shedding new light on the antecedents and outcomes of senior leader indecision. Upper echelon decision-makers may use the insights from the conceptual framework to assess the phenomenon of indecision in their respective organisations; to the extent that it exists, and consider the recommendations to mitigate such indecision.

## **Keywords**

Decision-making; Indecision, Strategic Leadership; Upper Echelons Theory; Complex Organisation

## **Declaration**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Corporate Strategy at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Problem

## 1.1 Introduction

Everyday leaders across profit and non-profit organisations make decisions. These decisions influence the short-term success and long-term sustainability of their organisations. Consequently, decision-making is a central component of a leader's function (Samimi, Felipe, Anderson & Herrmann, 2019). However, indecision (lack of decision-making), non-commitment to a selected decision, delayed decisions, or endless change of mind by leaders impact the organisation's financial and non-financial outcomes (Samimi et al., 2019; Kokkoris, Baumeister, & Kühnen, 2019).

Notwithstanding, the general view that leaders make decisions on their own (Leotti & Delgado, 2014); the limitless internet material on indecision, for example; "*10 Proven Steps to Overcoming Indecision*" or "*5 Tips to Make Business Decisions if you're an Indecisive Leader*", indicates that some leaders may suffer from indecisiveness (Boitnott, 2014; Kokkoris et al., 2019; Young Entrepreneur Council, 2016). Germeijs and Verschuere (2011) assert that leaders often struggle with decision-making and too often, delay deciding even in circumstances where such delay is costly. Also, decision avoidance is common among leaders to the point of hoping others could make the decision on their behalf (Kokkoris et al., 2019; Leotti & Delgado, 2014).

Premised on the perceived challenge faced by leaders in executing their core function of decision-making and influence of indecision on organisations; this exploratory research seeks to understand the drivers and implications of indecision by strategic leaders within a regulated and complex organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## 1.2 Background to the Research Problem

One of the core leadership functions across various organisations—private businesses, non-profit organisations, political organisations, and government agencies, is decision-making. Leaders' decisions are both simple and complex and impact the organisation's outcomes (Kokkoris et al., 2019). Gottfredson and Reina (2020) contend that leaders are charged with creating a conducive environment that assists their organisations in adjusting and winning in a competitive environment. Therefore, it is important to understand the underlying processes that contribute to leaders' decision-making and behaviour. However, in the context of the decision-making process, leaders sometimes suffer indecision and delay or delegate

individual decisions because of potential difficulties or possible adverse consequences (Samimi et al., 2019; Kokkoris et al., 2019).

The World Economic Forum (WEF) (2017) report argues that decisiveness by leaders is the solution to keeping pace with the fast-moving business environment. The report states “followers may choose not to act out of fear of making a wrong decision; however, leaders must make a decision and not suffer from the paralysis of indecision” (WEF, 2017). From a business and political perspective, the recent gloomy track record of retaining talented professionals from the private sector, who were called upon to help save ailing South African State-Owned Companies is a concern. In 2019 alone, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Eskom, South African Post Office, and South African Airways walked-out and abandoned their roles, leaving these organisations with acting CEOs for the longest of time. Indecision and political interference by the government were cited among the reasons these executives left their posts (Prinsloo & Henderson, 2019).

Larson (2018) postulates that uncertainty and leaders’ pursuit of having complete information before making the decision leads to chronic indecision and remains the Achilles heel for many organisations. Notwithstanding challenges, the Chief Executive of Amazon, the largest organisation in the world by market capitalisation (approximately US\$1.6 trillion – January 2021) seems to go against the notion of certainty and availability of all information before deciding. He is known for making commercial decisions based on 70% of available information. Despite pivoting his decisions now and again, his approach of “not playing it safe and waiting until he is sure he cannot mess up”, has propelled Amazon into uncharted new grounds and innovation of platform businesses leaving competitors behind (Larson, 2018).

Drawing from perspectives across business, politics and academia, there is an alignment that decision-making is a central leadership function (Forbes, 2018; Bloomberg, 2019; WEF, 2017; Samimi et al., 2019). Therefore, indecision, unduly delaying or delegating decisions for fear of consequences can adversely influence any organisation’s future success (Samimi et al., 2019; Kokkoris et al., 2019; Gottfredson & Reina, 2020). Further, Samimi et al. (2020) claim that drivers behind indecision and their influence on organisations have remained mostly unexplored. Hence, in the context of the decision-making process, this exploratory research seeks to understand the drivers and implications of indecision by strategic leaders within a regulated and complex organisation with operations across many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

It is important to provide a description of a “complex” organisation in the context of this study. The researcher drew from literature to expound and clarify the notion of complexity. Uhl-Bien

and Arena (2017) assert that complexity relates to interconnectivity. This means that, as things in a network or system intermingle, their form and substance change permanently and in an unpredictable manner (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Other scholars clearly distinguish between “complicated” and “complexity”. They assert that complicated networks or systems have multiple changing elements that work in a predictable mode (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Notwithstanding the many parts of the system that interact together, such interaction follows a pattern (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Consequently, a complicated system's behaviour can be predicted with a high degree of accuracy (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Snowden & Boone, 2007; Sargut & McGrath, 2011).

However, complex systems, by contrast, are different to complicated systems. Firstly, Stumberg and Martin (2013) postulate that complexity comes from the Latin word *Complexus*: *com* means “together” and *plectere*, that is “to wave or braid”; and speaks on how things are connected with each other and how these interactions work together. Further, Sargut and McGrath (2011) contend that multiplicity, interdependence, and diversity are three distinct features of a complex environment. Multiplicity denotes the interaction of many elements; interdependence refers to the multiple element's connectedness; and diversity relates to the degree of these elements' heterogeneity (Sargut & McGrath, 2011).

The greater the multiplicity, interdependence, and diversity; the greater the complexity. For example, organic growth is highly complex, involving many distinct, diverse, and collaborative elements, which are constantly changing (Sargut & McGrath, 2011). Drawing from the literature on organisational complexity, and for the purposes of this exploratory study, the complex organisation refers to an organisation with high levels of multiplicity, interdependence, and diversity (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Snowden & Boone, 2007; Sargut & McGrath, 2011).

The selected organisation, one of the largest multinational companies in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a market capitalisation of over ZAR 100 billion as of January 2021, reflects high complexity levels. Further, it has a compelling source of competitive advantage – recognised brand, operations in twenty African markets, substantial on-ground assets (over 1 200 branches and 9 000 ATMs), over 50 000 employees and modernised core banking platforms providing leading-edge digital capabilities (Fitch Solution, 2020).

### **1.3 Research Problem**

Over the years, scholars have explored the role and responsibilities of strategic leaders (notably, Boards, CEOs, and high-level executives) in making a variety of strategic decisions

including acquisitions, entering new markets and innovation. The seminal work by Hambrick and Mason (1984) contended that strategic leaders influence organisational outcomes through the decisions they make. Wang, Holmes, Oh, and Zhu (2016) professed that unlike decisions made at lower organisational levels, strategic leaders' decisions affect allocations of resources and commitments that can have far-reaching implications for organisations.

Furthermore, the fast-paced competitive environment, uncertain and ambiguous nature of the business landscape complicate decision-making, and in turn, exacerbates a leader discomfort in making decisions (Kokkoris et al., 2019; Wowak, Mannor, Arrfelt & McNamara, 2016). Knight (2017) reflects on employee frustration due to the leaders' indecisiveness and postulates that leaders who struggle to pick a course of action or constantly change their minds frustrate employees. This behaviour often leaves followers confused on what to focus on as they are abruptly switching directions, and regrettably in that process suffer credibility with their colleagues (Knight, 2017).

The South African government and the executives at Eskom provide an example of policy and regulatory indecision in the late 1990s: wherein, (a) private companies were prohibited from producing, transmitting and distributing electricity, and (b) the decision to build new power plants (Medupi and Kusile) were not taken until 2004—a delay of over ten years (Bloomberg, 2015). The delay in commissioning new power plants placed a significant strain on Eskom's ageing power plants. According to the Department of Public Enterprise (DPE), 50% of the generation fleet is, on average, 37 years old and requires significant refurbishments (DPE, 2018). Consequently, the constrained electricity system contributed to regular plant breakdowns, shortage of energy supply and load shedding.

The inability to provide energy supply security limited new investment into the country's real economy, thus, curbing the much-needed economic growth and job creation. Without economic growth, the government collects fewer taxes and cannot invest in new projects. The government must then borrow expensive local and foreign debt to fund its expenditure and infrastructure programmes. This puts a strain on the country's debt to GDP, currently over 60% (DPE, 2018).

For Eskom to keep the lights on, they were forced to use gas turbines to supplement power supply. However, this alternative source of power came with an exorbitant diesel cost of ZAR 1-2 billion cost a month, leading to high electricity cost for consumers. Other than poor debt collection, alleged corruption, poor corporate governance, high operational costs (salary, maintenance, others) and capital expenditure overruns, Eskom debt of over ZAR 430 billion (15% of sovereign debt), the previous policy and regulatory indecision contributed into

Eskom's current liquidity (inability to generate enough cash required to service interest expense and capital repayments obligations), operational and debt crisis.

Considering decision-making is at the heart of a strategic leader's function, indecisiveness, delaying and undue delegation of strategic decisions can unfavourably influence the success of the organisation (Wowak et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2016; Kokkoris et al., 2019; Gottfredson & Reina, 2020). However, Samimi et al. (2019, p. 4) argue that "in terms of the strategic decision-making process, researchers have given little attention to indecision (lack of decision-making) and the discarding of available choices". Hence, this exploratory study aims to understand the drivers and implications of indecision by strategic leaders within a regulated and complex organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## **1.4 Purpose of the Research**

Given the challenges set out in section 1.2 and 1.3 above, together with the invitation for further investigation by Samimi et al. (2019), the purpose of the exploratory research is to understand and answer the overarching question on strategic decision-making by the upper echelon leaders within the regulated and complex organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa: *What are the drivers and implications of strategic leaders' indecision?*

In support of the central research question, the exploratory study aims to; (1) investigate specific drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders, (2) explore the reasons strategic leaders delay or delegate decision-making, and (3) understand the implications of indecision, delaying or delegation of decision-making by the strategic leaders. For the purposes of this exploratory study, delayed and delegated decision-making are viewed as responses to indecision, thus considered as part of indecision.

## **1.5 Scope of the Research**

While extant literature covers the role of strategic leaders (Samimi et al., 2019) and the implications of decision-making to the outcomes of the organisation (Wowak et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2016); this study is narrowed to gaining insights into drivers and reasons behind indecision by strategic leaders within a regulated and complex organisation and their short term and long term implications. The scope is confined to drivers and the implication of indecision within a regulated and complex organisation; hence, external factors are cited but not explored at depth.

## **1.6 Significance of the Research for Business and Theory**

The arguments presented in the preceding sections evidence that decision-making is one of the core functions of strategic leaders. These decisions influence the future performance and survival of the organisation (Samimi et al., 2019). The fast-paced business environment, uncertainty and unpredictability occasionally can relegate strategic leaders into chronic paralysis of indecision (Wowak et al., 2016; WEF, 2017). Brooks (2011, p. 683) states, “indecision is not the hallmark of a great manager ... being decisive has positive connotations; being indecisive has negative ones” and postulates that organisations never look for leaders who suffer from the plague of indecision. Consequently, this exploratory research aims to contribute to behavioural decision-making literature and business (primarily to organisations within the financial services industry, and multinational corporates), while considering the upper echelons theory (Bromiley & Rau, 2016) and bounded rationality theory (Tarka, 2017; Sent, 2018). Both upper echelons and bounded rationality theories are expounded further in section 2.2.2 below.

There is a large body of research on when and how leaders make decisions, but limited study on indecision within the strategic decision-making network (Brooks, 2011; Samimi et al., 2019), operating at the upper echelons of a regulated and complex organisation. Therefore, it is prudent that regulated and complex organisations understand the drivers and implications of indecision by strategic leaders. The significance to business is that rich insights from this exploratory study may offer perspectives to the upper echelons leaders of regulated and complex organisation on, (a) the antecedents to indecision, (b) the reasons behind indecision, and (c) the implications of indecision at the strategic leadership level, and in turn, improve performance and ensure the future survival of the organisation (Brooks, 2011; Samimi et al., 2019).

## **1.7 Structure of the Research Study**

### **Chapter 1: Problem definition and purpose**

This section introduces the research and illustrates its relevance in both the business and academic domains. It illustrates the research problem and the purpose of the research.

### **Chapter 2: Literature review**

This chapter reviews the extant literature on indecision, strategic leadership and decision-making theories, as well as the implication on organisational outcomes of indecision.

### **Chapter 3: Research questions**

This segment positions the central research question, the associated sub-questions, as well as the rationale for each of the research questions.

### **Chapter 4: Research methodology and design**

This chapter discusses the research methodology and design, as well as defend the various research methodology and design decisions. Details pertaining to the population, sampling method and size, data gathering approach, analysis approach, and limitations are presented.

### **Chapter 5: Research results**

This chapter presents the results from the analysis of twenty semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with experts from the organisation. Chapter 5 presents the qualitative data collected from the interviews.

### **Chapter 6: Discussion of results**

This section provides a detailed account of the research results against the existing literature on which the research is grounded.

### **Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations**

Chapter 7 presents the key findings of the research as well as provides pertinent recommendations for business. Possible future research on the topic is also recommended.



# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

In the context of the strategic decision-making process, this chapter reviews current literature to establish factors related to indecision by upper echelons leaders and their implications to the organisation. Underpinned by the research problem and purpose in section 1.2 and 1.3 respectively, and the pursuit to understand indecision drivers, this exploratory research draws on upper echelons theory (Bromiley & Rau, 2016) and bounded rationality theory (Tarka, 2017; Sent, 2018) as theoretical frameworks. Below, each of these theories is explored on how they relate to indecision by strategic leaders and influence organisational outcomes—financial and non-financial. Figure 2.1 below provides a sequential flow for the literature review for this research inquiry.

Literature Review Roadmap			
Headings and Sub-heading	<b>2.1 Introduction</b>	<b>2.3 Strategic Leadership</b>	<b>2.5 Implications of Indecision</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview</li> <li>• Literature review roadmap</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept of strategic leadership</li> <li>• Construct of strategic leadership</li> <li>• Core roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competitive advantage</li> <li>• Firm growth</li> <li>• Performance volatility</li> </ul>
	<b>2.2 Theoretical Frameworks</b>	<b>2.4 Indecision (lack of decision-making)</b>	<b>2.6 Conclusion</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upper Echelon Theory</li> <li>• Bounded Rationality Theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept of indecision</li> <li>• Antecedents to indecision</li> <li>• Subjective Experiences of Choice</li> </ul>	
	<b>Proposition from literature on drivers and implications of indecision within the decision-making process</b>		

Figure 2.1: Literature Review Roadmap

Source: Author’s own

## 2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

### 2.2.1 Upper Echelons Theory

The upper echelons theory states that organisational outcomes are somewhat predicted by its leaders’ background features (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). In the later literature, Hambrick (2007, p.334) succinctly captures the fundamental premise of the upper echelons theory and asserts that it is the “executives’ experiences, values, and personalities greatly influence their interpretations of the situations they face, and, in turn, affect their choices. These choices, in turn, influence organisational performance”. These attributes have relevance in the context of

this study, given the centrality of upper echelon strategic decision-makers to the overarching research question: What are the drivers and implications of strategic leaders' indecision?

There has been a progression of upper echelons theory from Hambrick and Mason's (1984) seminal article, which tabled upper echelons leaders' characteristics that make strategic decisions for their organisations. Other scholars focused on how upper echelons leaders' characteristics influence organisation strategic decisions and outcomes (Carter & Greer, 2013). In the last decade, research in this area has studied how upper echelons leaders' social, behavioural, and cognitive factors influence their strategic choices and performance levels (Bromiley & Rau, 2016). At the core, Hambrick and Mason (1984) argued that the outcomes of the organisation echo the values and cognitive bases of the upper echelon decision-makers in the organisation. Carpenter, Geletkanycz and Sanders (2004) further asserted that the upper echelons perspective centres on values, reasonings, perceptions of leaders, their influence on the strategic decision-making process and resultant performance outcomes. Carter and Greer (2013) contended that the upper echelon leaders' specific actions could be predicted based on observable characteristics, such as functional background, education, tenure, experience, and age.

Drawing from the literature on upper echelons theory, the conclusion is that an organisation's strategic decisions and performance levels are predominately influenced by its leaders' characteristics, social, behavioural, and cognitive factors. Additionally, responding to Samimi et al. (2019, p. 4) invitation for further research on one of the key roles of strategic leaders, which stated, "in terms of the strategic decision-making process, researchers have given little attention to indecision (lack of decision-making) and the discarding of available choices". Hence, this exploratory study seeks to understand the drivers and implications of indecision by a regulated and complex organisation's upper echelon leaders.

### **2.2.2 Bounded Rationality Theory**

Bounded rationality theory is one of the prominent theories that has influenced various domains, including psychology, economics, and strategic management. Scholars have contended that rational (objective) and bounded-rational (subjective) are the critical features of decision-making theories (Pataki & Padar, 2013; Tarka, 2017; Sent, 2018). In a recent study, Sent (2018) traced bounded rationality from decades post World War II, where neoclassical economics was a dominant research sphere. At the centre of neoclassical economics is the notion of rationality, which (a) focuses on objective analysis and evaluation

of decision-making process, and (b) asserts that the rational and self-interested individual aims to find the maximum value from the available alternatives (Sent, 2018; Tarka, 2017).

Pataki and Padar (2013), viewed the rationality theory as an economic man who is rational and consistent while making a value-maximising decision. The assumption was that the economic man has, complete knowledge of the environment; a consistent system of selecting alternatives; capability to assign accurate probability returns for each alternative; and rationally selects the alternative with the maximum return (Cheek & Goebel 2020; Pataki & Padar, 2013). Commenting on this concept of rationality, Herfeld (2020) stated that individuals make rational choices by considering options based on their preferences and beliefs. Principally, the notion of rationality postulates that leaders make a rational decision if an alternative satisfies their preferences considering their beliefs and delivers maximum value (Herfeld, 2020; Sent, 2018; Tarka, 2017; Pataki & Padar 2013).

Having outlined the phenomenon of rationality, Sent (2018) noted that early 2000s emerged with a shift from neoclassical economics to behavioural economics. Central to behavioural economics are terms such as 'normative', which discusses the rational behaviour; and 'descriptive', which is the deviation from rational choice (Sent, 2018; Tarka, 2017). According to Sent (2018), the conceptual shifting of bounded rationality comes a long way; initially labelled 'limited intelligence' in 1840 to 'finite intelligence' in 1880 and converting to rationality from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Sent (2018) argued that Herbert Simon, the father of bounded rationality theory, started at 'limited rationality' moved to 'approximate rationality', terms much familiar within the political debates, then finally settled on 'bounded rationality'. The existing literature emphasises the following three assertions as key tenants to bounded rationality: they deeply influence the individual's decision-making process. Firstly, these include limited thinking and reasoning capabilities; secondly, restricted time and cost associated with gathering information about the environment; and finally, the complexity of evaluating alternative with the maximum return, all impact the individuals' ability to solve problems (Sent, 2018; Tarka, 2017; Simon, 1972).

In contrast to Pataki and Padar (2013), rational theory and model of an economic man stated above, Simon (1972) proposed the theory of bounded rationality and the administrative man's model. Regarding bounded rationality, Simon (1972) identified three limits of rationality. Firstly, risk and uncertainty—finding an alternative with maximum outcomes are difficult. Secondly, limited information about alternatives—allocating resources in the search for information about alternatives is challenging. Finally, complexity— evaluating alternative with the maximum return can be costly, thus limiting decision-makers from evaluating the best course of action. Table 2.1 compares the key characteristics of rationality and bounded rationality.

Table 2.1: Key Characteristics of Rationality and Bounded Rationality

Dimensions	Rationality	Bounded rationality
<b>Purpose</b>	Optimising (making a value-maximising choice)	Satisficing (selecting a satisfactory or 'good enough')
<b>Knowledge</b>	Having complete knowledge of the environment and preferences	Incomplete knowledge of the environment and preferences
<b>Behaviour</b>	Calculating the optimum value	Searching for alternatives to select a satisfactory solution
<b>Limits of rationality</b>	No limitation	Risk and uncertainty. Restricted time and cost associated with the gathering of information about the environment, risk. Complexity and costs of evaluating alternative with the maximum return

**Source:** Adapted (Simon, 1972; Pataki & Padar, 2013; Tarka, 2017; Sent, 2018; Cheek & Goebel, 2020)

Brooks (2011) postulated that systematic bias is an antecedent of indecision (in section 2.4.2.2). Systematic biases, which speak of omission and status quo preference by strategic leaders, generally result in either indecision or perception of indecision (Brooks, 2011). Therefore, this study contributes to the broader literature of bounded rationality.

In conclusion, the attributes of both the upper echelons theory and bounded rationality theory, as discussed above, have relevance in the context of this study. This is so because, the fundamental premise and perspectives of both theoretical frameworks are focused on the strategic decision-maker's behaviour and impact on the organisation, which the study seeks to explore.

### 2.3 Concept of Strategic Leadership

Having expounded on indecision in the upper echelon leadership and the fact that decisions they make are bounded. This section reflects on a deep dive on strategic leaders' roles and responsibilities from the literature perspective. It explores various scholars' viewpoints on shifts and similarities on strategic leaders' roles and responsibilities over the last decade. To the extent that decision-making remains a core function of strategic leadership (Samimi et al., 2019), the upper echelon leaders' indecision is a hindrance to the central fulfilment of their role and responsibility.

### 2.3.1 Definition

The current literature provides several perspectives on the definition of strategic leadership. Hambrick and Mason (1984) referred to strategic leadership as the activities, including decision-making by upper echelon leaders. Ireland and Hitt (1999) expanded on the notion of strategic leadership. They incorporated the leaders' ability to anticipate, think strategically, and work with others towards a sustainable future performance of the organisation. Boal and Hooijberg (2000) viewed strategic leadership as leadership "of" organisations as opposed to leadership "in" organisations. Fundamentally, strategic leadership is influencing others to make daily decisions that enhance the organisation's long-term sustainability while delivering on short-term financial targets (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). Finkelstein, Hambrick, and Cannella (2009) defined strategic leadership as "executives who have overall responsibility for an organisation, [including] their characteristics, what they do, how they do it, and particularly, how they affect organisational outcomes" (p. 4).

During the past decade, the main features of strategic leadership definition remain largely unchanged. According to Goldman and Casey (2010), the scope, influence, and long-term impact of strategic leadership actions differentiate it from leadership at lower levels of the organisation. Furthermore, Barstardoz and Van Vugt (2019) underscored the seminal definitions, including individuals with influence on the initiation, direction, and coordination of followers that voluntarily accept the leader's influence towards the organisation's future. Georgakakis, Heyden, Oehmichen, Ekanayake (2019), postulated that strategic leadership is a collective process of interactions between the UE leaders that influence the organisation's outcomes. Finally, the recent study by Samimi et al. (2019), provided a similar perspective on strategic leadership as "the functions performed by individuals at the top levels of an organisation (CEOs, TMT [Top Management Team] members, Directors, General Managers) that are intended to have strategic consequences for the firm" (p. 4). However, Samimi et al. (2019) contended that most extant definitions limit strategic leadership in creating and implementing the organisation's vision or merely specify who strategic leaders are.

Drawing from stated literature definitions, this exploratory research views strategic leadership as the leadership "of" organisations as opposed to "in" organisations (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). Strategic leaders are those with the overall responsibility for the organisation, not just the CEO but also the dominant coalition—heads of business units (Samimi et al., 2019); and their influence on organisational outcomes through the decisions they make (Georgakakis et al., 2019; Samimi et al., 2019).

## 2.3.2 Functions of Strategic Leadership

Strategic leaders are charged and expected to deliver on specific roles and responsibilities (Mintzberg, 1997). Table 2.2 compares UE leaders' functions as articulated by Hitt, Haynes and Serpa (2010) and Samimi et al. (2019). More specifically, the table displays the complexity and multi-dimensional role of strategic leaders as well as the overall impact on the outcomes of the organisation (Hitt et al., 2010; Samimi et al., 2019). In the main, the table classifies the similarities of the functions of strategic leaders under the themes of; (a) strategic decision-making, (b) human capital management, and (c) operational efficiency and governance.

Table 2.2: Comparison of Upper Echelon Leaders

Themes	Hitt et al. (2010)	Samimi et al. (2019)
<b>Strategic decision-making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set and cascade a vision</li> <li>• Focus on innovation and develop new technologies</li> <li>• Develop core capabilities</li> <li>• Engage in valuable strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make strategic decisions</li> <li>• Manage conflicting demands</li> <li>• Engage external stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Human capital management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure effective deployment use human capital</li> <li>• Create and embed a healthy organisational culture and behaviours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perform human resource management</li> <li>• Motivate and influence employees</li> </ul>
<b>Operational efficiency and governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement balanced controls</li> <li>• Engage in ethical practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage information flow</li> <li>• Oversee operations and administration</li> <li>• Manage social and ethical issues</li> </ul>

**Source:** Adapted (Hitt et al., 2010; Samimi et al., 2019)

While Samimi et al. (2019) expressly listed decision-making as a key function of strategic leaders, Hitt et al. (2010) detailed activities of set and cascade a vision; focus on innovation and develop new technologies; develop core capabilities; and engage invaluable strategies, which—when taken together—can be implicitly equated to strategic decision-making. Furthermore, Gottfredson and Reinab (2020) emphasised that strategic leaders are decision-makers and responsible for creating an enabling culture for the organisation to succeed in a competitive environment. Therefore, drawing from the seminal and recent academic literature, decision-making is a core function of strategic leaders. Consequently, indecision by the upper echelon decision-makers hinders the fulfilment of their central role and responsibility.

### **2.3.3 Focus on Strategic Decision-Making**

Friedman, Carmeli, Tishler (2016), viewed decision-making as the process of selecting among options, executing a decision, and using the learnings to inform future decision. Whereas, Kauppila, Bizzi, Obstfeld (2018) described decision-making as the process used to select an appropriate alternative to take advantage of an opportunity or address a specific challenge. Despite the large body of research on the strategic decision-making function, several important aspects of the function remain understudied (Samimi et al., 2019). For example, "in terms of the strategic decision-making process, researchers have given little attention to indecision and the discarding of available choices. Strategic leaders sometimes delay or delegate certain strategic decisions because of potential difficulties or possible negative outcomes. The drivers behind such behaviours and their influence on the firm remain unexplored" (Samimi et al. 2019, p. 4).

Denis, Dompierre, Langlely and Rouleau (2011) considered escalating indecision and network of indecision within the strategic decision-making process as concepts to comprehend the notion of indecision. The features of escalating indecision include multiple participants who must collaborate to produce a decision; cumulative events of decision-making on the same issue over time, rather than a single isolated incident; and the constant risk of reversal, re-orientation or scope-creep on the imminent decision (Denis et al. 2011).

Denis et al. (2011) contended that participants in the strategic decision-making process have enough common interest to work together to move a project forward about the network of indecision. However, they struggle to agree on the projects' operational details; consequently, project closure stays elusive (Denis et al., 2011). For strategic leaders, this leads to a chronic state of indecision. Also, this impacts organisational outcomes due to the background features of the organisation's leaders—a core idea or premise of the upper echelon theory. Not to water down the complexity of the fact that strategic leaders' decisions are bounded—according to bounded rationality theory, somehow contributes to indecision. Therefore, this exploratory research aims to understand an answer to this overarching question: *What are the drivers and implications of strategic leaders' indecision?*

## **2.4 Concept of Indecision**

### **2.4.1 Definition**

The current literature on indecision provides distinctions on closely related concepts such as indecisiveness, procrastination and decision difficulty. Brooks (2011) declared that indecision

is not the hallmark of a great leader but questioned whether there was ample knowledge of when and why leaders avoid or postpone decision-making. Generally, organisations steer away from promoting or hiring leaders who may suffer from chronic indecision (Taillefer, Liu, Ornstein & Vickers, 2016). This is so because rarely is someone commended for making the difficult decision to 'not decide'. Furthermore, decisiveness and indecisiveness are respectively associated with positive and negative connotations (Taillefer et al., 2016). Notwithstanding the vast research on when and how leaders make decisions, Samimi et al. (2019) argue that there is still a scarcity of literature on when and why strategic leaders often gravitate into indecision.

In the context of the strategic decision-making process, Tibbett and Ferrari (2015) contrasted indecision and procrastination. They proclaimed that indecision is associated with but not the same as procrastination. While procrastination relates to a delayed start or finishing of the tasks, indecision is about decisional procrastination, that is, a narrower case of procrastination concerning decisions (Tibbett & Ferrari 2015). Although indecision and indecisiveness share features, Kokkoris et al. (2019) viewed them as different. Accordingly, defined indecisiveness as "an individual trait that refers to difficulty in making decisions across domains, regardless of the importance of the decision" (Kokkoris et al., 2019, p. 49).

Additionally, contended that indecisiveness refers to a decision-making process characterised by decision uncertainty, decision reluctance, decision avoidance, and post-decision worry (Kokkoris et al., 2019). In contrast, indecision describes the same tendency within a specific decision domain (Kokkorisa et al., 2019). For example, a leader challenged by hiring indecision is not necessarily an indecisive leader overall. In other words, indecisiveness and indecision can be respectively understood as a trait and state expressions of the same psychological tendency (Kokkoris et al. 2019; McGarity-Palmer, Excell, & Ferrari, 2019).

According to Cheek and Goebel (2020, p. 9), "indecisiveness is an individual difference that describes the general tendency to experience difficulty during decision-making"—decision difficulty. This tendency includes characteristics such as finding decision-making challenging, taking a long-time to make decisions, attempting to delay or avoid making decisions, regularly changing one's mind before deciding, and worrying about decisions once they have been made (Cheek & Goebel, 2020; Samimi et al., 2019; McGarity-Palmer et al., 2019). Cheek and Goebel (2020) viewed indecisiveness and decision difficulty as the same concept. This was due to both sharing similar properties, such as difficulty, delaying, and uncertainty. Furthermore, Barkley-Levenson and Fox (2016), found indecisiveness and decision difficulty closely related and highly correlated.



Weighing in on the concept of indecision, Bernheim and Bodoh-Creed (2020) defined decisiveness as the ability to make a timely decision notwithstanding the prevailing uncertainty. Also, they asserted that leaders who are biased for action rather than paralysis by analysis are generally considered effective (Bernheim & Bodoh-Creed, 2020). Consequently, leaders suffering from indecision are deemed ineffective, plagued by apprehension, worry and regret (Taillefer et al., 2016; Bavolar, 2018; Bernheim & Bodoh-Creed, 2020). The purpose of the exploratory research is to look at the upper echelon decision-making, explore what causes them to be indecisive, and understand its implications.

## **2.4.2 Antecedents to Indecision**

Brooks (2011) postulated three antecedents of leadership indecision—(a) decision context; (b) systematic biases; and (c) trait of indecision. Firstly, the assertion within decision context, is that leaders' indecision is reduced when there is a clear and attractive alternative to select; and when the decision between alternatives is easy. Secondly, systematic biases—omission and status quo preference, generally result in either indecision or the perception of indecision. Finally, on the trait of indecision, certain leaders are more prone to indecision than others, and some deeper understanding of these leaders can assist in comprehending indecision (Brooks, 2011).

McGarity-Palmer et al. (2019) highlighted self-critical cognition (the tendency for self-related thoughts that are critical and defeating), perfectionism, and intolerance of uncertainty as factors inclining to indecision. Other scholars have concluded that lack of information and high uncertainty of outcomes as perceptions leading to indecision (Rassin, 2007; Germeijs & de Boeck, 2003).

### **2.4.2.1 *Decision Context and Indecision***

Brooks (2011) asserted that indecision manifests in various decision contexts; for example, for a consumer, indecision can consider other alternatives, thus elect not to purchase or delay buying a product. In a strategic investment context, decision avoidance may mean delaying an investment decision, soliciting for more information rather than making the decision, or hoping the emergence of a better alternative. Notwithstanding the context, Brooks (2011) contended that the availability of alternatives to choose from, critically influence the leaders' choice behaviour. Exploring the decision context further, the first factor that can increase indecision is the availability of quality options for leaders to select. Where options to choose

from are sub-standard in quality, it is reasonable to expect leaders to choose indecision (Brooks, 2011). Thus, the availability of better-quality options likely reduces indecision, delay or delegation of the decision.

The option similarity is considered the second factor that increases indecision (Brooks, 2011). In the option similarity setting, leaders are more likely to default to indecision due to the attractiveness of similar options than when the options are different (Brooks, 2011). Further, indecision under option similarity is exacerbated by the availability of two similar and high-quality alternatives which is challenging to justify selection and or deselection of the other (Feldman, Baumeister & Wong, 2014).

The final feature of leadership indecision is unclearly articulated alternatives, making it difficult for leaders to make decisions (Feldman et al., 2014). For example, the poorly written report lacking clarity of thought can result in leaders avoid deciding (Brooks, 2011; Feldman et al., 2014). Additionally, researchers noted that decision difficulty is further increased by requesting leaders to provide cumbersome lists of reasons for their decision. These include detailed pros and cons for the decision as well as alternatives considered and discarded before reaching the selected decision (Feldman et al., 2014).

#### **2.4.2.2      *System Biases and Indecision***

According to Brooks (2011), omission bias and status quo bias are two systematic biases associated with indecision. Omission bias is a tendency to view the penalty of not acting less harmful than the penalty emanating from acting (Brooks, 2011). For example, a leader faced a decision between investing in new technology and sitting on the sidelines. The research suggested that investing and failing is riskier to the leaders' career than failing to invest in a technology that proves successful elsewhere. Failing to act is viewed as a less critical mistake than acting, even when both lead to equally negative outcomes, that is, making the wrong decision and losing money for the company (Feldman et al., 2014).

#### **2.4.2.3      *Personal Traits and Indecision***

Notwithstanding the decision context and system biases, some leaders seem to be more disposed to indecision than others (Cheek & Goebel, 2020). The literature articulated the following relating to leaders suffering from the plagued of chronic indecision. Alexander (2008) (as cited in Brooks, 2011) and Bacanli (2006) noted that indecision is associated to personality and behavioural tendencies; involving excessively seeking for advice when deciding; endlessly searching for an optimal solution rather than settling for a satisfactory one; mostly

seeing outcomes as predetermined and outside of one's control, and low self-esteem. In summary, the personality of an indecisive leader includes; anxiety, disposed to regret, insecurity, and undue need for validation—all which drive leadership indecision and decision avoidance (Cheek & Goebel, 2020).

Status quo bias (an inclination to keep things the same), is closely connected to omission bias. Tarka (2017) urged that the status quo is connected to less regret, limited need to justifying a different direction and avoiding accountability. Sautau (2017) noted the notion of inertia as a trait often at play in the decision-making process. Inertia described as an inclination for decision-makers to keep the status quo because of aversion to regret and perceived ambiguity (Sautau, 2017). Regardless of the status quo's appropriateness in certain situations, leaders with a bias to keeping things the same are generally viewed as indecisive (Sautau, 2017).

McGarity-Palmer et al. (2019) highlighted self-critical cognition as a personality trait and a predisposition for self-related thoughts that are critical and defeating. The self-critical cognition includes perfectionism and uncertainty as factors associated with indecision (McGarity-Palmer et al., 2019). They asserted that individuals with negative self-related thoughts, doubt their competence at tasks such as decision-making and, in turn, delay or avoid deciding (Rassin, 2007; McGarity-Palmer et al., 2019).

#### **2.4.2.4 Free-will Beliefs and Indecision**

Kokkoris et al. (2019) examined whether belief in free will, the conviction that individuals can independently select a course of action without limitations, influences individuals' decisiveness or indecisiveness. They considered two related philosophical traditions—namely existential and evolutionary propositions. These propositions made opposite predictions on whether belief in free will restricts or liberates decision-making? Also, both propositions share the key assumption that free will demonstrates individuals' autonomy and responsibility. However, autonomy and responsibility lead to different consequences (Kokkoris et al., 2019; Baumeister & Monroe, 2014).

For the existentialist, acceptance of responsibility paralyzes decision-making, whereas it is liberating for evolutionists (Kokkoris et al., 2019; Baumeister & Monroe, 2014). The accountability that comes with decision-making brings feelings of nervousness, anguish, and indecision for the existentialist (Baumeister & Monroe, 2014). However, sources of self-reliance and enjoyment brought by free will result in decisiveness—less indecision by the evolutionist (Kokkoris et al., 2019). The conclusion from Kokkoris et al. (2019) was that individuals who believe in free will (evolutionist) and have a high sense of self-awareness are

more decisive, conversely, do not suffer from indecision. Other researchers indicated reduced conformity and decision difficulty as benefits of free will beliefs for decision-making (Feldman et al., 2014; Seto & Hicks, 2016).

### **2.4.3 Subjective Experience of Decision-Making**

Brooks (2011) described the subjective experience that leaders face in the decision-making process that leads to indecision—decision difficulty, decision justification, cost of indecision, and anticipated regret. Kim and Miller (2017) found that the post-decision experience of rational or 'economic man' (the maximiser) is more vulnerable to negative feedback about chosen alternative than that of bounded-rational 'administrative man' (satisfiers). Based on their study, Kim and Miller (2017) concluded that indecisive individuals are more upset when receiving negative feedback about their choices. Drawing on decisive leadership theory, Sautau (2017) argued that inertia is heightened when an individual expects regret when deciding.

## **2.5 Implications of Indecision for Organisation**

Samimi et al. (2019) highlighted the following areas of the organisation that are impacted by leaders' indecision. These are an organisation's competitive advantage; growth; relative performance, and performance volatility (Samimi et al., 2019). These financial and non-financial outcomes speak to the short-term survival and long-term sustainability of the organisation. Consequently, in the context of decision-making, the indecision of upper-echelon leaders has massive implications on the current and future state of the organisation (Samimi et al., 2019). Hence, this exploratory study seeks to explore the drivers of indecision by strategic leaders within the organisation and their implications on the organisation.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Drawing from the seminal and recent academic literature, decision-making is a core function of strategic leaders (Samimi et al., 2019; Georgakakis et al., 2019). Notwithstanding, the large body of research on when and how leaders make decisions, there is however, a paucity of literature on when and why upper echelon leaders are often plagued by indecision (Brooks, 2011; Denis et al., 2011; Samimi et al., 2019). Further, based on the research problem (section 1.3) and research purpose (section 1.4), this exploratory research seeks to understand an

answer to the overarching question on strategic decision-making by the upper echelon leaders within a regulated and complex organisation: *What are the drivers and implications of indecision by the strategic leaders*

Finally, Figure 2.2 below depicts the author's initial conceptual framework for the research inquiry. The conceptual framework depicts that decision-making is one of the core roles within strategic leadership and that indecision (not making decision) flows out of the decision-making responsibility. To the left of indecision, a central phenomenon under research, antecedents of indecision and the right is a subjective experience. Finally, the implications for organisations are the resultant effect of indecision.

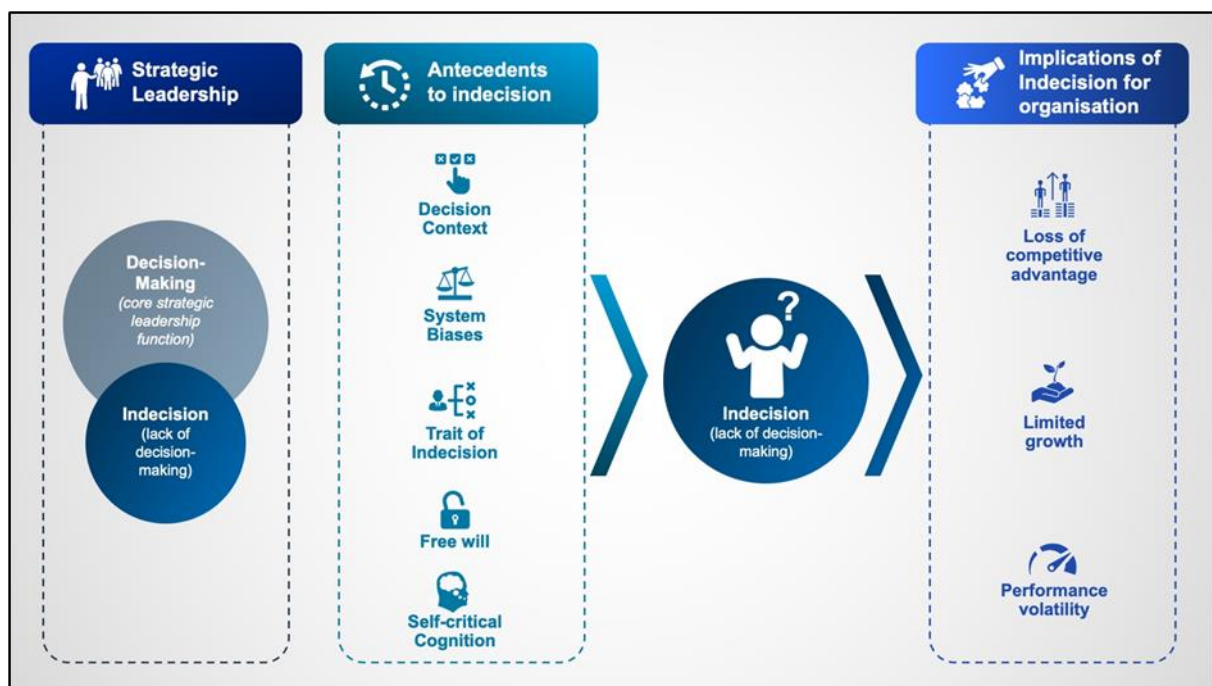


Figure 2.2: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's own

## Chapter 3: Research Questions

### 3.1 Introduction

Liu (2017) defines a research topic as a subject of interest or research domain that a researcher is drawn to when conducting research. Liu (2017) further contends that a well-defined research topic is the starting point of every successful research project. Therefore, for this exploratory study, the research topic is within the domain of decision making by strategic leaders titled: *Implications and drivers of strategic leader indecision*. In a qualitative study, Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 133) recommend that "research questions should assume two forms: (a) a central question and (b) associated sub-questions". The central question is broad and asks for an exploration of the central phenomenon. Several sub-questions, which overlap between describing an issue and process, develop from the central question and the focus of the study but leave open the questioning (Agee, 2009; Yin, 1996; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Janesick (2000, p. 382), as cited by Agee (2009), postulates that qualitative research starts with "a question, or at least an intellectual curiosity if not a passion for a particular topic."

### 3.2 Research Questions

For this research, the central question seeks to explore strategic decision-making by the upper echelon leaders within the regulated and complex organisations: *What are the drivers and implications of indecision by strategic leaders?* The following three sub-questions linked to the central question, further narrow the exploratory research focus but leave questioning open-ended. **Research Question 1:** What are specific drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders? **Research Question 2:** Why strategic leaders delay or delegate decision-making? **Research Question 3:** What are the implications of indecision, delaying or delegation of decision-making by the strategic leaders? For the purposes of this exploratory study, delayed and delegated decision-making are viewed as responses to indecision, thus considered as part of indecision.

### 3.3 Conclusion

This study's research domain is that of strategic decision-making by the upper echelon leaders of the complex and regulated organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa. Further, the strategic decision-making by leaders is considered within a bounded rationality sphere. The central question, supported by associated sub-questions, seeks to understand: *What are the drivers and implications of indecision by strategic leaders?*

## Chapter 4: Research Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

The chapter outlines the selected research methodology and design for exploratory research. Drawing from the overarching question that the exploratory research seeks to answer and the aim to develop insights on indecision by strategic leaders; the qualitative research method was considered an appropriate research approach. Data was collected through one-on-one semi-structured, in-depth interviews (using open-ended questions) with an organisation's upper echelon decision-makers. As asserted by Creswell and Creswell (2018), the thematic analysis was adopted to gain insights from the qualitative interview data and field notes.

### 4.2 Choice of Methodology

Creswell and Creswell (2018) outline the three research approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The key distinction between qualitative and quantitative research approaches is often the difference between open-ended questions and closed questions. Qualitative research is best suited when the researcher does not know the important variables to examine (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Further, this exploratory research aligns to the five features of qualitative research by Yin (2016), namely (a) gathering insights on individuals' real-world conditions, (b) representing the views and perspectives of participants in a study, (c) covering the contextual condition of their lives, (d) contributing insights into the existing or emerging phenomenon, and (e) using multiple sources of data. ***Having reviewed literature on the research approach and the exploratory nature of the overarching research question for this study, the qualitative research methodology was considered appropriate.***

Before naming and describing the philosophical paradigm for this exploratory inquiry, it is important to define the concept of 'paradigm', its components and the three common philosophical paradigms. Hlady-Rispal and Jouison-Laffitte (2014) define a paradigm as a world view, with a basic set of beliefs and assumptions that guide a researchers' inquiry. Fundamentally, researchers set onto inquiry with their world views, beliefs, philosophical assumptions on the phenomenon, and these influence the conduct of the study (Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano and Morales (2007) note three common philosophical paradigms or orientations of the researcher. Firstly, positivists—believe in a single reality,

which can be measured and known, and therefore use quantitative methods to measure this reality. Secondly, pragmatists—believe that reality is continuously renegotiated, debated, interpreted, and therefore selects the best method that solves the problem, often considering either mixed-methods, design-based or action research methodology measure this reality. Finally, constructivists—believe that there is no single reality or truth, and therefore reality needs to be interpreted, and therefore use qualitative methods to solicit multiple realities.

***Given the research purpose and central exploratory question: What are the drivers and implications of indecision by strategic leaders? Also, the literature review undertaken for this research inquiry, the constructive interpretivism was considered the most befitting research paradigm to underpin this exploratory study.*** As articulated above, the constructivists believe that there is no single reality or truth, and therefore reality needs to be interpreted. Additionally, Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) note that interpretivism is one form of qualitative methodology, which relies on a researcher and the human subject as the instruments to measure some phenomena, and typically involves both observation and interviews.

In summary, the selected research philosophy of constructive interpretivism aligns to Creswell and Creswell (2018) assertion that qualitative study relies on text (non-numeric) and image data. Also, the research questions' subjective nature is within the social context and does not focus on quantifiable and measurable variables (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Josselson, 2013). ***Therefore, constructive interpretivism research philosophy was considered appropriate.***

Turning the attention to the research design for this exploratory inquiry. Yin (2016) defines research design as a plan for a study, providing the overall framework for collecting, measuring, and analysing data. Creswell et al. (2007) view research design as a plan for selecting subjects, research sites, and data collection procedures to answer the research question(s). They further indicate that the goal of a sound research design is to provide credible results. According to Given (2008), research design refers to how a research idea is transformed into a research project. For Creswell and Creswell (2018), the research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution, or implementation of the research strategy. When drawing from the above declarations, ***a research design is essentially a blueprint for collecting, measuring, and analysing data.***

Qualitative research is best suited in answering the research question of 'how' and appropriate to depict a phenomenon (Morrow, 2007). The extant literature outlines numerous research



designs for qualitative research (Creswell et al., 2007), phenomenology (Creswell, 2012), grounded theory (Suddaby, Bruton & Si, 2015), case study (Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014); narrative research (Singh, Corner & Pavlovich, 2015). ***The single case design arena, which is predominately used when the researcher explores a bounded system (a case) to answer research questions through detailed, in-depth data collecting involving multiple sources of information (Creswell et al. 2007), was considered appropriate for this exploratory inquiry.*** This is because of the exploratory and subjective nature of the research question. Also, it aligns with both the description and consideration of when to use the single case research design when seeking to provide an in-depth understanding of a case (Creswell et al. 2007).

At the proposal stage of this exploratory research, the conceptual theoretical framework based on the literature review was developed showing a deductive (theoretical or top-down) approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Upon the researchers' completion of the primary data gathering process and thematic analysis—an inductive (bottom-up) approach; the conceptual theoretical framework was refined (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ultimately, the exploratory research combined the deductive and inductive methods approach to gather pieces of evidence (Bell et al., 2019; Creswell & Creswell 2018).

### 4.3 Population

The population is defined as the complete set of group members and need not only be people but also organisations and places (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The study population was 20 upper echelon decision-makers of a regulated and complex organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa. To ensure the balanced representation of the population for this study, the researched considered various criteria in selecting the upper echelon leaders of the regulated and complex organisation (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora & Mattis, 2007).

The criterion included diversification across client segments, functional areas and geographic representation. That is, (a) strategic leaders came from consumer and high net worth, business and commercial, as well as wholesale client segments—*client segment diversification*; (b) functional areas (client-facing and back-office strategic leaders)—*functional diversification*; and (c) strategic leaders from regions across Sub-Saharan Africa—*geographic diversification*. Further, the participant's experience with the organisation had to be more than ten years operating within either the client segment, functional, or geographic executive committee level. In the main, the participants' selection was based on the researchers'

professional networks, the criterion mentioned above and the researcher's institutional knowledge of the organisation, having worked in the organisation since 2006.

#### **4.4 Unit of Analysis**

Vogt (2005, p.2) defines the unit of analysis as "the person or things being studied". Given the background to the research problem, the research purpose, and the invitation for further research by Samimi et al. (2019); the sample of participants included upper echelon leaders and senior executives directly involved in strategic decision-making across client segments, functional areas and geographic operation (section 4.3) in the case organisation. Drawing from these attributes, rich and thick data was collected, which may be applicable to other regulated and complex organisations (such as multinational corporates and large local or regional corporates) in the financial services industry as well as other industries.

#### **4.5 Sampling Method and Size**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) define purposive sample (also referred to as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling), as a non-probability sample that is selected based on the characteristics of a population and the objective of the research study. Under purposive sampling, the researcher attempts to obtain a sample that appears to be representative of the population. Purposive sampling is different from other sampling techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Yin (2016) articulates various purposive sampling strategies including convenience sampling (participants happen to be willing and available at the time), snowball sampling (participants asked to recommend others, who may be outside the pre-defined sample criterion). Generally, the convenience and snowball sampling strategies are discouraged and were not used for this exploratory inquiry. This is because of their inherent risk of recruiting participants who cannot provide detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation.

***Given the single-case design setting within one complex and regulated organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa, the study used a homogenous purposive sampling strategy, based on upper-echelon leaders' experience and length of service in an organisation operating at an executive committee level, was considered appropriate for this exploratory inquiry.*** Under this sampling strategy, participants with similar characteristics or attributes—knowledge and experience of the phenomenon (indecision) under inquiry were selected. The researcher selected a homogeneous sampling strategy as it

targets units (for example, people, cases) that share the same or similar characteristics or traits (for example, a group of people that are similar in terms of age, gender, background, experience or occupation) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

***The researcher cautiously considered saturation during the data collection period (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018), and it emerged after the 15<sup>th</sup> interview.*** The general rule in qualitative research is that the researcher continues to sample until there is neither new information nor new insights—this point is referred to as saturation (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018). Importantly, saturation is not a simple function of the amount of data collected but based on the richness of the emerging data set (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbin, 2015; Creswell & Cresswell, 2018). The extant literature has varied views on whether it is possible to reach saturation, as more interviews could uncover something new and unexpected (Gentles et al., 2015). Consequently, the point of saturation differs with each study and cannot be predicted. However, Creswell and Creswell (2018), assert that once the researcher is 'reasonably' content that saturation has potentially been achieved, data collection can then stop. For this study's purposes and drawing from the literature's guidance, the researcher was judiciously satisfied that saturation was achieved at the end of an interview with participant 15.

***To ensure triangulation, the researcher interviewed the top three layers of upper echelon decision-makers of the regulated and complex organisation.*** The participants were upper-echelon leaders at the organisation's Business and Unit level, Country executive leaders and direct reports of Business unit and County Heads. This increased data legitimacy as data was collected from various layers of strategic decision-makers, across client segments, functional areas, and geographic base (Yin, 2016). As per Yin (2016), triangulation is about collecting converging evidence from diverse sources. Patton (2002) discussed four types of triangulation methods involving data, research, theory and methods to single problems or programs and cautions for reasonableness and practicality based on time and budget considerations.

## **4.6 Measurement Instrument**

The measurement instrument is defined as the research process's measurement device (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The appropriate data collection instrument for this exploratory research was semi-structured interviews grounded on open-ended and non-leading questions, as recommended by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) and Josselson (2013). The researcher followed an interview guide (Appendix A: Interview Guide) and conducted one-on-one, in-

depth, semi-structured interviews with the upper echelon leaders and executives directly involved in strategic decision-making. The measurement instrument was built on the back of extant literature that provides a general guideline of conducting an effective interview inquiry (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Josselson, 2013). Soliciting input from various literature on an interview description, they converge into a structured conversation (conducted face-to-face or over the telephone or online platform) to gather information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Josselson, 2013; Creswell & Creswell 2018). The researcher (interviewer) coordinated the conversation process, asking the participants (interviewee) questions to respond to those questions (Yin, 2016; Creswell & Creswell 2018; Josselson, 2013).

The semi-structured interview format was followed, wherein a few open-ended questions linked to the central research question were asked (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Given the setting of the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, albeit online, the researcher had the opportunity to ask follow-up or clarity questions and observe the participants' body language and tone (Creswell & Creswell 2018, Yin, 2016). Predominantly from the follow-up questions, important themes beyond the drivers and implications of strategic leaders' indecision emerged. These themes related to how indecision by strategic leaders can be mitigated—these are captured in section 5.3.4.

## **4.7 Data Gathering**

This exploratory inquiry's appropriate data collection instrument was semi-structured interviews grounded on open-ended and non-leading questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016; Josselson, 2013). A total of 20 one on one interviews were conducted over four weeks. This was in line with Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) and Josselson (2013), who recommended using semi-structured interviews grounded on open-ended and non-leading questions for exploratory study. The research inquiry was conducted through one on one personal interviews on a pre-determined schedule. However, given the COVID-19 pandemic and, lockdown regulations, one on one personal interviews were conducted using an online medium platform. With all participants' prior consent, all interviews were recorded.

The interview started with a brief introduction from both sides, confirmed the willingness to record the interview, and followed a context setting. The raw data collected from the interview was transcribed into word documents using a transcriber's services, who signed the confidentiality agreement. All interview data (voice, video recordings and transcripts) were stored and reported without identifiers.

## 4.8 Analysis Approach

Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 193) recommend "researchers to look at qualitative data analysis as a process that requires sequential steps to be followed, from the specific to general, and involving multiple levels of analysis". Further, for the exploratory study to achieve methodological coherence, the research design, research question and topic influence the data analysis method (Creswell, 2012; Byrne, 2017). One may choose one or more methods for data analysis (Byrne, 2017) however the ultimate objective is to learn the meanings "the participants hold about the problem or issue" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.182).

***As recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Yin (2016), the researcher followed the five-sequential data analysis process to analyse the data, which is referred to as an inductive (bottom-up) logic. The process was as follows:***

- The first step was to organise and prepare data for analysis—transcribing the interview, completing field notes, and capturing transcripts onto Computer Data Analysis Software, Atlas T.I 8.
- Secondly, read all transcripts—understanding general ideas that participants communicated and evaluating the overall impression of the information's depth and credibility.
- Thirdly, engaged in the iterative process of coding of data which according to Rallis and Rossman (2012), as cited by Creswell and Creswell (2018), involves organising data by bracketing portions of text and writing a word(s) representing a category in the margins—referred to as *open coding* (the initial organisation of raw data to try to make sense of it. Other codes were created using words based on the participants' actual language—called *in vivo coding*).
- Fourthly, used the coding process to generate descriptions (information about people, place or events in the setting) and themes which reflect multiple perspectives from participants, supported by direct quotes from the participants.
- Finally, the specifics of each theme were refined through iterative and ongoing analysis.

## 4.9 Data Quality

The researcher closely considered Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) declaration on a non-structured interview—"prior planning prevents poor performance", which ensured adequate data quality. Further, the researcher reflected on trustworthiness and authenticity, two overarching criteria for a qualitative inquiry to achieve data quality (Yin, 2016).

The extant literature is filled with varied perspectives and terms on qualitative validation. For example, Table 4.1, as cited by Creswell (2013), illustrates the wide-ranging articulation of data quality validation.

*Table 4.1: Data Quality Validation*

<b>Study</b>	<b>Perspective</b>	<b>Terms</b>
LeCompte and Goetz (1982)	Use of parallel, qualitative equivalents to their quantitative counterparts in experimental and survey research	Internal and external validity, reliability, objectivity
Lincoln and Guba (1985)	Use of alternative terms that apply more to naturalistic axioms	Credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability
Eisner (1991)	Use of alternative terms that provide reasonable standards for judging the credibility of qualitative research	Structural corroboration, consensual validation, referential adequacy

**Source:** Adapted from Creswell (2013)

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), as cited by Creswell (2013), trustworthiness entails five unique components: credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability and confirmability. For this exploratory inquiry, the researcher used Lincoln and Guba's (1986) study perspective and terms, i.e. credibility, transferability and confirmability (as cited by Creswell, 2013). These provisions were adopted as far as practicable and as per the relevance to the research.

The researcher ensured credibility by selecting upper echelon decision-makers across the top three layers of executives (Group executives, Business Unit level and Country executive and direct reports of Business unit and County heads). Various scholars reflect on credibility and make the following assertions. It necessitates that the research adheres to best practices and involves sharing findings with the participants to confirm the accuracy of understanding and interpreting the participant's views (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The account of the narrated events must be acceptable to the participants and is referred to as respondent validation (Bell et al., 2016). The researcher did not share the findings with participants; however, participants have requested that the research share the final signed-off thesis documents.

Further, Creswell (2013) argues that the researcher establishes credibility by using techniques such as prolonged engagement in the field and the triangulation of data sources. To ensure triangulation, the researcher interviewed the top three layers of upper echelon decision-makers of the regulated and complex organisation. The participants were upper-echelon leaders at the organisation's Business Unit level, Country executive leaders, and direct business unit and Country Heads reports. This increased data legitimacy as data was collected from various layers of strategic decision-makers, across client segments, functional

areas, and geographic base (Yin, 2016). Creswell (2013) notes the necessity of 'thick descriptions', which are in-depth of details of a shared phenomenon, for the findings to be considered transferable between the researcher and those studied.

The researcher established an auditable research process that increased the study's dependability and confirmability (Creswell, 2013). Confirmability is concerned with how objective a researcher is and entails ensuring that personal preferences relating to the theory and personal values do not influence how the study is conducted and do not influence the findings in any way. The researcher's role and reflexivity in the study are important, which relates to how personal values, gender, background and value systems can shape interpretations emerging in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Bell et al., 2019).

## **4.10 Limitations**

As an exploratory qualitative research study, there are limitations to the generalisability of the results. Further limitations to this exploratory research due to design and scope are as follows:

- The qualitative research's subjective nature introduces biases such as interviewer and interviewee bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which may impact data and interpretation thereof. The biases that may impact data collection range from the lack of researchers' independence from the data collection process—the data's trustworthiness and the researcher interviewing skills (not have prior training on conducting interviews for research purposes)—the quality of data. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
- The exploratory study is a single case design setting within one organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although a homogenous sample's advantages were obtained, a different participant population of 20 interviewees might have given different answers to the research questions. However, the population's composition was arguably representative of those participants relevant to the subject under discussion. Therefore, this limitation is seen as mitigated.
- The selection and use non-probability sampling technique for this study, based on the researchers' network and knowledge of the organisation, introduces selection bias. This fuels the limitations to the generalisability of the results. The researcher managed this bias through setting rigorous selection criteria for the population under study (including, experience, role, diversity of functions, various executive levels, and geographic jurisdiction). Therefore, this is not considered as a massive limitation.
- All interview participants, save for participant 14, were male. This introduced gender bias and limited the female perspective's strategic leadership voice. The limitation was due to

females' access constraints and paucity at the organisation's strategic leadership levels, thus a serious and unfortunate limitation to the study.

- The participants could have changed their behaviour knowing that they were recorded and some are the indirect report to the researcher. This could have the potential of impacting the results. However, the inclusion of three levels of upper echelons decision-makers (senior executives, peers, and indirect reports to the researcher) from different functional and geographic jurisdictions, mitigated the effects of participants' perceptual awareness.
- The interview questions were crafted from the literature reviewed. Thus, their substance and form were a likely constraint. However, this is not viewed as a dominant limitation.

## **4.11 Research Ethics**

The researcher obtained the Gordon Institute of Business Sciences Ethics Committee's necessary ethical clearance before approaching any field activity, including general mentions to potential participants. Signed consent forms were collected, and strict confidentiality and anonymity were followed throughout the report, and participants' pseudonyms were used.



## **Chapter 5: Results**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings for this exploratory research. The findings are outlined and discussed using the relevant themes and codes that interpret the study participants' views. As seen in Chapter 1, the purpose of the exploratory research is to understand an answer to the overarching question on strategic decision-making by the upper echelon leaders within a regulated and complex organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa: *What are drivers and implications of indecision by strategic leaders?* In support of the central research question, the exploratory inquiry aims to; (1) investigate the specific drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders, (2) explore the reasons strategic leaders delay or delegate decision-making, and (3) understand the implications of indecision, delaying or delegation of decision-making by the strategic leaders.

Given the current COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown restrictions, the study applied the one-on-one, semi-structured in-depth interviews grounded on open-ended and non-leading questions to collect the data, using an online platform. The sample size for the study were 20 participants. The data were analysed using Computer Based Software Atlas T.I 8.

### **5.2 Overview of the Sample**

#### **5.2.1 Profile of the Participants**

Twenty interviews were conducted to collect the data. The participants of the study consisted of nineteen males and one female. The study participants are all upper echelon decision-makers of a regulated and complex organisation, with over ten years of work experience as strategic leaders (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Profile of the Participants

Participants	Gender	Country	Position/Role	Number of years—operating as an upper-echelon leader
PAT1	Male	Nigeria	In-country Business Unit Head, Nigeria	Over ten-year experience as strategic leaders of the organisation and operating at either Group or Business Unit or Country Executive Committee level.
PAT2	Male	East Africa <sup>#</sup>	Regional Chief Executive, East Africa	
PAT3	Male	West Africa <sup>##</sup>	Regional Product Head, West Africa	
PAT4	Male	South Africa <sup>*</sup>	Global Coverage Head	
PAT5	Male	South Africa <sup>*</sup>	Global Product Head	
PAT6	Male	South Africa <sup>*</sup>	Global Operations Head	
PAT7	Male	Ghana	In-country Product Head	
PAT8	Male	South Africa	In-country Product Head, South Africa	
PAT9	Male	South Sudan	Country Chief Executive, South Sudan	
PAT10	Male	South Africa <sup>**</sup>	Africa Regions Chief Financial Officer	
PAT11	Male	South Africa	Group Head, Internal Audit	
PAT12	Male	South Africa <sup>*</sup>	Global Sector Head, Oil & Gas	
PAT13	Male	Mozambique	Country Chief Executive, Mozambique	
PAT14	Female	South Africa <sup>*</sup>	Global Head, Human Capital	
PAT15	Male	South and Central Africa	Regional Chief Executive, South and Central Africa	
PAT16	Male	Outside Africa <sup>####</sup>	Chief Executive Officer, International Business	
PAT17	Male	East Africa	Regional Product Head	
PAT18	Male	South Africa	In-country Head, Cape Region	
PAT19	Male	South Africa	In-country Product Head	
PAT20	Male	South and Central Africa	Regional Product Head	

<sup>#</sup> East Africa countries include Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and South Sudan.

<sup>##</sup> Western Africa countries Nigeria, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

<sup>###</sup> South and Central African countries include Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Angola.

<sup>####</sup> Outside Africa businesses are headquartered in the United Kingdom and include London, Brazil, United Arab Emirates and China.

<sup>\*</sup>South Africa (SA) role is based in SA but accountable for countries across all regions (South, East, West, South and Central Africa and Outside Africa).

<sup>\*\*</sup> Africa Region include all countries of operations for the organisation in Sub-Saharan Africa, except for South Africa



Table 5.2: Research questions, linked themes and consolidated codes

Research Questions	Theme	Consolidated codes
<b>Research Question 1:</b> What are the drivers of indecision by strategic leaders?	Drivers of indecision	Organisational hierarchy
		Fear of failure
		Management complexity
		Lack of trust
		Lack of support by other strategic leaders ( <i>Positive team spirit</i> )
		Budget considerations
<b>Research Question 2:</b> Why strategic leaders delay or delegate decision-making?	Reasons for indecision	Fear of accountability
		Geographical jurisdictions
		Power influence
		Avoiding conflict
<b>Research Question 3:</b> What are the implications of indecision, delaying or delegation of a decision by the strategic leaders?	Implications of indecision	Business failure due to resource loss
		Demotivated teams
		Revenue loss
		Opportunity loss
		Competitors become stronger
Themes that emerged from follow-up questions, reflect on considerations for strategic leaders to mitigate indecision		Leadership transformation
		Bold leadership
		Courageous leadership

### 5.3.1 The Drivers of Indecision by the Strategic Leaders

The first research question of the study, as explained in chapter 3, can be summarised as follows.

#### **Research Question 1: What are the drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders?**

This research question aims to explore specific drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders. According to this research question, strategic leaders are often plagued by indecision; therefore, this research question was designed to determine drivers behind indecision. Further, this research question was supported by three interview questions from the interview guide (Annexure A: Interview Guide). These were, share an example where you experienced or observed indecision in the organisation? What would you say were drivers of indecision in that instance? Tell me of any other experiences or observations of drivers of indecision in the organisation?

## **Theme 1: Drivers of indecision**

Six consolidated codes were constructed to discuss this theme. These codes are organisational hierarchy, fear of failure, lack of trust, management complexity, budget considerations, and other strategic leaders' lack of support. These are presented in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Drivers of Indecision

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Construct</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
1	Organisational hierarchy	10
2	Fear of failure	8
3	Management complexity	7
4	Lack of trust	6
5	Lack of support by other strategic leaders ( <i>positive team spirit</i> )	5
6	Budget considerations	4

### **Organisational Hierarchy**

The strategic decision-makers within the organisation found themselves faced with indecision due to the organisational hierarchy. This makes it difficult for them to make decisions effectively because there are so many layers of levels that they must consult before making the final decisions. They are strategical leaders; they have all the powers invested in them to make organisational decisions. However, the organisational setup in terms of levels of hierarchy somehow fosters the culture of indecision. It becomes difficult for them to make decisions without consultation; this can be related to the power dynamics and even political influences among the organisation's leaders. Therefore, organisational hierarchy is viewed as one of the drivers of indecision within the organisation.

Participant 18 indicated that *"I would imagine that a lot of, indecision is happening, in the, in certain layers of the, of that hierarchy..."* and *"they call me and say, Chief Executive doesn't know, I said, he knows. So, the hierarchy creates lots of anxiety around some of these things, which is unnecessary [and] how we show up is everything for people."*

Furthermore, participant 15 indicated how the organisational chart might have an impact on decision-making *"And that org. chart used to be very sort of top-down type of thing rather than flat. Okay. As a result, people don't realise, you know, that, you can really make a difference if you stand up."*

*"But as soon as I start waiting for a meeting with [the] Chief Executive and he has to go and see this one, and that one will then take the message across to some, it can take forever."*

*And that's not because of that. It's not because of those people. It's just the organisational structure" ... "and we need to have a little bit of autocracy. And I guess every now and then we need to understand who's divisive" [PAT15].*

Finally, participant 9 felt that the way the organisation is structured and organised plays a role in how the organisation's decisions are made. *"My take is, part of the problem I see in this organisation is, it is mostly the way we are organised. And, for me, what I mean here is mostly around the matrix."*

*"Not that it's not with Standard Chartered, but I think to me it was shorter, perhaps Citi was much shorter or not too many matrix layers, and in our organisation, there are too many matrix layers." [PAT 9].*

*"So, you can see, for me, it attributed to either it's, you know, you're so concerned and so consumed by the hierarchy and what the hierarchy thinks or is going to do, the implications for you so that it ends up stifling decision-making," [PAT 9] and "there's so much either centralisation of power in Joburg. And then the way it's cascaded down through the matrix structure, it's difficult sometimes to break out of that mode." [PAT 9].*

### ***Fear of Failure***

The participants expressed that fear of failure is one of the drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders within the organisation. These strategic leaders are normally faced with huge decision-making that will affect and shape the whole organisation; therefore, they end up fearing that their efforts may not be good enough and the whole organisation may lose valuable resources. Participant 19 stated that *"I guess at [this] organisation, for me, that drive is fear. Okay. So people's fear around making the incorrect decision"*. Participant 8 said, *"The spotlight is on. You have big mandates, siyasaba (we are scared) [Zulu] to fail."*

Furthermore, the participants agreed that the major driver of indecision is that more and more leaders fear failure, which drives the delay in making-making. The more you fail as a leader, the employees turn to question your decision-making skills and lose respect for you and your capabilities. Consequently, it is common for leaders to want to take more time and do research and get second opinions before making the final and drastic decision. Another reason is that they want to have plan B just in case they fail so that they have something to fall back on. *"Management aren't used to that. So after two failures, they're like, guys, we can't be failing forever. So how many failures do you want to have." [PAT 19].*

*“You know, it’s a very interesting one because I would think, there’s a lot of insecurity around decision-making in today’s world. I think the insecurity among strategic leaders, is coming from a fear of failure, you know.”* [PAT 20].

Participant 3 stated that *“And I think that’s probably another thing that I think scares us or makes us not make a decision as [strategic leaders within the] organisation, [is] fear of failure. I think it all comes up from, if we fail, what do we do? I think that’s probably why they were too afraid to fail, that we’re failing in small bits day by day.”*

The participants indicated that there are people who are fearful of failing and making mistakes due to their lack of self-confidence and insecurity and that it is in our nature as humans to have a little fear when it comes to making life-changing decisions. *“I think there are some people in the organisation who are petrified of making mistakes or making the wrong decision.”* [PAT 5]. *“I think a lot of indecision is about fear of the consequences.”* [PAT 3]. Participant 6 highlighted that *“So, the one thing is, it’s [lack of] confidence [and] insecurity. And I think the fear factor, of failing.”* Also, Participant 9 stated that *“I think they’re still too fearful, and we’re fearful, partly because of, I think it’s in our DNA.”*

### ***Management Complexity***

Management complexity was identified as one of the drivers on indecision by strategic leaders in the organisation. From the participants' views, it is evident that when there is complexity, the decision-making process slows down. *“If you operate in a context of complexity of high stress or high uncertainty, your decision-making, your cadence on this, let’s put it [this way], the cadence of decision-making is going to slow down”.* [PAT 18] and participant 6 further explained that, *“I think organisations too complex for that as well.”* Also, participant 18 stated that *“whereas in parallel with that, we’ve created for ourselves in [the] organisation, considerable complexity in this time, but it is a matter of survival for us, and it is unavoidable that we have to do this, in that we’ve launched a massive preservation program in the organisation while we all operating in a very complex context.”*

Participant 6 further reflected on an example that demonstrated management complexity and stated *“And at the time I was reporting to head of operations, who became head of finance for [the] organisation, and operations reported into him [also]. And ... there was a time when we really needed some clarity on, you know, how to take the structures forward. How do we take this operations thing forward?”* and *“There was a lot of this animosity between, you got the organisation in London and operations and ...all the teams on this*

side [Johannesburg], and we were trying to figure out what's the balance between, you know, who makes, what calls and, you know, how do we manage this thing?" [PAT 6].

Participant 18 explained that "one is just this consensus-seeking and consult [is] probably exaggerated or over consultation in the decision-making." Participant 19 further confirmed that "probably we don't really, have a culture that incentivises and drives [an individual decision-making] behaviour. That means that decisions are not made by individuals, but rather by groups of people." Participant 5 said, "So, I think one of the big areas of moving towards being decisive as a collective, because for me, let me answer the question in a way that says...we are not indecisive as individuals, we indecisive as a collective."

### **Lack of Trust**

Lack of trust from the teams or the management can affect the decision-making process. When the strategic leaders are faced with a lack of trust from their subordinates, seniors and even themselves on the effectiveness of the decisions they will make, they then become indecisive. This can also result from a situation that has occurred before; they might feel that what if something goes wrong for the second time? Further, if something goes wrong, the trust will be shifted from that leader. "and I think a lot of the time where we are not making decisions or have indecisions is due to a lack of trust." [PAT 2].

According to the participants, once there is no trust between team players, it makes the process long and hard due to the individuals questioning and contradicting each other in the process. So trust is a very critical and important aspect needed within the teams "So, you know, the product divisions maybe [because of] a lack of trust." [PAT 20]. Also, "the people's lack of trust in the leadership, because if they see you being indecisive, it makes them trust you less [and] lack of willingness to follow you." [PAT3]. Further, "between the product divisions, you know, there was a complete lack of trust from both sides on unit 1 and unit 2." [PAT 20]

The lack of trust between leaders is another cause of delay of decision-making "I think unit 1 couldn't trust unit 2 to go and launch a similar product and not try and cannibalise the business, and unit 2 probably couldn't trust unit 1 to make the right decision for the organisation, which was actually a favourable decision for unit 1's customers, at that point." [PAT 20]

Participant 14 explained that "but it's almost impossible to get agreement...that leads to long delays in getting to answers and agreeing to stuff, lobbying beforehand, lobbying



*afterwards...I think that flies in the face of the notion of empowerment and trust debate, and then that those delays, those things make people question, you know, they lose confidence, they wonder [whether] there's credibility."*

### ***Lack of Support by other Strategic Leaders***

The strategic leaders and their teams need to ensure that there are good relations between them. This can help to mitigate the drivers of indecision because they will not only carry the decision-making burden alone. They will know that other strategic leaders are fully behind them when making decisions.

Participants believed that having a positive team spirit among the teams can help mitigate drivers of indecision. Participants 14, 8 and 5 mentioned that having each other's backs kept them going when faced with indecision. *"So, it takes in a team like ours. It takes, you need to be very confident in your solution and in your mandate and in some of these instances that the backing of your boss to make progress"* [PAT 14]

Participant 8 stated that *"...then I understood I had the chief executive's backing and others, suddenly I was able to then stand on my own two feet and physically make decisions and make decisions that were unpopular that went against the grain. And I was fine with it"* Further, *"So, I think, we are moving in the right direction. It's, we've got the tools we've drank the cool aid together. We need to apply it."* [PAT 5].

Having a positive team spirit among the team members was also mentioned by other participants when they insisted that it takes the whole team to decide; therefore, nobody amongst the team must face the consequences alone. Participant 19 stated that *"Yes. I may have been the head of the unit..., but it's unfair to blame me because we all made a decision"*, participant 5 stated that *"I won't risk my career or my life stupidly, but I will support people who are, who are feeling that they are not being given a fair chance in any way."* and *"secondly, if teams that feel recognised and rewarded for the full construct of what they can deliver, it means we go the same route."* [PAT 5].

### ***Budget Considerations***

When one has an allocated budget to work within, it is often difficult to make decisions as they please. This is because they are limited by the budget they must not exceed; therefore, it is important to prioritise the decisions. When the budget limits a strategical leader, they

may become indecisive as to what they must do first. This is because the final decision is not just a personal one; it is an organisational decision. Within the organisation, a hierarchical structure requires the leaders to adhere to the policies that are guiding principles in relation to the decisions related to the budget. *“So, I think, I think we still do have turf protection, which we would call the silos. So, it’s sort of, there’s this mentality, my turf, my budget, my bonus, and, you know, those three are interlinked.”* [PAT 20].

*“In this change, you know, someone has not made a decision or Joe has not made a decision until you then support the statement of intent with resources, which to be fair, they starting to now...do the work [and] appropriate budget.”* [PAT 20]. Additionally, *“So, my turf, my budget, my bonus, and I think that in the money market space was the biggest hindrance to everything.”* [PAT 20].

In summary, research question one was answered using theme one (drivers of indecision) with six consolidated codes: organisational hierarchy, fear of failure, lack of trust, management complexity, lack of support from other strategic leaders and budget considerations. Figure 5.2 captures the visual picture of the drivers of indecision together with their association linkages.

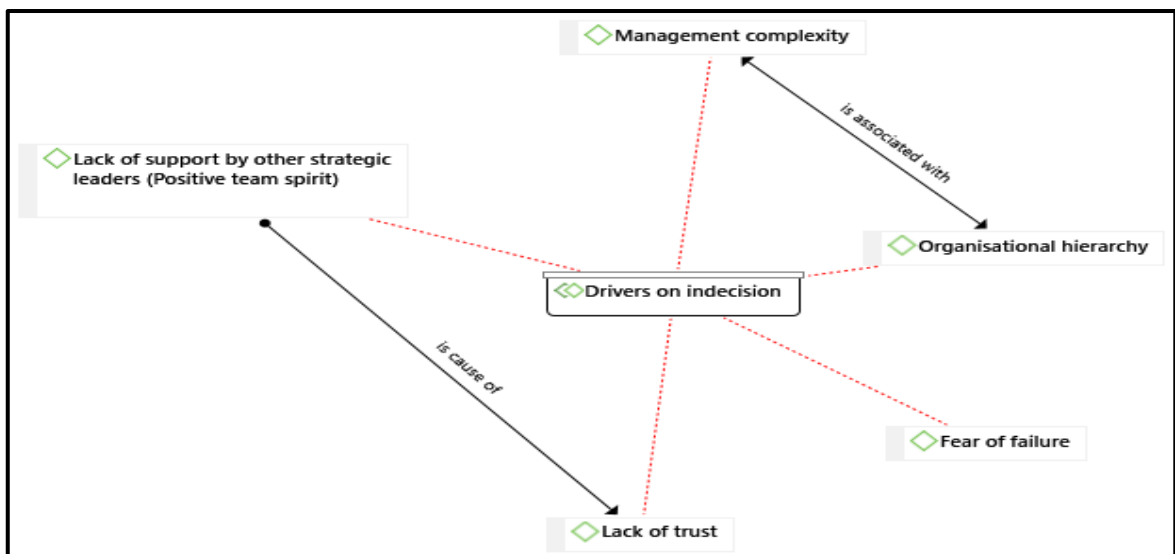


Figure 5.2: Drivers of Indecision Map

Source: Author's own

### 5.3.2 Reasons for Strategic Leaders to Delay or Delegate Decision-Making

Having identified the drivers of indecision by the leaders, the following critical question was to understand why the strategic leaders within the organisation delay decision-making. **The**

**essence of the question was to explore what set underneath the drivers of indecision captured in 5.3.1**. This can be recapped as follows:

**Research Question 2: Why strategic leaders delay or delegate decision-making?**

The purpose of this research question is to understand the reasons strategic leaders delay or even delegate decision-making. To answer this research question, theme two was developed with four consolidated codes. ***As declared in chapter 1, delayed or delegated decision-making is considered responses to indecision. Thus, for the purposes of this study viewed as indecision.***

**Theme 2: Reasons for indecisions**

Theme 2 was developed to discuss the reasons that lead the strategic leaders to delay or delegate decision-making. Four consolidated codes were constructed to discuss this theme. These codes are power influence, geographical jurisdictions, fear of accountability, avoiding conflict. These are presented in Table 5.4.

*Table 5.4: Reasons for Delaying or Delegating Decision-Making*

Rank	Construct	Frequency
1	Fear of accountability	10
1	Geographical jurisdictions	10
2	Power influence	6
3	Avoiding conflict	4

***Fear of Accountability***

Accountability goes hand in hand with responsibility; it is the strategic leaders' responsibility to make decisions within the organisation. Therefore, they need to be accountable for their actions and decisions. A fear to account for the decision is viewed as one reason behind indecision facing the organisation's strategic leaders. They fear to account because their decisions impact the organisation either positively or negatively. Sometimes decision-making may also cost the leaders their jobs and dignity when something goes wrong.

According to participant 5, 17, 19 and 3, there is a huge fear of being held accountable about their decisions. Therefore, leaders within the organisations prolong and delay making any decisions due to their fears. *“I think it comes through to, that we are fearful of being called out on something as standing up for something.”* [PAT 5].

Participant 17 stated that *"They don't want to make big decisions anymore, because when you don't make big decisions, you can't get big things wrong"*.

*"In my world, the pressure and the spotlight aren't on me. So, I can make that decision right there in a lot of other things."* *"There's a lot of space and, freedom for me to hide behind others."* [PAT 19].

*"And nobody takes responsibility for anything. And we end up having decisions that don't reflect what the real thought processes, because everybody's hiding behind everybody to come up to the point of making"* [PAT 3].

The fact that nobody wants to take responsibility and be accountable for any mistakes and any downfalls plays a huge role to a point where the organisation ends up not making any big decisions and things are left hanging.

Participant 6 indicated that with any bad or wrong decision made, even if the decision was the correct one, you are putting yourself as the decision-maker at risk which can result in you losing your job or going for any disciplinary hearings. Nobody wants that. *"You know that their accountability that weighs on their decision is too heavy. And the accountability of this decision might be that I might lose my job, or I might look bad in the eyes of others, whereas I think the contrary is actually true that I think people in many cases just want people to make decisions."* [PAT 6].

Participant 19 also stated that *"they may feel in their own mind, you know what somebody else is bloody smart in my team. They're much smarter than me. Let them make the decision."* This indicates a lack of confidence in oneself. They fear making the wrong decisions, so the reason for the delay in that aspect could be they are seeking advice from someone they believe is smarter than them and believe capable of making the soundest decisions.

Further, participant 15 stated that *"So the first thing is that I think they are anxious about losing hold and control. And so, and that's, is that about not wanting to delegate or is that indecision?"* And *"The other thing is that sometimes people say, no, I want to be in the team, or I want to be in the meeting room, but I don't want people to single me out when we make the decision or, you know,"* [PAT 15]. This indicates that most leaders fear being left out and excluded within the work environment because of the decisions that make, this for them, it means they have lost control and are excluded in teams.

## **Geographical Jurisdictions**

The scope of the organisation in this study is complex and very broad. Its operations are not limited to South Africa, but they cover the other 19 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa as well. To answer the research question that seeks to understand why strategic leaders delay or delegate decision making, the geographical jurisdictions factor was identified as one of the reasons there is a delay or delegation on decision making. The participants' views point out that the leaders delay decision-making because their powers are only limited to that geographical location wherein they operate.

Participant 9 said *“I attribute it [geographic location] a lot to decision-making. The fact that we are slow in decision-making ourselves as [an] organisation in East Africa, [is] because it might be the ultimate decision-makers don't reside in this jurisdiction.”*

While participant 5 indicated that *“the third dimension is jurisdiction in different directions. Yeah, exactly, cause then you're going to get in-country chief executive in Kenya saying nah, but that doesn't work for me, you know? Or in-country chief executive in Botswana saying our case is completely different.”*

Participant 9 further indicated that *“I'd like to believe that actually happens across the other geographies, that actual decision-makers actually sitting in Johannesburg. And as a result of that, it it's just causes, delays.”* Also, *“Yet when it comes to driving Africa's growth, we then tend to hesitate on who we support because we are then marking them against global giants.”* [PAT 7]

Some of the participants indicated that the conflict between the country's matrix plays a huge role in decision-making. This comes down to the type of growth they are looking for and the platforms they want to end up in. Further, the different cultures that the countries have to play a role because some countries are more restrictive than the other. *“I think when I joined, I would say perhaps, probably nine years ago markets, I felt a big part of, towards the end, especially of my decision to even leave, move into different stuff, was always that conflict between country matrix.* [PAT 9].

*“So, you need to look for growth elsewhere, where there's markets or platform like the bank is now geographies, et cetera. So, do you think the geography play was a good one and I'm part of it.”* [PAT 10] and *“I can't, then I'd rather not to make a presentation because I can't go and talk about multinationals in South Sudan. There's no big multinationals.”* [PAT 9]

Participant 5 suggested that if there can be a breakdown done of the regional structure, that could help speed up the processes *“What we didn't do and should have done was break*

down the regional structure.” [PAT 5]. Participant 9 agrees with participant 5 and indicated that “And I don’t know why, to be quite honest, why not breaking from the top leadership and just force all countries to merge into one.” and “I suspect sometimes a lot of the allegiance is towards those individuals. And if those individuals don’t happen resided in your jurisdiction, you will tend to have a conflict. And I think that to me is what I see a lot in this organisation.” [PAT 9]

### **Power Influence**

Power can be used for the better or the worst. When a person is in possession of power, they can influence the whole organisational setup because they have the power to do so. In the organisation's context, some have power over others, and they can easily influence the decision-making process. However, the intentions of power influence vary for everyone; these influences may be both good and bad.

The views of the participants of the study were used to discuss the power influence within the organisation. Their views highlighted why strategic leaders delay or delegate decision making. According to participant 1 “And if there’s a bit of resistance from this informal structure, unfortunately, this informal structure is quite strong, quite strong, in a sense that it can sabotage any decision or any process within the [formal] system because it takes things beyond the organisation itself.” He further highlighted that “A lot of guys within the [formal] system still consult the informal structures. There’s a lot of stuff that happens over braais and over weekends in South Africa that influences a lot of the decisions that are made by a lot of our seniors.”

Furthermore, participant 20 indicated that politics in the workplace plays a huge role when it comes to decision-making and that is one of the most common reasons for delays “You know, if a senior guy in TCM [Treasury Capital Management] or a senior guy in client coverage had to say, guys, the very obvious decision for the organisation is that it’s progressive for us to roll out for GM [Global Markets]. And maybe people in TPS [Transactional Products Services] would be very angry with that person. You know, if they favoured TPS, and the GM people would be up in arms. So, I think for me, the reasons for the delay in that project were mainly political.”

According to participant 3 some delays are influenced by the people in power; they become so hard-headed that they do not listen to anyone’s opinion. “They become so powerful that it gets to their head because nobody else can tell them.”

For a complex organisation such as the organisation, formal and informal structures influence the leadership decision-making process. *“Informal structure for some unknown reason is internal. And it’s also external, you know, either senior sort of former executives within the system that still have direct influence on our decision making.” “How do I get paid and how do I get promoted up the chain? Because the question then comes back down on me too, please, hush. Don’t say anything. Don’t go in that matter because it’s not supported by these particular senior guys up.” [PAT 1]. So, there’s this invisible hand that comes into the organisation and it works through the informal organisation. So, you find that the people that are holding the positions within the formal structures have to, you know, get support from a whole lot of people that are within this informal structure” [PAT 1].*

### ***Avoiding Conflict***

It was pointed out that the reason strategic leaders delay or even delegate decision-making is to avoid conflict. Conflict can be due to a decision or an action that has been taken. Therefore, the organisation's strategic leaders will not make decisions or just delegate that decision-making to avoid conflict. *“There are always people that like to avoid conflict and they would just avoid it and they would avoid it in a way or other, being rolled over or simply by avoiding the problem and putting their head in the sand... and hoping the problem goes away.” [PAT 5].*

*“So, I think avoiding conflict is a natural phenomenon that we will have in the organisation, given the size of it and given the different personalities. So that is something that one just says to be aware of and know where the people are that have you could be fantastic at your job, but a conflict avoider, as long as it’s recognised, and you’re either coached or someone else’s making those decisions or help you through those tough times, but you still really good at.” [PAT 5].*

In summary, the participants showed their understanding and experience in answering this research question and theme two (reasons for indecision). Theme 2 was developed from four consolidated codes: power influence, geographical jurisdictions, fear of accountability and avoiding conflict.

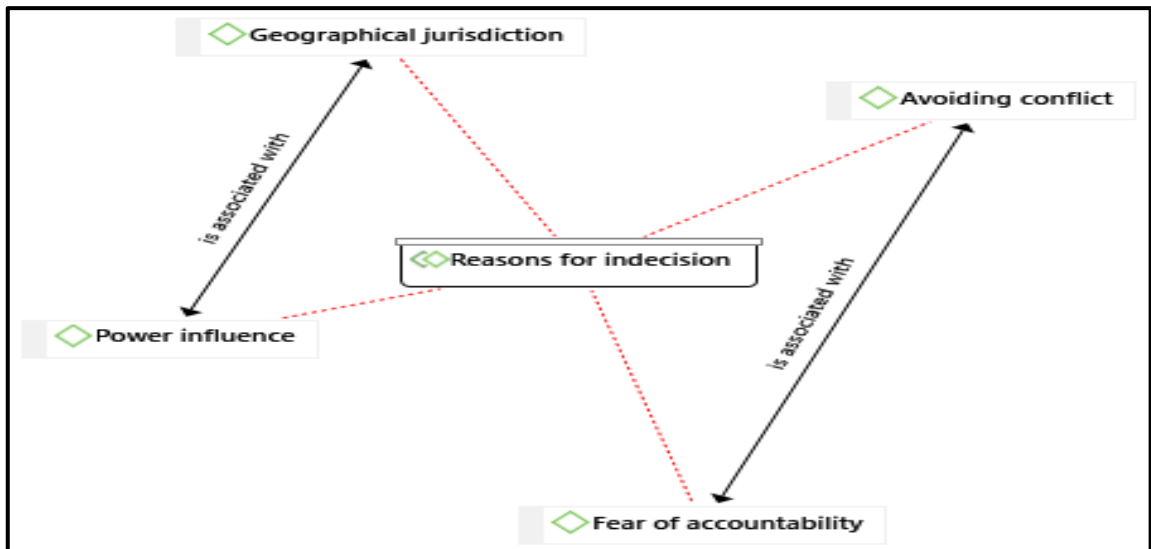


Figure 5.3: Reasons to Delay or Delegate Decision Making Map

Source: Author's own

### 5.3.3 The Implications of Indecision, Delaying or Delegation of a Decision by the Strategic Leaders

Further questions to this study were to understand the implications of indecision, delaying or delegation of a decision by the strategic leaders within the organisation; to answer this research question, the third theme (implications for indecision) was developed with five consolidated codes.

#### **Research Question 3: What are the implications of indecision, delaying or delegation of a decision by the strategic leaders?**

This research question seeks to understand the implications of indecision, delaying, or delegation of a decision by the organisation's strategic leaders. Having discussed drivers of indecision (first theme) and reasons behind indecision (second theme) within the organisation, the researcher wanted to understand the implications of indecision, delaying or delegating of decision making.

#### ***Theme 3: Implications of Indecision, delaying or delegation Decision-making***

This theme was developed to discuss the implications of indecision, delaying or delegating decision-making within the organisation. There are relevant codes that were constructed to



discuss this theme. These constructed factors developed are business failure due to resource loss, demotivated teams, revenue loss, opportunity loss and competitors become stronger. These are presented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Indecision, Delaying or Delegation Impact

Rank	Construct	Frequency
1	Business failure due to resource loss	5
1	Demotivated teams	5
1	Revenue loss	5
1	Opportunity loss	5
2	Competitors become stronger	3

### ***Business Failure Due to Resource Loss***

The impact of indecision by the strategic leaders within the organisation can have both positive and negative effect, depending on the reason and timing for not deciding. In relation to this study, the participants' views point that the indecision within the organisation has a negative impact. Because the organisation has lost clients, people and other resources, it puts the business at a considerable risk of failing.

According to participant 14, the longer the decision-making process takes the more loss the business encounters like *"I think it's got an impact, indecision leads to loss of confidence, loss of money, loss of good quality clients."* Participant 3 confirms and agrees with PAT14, the longer the process, the more skills the organisation loses because the employee will leave the company due to the lack of progress and being stuck on one thing. People quickly lose faith and interest in things that delays them. *"So, when we don't take decisions, there are many implications, you lose staff. A lot of staff will go to institutions that can take decisions."* [PAT 3]. *"And, it's like a negative cycle of delayed implementation and no impact."* [PAT 14]

Furthermore, participant 20 emphasises how delays chase away clients because they are kept in the dark and waiting during the process. As the saying goes "time is money" the clients go looking for other business who are willing to work with them and who are more efficient and effective. *"I think there is one of the implications of delaying decisions because they have been waiting for something and then the organisation can't make the decision. And if it is the right decision, you know, in the, customer's going to, our business will stagnate, and those, you know, and as a result, my next point is our competitors become stronger."*

## ***Demotivated Teams***

The teams become demotivated as a result of indecision, delaying or delegation decision-making. Their focus shift, they lose motivation because the act of indecision can also affect their incentives, rewards and bonuses. So, when the strategic leaders delay or delegate the decision-making, many people get affected. Participant 4 mentioned that the results of the indecision, delaying or delegating decision making has an impact on the staff performance due to shifted focus. *“The staff morale goes down. And then, so there’s a real cost to it, which is difficult sometimes to quantify. But there’s no doubt, there’s a cost to it.”* Participant 20 and participant 4 also supported this view by stating that *“So, it’s sort of, there’s this mentality, my turf, my budget, my bonus...”* [PAT 20]. Participant 4 stated *“it means that teams, instead of being focusing on doing the right thing, you know, they get caught up in this, what’s going to happen, and they, you know, they’re not focusing on the right things”*.

It was noted by participant 13 that the teams always want to know the decisions that are being taken; they want to know where the decision is going to take them. This requires the leaders to be able to make decisions that will be known to the teams. Participant 13 stated *“there is no team I’ve seen that doesn’t want to say, that’s where we are going. Okay guys, even if we don’t know how we get it, how do we get it? Okay. Tomorrow we’ll figure it a bit more, and that is where we are going.”* Participant 13 further mentioned that when there is indecisiveness, the teams can lose trust and confidence in their leader by stating that *“I think those are some of the implications I’ve seen, for the team around you, if are not making decisions quickly or helping them, they might begin to lose confidence and trust. And could it be, I don’t trust them. I don’t know what I’m doing”*.

## ***Revenue Loss***

Indecision can also have revenue loss implications on the business. This means that the business can lose revenue and other resources of great value due to a decision delayed or not being made. Participant 14 explained that the implications of indecision could include monetary loss, time loss among other things when it was stated that *“But the implication is loss all around loss, loss of confidence in your people, loss of empowerment, monetary loss, time loss”*. [PAT 14].

The views of participant 18 and participant 17 also emphasised on the revenue loss by stating that *“years later, you know, and Chief Executive is crying on our shoulder because he doesn’t have anything that can compete in the market”* [PAT 18] and [PAT 17] stated that *“So, the implications of indecision for an organisation..., is quite varied, right? From a*

*shareholder point of view, it leads to reduced revenue and headline earnings, because you're going to be able to connect at the right time to [time you did not] take advantage of opportunities”.*

Participant 20 further elucidated on the indecision by mentioning that the revenue can be lost through client franchise stagnation, resulting in the organisation losing its momentum. Therefore, competitors become stronger, and revenue will be lost. *“So, you know, I wrote down three notes there, I thought, the first implication is, our client franchise stagnates”* [PAT20]. *“So, I'd say we lose momentum and our competitors become stronger.”* [PAT20].

### ***Opportunity Loss***

Opportunity loss is one of the implications of indecision, delaying or delegating decision-making by the organisation's strategic leaders. The participants' views pointed out that when the strategic leaders are not making the decisions, the organisation loses lots of opportunities to grow and make a profit. The views of participant 11 showed that the implications of indecision could lead to opportunity loss by the organisation. It was mentioned that *“what are the implications, you know, I suppose the question could be, it should be, where could we have been?”* [PAT 11]. Another point stated by this participant is that *“but those organisations that positioned themselves to be ecosystems or platforms are reaping a multiplier, in terms of, earnings and profitability than those who are not.”* [PAT 11].

Participant 4 stated that *“I think indecision is the real cost to the business, which is difficult to quantify because it just means things take long.”* When things take long, the organisation will be losing opportunities to gain profits, and the organisation will not grow, this was supported by the views of participant 11 and participant 20. Participant 11 emphasised that the implications of delaying decision-making will always cause the organisation to lose opportunities by stating that *“so, to talk to your point of implications is if we continue the pace of decision-making that requires long term consultation and consensus, I think we were going to lose some opportunities.”* and [PAT 20] stated that *“so, we begin to stagnate.”*

### ***Competitors Become Stronger***

When the strategic leaders are not making the decisions or delaying the decision-making, the business can lose its momentum, therefore the competitors become stronger, and it can be challenging to keep up with the competitors. Strategic leaders must avoid indecision because they can negatively impact the organisation.

According to the participants, the competitors become stronger because they gain more clients while your organisation loses more due to the delays and lack of decision-making. *“Indecisiveness and when our strategic leaders avoid making decisions decisively, then our competitors will become stronger relative to us.”* [PAT 14] and *“So, I think it’s hard to say, you know, would we have been more or less successful? That’s hard to say, but I think we can, yeah, it can, it is having an impact on our business”.* [PAT 14]. *“Consequences of not making the right decision, are immediate and they’re real.”* [PAT 1].

In summary, research question 3 was answered using theme three (implications of indecision), where five consolidated codes were developed using the participants' views. These consolidated codes were business failure due to resource loss, demotivated teams, revenue loss, opportunity loss and competitors become stronger. These consolidated codes were quite relevant because there is a high chance of business loss when the company lacks sufficiency and reliability.

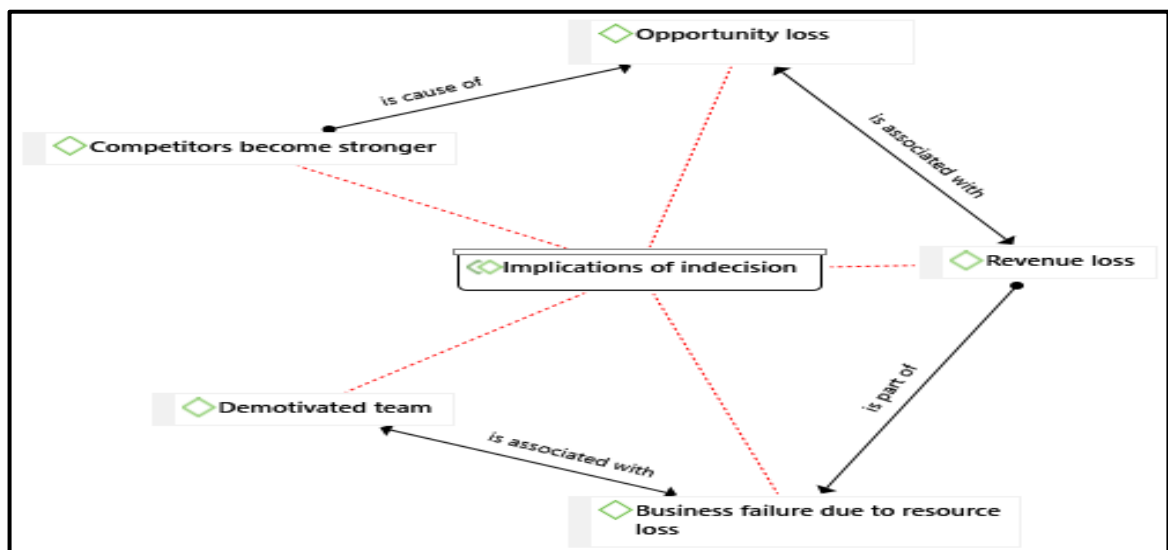


Figure 5.4: Implications of Indecision/Delayed or Delegated Decision-Making Map

Source: Author's own

### 5.3.4 The Mitigating Considerations to Indecision by the Strategic Leaders

Through probing and asking follow-up questions of clarity, the recommendations to mitigating indecision emerged. Three consolidated codes were constructed to discuss the mitigating consideration to indecision within the organisation. These codes are bold

leadership, leadership transformation, and courageous leadership. These are presented in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6: Mitigating consideration to indecision

Rank	Construct	Frequency
1	Leadership transformation	14
2	Bold leadership	10
3	Courageous leadership	6

### **Leadership Transformation**

The strategic leaders within the organisation are often faced with indecision due to various factors. However, some factors can be identified as interventions that can assist in mitigating the drivers of indecision. From the views of the study participant, leadership transformation is one of those interventions. In relation to the study, leadership transformation refers to a need for strategic leadership to adopt new ways of doing things. Also, they must have a vision and must have strategies to deal with indecision.

Participant 19 believed that the leadership style must be transformed and be aligned with organisational purpose and vision. In that manner, the things that were not correctly done can be reviewed and rectified by adapting new approaches by the leaders. *“I think when we talk about leadership and indecisiveness, I think that when you have change in leadership, it gives you the ability to change some of the things that we didn’t get [right before].”* [PAT 19]

The views of participant 9 showed that the leaders need to adopt a strategy that will be executed throughout the organisation when they are making decisions. *“So, I think that we need to adapt a clearer, almost like granular strategy. And then it almost defeats the whole purpose of strategy because strategy is supposed to identify the way and then allow people to execute it.”* It was also stated that the leaders need to have a vision and a purpose when they are making decisions, participant 9 stated that *“have a vision, purpose, you know, strategy, which I agree with by the way”*.

Participant 15 and participant 18 views showed that there is already a transitional shift in old leadership to a new leadership style that the leaders must adopt when making decisions. Participant 18 stated that *“I hope that mine brings a level of balance against a backdrop purely of South Africa, which is undergoing a massive transitional shift in old leadership to new leadership”* [PAT 15] and participant 18 stated that *“many of us strategic and key*

*leaders have had to draw on a different, hierarchy of decision-making considerations*". [PAT 18]

The views of participant 15 and participant 18 were supported by the views of participant 9 and participant 1. Participant 9 stated that *"So now course everyone is taking a very cautious approach. So, you sit and you [do not] make the decision, but you just sit there and it just, you buy time."* and participant 1 stated that *"It was quite clear that the change in leadership within our own business, you could see that there was a serious weakening of those [informal] structures because the independence of decision making was quite clear."*

Participant 18 further stated that *"because the manner in which we execute decision-making in a transformation journey, arguably may be fundamentally different to a decision-making in an environment business context where it is, let's call it business as usual in its comments"*.

### ***Bold Leadership***

The leadership within the organisation needs to be bold and confident when making decisions. This will mitigate the delay or delegation of decision-making because it will mean that strategic leaders know and believe what they are about to decide on. Further, they are firm about their decision-making. This will enable effectiveness inside the organisation.

Participant 1 mentioned that bold leadership could enable the leaders to mitigate drivers of indecision by stating that *"You know, I think for me, if we can figure out a way, I suppose, requires courageous and kind of bold leadership to be able to work through this thing. And actually, I suppose get rid of it."* To support this view, participants 13, 17 and 18 also emphasised that the leaders need to be bold and firm to make decisions. *"So, you don't need me to come and sit with you and hold your hand. You need to be bold enough to say, look, I will get it right. [and sometimes] I will get it wrong."* [PAT 13]. Participant 17 stated that *"the guts required, the braveness, the self-belief and the strength of leader to go and change some of that now is, is so strong that there's almost nobody that could change it."*

Participant 18 further explained on bold leadership by sharing the experience working with other bold leaders who could be used to mitigate the drivers of indecision. *"I've worked with many, many leaders in the organisation. Most of them good, a handful just great...and the common thread that binds those decision-makers that I've encountered [is that they were]*

*...were able to vary their decision-making style. And here's another good point that, because we've been told in recent years, we've got vary our style and our approach."*

Intending to discuss the importance of bold leadership further, participant 18 mentioned that as leaders they come across different seasons and cycles which require them to make bold decisions by stating that *"We get seasons, we get cycles. And now we're in a phase that requires bold decision-making"*. Participants 5 and 3 also shared their views about the bold leadership as a means to mitigate indecision as to support the views of other participants. *"I think the need to have rubber stamps and bureaucracy, et cetera, still exists in the organisation, but we need to be led by those people, like the current chief executive of this world that have the confidence to make a decision or make a decision because pragmatically it's the right decision"* [PAT 5] and participant 3 stated, *"I believe that it also creates weak future leaders, leaders that can't take decisions on their own because they've learned the culture of the organisation"*.

### ***Courageous Leadership***

To mitigate the impact of indecision, the organisation's strategic leaders must be courageous when they are making the decisions. Decision making is not always easy, but in the end, it needs to be done. Therefore, they need the courage to do it. They must not worry about failing and not being good enough. The views of the participants 18 and 6 showed that indecision could be mitigated through leaders that have great courage. Participant 18 stated that *"And that requires great courage, decision-making courage."*, and *"I think to sense a decision is required and then you step up and you make a decision You're not scared of what will happen."* [PAT 6].

In support of participants 18 and 6, participants 8 and 9 also mentioned that as a strategic leader, it is important to have courage when making decisions and that can help mitigate indecision. Participant 8 stated that *"When you are in executive management and leadership in a business, there's a lot, it's a machinery. I think in a start-up, it's different. Nothing happens unless you make it happen, but good business. It's a machine iyahamba (it is moving)"* [Zulu]. Participant 8 also shared that there was a time where courage had to be practised by stating that *"So, I made decisions. I did things. I put my vision forward and relate what I believed as a great business"* and participant 9 stated that *"some board members now will do that push, try, be innovative, be courageous."*

## 5.4 Chapter Summary and Answering Research Questions

In this study, nineteen participants were males and one female; these participants were all from a regulated and complex organisation with job experience as strategic leaders that was more than ten years operating in executive committee level. The findings of the study were interpreted and discussed in this chapter, where three themes were developed—(1) drivers of indecision, (2) reasons for indecision, and (3) implications of indecision. The relevant codes were also constructed to discuss the participants' views in relation to the interview questions. The findings showed that most drivers to indecision were fear of failure, where most leaders prolong the decision-making processes because they fear failing in the process and losing the employees trust and faith in them. Further, the budget also plays a role. It becomes a problem to make decisions that are influenced by funding, knowing very well that the organisation cannot afford to lose the funds.

The first research question was, what are the drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders? The participants were able to identify the factors they think are drivers of indecision by the organisation's strategic leaders. These were organisational hierarchy, fear of failure, lack of trust, management complexity, lack of support by other strategic leaders (*positive team spirit*) and budget considerations. According to the findings, the results show that the organisation needs leaders who have strong self-belief, who can make decisions without worrying about what other people will think of them. Failure is something that we all cannot run away from, and we cannot predict the future.

The second research question was why strategic leaders within the organisation delay or delegate decision-making? The participants indicated that most of the impact comes from the leaders fearing to be accountable for whatever that could go wrong. This is due to the results that they may have to face, losing their jobs or suspension for a certain period. The participants highlighted another reason for fear of conflict, so they prolong the decision-making period to avoid conflict with coworkers and clients.

The third research question was what the implications of indecision, delaying or delegation of a decision by the strategic leaders are? The study revealed that the implications of the indecision, delaying or delegating decision making were identified and discussed from the study participants' views. Five consolidated codes were developed to answer this research question; business failure due to resource loss, competitors become stronger, demotivated teams, revenue loss and opportunity loss. These were evident that clients hate to be kept waiting for long, and for those reasons, they will find someone else to do business with. However, the more you lose clients in the business, the more you lose revenue.



Additionally, the business could also lose employees, resulting in a loss of skill and organisational knowledge. This finding outlined the consequences of frustrating managerial processes through long periods of waiting for resolutions. Frustrated employees become demotivated, and frustrated clients take their business elsewhere. Therefore, what results is ultimately a loss of revenue making opportunity.

These results will be discussed in chapter 6, with the limitations of that help to contextualise the findings and the overall study highlighted in chapter 7.

## Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

### 6.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to understand an answer to the overarching question on strategic decision-making by the upper echelon leaders within a regulated and complex organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa: *What are drivers and implications of indecision by strategic leaders?*

The leaders across profit and non-profit organisations make decisions on a daily basis. These decisions influence the short-term success and long-term sustainability of their organisations. Consequently, decision-making is a central component of a leader's function (Samimi, Felipe, Anderson & Herrmann, 2019). However, indecision (lack of decision-making), non-commitment to a selected decision, delayed decisions or continuous change of mind by leaders impact the organisation's financial and non-financial outcomes (Samimi et al., 2019; Kokkoris, Baumeister & Kühnen, 2019). Therefore, this study is titled: Implications and drivers of strategic leaders' indecision, thus focusing on understanding the main drivers of indecision.

The following three sub-questions linked to the central question, further narrow the exploratory research focus but leave questioning open-ended. **Research Question 1:** What are specific drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders? **Research Question 2:** Why strategic leaders delay or delegate decision-making? **Research Question 3:** What are the implications of indecision, delaying or delegation of decision-making by the strategic leaders?

This study was conducted, and the data was collected from a sample size of twenty participants using the qualitative research method. The results were presented in Chapter 5. In this chapter, the results are discussed, reflecting on the results of the study.

### 6.2 Credibility of the Study – Adequacy and Relevance of the Sample

This study's primary aim was to understand the drivers and implications of indecision by strategic leaders within a complex organisation. The literature reviewed and analysed various academic resources, academic journals, books, conference papers, working papers, publications, and reports to address the research questions.

Before discussing the research questions, it was prudent to validate the credibility of the study. In chapter 4, the credibility and trustworthiness of the study were highlighted (section

4.9). Post analysis, it was also judicious to bring together all the steps taken to validate the rigour of the findings and the study's overall credibility. Different aspects were considered in this study to ensure credibility. These include selecting the correct research design, the relevance of the sample, the adequacy of the sample size and rigour of the analysis.

Firstly, as highlighted in chapter 4, the study followed an exploratory analysis using a qualitative research approach. This methodology and design are recommended when building knowledge, with the outcome being the conceptual model or framework (Mtotywa, 2019). This was made possible by the insight presented based on the participants' experience, which allows them to share such experiences to develop knowledge (Scotland, 2012). The findings of the study managed to identify the drivers of the indecision from participants. This work supports the development of knowledge as indicated by Samimi et al. (2019), where the purpose of this exploratory research is to understand an answer to the overarching question on strategic decision-making by the upper echelon leaders within a regulated and complex organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Secondly, the sample's relevance is considered one of the key credibility aspects, as highlighted by Guetterman (2015). The sample comprises diverse leaders within the organisation, which are highly experienced with all more than 10-year experience operating as strategic leaders, cutting across the different areas such as client coverage, risk management, foreign exchange, transactional services, global markets, human capital, finance, operations and internal audit. This was from different countries where there might be societal, cultural and other related factors that might influence how business is conducted. These countries included South Africa, Nigeria, Mozambique, South Sudan, Kenya and other countries in the West and East African regions. The only downside to the sample's relevance was that it was highly skewed towards male perspectives (out of the twenty participants, only one female interview). The problem with this is that female leaders' voices are not adequately coming through in these findings. Except for this weakness, there was an overall relevance of the study, confirming the purposive sampling's effectiveness.

Thirdly is the adequacy of the sample size. In this study, there were 20 interviews conducted during the collection of empirical data and took four weeks to complete. The 20 interviews were in line with the qualitative design of 5-25 as proposed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016). This was also congruent to the Mason (2010), where 20 interviews were one of the common interview sizes in the qualitative studies. Although this size was adequate based on the design, the literature also recommends that this is adequate only if there is data saturation. In explaining this, Saunders et al. (2016, p 1893) "saturation has attained widespread acceptance as a methodological principle in qualitative research. It is commonly taken to indicate that, on the basis of the data that have been collected or

analysed hitherto, further data collection and/or analysis are unnecessary". In this study, the saturation was achieved after 15 interviews with the last five interviews, not showing any new themes for the study.

Lastly, the rigour of the analysis was considered. Multiple approaches were made to ensure the rigour of the analysis. Critically, the analysis was conducted using a computer-aided program, Atlas T.I. 8, which makes coding and related aspects analysis efficient. An evidence-based approach used verbatim quotation, which ensured objectivity in the findings (Shenton, 2004).

All these aspects that are mentioned above validated the study's credibility and ensured the study's findings' rigour.

### **6.3 Drivers of Indecision by the Strategic Leaders**

The study's first research question can be recapped as follows: *What are the drivers of indecision by strategic leaders?*

Brooks (2011) and later supported by Samimi et al. (2019), explained that operating at the upper echelons of a regulated and complex organisation is not easy. There is a need to understand the drivers behind leadership indecision and implications to the organisation. Several drivers were highlighted by the participants, which included the organisational hierarchy, fear of failure, lack of trust, management complexity, budget considerations, and lack of support by other strategic leaders.

Organisational hierarchy and management complexity were identified as some of the drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders. This suggests that upper echelon decision-makers can be plagued with indecision in highly hierarchical organisations. Too much consultation before the actual decision-making process results in indecision and delayed decision making. This supports the study conducted in 2011 by Denis et al.; where they found that drivers of indecision include multiple participants who must collaborate to produce a decision, cumulative events of decision making on the same issue over time, rather than a single isolated incident; and constant risk of reversal or re-orientation or scope-creep on the imminent decision.

In relation to the issue of organisational hierarchy and management complexity, the views of Denis et al. (2011) who find that indecision can be a result of multiple participants who must collaborate to come up with a decision can be associated with indecision or delayed decision making are in contrary to the views of Ireland and Hitt (1999). Ireland and Hitt (1999) expanded on the notion of strategic leadership. They incorporated the leaders' ability

to anticipate, think strategically, and work with others towards a sustainable future performance of the organisation.

This view indicates that having multiple participants in the decision-making process can positively affect the organisational success (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). In line with the strategic leadership and incorporation to maximise the strategic thinking towards the benefit of the organisation, Georgakakis et al. (2019) stated that strategic leadership is a collective process of interactions between the upper echelon leaders which influence the outcomes of the organisation. The views of these scholars are in contradiction with each other, while the findings of this study agree with the views of Denis et al. (2011).

Another critical driver was the budget considerations. Simon (1972) identified three limits of rationality. Firstly, *risk and uncertainty*—finding an alternative with the maximum outcome are difficult. Secondly, *limited information about alternatives*—allocating resources in the search for information about alternatives is tough. Thirdly, *complexity*—evaluating alternative with the maximum return can be costly, thus limiting decision-makers from evaluating the best course of action (Simon, 1972). In this study, it was revealed that strategic leaders might be indecisive or delay decision making because they consider the budget. In relation to the budget consideration, some decisions involve budget and proper financial examination to ensure that financially, the organisation is in a state to maximise its profits from the decision that is being made; therefore, the strategic leaders may feel that some decisions can be delayed because they will not make profits for the organisation.

Pataki and Padar (2013), viewed the rationality theory as an economic man who is rational and consistent while making the value-maximising decision. They assume that the economic man has, complete knowledge of the environment; a consistent system of selecting alternatives; capability to assign accurate probability returns for each alternative; and rationally selects the alternative with the maximum return (Pataki & Padar, 2013). In agreement to the findings of this study and the views of Pataki and Padar (2013), Herfeld (2020) stated that individuals make rational choices by considering options based on their preferences and beliefs (Herfeld, 2020). This indicates that the strategic leaders may consider their beliefs of maximising the organisational profits when making the decisions.

Lack of trust was another major driver for the indecision. Lack of trust by the subordinates can drive the strategic leaders to be indecisive. When the subordinates do not trust their leader's decision-making capability, their leader may experience indecision or delay or even delegate the decision-making process. The subordinates may challenge their leader's decision-making capabilities due to prior mistakes that might have occurred. The existing literature emphasises the three assertions as key tenants to bounded rationality and profoundly influences an individual's decision-making process. These include limited

thinking and reasoning capabilities; restricted time and cost associated with gathering information about the environment; and the complexity of evaluating alternative with the maximum return, all impacting the individuals' ability to solve problems (Simon, 1972; Tarka, 2017; Sent, 2018).

These drivers are critical to the organisation's operations and success and bring complexity to its management. They tend to be drivers of indecision by strategic leaders within a complex organisation such as the highly regulated industry. This study shed new light on indecision drivers, which are strategic leader's fear of failure and lack of support by other upper echelon decision-makers in the organisation. These have been discussed in section 5.3.1, and are considered a contribution to knowledge, as per the invitation by Samimi et al. (2019).

## **6.4 Strategic Leaders Delay or Delegate Decision-Making**

Upon understanding, the drivers of the indecision, the next question on the study was to understand why strategic leader delay or delegate decision-making, with the second research question, recapped as follows: *Why strategic leaders delay or delegate decision-making?*

The study's findings revealed that the main reasons for the delay or delegation of the decision-making were mainly the power influence, geographical jurisdictions, fear of accountability, and avoiding conflict.

Power influence was one of the most highlighted factors. Indecision by the strategic leaders can also be associated with the power influence. Strategic leaders may feel that their decision-making capacity is not good enough and seek advice from other people. They may also feel that their decision making will be questioned; therefore, they would not be able to make decisions. This is in line with Alexander's (2008) and Bacanli's (2006) views on power influence and indecision. Alexander (2008) (as cited in Brooks, 2011) and Bacanli (2006) noted that indecision is related to several personality and behavioural tendencies. These include excessively seeking advice when deciding; endlessly searching for an optimal solution rather than settling for a satisfactory one; mostly seeing outcomes as predetermined and outside of one's control, and low self-esteem.

Geographical jurisdictions are regarded as inherent in a complex organisation such as operations across 20 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The major highlighted reasons are that the scope of the organisation under investigation is complex and broad. Its operations

are not limited to South Africa, but they cover several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and indicated in the sample's characteristics.

Additionally, fear of accountability and avoiding conflict were other factors. The study findings revealed that strategic leaders within the organisation delay or delegate decision-making due to the fear of accountability, that is, they do not want to face the consequences of the decision making because they are scared that the decision may have the negative impact on the organisation, and that can affect the organisation for a long term. Kokkorisa et al. (2019) stated that indecisiveness refers to a decision-making process characterised by decision uncertainty, decision reluctance, decision avoidance, and post-decision worry (Kokkorisa et al. 2019). McGarity-Palmer et al. (2019) also highlighted that indecision could be related to self-critical cognition (the tendency for self-related thoughts that are critical and defeating), perfectionism, and intolerance of uncertainty as factors inclining to indecision.

According to Cheek and Goebel (2020, p. 9), "indecisiveness is an individual difference that describes the general tendency to experience difficulty during decision-making"—decision difficulty. This typically results in a prolonged decision process or indecision by the strategic leaders. This tendency includes attempting to delay or avoid making decisions, constantly changing one's mind before deciding, and worrying about decisions once they have been made. Another scholar who narrated on the fear of accountability concept as the driver of indecision is Tarka (2017) who urged that the status quo is connected to less regret, limited need to justifying a different direction and avoid accountability.

This study confirmed the views from the literature reviewed on the essence of what is behind the drivers of indecision. These include power influence, fear of accountability and avoiding conflict. The new finding from this study on why strategic leaders delay or delegate decision-making was geographic jurisdiction. That is, indecision is fueled when an organisation operates in multiple geographical jurisdictions. These have been discussed in section 5.3.2.

## **6.5 Implications of Indecision, Delay or Delegation of Decision-Making**

Having understood the drivers of indecision as well as the reasons for strategic leaders delay or delegation of decision making, the next question was to understand the implications of indecision. The third research question can be recapped as follows: *What are the implications of indecision, delaying or delegation of a decision by the strategic leaders?*

The study's findings revealed that the impacts of indecisiveness by strategic leaders could be business failure due to loss of resources, and competitors may become stronger. The organisation would have lost its momentum and capacity to make profits due to delayed decisions and indecision. This view supports Samimi et al. (2019) study where it was indicated that indecision could impact the organisation in the following areas, organisation's competitive advantage; growth; relative performance, and performance volatility (Samimi et al., 2019). This can negatively affect the short-term survival and long-term sustainability of the organisation. Samimi et al. (2019) further stated that in the context of decision-making, the indecision of echelon leaders has massive implications on the current and future state of the organisation.

The impact of indecision by the strategic leaders was highlighted by Taillefer et al. (2016). It was stated that being decisive has positive connotations; and being indecisive has negative ones (Taillefer et al., 2016). This view was in line with Samimi et al. (2019) views when they stated the negative impacts that indecision can have on the organisation's success. It is evident that when the strategic leaders can stop being indecisive, many opportunities can be utilised to the maximum benefit of an organisation.

Implications of indecision, delaying, or delegation of the strategic leaders' decisions can result from failure to perform their duties and responsibilities to the full potential. This study's findings showed that the implications of strategic leaders' indecisiveness are demotivated teams, revenue loss and opportunity loss. Gottfredson and Reina (2020) emphasised that strategic leaders are decision-makers and responsible for creating an enabling culture for the organisation to succeed in a competitive environment (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020). This shows that strategic leaders must always perform their responsibilities to the benefit of the organisation. According to Gottfredson and Reina (2020), indecision by the upper echelon leaders is a hindrance to the fulfilment of their central role and responsibility.

The views of Brooks (2011) and Feldman et al. (2014) both agree that the leaders may act indecisive because they fear that the organisation will lose its revenues as the result of a decision that might have gone wrong. According to Brooks (2011), omission bias and status quo bias are two systematic biases associated with indecision. Omission bias is a tendency to view the penalty of not acting less harmful than the penalty emanating from acting (Brooks, 2011). For example, a leader faced a decision between investing in new technology and sitting on the side-lines. The research suggested that investing and failing is riskier to the leaders' career than failing to invest in a technology that proves successful elsewhere. Failing to act is viewed as a less critical mistake than acting, even when both lead to equally adverse outcomes, making the wrong decision and losing money for the company (Feldman et al., 2014). This can also be linked to the teams' demotivation and



opportunity loss. When the leaders are reluctant to decide, the organisation will lose revenue, and the teams will be demotivated to have missed an opportunity that would have made them gain experience or rewards. This will mean that the organisation would have lost its opportunity to do something big.

The study's findings show a link between demotivated teams, revenue loss, and opportunity loss as indecision implications by the strategic leaders within the organisation. These findings are all in line with the views of Gottfredson and Reina (2020), Brooks (2011) and Feldman et al. (2014). This study confirmed the financial and non-financial impacts of indecision from the literature reviewed. These include business failure due to loss of resources, competitors become stronger, demotivated teams, revenue loss and opportunity loss. These have been discussed in section 5.3.3.

## **6.6 Improvement of Indecision, Delay or Delegation of Decision-Making**

The study's problem explained that scholars had explored strategic leaders' role and responsibilities in making various strategic decisions, including acquisitions, entering new markets and innovation over the years. Hambrick and Mason (1984) contended that strategic leaders influence organisational outcomes through the decisions they make. In contextualising this Wang, Holmes, Oh, and Zhu (2016) professed that unlike decisions made at lower organisational levels, strategic leaders' decisions affect allocations of resources and commitments that can have far-reaching implications for organisations. The importance of these decisions is highly the potential adverse implication for indecision, delay, or sometimes non-genuine delegation of the strategic leaders' decision, especially in a complex organisation.

Within these implications highlighted, participants also reflected on solutions or interventions that can help the organisation's strategic leaders mitigate drivers and reasons for indecision. These included a transformational leadership approach as well as bold and courageous leadership. This is in line with the views of Carter and Greer (2013), in their argument where it was stated that specific actions of the upper echelon leaders could be predicted based on observable characteristics, such as functional background, education, tenure, experience, and age (Carter and Greer, 2013).

Certain factors such as education, experience and age of the strategic leaders can be associated with the interventions that can help strategic leaders mitigate indecisiveness. Sanders (2004) further asserted that the upper echelon perspective centres on values,

reasonings, perceptions of leaders, their influence on the strategic decision-making process and resultant performance outcomes (Sanders, 2004). The views of Carter and Greer (2013) and Sanders (2004) are both in line with this study's findings.

With regard to the bold leadership and courageous leadership, Kokkoris et al. (2019) explain that it is a great thing that the leaders portray boldness and courage in their decision-making style. It is believed that those leaders that are bold and courageous do not suffer from indecision because they passionately believe in what they think is right for the organisation. Kokkoris et al. (2019) concluded that individuals who believe in free will (evolutionist) and have a high sense of self-awareness, are more decisive and do not suffer indecision.

The leader may be bold and courageous in their decision making. However, there is always that element of accountability that comes when the decision is about to be made, leading to delaying or delegating strategic leaders' decision-making. Baumeister and Monroe (2014) indicated that the accountability that comes with decision-making brings feelings of nervousness and anguish, leading to indecision for the existentialist (Baumeister & Monroe, 2014). This view partially supports Kokkoris et al. (2019) views, who highlighted the concept of the evolutionist.

The upper echelons theory validates the importance of ensuring that there is decisive leadership. Carter and Greer (2013) explain that leaders' characteristics influence organisation strategic decisions and outcomes. This is mainly grounded by the strategic leaders' social, behavioural, and cognitive factors that influence the organisation's strategic choices and performance levels (Bromiley & Rau, 2016). Simply put, the organisation's success and failure are highly dependent on strategic leaders' decision-making abilities. This is intertwined and supported by bounded rationality theory. Pataki and Padar (2013), viewed the rationality theory as an economic man who is rational and consistent while making a value-maximising decision. The assumption is that the economic man has, complete knowledge of the environment; a consistent system of selecting alternatives; capability to assign accurate probability returns for each alternative; and rationally selects the alternative with the maximum return (Cheek & Goebel 2020; Pataki & Padar, 2013). For-profit organisations, operating in a highly competitive financial services industry, the strategic leader decision directly impacts the organisation's economic value and finances. Therefore, having a decisive, transformation, bold and courageous leader is a prerequisite for the organisations' financial and sustainability, especially the complex and regulated organisations such as the organisation.

## 6.7 Conclusion

The literature review and findings of this study show that the organisation's strategic leaders responsible for making decisions that can have short to long term implications for the organisation face indecision, delaying or delegating decision-making. The strategic leaders may not want to face the consequences of their decisions because of fear driving them. The management structure's complexity causes the strategic leaders' indecision and delay of decision-making from this study. It is not that these strategic leaders do not want to practice their responsibilities. However, there are factors behind their act of indecision, delaying or delegating decision making.

Against this backdrop, strategic leaders who have indecision challenges and delay on non-genuine delegation of decision-making need intervention to improve themselves for their betterment and sustainability. The study's conclusion and the limitation of the findings critical to contextualise the study follow in the last chapter. The last chapter will then provide recommendations based on the organisation's findings (and similar settings) and recommend future studies on aspects that emerged that were not within this research scope.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The paucity of academic literature on drivers of indecision by strategic leaders as asserted by Samimi et al. (2019), was the catalyst behind this study. Strategic leaders across profit and non-profit organisations make decisions on a daily basis. These decisions influence the short-term success and long-term sustainability of their organisations. Consequently, decision-making is a central component of a leader's function (Samimi, Felipe, Anderson, & Herrmann, 2019). However, indecision (lack of decision-making), non-commitment to a selected decision, delaying or delegation of decisions by strategic leaders impact the organisation's financial and non-financial outcomes (Samimi et al., 2019; Kokkoris, Baumeister & Kühnen, 2019). Premised on the perceived challenge faced by leaders in executing their core function of decision-making and influence of indecision on organisations; *this exploratory research sought to understand the drivers and implications of indecision by strategic leaders within a regulated and complex organisation operating in Sub-Saharan Africa.*

This chapter concludes the research on 'implications and drivers of strategic leaders' indecision. It presents research findings, discusses the implications for theory and business; details the research limitations, and suggests future research areas.

### **7.2 Overview of the Literature Study**

In the context of the strategic decision-making process, extant literature has established factors related to upper echelon leaders' indecision and their implications to the organisation. Underpinned by the research problem and purpose in section 1.2 and 1.3 respectively, and the pursuit to understand drivers of indecision drivers, this exploratory research drew on upper echelon theory (Bromiley & Rau, 2016) and bounded rationality theory (Tarka, 2017; Sent, 2018) as theoretical frameworks. These theories were explored in Chapter 2 on how they relate to indecision by strategic leaders and influence organisational outcomes—financial and non-financial. The review of seminal and recent academic literature confirmed that decision-making is a core function of strategic leaders (Samimi et al., 2019; Georgakakis et al., 2019). Notwithstanding, the large body of research on when and how leaders execute on their central function of decision-making, there is, however a paucity of literature on when and why upper echelon decision-makers are often plagued by chronic indecision (Brooks, 2011; Denis et al., 2011; Samimi et al., 2019).

## 7.3 Research Questions Revisited

Considering Liu (2017) guidelines on features of a well-defined research topic, the implications and drivers of strategic leaders' indecision were considered an appropriate topic for this exploratory study. The following three sub-questions linked to the central question narrowed the exploratory research focus but left questioning open-ended.

**Research Question 1:** What are specific drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders?

**Research Question 2:** Why strategic leaders delay or delegate decision-making?

**Research Question 3:** What are the implications of indecision, delaying or delegation of decision-making by the strategic leaders? For this study, delayed and delegated decision-making are considered responses to indecision; consequently, they form part of indecision.

## 7.4 Contribution of the Study

While considering the upper echelons (Bromiley & Rau, 2016) and bounded rationality (Tarka, 2017; Sent, 2018) theories, this study contributes to the behavioural decision-making literature and business—primarily organisations within the financial services industry, large local or regional or multinational corporates in other industries. The literature review discussed in Chapter 2, led to the development of the initial conceptual proposition on indecision (figure 2.2) and informed the research question's construction (section 3.2). However, figure 5.5 depicts the resultant conceptual framework for this study. Essentially, this resultant conceptual framework was developed through the coming together of the literature review through the lenses of upper echelons and bounded rationality theories and key insights from the research findings discussed in chapters 5 and 6. The resultant conceptual framework is explained in sections 7.4.1 to 7.4.4 and provides some insights for the upper echelon decision-makers on this phenomenon of indecision (drivers, reasons and implications); to the degree, that such is present, consider the recommendations to mitigate indecision in their respective organisations.

The surface description of the conceptual framework is found in Figure 5.5. To the top left of indecision, a central phenomenon under research are drivers of indecision from the literature reviewed and insights from research findings (referred to as number 1). This is followed by reasons of indecision drawn from research findings (referred to as number 2). Then, indecision implications for organisations are the resultant effect of indecision from both literature reviewed and research findings (referred to as 3). Finally, the recommendations that emerged from research findings (referred to as number 4). For clustering purposes, the drivers and reasons of indecision have been categorised as

structural (*organisational structure or hierarchy*), leadership (*engagement of strategic leaders*) and individual (*personal*) in nature.

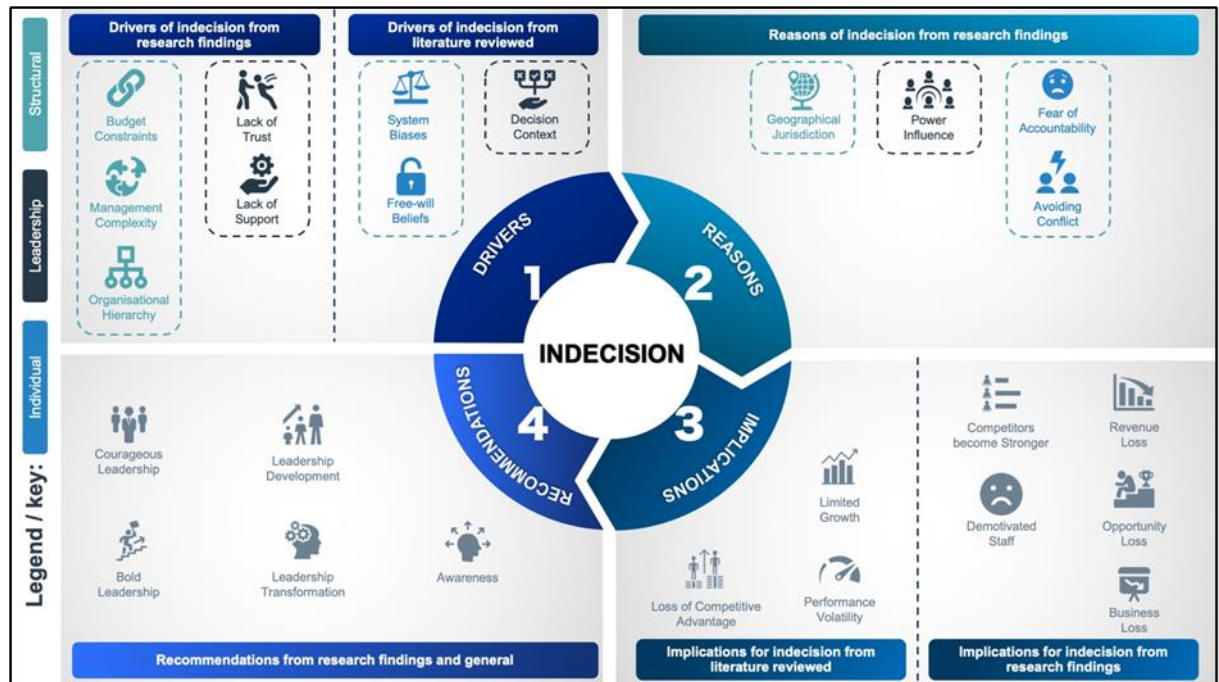


Figure 5.5: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's own

### 7.4.1 Drivers of Indecision from Literature Review and Research Findings

Following the literature reviewed, indecision drivers were largely personal in nature, including system biases and free-will beliefs, and one was leadership in nature—decision context, section 2.4.2. The inquiry identified organisational hierarchy and management complexity (structural nature) as some of the drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders, section 5.3.1. This suggests that upper echelon decision-makers can be beset with indecision in highly hierarchical organisations. Also, too much consultation before the actual decision-making process results in indecision. This supports the study conducted in 2011 by Denis et al.; where they found that drivers of indecision include multiple participants who must collaborate to produce a decision, cumulative events of decision making on the same issue over time, rather than a single isolated incident; and constant risk of reversal or re-orientation or scope-creep on the imminent decision (Denis et al. 2011).

Further, fear of failure (individual or personal in nature), lack of trust, lack of support by other strategic leaders and budget considerations (all leadership in nature), were found to be drivers of indecision, section 5.3.1. According to the findings, the results show that the

organisation needs leaders who have strong self-belief, who can make decisions without worrying about what other people will think of them. Failure is something that we all cannot run away from, and we cannot predict the future.

Save for the strategic leader's fear of failure and lack of support by other upper echelon decision-makers in the organisation, which are new insights from this study; the other drivers confirmed the literature review findings.

#### **7.4.2 Reasons for Indecision from Research Findings**

In response to the second research question on why strategic leaders within the organisation delay or delegate decision-making? The study's findings revealed four reasons that lie beneath the delay or delegation of decision-making: power influence, geographical jurisdictions, fear of accountability, and avoiding conflict.

Power influence was one of the most highlighted factors. Strategic leaders may feel that their decision-making capacity is not good enough and seek advice from other people. Alexander (2008) (as cited in Brooks, 2011) and Bacanli (2006) noted that indecision is related to several personality and behavioural tendencies. These include excessively seeking advice when deciding; endlessly searching for an optimal solution rather than settling for a satisfactory one; mostly seeing outcomes as predetermined and outside of one's control, and low self-esteem.

On the fear of accountability, the study shows leaders delay decision-making due to the consequences they may face, should their decisions go wrong. These include possibly losing their jobs, demotion, or suspension for a certain period. In addition, because of fear of conflict, strategic leaders prolong the decision-making period to avoid conflict with coworkers and clients, thus perpetuating indecision. Kokkorisa et al. (2019) stated that indecisiveness refers to a decision-making process characterised by decision uncertainty, decision reluctance, decision avoidance, and post-decision worry (Kokkorisa et al. 2019). McGarity-Palmer et al. (2019) also highlighted that indecision could be related to self-critical cognition (the tendency for self-related thoughts that are critical and defeating), perfectionism, and intolerance of uncertainty as factors inclining to indecision.

This study confirmed the views solicited from the literature review on the essence of what is behind the drivers of indecision. These include power influence, fear of accountability and avoiding conflict. The new findings on why strategic leaders delay or delegate decision-making was geographic jurisdiction. This suggests that upper echelon leaders of organisations operating in multiple geographic locations are susceptible to indecision.

### **7.4.3 Implication for Indecision from Literature Review and Research Findings**

The study revealed five key financial and non-financial insights on indecision implications, all of which aligned with the findings from literature reviewed. These are business failure due to resource loss, competitors become stronger, demotivated teams, revenue loss and opportunity loss. At the core of these findings is that indecision impacts the organisation's momentum and capacity to generate short term profits and sustainable returns. This view supports Samimi et al. (2019) study where it was indicated that indecision could impact the organisation in the following areas, organisation's competitive advantage; growth; relative performance, and performance volatility (Samimi et al., 2019).

The inquiry highlighted that clients often 'vote with their feet' and do business with another organisation if they are kept waiting for a decision over an undue period of time. This has an adverse impact on the organisation, in that, losing clients lead to short- and long-term revenue losses. Additionally, the business could also lose employees, resulting in a loss of skill and institutional knowledge. This finding outlined the consequences of frustrating managerial processes through long periods of waiting for resolutions. Overall, frustrated employees become demotivated, and frustrated clients take their business elsewhere. Therefore, what results is ultimately a loss of revenue making opportunity for the organisation.

## **7.5 Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this exploratory qualitative research study included the following.

- The generalisability of the results based on the small sample size, particularly in the context of a complex organisation.
- All participants, other than one—participant 14, were males, which introduced gender bias and limited the female perspective's strategic leadership voice. The limitation was due to access constraints as well as a paucity of females at the strategic leadership levels within the organisation.
- The researcher did not have prior training on conducting interviews for research purposes, and this could have had an adverse impact on the results.



## 7.6 Areas for Future Research

Based on this exploratory research study's findings, the following are identified as area for future research.

- The selection and use non-probability sampling technique for this study, based on the researchers' network and knowledge of the organisation, introduces selection bias. This further fuel the inherent limitations to the generalisability of the results. A future area of research on the phenomenon of indecision could include a larger sample contrasted between upper echelon leaders, senior management, and middle management within the organisation.
- All interview participants, save for participant 14, were male. This introduced gender bias and limited the female perspective's strategic leadership voice. The limitation was due to females' access constraints and paucity at the organisation's strategic leadership levels; thus, a serious and unfortunate limitation to the study—balance representation of population with female strategic leaders is another area of future research.
- This study's insights are in the context of a single case design, within a regulated and complex organisation (financial services industry) that operates in Sub-Saharan Africa (developing markets). Undertaking a similar study in the same industry or another in the developed markets is another area for future research.
- The exploratory study is cross-sectional, not longitudinal. This is an area for future research, that is, understand how indecision hinders organisational outcomes over time.

## 7.7 Recommendations

Specific from the research findings—leadership transformation, bold leadership, and courageous leadership. Other broad and general considerations to mitigating indecision include—awareness and leadership development. When upper echelon decision-makers in the organisation are aware of the plague of chronic indecision, they can engage in efforts to remedy indecision. This view aligns with Eckhart Tolle's thought, who said, "*Awareness is the greatest agent for change.*" Further, continuous targeted development of upper echelon decision-makers can mitigate indecision in the organisation.

Drawing specifically from this study, bold leadership, leadership transformation, courageous leadership, and positive team spirit among strategic leaders can help mitigate strategic leaders' indecision. This is in line with the views of Carter and Greer (2013), in their argument where it was stated that specific actions of the upper echelon leaders could be predicted based on observable characteristics, such as functional background, education, tenure, experience, and age (Carter and Greer, 2013).

With regard to the bold leadership and courageous leadership, Kokkoris et al. (2019) explain that it is a great thing that the leaders portray boldness and courage in their decision-making style. It is believed that those leaders that are bold and courageous do not suffer from indecision because they passionately believe in what they think is right for the organisation. Kokkoris et al. (2019) concluded that individuals who believe in free will (evolutionist) and have a high sense of self-awareness, are more decisive and do not suffer indecision.

In relation to the study, leadership transformation refers to a need for strategic leadership to adopt new ways of doing things—a paradigm shift in ‘old’ leadership to a ‘new’ leadership style in decision making.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

The study has provided insights into the implications and drivers of strategic leaders' indecision within a regulated and complex organisation. Twenty one-on-one semi-structured, in-depth interviews (using open-ended questions) with the organisation's upper echelon leaders were conducted. Thematic analysis was adopted to gain insights from the qualitative interview data and field notes. The findings were categorised along three themes of drivers of indecision, reasons for indecision and implications for indecision for an organisation. Within the context of constructed themes, drivers that often plague strategic leaders into indecision were developed; underlying reasons to strategic leader's indecision were explored, and financial and non-financial implications for indecision were highlighted.

The convergence of the literature reviewed through the lenses of the upper echelons theory and bounded rationality, and key insights from the research findings resulted in the proposed conceptual framework (figure 5.5) for this study. Upper echelon decision-makers of the organisation may use the insights from the conceptual framework to assess the phenomenon of indecision in their organisation, and if it exists, consider the recommendations to mitigate such indecision. While considering the upper echelons theory and bounded rationality theory, the study contributes to behavioural decision-making literature and business—primarily organisations within the financial services industry, large local or regional or multinational corporates in other industries.

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## Appendix A: Research Questionnaire

<b>Research and interview questions</b>	
<b>Introduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce myself and give the purpose of the research inquiry</li> <li>• Explain the method of data collection, analysis and assure confidentiality</li> <li>• Confirm the estimated completion time and obtain a signed consent form</li> </ul>
<b>RQ1: What are the drivers of indecision by the strategic leaders?</b>	
<b>Associated interview questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me an example where you experienced or observed indecision in the organisation?</li> <li>• What would you say were drivers of indecision in that instance?</li> <li>• Tell me of any other experiences or observations of drivers of indecision in the organisation?</li> </ul>
<b>RQ2: Why strategic leaders within the organisation delay or delegate decision-making?</b>	
<b>Associated interview questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me your thoughts on why leaders in the organisation are indecisive, delay or delegate decision-making?</li> <li>• What are challenges that cause leaders in the organisation to be indecisive, delay or delegate decision-making?</li> </ul>
<b>RQ3: What are the implications of indecision, delaying or delegation of a decision by the strategic leaders on the organisation?</b>	
<b>Associated interview questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me what you have experienced or observed as consequences of indecisions, delaying or delegating decision-making?</li> </ul>
<b>Closure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank the participant for being part of the interview process</li> <li>• Indicate ending without closing the door for continuing discussion</li> <li>• Start more casual chatting</li> </ul>