Influence of executive turnover on middle management's vertical code-switching in South African organisations

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ABSTRACT

Middle managers represent a unique position in the organisation, as they can switch vertically between the contrasting positions of follower and leader. This implies that the middle manager engages in a power play by adopting multiple personas.

The objective of this study was to gain an understanding of the challenges that the middle manager experiences when engaging in vertical code-switching and adopting a variety of power roles during the internal organisational pressure caused by executive level turnover. Research was undertaken using a qualitative, exploratory and interpretivist approach to obtain new insights into the phenomenon of vertical code-switching. Fifteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews were performed with middle managers to explore how they balanced power during an internal organisational pressure event, such as turnover at executive level.

The key findings support the role transition theory and provide insight into the influence of executive turnover on the middle manager's ability to switch between different organisational roles. The findings extend the current literature by demonstrating how the middle manager is left powerless during executive turnover by experiencing role overload due to the excessive demands placed upon them by the high-power strategic level. Furthermore, it was proven that external stimuli exist, and internal stimuli do not play a role in determining behaviour under pressure. The researcher developed a framework of vertical code-switching behaviour in the presence of executive turnover, and offered recommendations based on this framework.

The findings are a theoretical and practical addition to the topic by offering an enhanced understanding of how vertical code-switching functions under internal organisational pressure and will help leaders adjust to changes in their environments.

This paper makes use of hyperlinks across various sections for the ease of cross-referencing for the reader.

KEYWORDS

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 Business Administration 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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Belinda de Meyer   Date

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the research problem

1.1.   Research problem

An organisation is "a complex system of power relations" (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017, p. 659). Power spreads through every corner of an organisation. Every level of the organisational hierarchy reflects a group that has power over another. This implies that employees have power over each other in social interactions. The only difference is the level of power exercised when networking with others (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017).

The middle manager occupies a position in the organisation's hierarchical middle tier, which allows interaction with a diverse network, hence liaising with both strategic and operational levels (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). As each interaction partner possesses their own distinct levels of power, it follows that the middle manager is responsible for catering to both an audience that possesses a high level of power and an audience that possesses a low level of power (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020). To fulfil responsibilities, the middle manager fluctuates between the different levels of audiences; therefore, the middle manager has the ability to adopt different levels of power states (Anicich, Schaerer, Gale, & Foulk, 2021; Falls & Allen, 2020).

The power of the middle manager is determined by the interaction partner; thus, the middle manager's power will be neither higher than senior management, nor lower than the operational workforce (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). However, it is possible for a middle manager to feel powerful in one moment, and completely powerless in the next (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al., 2021). This suggests that the power held by the middle manager is unstable (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). The middle manager's movement upwards and downwards between the various power states is referred to as vertical code-switching (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al., 2021).

The aim of this research was to explore how the middle manager engages in daily activities by transitioning between different levels of power when there is internal organisational pressure. In this study, the event of executive turnover has been selected as an organisational pressure to investigate as a research construct. A prior study done by Anicich and Hirsh has urged for additional investigation into how various organisational pressures affect an employee's perception of power (2017). First, the research investigated the meaning of executive turnover as an

organisational pressure. Thereafter, lived experiences from middle managers were collected as insights for executing their responsibilities under the conditions of executive turnover. Next, the research investigated the phenomenon of fluctuating between distinct tiers of power, also known as vertical code-switching. This provided insights into how the middle manager switches between the various power states, and the multiple roles and identities that the middle manager assumes amid executive level turnover.

1.2.   Business rationale for the research

The middle manager presents a unique constitution since it can play the function of either leader or follower (Falls & Allen, 2020). This is a result of the middle manager's interaction with and serving of two distinct audiences. However, these audiences generate conflicting and persistent demands (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). It is typical for the middle manager to construct two convincing but often conflicting narratives to their superiors in reference to the task that they are carrying out, and another narrative to their subordinates (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020). Therefore, the middle manager needs to switch gears to adopt different personas according to the situational context, or adopt different behaviour patterns in completion of their responsibilities (Ashforth, 2000; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020).

The mid-level structural position of the middle manager implies that the middle manager fluctuates vertically between power levels during the day. Thus, the middle manager treats interaction with high-power individuals differently than interaction with low-power individuals. The interplay between the middle manager and power is complex and unsteady since the transitions can occur frequently as different roles are adopted or disabled (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2020; Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Ashforth, 2000; Falls & Allen, 2020).

In the business world, there is a lack of understanding of the delicate balance of power and authority that must be maintained by middle managers, or how the middle manager responds to performance expectations or cope with feelings of being powerless (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020). It is unclear whether the middle manager is restrained by organisational pressure when interacting with the various power tiers and carrying out their duties, or if a healthy transitioning between power states is still permitted. Hence, it is uncertain whether the nature of the middle manager's work

will evolve or remain the same. As such, the goal of the research was to increase understanding of vertical code-switching – the process by which individuals move between hierarchical levels of power – and how it manages the challenges, if any, caused by executive turnover. By doing so, we expand on research and contribute to the body of knowledge about vertical code-switching.

Workplace transformation is inevitable in the current era, making this research even more critical. It is argued that the well-being of employees is negatively affected when they are unable to adapt or adjust to their working conditions. It leads to a "sense of loss as well as anxiety" (Blom, 2018, p. 1). Blom (2018) further explained this impacts on the functioning of the employee. The repercussions of these unpleasant emotions are employee disengagement or increasing intent to leave the organisation (Anicich et al., 2021).

1.3. Academic rationale for the research

Anicich and Hirsh (2017) argued that past academics have not paid a lot of attention to power being centred in the middle tier of the organisational hierarchy setting. Therefore, the term "vertical code-switching" is a relatively new topic that has not yet been studied extensively in relation to the evolution and transformation of power in an organisational setting.

Code-switching is much more familiar in "linguistic … and cross-cultural … contexts" (p. 663). Heller (2010) defined linguistic code-switching as individuals who can speak two languages, and switch between these languages in the same conversation. Heller postulates that this is to "accomplish conversational goals" (p. 14). Equally, Molinsky (2007) described cross-cultural code-switching as "the act of purposefully modifying one's behaviour in an interaction in a foreign setting in order to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behaviour" (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017, p. 624). It must be noted that this study does not focus on linguistic or cross-cultural code-switching. This study focuses only on vertical code-switching as a sense of power in an organisational setting. This is since Ramarajan and Reid (2013) claimed we have a relatively limited understanding of the ways in which individuals navigate the effects of organisational and professional pressures (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017).

Although the research by Anicich and Hirsh is outdated, it is still supported by recent

studies. Falls and Allen (2020) claimed that little is known about the transition process and the flexibility to engage and disengage between the leader and follower role. Further research is requested into the understanding of the triggers that prompt middle managers to switch between multiple roles and gain an understanding of the natural process of transitioning.

1.4. Research purpose

Anicich and Hirsh (2017) suggested that certain test factors, namely "organisational structure, tenure at a given power level, organisational commitment, psychological safety, and hierarchical stability" (p. 675) might impact on an employee's sense of power. The authors stated these test factors can impact on the mental or emotional state of the employee and thus shape the behaviour of the employee. For this reason, the authors proposed further studies to be conducted into these test factors. Although the authors have not classified these test factors as organisational pressures, the researcher responded to this request and decided to test how the middle manager's multiple roles and associated behaviours are shaped by an organisational pressure.

For the purpose of this study, the executive turnover event has been identified as an organisational pressure that can impact on the sense of power of middle managers. Zimmerman, Swider, and Boswell (2019) claimed that "turnover remains a prominent and important topic of study for organisational researchers" (p. 110). There are numerous studies that focused on the identification of determinants of employee turnover intentions (Mumtaz, Bourini, Al-Bourini, & Alkhrabsheh, 2022). These studies provided robust recommendations and insights on management methods for employees indicating turnover intentions. Other studies sought to understand the relationship between turnover intentions and transformational leadership, job satisfaction (Tiro, 2021) and leader-member exchange (Niu, Wu, & Ma, 2022). This has resulted in a growing body of knowledge related to turnover intentions. The existing literature fails to provide an understanding of how a turnover event as an organisational pressure impact on the middle manager's power movement of vertical code-switching.

The purpose of the study is to contribute to an understanding of the vertical code-switching activity and how it responds to pressure identified as executive turnover event. The understanding gained by this study will extend the theory related to the

construct while responding to calls of existing researchers.

1.5. Conclusion

In terms of the business purpose, this study seeks to better understand the influence of executive turnover on the middle managers' transitioning between different power states, thus the ability of a middle manager to play multiple roles, often known as wearing several hats. For academic purposes, the study will broaden knowledge about how the middle manager practises vertical code-switching when faced with pressure from within the organisation due to executive turnover.

The next chapter reviews the academic literature related to the study, providing context of where the study fits into the literature, and presents insights that informed the research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to familiarise the reader with the current literature regarding the influence of turnover at executive level on managerial code-switching, and to use role transition theory to understand the relationship with vertical code-switching. By examining the relationship, this study aims to contribute to the state of academic knowledge.

The chapter starts with a discussion on Executive_employee_turnover. The literature review seeks to understand the impact of executive turnover events on the organisation, and on the transitioning of the middle manager between the different power states. This explains the reason for executive turnover identified as internal pressure on the organisation. Next, literature on Vertical_code_switching is reviewed to introduce the endless transitioning activity of the middle manager between high- and low-power states throughout the day. The existing literature on the transitioning activity of a middle manager is limited (Falls & Allen, 2020), while more research focuses on the role of the middle manager in the organisational structure. This is followed by a literature description of Middle_management. Finally, a discussion of the identity Theory_discussion follows to explain an individual's identity in the social environment within a particular role and the associated behaviour displayed. Thereafter, the transitioning between the different roles is explained with the assistance of the role transition theory. The progressive flow of the literature review is depicted in Figure 1.

Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3
Executive employee turnover	**Vertical code switching**	**Middle management**
- Importance of the executive employee - Impact of the executive employee turnover - Negative impact of executive turnover - Positive impact of executive turnover	- Definition - The environment and role transition scripts - Employee well-being - Role conflict - Role overload	- Definition - Multiple roles - Transition ability - Role conflict as a result - The Salient role
Social identity theory	Role transition theory	Social identity theory
		Role identity theory

Figure 1: Framework of the systematic literature review

2.2.   Executive employee turnover

Kuypers, Guenter and Van Emmerik (2018) provided a definition in support of a description raised originally in 1958 by March and Simon that stated that employee turnover refers to a worker departing from an organisation. In 1989, a more comprehensive description was provided by Price to include a worker entering an organisation or a worker departing from the organisation (Connolly, 2018; Gjerløv-Juel & Guenther, 2019).

Together, previous studies outlined that the executive turnover event can be challenging for an organisation since it causes serious issues (Asad, 2020). Several changes will follow in the organisation after the turnover event (Laulié & Morgeson, 2021), including a sensemaking process. Geys, Connolly, Kassim and Murdoch (2020) argued that the remaining employees after the turnover event face major impacts in their thought processes and behaviours. The authors claimed that changes in staff attitudes warrant attention since they have a bearing on both individual and organisational performance.

Conversely, Connolly (2018) reported turnover in positions requiring a high level of necessary ability and a high degree of task difficulty is anticipated to have a positive organisational impact compared to turnover in positions requiring a low degree of task difficulty and a low level of required skill. Thus, turnover in positions with low task difficulty and low levels of required skill is more likely to result in negative organisational outcomes. The study further stated that turnover at managerial level can result in negative results, but the impact is not as severe as turnover at general level. The reasoning behind this statement is based on the infusion of new ideas accompanied by the new executive entering the organisation, and subsequently a boost in morale spreading across the organisation. This study, however, focuses on the impact of turnover on the genuine middle tier, more specifically the middle management role. Since the middle manager fluctuates between the high and low degrees of task difficulty roles, the study seeks to understand if the middle manager will thus then experience both a positive and negative impact during organisational pressure while practising vertical code-switching.

2.2.1. Importance of the executive employee

This section discusses the reasons why executive employees are important for the organisational functions. Collectively, the literature is consistent in its findings and several studies agreed that the executive employees (or top management) are responsible to achieve the targets of the organisation and function as a "strategic leadership system" (Luciano, Nahrgang, Shrosphire, 2020, p. 678), providing guidance to the organisational workforce. The authors explained these strategic responsibilities include "analysing, formulating, and implementing strategies, policies, and tactics" (p. 678). Similarly, other research studies argued that the executive team has fundamental power over the performance of the organisation (Wang & Sun, 2022) and that the responsibilities focused on macro design that include "strategy, structure, processes, rewards, and people" (Livijn, 2019, p. 3).

2.2.2. Impact of the executive employee turnover

2.2.2.1 Negative impact of executive turnover

Several prior studies examined how executive turnover affected organisational performance, and various detrimental effects were noted. Researchers contended that the organisation's organisational structure is undergoing changes (Blom, 2018; Connolly, 2018; Laulié & Morgeson, 2021, p. 391) that influence the dynamics of its human (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019; Hancock, Allen, & Soelberg, 2017; Laulié & Morgeson, 2021; Wang & Sun, 2022) and social (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019) resources. Additionally, other studies asserted that the organisation's strategy may change (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019), while some claimed the decision-making process is disrupted and modified (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019). Alterations in the organisation's image are also witnessed (Blom, 2018, Laulié & Morgeson, 2021; Wang & Sun, 2022). Lastly, the shift in leadership styles has an even greater impact on the workforce (Blom, 2018; Mumtaz et al., 2022; Tiro, 2021). Following is a review of some detrimental effects.

(a) Changes in organisational structure

Researchers tend to present executive turnover as having a negative relationship with the performance of the organisation. For this reason, it is argued that turnover at executive level imposes higher consequences with serious risks and threats for the organisation. This is a result of the organisational structural changes and the

formalisation process that occurs. The organisational structural changes involve the review and rewrite of policies, processes and job descriptions within the organisation. These actions lead to current organisational resources being side-tracked and used for other purposes initially intended. Working relationships are rebuilt and new routines are implemented. Employees are, furthermore, relocated or additional employees are employed to support the current employees. Also, jobs are restructured to meet the new realities and groups are reorganised to restore lost cohesion. Through all these changes, the organisation was reminded to finish tasks, meet deadlines and achieve goals. Consequently, the remaining workers endure a bigger percentage of the existing workload and are subjected to changes in their work (Blom, 2018; Connolly, 2018; Laulié & Morgeson, 2021, p. 391).

In other words, the resignation of an executive could cause a shock through the organisation and is therefore classified as a disruptive behaviour. A void is created in the organisational structure, which impairs the internal operations. Furthermore, organisational routines, processes, operations and informal relationships among members are temporarily disrupted, which makes the organisation less stable and increases uncertainty. It is implied that organisations are less efficient after a turnover, which has a negative impact on the future success of the business (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019; Wang & Sun, 2022).

In an analysis of international city manager turnover, Connolly (2018) recommended sufficient time, at least a few years, for the new manager to prove themself so that they may successfully adopt new strategies and improve results. This recommendation was made in the context of research conducted on local governments with specific attention to the period between 2008 till 2011. This includes the Great Recession period, which was known as a tense or crisis era. This stance is maintained due to managers' playing a crucial role in shaping the content and implementation of city policies, as a shift in leadership can adversely affect the daily operations.

(b) Changes in human capital and skills

Other studies found that executive turnover led to a drain in human capital, implying the departure of technical knowledge, firm-specific knowledge and skills as employees exit the organisation. Firm-specific knowledge includes norms, values, routines and other non-written knowledge necessary for operational functioning.

Similarly, a loss is also experienced in the history, culture, strength and weakness of the organisation. Hence, the authors found that the competitive advantage for the organisation was deteriorating (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019; Hancock et al., 2017; Laulié & Morgeson, 2021; Wang & Sun, 2022).

(c) Changes in social capital and relationships

Likewise, studies also found executive turnover led to reduced social capital. This indicates that the way team members interact as part of the team's operation is challenging and problematic. Relationships within and beyond the organisation are being strained, including external connections with customers, competitors and investors. This is because each executive has a unique set of commitments and interests which impact on the operations of an organisation (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019).

(d) Changes to strategy or direction

Despite the majority of studies focusing on the departing executive member, a few studies focused on the joining of a new executive member that also impacts the organisation negatively. A new member of the executive team carries with them specialised knowledge that is distinct from the predecessor, as well as a distinct set of skills, management style, strategic focus and prioritisation. In this perspective, new executives are often unable to prove their efficacy and worthiness by merely preserving the status quo. It is argued that the new manager must still show their abilities and convince the organisation that they have what it takes to succeed. Hence, the new executive will serve as a signal of change in strategy or make use of unexplored markets or methods (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019).

(e) Changes in decision process

Changes at executive level impact the decision-making process and prolong the decision implementation process. As a result, the organisation is weakened for this period until the reorganisation is sorted. This impact on the efficiency of the organisation and research-claimed opportunities might be missed (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019).

(f) Changes in portrait of organisation

During an executive turnover event, the organisation is portrayed as being "chaotic,

messy, unpredictable, disordered and disorganized" (p. 9). The staff experience difficulty in adapting and embracing the changes. As a result, the employees struggle to perform in such a hostile environment, and feelings of stress, anxiety and fear emerge. This creates an atmosphere of doubt and lack of sureness among the workforce. The effectiveness of the organisation suffers from these unfavourable feelings. This in turn has an impact on the productivity, attitude and morale of the workforce (Blom, 2018, Laulié & Morgeson, 2021; Wang & Sun, 2022).

(g) Changes in leadership practices

Blom (2018) argued that the detrimental effects of executive turnover can be mitigated by the presence of leadership in the change process. It is the responsibility of leaders to ease the transition into the new environment. Leaders should provide novel avenues for interaction, learning and action, opening boundless possibilities for growth, success and thrill. Instead, the relationship between senior management and followers becomes alienated, due to the rising workload and time constraints experienced by senior management during change events. Consequently, leaders are losing their natural ability to connect with, engage with and talk to the workforce. Recent evidence suggested that the workforce is more likely to be satisfied, which is important for their well-being, if management makes a concerted effort to address their concerns and improve their quality of life in the workplace (Mumtaz et al., 2022). This concludes that the leadership style and function contribute to the workforce well-being (Tiro, 2021).

2.2.2.2   Positive impact of executive turnover

In contrast, only a few studies confirmed a positive relationship between executive turnover and the performance of an organisation. Both Connolly (2018) and Gjerløv-Juel (2019) focused on the benefits arising from gaining a new executive member. The new executive member motivates the remaining staff to approach existing challenges with a new outlook and new perspective. Likewise, the organisation profits from the new executive's fresh expertise, viewpoints, ideas and social capital. This results in new and fresh concepts that improve the organisation's innovative culture. Spillover occurs into an improved social capital stock as team members work together in a productive manner and advanced problem-solving skills. Finally, the organisation's capacity is enhanced. In contrast with the previous section, the competitive advantage increases and efficiency improves (Connolly, 2018; Gjerløv-

Juel, 2019).

2.2.3.   Summary of executive employee turnover

The section on executive turnover started off by expressing that turnover can result in negative but also in positive impacts for the organisation. Although the effects of executive turnover cannot be generalised, it can either decrease or boost the organisation's competitive advantage over its competitors.

Negative implications have been discussed as a result of changes that have taken place in the organisation's strategies, policies, processes and resources. These changes imply a shift in the way the organisation is managed. As a result, changes have taken place in the structure of the organisation. Additionally, as executives leave, the event entails a loss of key experience, making the organisation more susceptible to threats. Relationship tension, taking too long to make choices, fostering unfriendly work cultures that have an adverse effect on employees' well-being, and a lack of skilled leadership to direct operations are further negative effects. In contrast, the hiring of a new executive may have a detrimental effect on the company by altering its strategy and direction, or it may have a positive effect by strengthening the capabilities of the organisation.

Executive staff members were cited as being crucial to organisational operations because they were strategic, goal-oriented and offered direction to the company. Mumtaz et al. (2022) argued that employees place a premium on their connections with their managers and supervisors. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to understand how a middle manager's ability to switch between different power plays during the course of his workday is affected by a shift in the relationship with their manager. Thus, the study explores the possibility of the executive, permitting the middle manager to play the role of both leader and follower, or allowing the middle manager to transition between the multiple roles. Laulié and Morgeson (2021) concluded that there is a significant gap in the current knowledge regarding how individuals who remain in an organisational setting are affected by turnover events. Hence, much has been reported on how financial performance and productivity are impacted by the high rates of organisational turnover, but little theoretical attention has been placed on the employees who remain in the organisation after a turnover event. Prior results imply that continuity at the top and among employees is important

in establishing routines and consistency in organisational behaviour (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019).

A Framework_turnover_vertical_code_switch was created by the researcher after the findings from the literature investigation on executive turnover had been considered.

This is the closing of the literature discussion on executive employee turnover. The following section is stipulated under the chapter's structure Framework_literature_review.

2.3. Vertical code-switching

Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000) and Anicich and Hirsh (2017) described vertical code-switching as the act of mentally disengaging from one role while simultaneously assuming another. In the organisational hierarchy, the middle manager can move between high- and low-power states multiple times during the day. The literature on the middle manager includes a discussion of Middle_manager_hierarchy in the organisational context. In literature, this fluctuation ability is classified as vertical code-switching. In support thereof, Anicich and Hirsh (2017) defined vertical code-switching as the practice of rotating between patterns of behaviour oriented toward interaction with partners with higher and lesser power (Anicich et al., 2021). Hence, this implies a connection and disconnect of distinct roles the entire day.

To illustrate the fluctuation between different power states, Anicich and Hirsh (2017) used a hypothetical group of three co-workers who maintain constant communication, namely Employee A, B and C respectively. Senior Manager A oversees both employees B and C. In dealing with employees B and C, Senior Manager A consequently feels a high sense of power. Similarly, Middle Manager B also experiences a high sense of power when interacting with Employee C. Conversely, Middle Manager B experiences a low sense of power when interacting with Senior Manager A. Whenever Employee C interacts with both Senior Manager A and Middle Manager B, a low sense of power is present. Hence, vertical code-switching can be explained as an upwards and downwards play of power between interacting partners demonstrated by Middle Manager B.

2.3.1. General definitions

The majority of role transitions are divided into two categories, namely macro- and micro-role transitions. The transition between successively held roles can be referred to as a macro-role, and it involves both physical and psychological factors. Examples of macro-role transitions are changing jobs within an organisation, which include a promotion or a transfer, moving between organisations, changing careers or leaving an organisation. These transitions or changes occur seldom and are long-lasting (Ashforth, 2000).

Contrary to macro-role transitions, micro-role transitioning refers to the frequent and repetitive transitions that occur between professional roles. During these transitions, employees step into and out of roles. These changes could be either mental (a reorganisation of one's thought processes) or physical (Ashforth, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000; Falls & Allen, 2020). The triggers for switching roles can come from the internal or the external environment. Emotions and goals are classified as internal cues, whereas external is seen as a manager with superior authority walking into the room (Falls & Allen, 2020). This research tends to focus on micro-role transitioning.

2.3.2. The environment and role transition scripts

Recent evidence suggests that the middle manager's vulnerability to power transitioning varies according to the degree to which the tasks are performed in a consistent and predictable manner, thus according to the level of routineness of the work. It is suggested that in routine organisations where the daily schedule of the middle manager remains stable, or where they face less disruptions to their daily schedules, the middle manager is more likely to establish transition scripts. Transition scripts describe what actions or events to do in different situations. Role transition script detail is explained under the literature discussion regarding role transition theory. Hence, middle managers working in a routine environment should have a more robust tolerance for power fluctuations and experience less role conflict and role overload (Anicich et al., 2021).

2.3.3. Employee well-being

Ashforth (2000) argued that the well-being of both individuals and organisations depends critically on the understanding of how people manage role transitions.

Recently, researchers verified that the employee's mental and physical health is negatively impacted by having inconsistent power fluctuations. The study demonstrated that psychological (emotional) discomfort and physical symptoms are two indications of reduced well-being at work that are affected by the transition process. Psychological discomfort is evaluated by using a triangulation of anxiety, uncertainty and stress. Distress also develops due to an awareness of a physical problem (such as a headache or backache). In addition, it was reported that role tensions, such as role conflict and role overload, contribute to the effects of reduced well-being of the middle manager. These results were proven to be more noticeable among individuals performing their work in nonroutine environments, opposed to those who perform their work in routine situations, the reason being the development of transition scripts (Anicich et al., 2021).

2.3.4. Role conflict

Role conflict emerges when there is a large gap between what is expected of the middle manager in each of their roles. Thus, the middle manager is continuously required to transition from an assertive (high-power) state to an incompatible deferential state (low-power) state. This leads to the middle manager developing conflicting beliefs about the roles that must be played to complete the task (Anicich et al., 2021). The large gap between the distinct roles implies that it is challenging to cross the role boundaries between the roles. Transitioning will be more taxing on people whose roles in the organisation help to reinforce clear distinctions between superiors and subordinates than on those whose roles tend to dilute those distinctions. Likewise, middle managers who have a personal preference for dissolving the borders between these two role-based identities will find the transitioning to be less stressful than those individuals who have a personal preference for preserving distinct leader and subordinate identities. An example of a successful transitioning is when the middle manager is likely to show the norms or behaviours of a subordinate when interacting with a superior, thus displaying defence and respect behaviour. Conversely, while interacting with subordinates, the middle manager must assume the position of a leader and is prone to exhibit aggressiveness and dominant behaviour. Role conflict occurs when the low-power behaviour is expressed (defence and respect behaviour) in a high-power role (as a leader) (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017).

In essence, each role has its own set of behavioural norms and expectations that are triggered by the social setting and the middle manager's involvement in the encounter. Therefore, each role has its own identity (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). The understanding and further exploration into the transitioning allows the middle manager to apply the appropriate required behaviour to the current situation and thus avoid role conflict (Ashforth et al., 2000). The literature review regarding the middle management includes an [Example of role conflict](#).

Role conflict has been linked to a variety of poor consequences such as "uncertainty, anxiety and stress" (p. 2), work dissatisfaction and increased likelihood of looking for new employment (Anicich et al., 2021). The health of the employee may take strain in the form of "increased hypertension, more frequent health centre visits, increased drug and alcohol use, increased depression, and reduced life satisfaction" (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017, p. 676). Poor health impacts negatively on the productivity of the employee.

2.3.5. Role overload

Time-based role conflict takes the form of role overload. Role overload occurs when the middle manager has too many responsibilities due to the various roles occupied and not enough time to meet all the demands. Thus, the middle manager feels pressured to choose between competing role expectations that, in theory, should be complementary, such as having to respond to requests from senior management and subordinates in a short period. Middle managers spread themselves thinly when they feel overburdened, which drains their energy and motivation, hence diminishing their interest in their work (Anicich et al., 2021).

2.3.6. Summary on vertical code-switching

The various types of vertical code-switching, namely macro- and micro-role transitioning, have been introduced, with an explanation of the differences in the frequency of the transitioning activity. The focus of this research is on micro-role transitions within the context of the middle manager hierarchy.

Repetitive vertical code-switching may be stressful for a middle manager and have an adverse effect on that manager's well-being. Similar emotional distress may be experienced during role conflict and role overload, which are both negative elements

of vertical code-switching. Role conflict occurs when a middle manager demonstrates inconsistent conduct in each role. Role overload occurs when a middle manager has too many tasks and insufficient time to meet the expectations of his multiple roles.

Theoretically, information about vertical code-switching is scarce. The current study holds the potential to extend the existing literature on vertical code-switching by understanding the physical act of transitioning between the different power states, hence the engagement into the process of switching between different roles. In addition, the current study also pays attention to the flexibility of the transitioning act during pressured conditions such as executive turnover event. And, lastly, added knowledge is gained about the effectiveness of the transitioning act.

A Framework_turnover_vertical_code_switch was created by the researcher after the findings from the literature investigation on executive turnover and vertical code-switching had been considered.

This is the closing of the literature discussion regarding vertical code-switching. The following section is stipulated under the chapter's structure Framework_literature_review.

2.4. Middle management

The middle manager has considerable power within an organisation since they have an impact on the effectiveness of the organisation's growth strategy. In this perspective, the middle manager provides upward feedback to the executive team based on what is experienced on operational level, and on emerging issues experienced. In contrast, the middle manager also influences the execution of the organisational strategy by interacting with downward feedback to the subordinates (Livijn, 2019). The perspective of the middle manager in this role is to protect subordinates. Protection includes rewording messages, rearranging timetables, tweaking audits tweaked and censoring information before it reaches the operational workforce (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020). Livjin (2019) characterised the protection process as a middle manager assisting the operational workforce to make sense of the operational environment and assuring organisation-appropriate communication in delivery.

2.4.1. Definition

In 2017, Anicich and Hirsh published a paper claiming an organisation is a complex system of power filled with employees operating at various levels of power. The authors introduced the middle manager by describing power on a continuum range and the middle manager operating between the senior management and subordinates. This implies the middle manager switches between senior management in the higher tiers and operational personnel in the lowest ranks several times throughout the day. Hence, the middle manager can act as a follower the one moment (feeling less powerful) and a leader the next moment (feeling more powerful) (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2020; Falls & Allen, 2020). Gjerde and Alvesson used the metaphor of a sandwich to depict this profile because middle managers are typically caught in the middle between the expectations of senior management and their subordinates (2020). It is made clear that the middle manager has a dual clientele, and they are tangled up in a network of relationships that generate constant, competing needs (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). The middle manager serves the two distinct clienteles by assuming multiple roles, including leader and follower (Anicich et al., 2021). Return to the literature discussion regarding Vertical_code_switching.

2.4.2. Multiple roles

Each role held by a middle manager entails a distinct set of expected and required actions (Anicich et al., 2021). Table 1 provides the distinct characteristics that distinguish the roles of leader and follower.

Table 1: Multiple roles with comparable features

Action	Leader role	Follower role
Influence direction	Downwards towards subordinates	Upward to senior manager
Behaviour required	Assertive and dominant	Deferential or respect
Level of power	High power	Low power

With respect to the leader role, the middle manager uses distinct assertiveness and dominance behaviour to give advice or direction to their subordinates. Thus, the middle manager is in a high-power state and manages downwards. Similarly, with respect to the follower role, the middle manager uses deferential and respect behaviour to receive guidance or direction from their senior manager on how to perform in the specific role. Thus, the middle manager is in a low-power state and manages upwards. Hence, it is noted that the middle manager possesses high- and low-power abilities to perform operational responsibilities (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al., 2021; Falls & Allen, 2020). In addition, each middle manager has their own preconceived notions of how leaders and followers should act (Falls & Allen, 2020).

2.4.3. Transition ability

Middle managers can either lead or follow, and therefore they must constantly transition between the two roles in fulfilling their duties. The leader and the follower roles can occur within the same engagement, or even concurrently, thereby making it challenging to transition between them (Falls & Allen, 2020). Alegbeleye and Kaufman (2020) defined the transitioning as being flexible because leadership and followership are not mutually exclusive roles in the organisational environment.

2.4.4. Role conflict as a result

Repeatedly switching between senior and subordinate social contacts increases the likelihood of role conflict (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al., 2021). Role conflict occurs when the middle manager is expected to fulfil different social roles, yet those roles give rise to competing sets of behavioural expectations. It is argued that the middle manager is more vulnerable to role conflicts due to their unique position occupied between the two extreme audiences and their respectively opposing

demands. An example of role conflict is when the middle manager attempts to act submissively (behaviour of followership) in a certain situation while also adhering to the norms associated with being a leader (e.g., acting with dominance). Likewise, there is also the potential for role conflict to arise while interacting with subordinates. The middle manager simultaneously considers the viewpoint of the superior. In summary, it is claimed that role conflict increases because of improper management of the clashing expectations associated with each of these roles and identities. Role conflict scenarios have negative effects of raising tension and frustration levels (Falls & Allen, 2020).

An example of role conflict is provided using two fictional employees, Alice and Tom. Both middle managers are required to attend two meetings, one with their superior (upward influence), followed by another meeting with their subordinates (downward influence). Alice is an experienced middle manager and, because of her gathered knowledge and experience, she is aware of the appropriate way to conduct herself throughout each meeting. Thus, Alice experiences low role conflict in attending both meetings. However, Tom, a newly appointed middle manager, is still adjusting to the frequency and style of contacts with two distinct audiences. Therefore, Tom experiences high role conflict. This exemplifies two distinct functions that are in direct competition, but still related, with each other (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). Collectively, the identities of those in the middle management tiers are complex and even conflicting (Falls & Allen, 2020). Return to the literature discussion regarding Role_conflict_under_vertical_code_switch.

2.4.5. The salient role

A recent study conducted by Falls and Allen (2020) focused on the transition activity between the different roles played by middle managers. They found that middle managers were hesitant to adopt a follower identity and instead focused on the primary role as a leader. It appeared that followers in the organisation hierarchy are mostly overlooked and neglected. The claim by Kelly (1998) is still supported, whereby followers are perceived as being inactive and subservient or play no significant role in the success of an organisation. Therefore, middle managers are generally inclined to take on leadership responsibilities rather than followership responsibilities. Alegbeleye and Kaufman (2020) contributed by claiming the follower role is associated with inadequate creative thinking.

2.4.6. Summary of middle management

Literature revealed the middle managers participate in a variety of roles in the performance of organisation duties. Hence, the middle manager can act as both a leader and a follower on the same day. The multiple roles imply that different audiences, senior management and subordinates are served. The position of the middle manager in the organisation's hierarchy has been represented by the metaphor of a sandwich.

Vertical code-switching enables the middle manager to serve both audiences by transitioning between the two roles. However, recurrent vertical code-switching may result in role conflicts, resulting in irritation and anxiety for the middle manager.

In addition, studies have shown that middle managers want to be perceived as leaders rather than followers because of the negative connotations associated with the followership role.

This study has the potential to extend the present business and theoretical understanding regarding the lived experiences of middle managers operating under internal stressed conditions. As a result, the study acquired insight into the challenge of fulfilling a function in the genuine middle of an organisation's hierarchy, thereby behaving as both a leader and a follower on various occasions during the day.

Figure 2 was created by the researcher after considering the findings from the literature investigation on executive turnover and vertical code-switching at middle management level. The red dash line surrounding the images indicates functionality of the organisation that is affected, as well as the middle tier and the operational level.
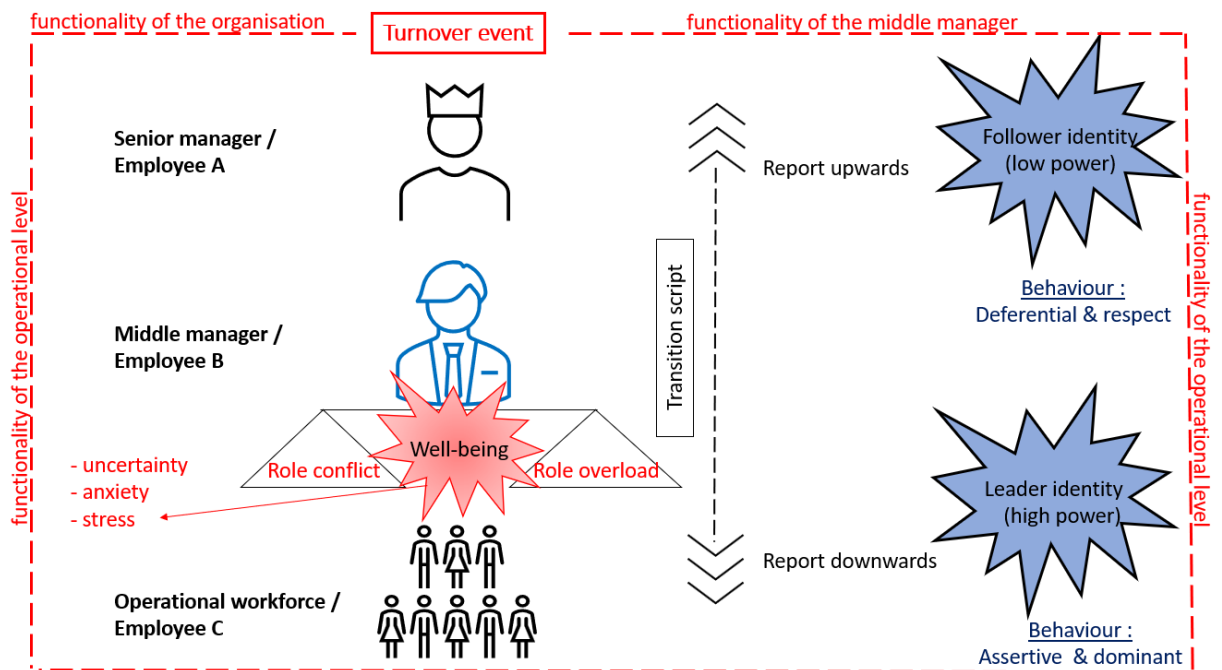
Figure 2: Framework of executive turnover and vertical code-switching at the middle management level

Figure 2 can also be compared to Figure 9 Framework_turnover_influence_switch developed on the findings of the current study as presented in the conclusion in Chapter 7.

This is the closing of the literature discussion on middle management. The following section is stipulated under the chapter's structure Framework_literature_review.

2.5.   Theory

2.5.1.   Social identity theory

The researcher has developed a summary table of the theories that were considered for this study. See Table 2 illustrating a Comparision_table_summary_theories.

2.5.1.1   Definition

The social identity theory has been selected to draw insights from the organisational environment with the intent to understand the relationship between the two social roles, namely executive level and the middle manager.

An element of social identity theory is the classification of groups or categories within

an organisation. When viewed from the outside, one may see that the organisation's functions are organised into a hierarchical structure of job levels. These job levels are divided by authority levels (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

2.5.1.2   Purpose

The social identity theory has a dual purpose. First, it logically divides and organises the social environment, creating categories and tiers to assist with characterising the individuals within the social environment. Second, it provides the ability of an individual to define themself in a social environment facilitated by social categorisation. Consequently, this provides an explanation of who they are (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). According to this perspective, social identity theory refers to the feeling of having a connection with or being part of a particular group of humans. Consequently, social identity offers a partial response to the question "Who am I?" In addition, growing an understanding of one's identity, hence who you are, assists in better adapting to the environment and fulfilling their duties or responsibilities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

2.5.1.3   Critique

Social identity theory explains only the awareness or feeling of one's connection to an environment, and not the behaviour and performance that may precede or follow that feeling (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The aim of this research is to understand how internal organisational pressure, namely turnover at executive level, impacts on the transition activity of a middle manager in adopting and abandoning different roles. The transition activity is a behavioural act (Anicich et al., 2021) and, therefore, not appropriate for the purpose of this theory.

2.5.2.   Role identity theory

The researcher has developed a summary table of the theories that were considered for this study. See Table 2 illustrating a Comparision_table_summary_theories.

2.5.2.1   Definition

A situational problem develops for the middle manager, who must assess the situation to identify which role to select to act at a particular moment, and must therefore select the salient role to perform. This indicates that the middle manager needs to adopt a power level for efficient execution of organisational responsibilities. This predicament persists throughout the day, necessitating the middle manager's use of high power (as a leader) or low power (as a follower) (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). This decision introduces the role of identity theory.

This implies that multiple identities can coexist within a single individual, such as leader, follower, mentor or scholar (Maurer & London, 2018). The different identities stem from factors like memberships, jobs, countries of origin and even genders. However, in any given situation, only one of the roles tends to be operative and dominant (Selenko, Berkers, Carter, Woods, Otto, Urbach, & De Witte, 2018).

2.5.2.2   Self-identification and persona

The middle manager's actions will be shaped by the role that has the most personal meaning to them, the role that helps define "who I am". (Yoshikawa & Hu, 2017; Carsten, Uhl-Bien & Huang, 2018). Moreover, role identity describes the sense of self-identification in relation to their work. It describes the middle manager's perception of themself and their activities (Maurer & London, 2018; Reay, Goodrick, Waldorff, & Casebeer, 2017; Tempelaar & Rosenkranz, 2019). As a result, the middle manager assumes a persona when playing a particular role since the role identity theory defines who you are in the context of that role (Ashforth et al., 2000). Thus, as the middle manager transitions between the different roles or changing from one identity to another, Ashforth (2000) described this process as "doffing one persona and donning another" (p. 21).

Maurer and London (2018) supported the claim of Ashforth et al. (2008) that identities include the individual's "knowledge, skill and ability" as well as "values and goals" (p. 1438). The identity of a role is thus shaped by a combination of intangible, job-related qualities (such as self-reliance, emotional stability, aggressiveness and objectivity) and more tangible, self-revealed characteristics (such as "intelligence and charisma") (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 475). Overall, identity is something that manifests uniquely for each individual and it therefore looks different for everyone

(Selenko et al., 2018).

2.5.2.3   Role orientation

Carsten et al. (2018) defined the sense of self-identification as role orientation. Role orientation refers to the assumptions about the responsibilities inherent in a role, as well as the actions and behaviours that produce successful performance of the role. Role orientation is individual-based and, therefore, employees in the same position can have vastly diverse conceptions of their responsibilities. This strengthens the argument made by Selenko et al. (2018) that each person's identity is distinct. As role orientation affects how individuals behave in each capacity, different role orientations result in distinct behavioural patterns (Carsten et al., 2018).

2.5.2.4   Example of multiple identities

In the backdrop of the Challenger catastrophe, Tempelaar and Rosenkranz (2019) provided the example previously used by Ashforth and Mael (1989) to illustrate how different behavioural patterns lead to varied employment results. The Challenger was not launched when a senior engineer was instructed to "take off his engineering hat and put on his management hat" in evaluating the available information (p. 1521). Therefore, one's judgement of available knowledge and the choices we consider are profoundly impacted by one's role identities. It is claimed that each role has different expectations and therefore achieves different results and consequences.

2.5.2.5   Purpose

In summary, identity serves three main purposes, namely that it helps people make sense of their social environment, it gives them a sense of self-worth so they can feel good about themselves, and it sets expectations, attitudes and behaviours. Therefore, attitudes, behaviours and choices can be better understood and explained when viewed through the lens of the salient identity category of an individual (Selenko et al., 2018; Tempelaar & Rosenkranz, 2019).

2.5.2.6 Critique

Upon review, the research challenge is only partially addressed by the role identity theory, even though it can effectively describe the middle manager inside a specific power state or role(s) and offer insights into the pertinent behavioural patterns. It is still unclear how the middle manager transition between the various responsibilities in the face of organisational pressure that is brought on by executive turnover. Further research into role transitioning theory is necessary because role identity theory is constrained in addressing the research problem.

2.5.2.7 Relation to role transition theory

However, role identity theory is still relevant to role transition theory due to the correlation between the degree of the shift from one role to the next. The more distant the two roles (leader and follower) identities are from one another, the more dramatic the transition between the two roles. The challenge lies in psychologically abandoning the identity implied by one position (disengaging) and adopting the radically different identity required by another role (reengaging). This is referred to as the "shifting cognitive gears" phenomenon (Ashforth et al., 2000).

2.5.3. Role transition theory

The researcher has developed a summary table of the theories that were considered for this study. See Table 2 illustrating a Comparision table summary theories.

2.5.3.1 Definition

The role transition theory has been chosen to share insights into how the middle manager moved between the high- and low-power levels to fulfil their duties. The theory will provide an explanation of the question on how a middle manager in an organisational hierarchy may simultaneously play the role of being superior with their staff, while remain submissive to their superiors. Simply put, we are interested in how middle managers frequently switch between different jobs within an organisation (Ashforth et al., 2000).

The preceding theory on role identity taught us that individuals are capable of successfully performing a diverse range of roles within an organisation (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). This requires the middle manager to engage or enter a role.

Simultaneously, the middle manager disengages or exits the opposite role. The literature referred to "wear different hats" and "shift gears" (Ashforth, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 472; Maurer & London, 2018), which point to the mental process of switching between roles (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017).

It is suggested that the acquisition of new information and abilities is not sufficient for a successful role transition; the motivations of the individual must also change. Hence, a person has not completed role transitioning, simply because they have taken on a new identity, if their areas of focus stay the same within a separate role identity. The theory suggests the individual needs to define themself and receive satisfaction from performing well in the new role to completely embrace a new identity. Hence, the individual must also adopt the "motivation via values, goals and beliefs", and not just adopt the "competence via behaviours, knowledge, and skills" (Maurer & London, 2018, p. 1429). In addition, the authors claimed managers who have recently been promoted often revert to their former levels of technical ability because they lack the necessary skills, competence and motivational orientation to transition into the new role.

2.5.3.2   *Role transition scripts*

The role transition theory states that the formation of role transition scripts occurs as the result of persistent participation in micro-role transitions. A script is an in-memory flowchart that lays out the steps to take, or the events that should occur in each given scenario. After some time, changing gears might become natural and easy, with little mental preparation (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al., 2021; Ashforth et al., 2000; Falls & Allen, 2020). Return to the literature discussion regarding vertical code-switching explaining transition scripts Script_under_vertical_code.

2.5.3.3   *Role boundaries*

Role transition theory centres around role boundaries that outline an employee's several role identities and the appropriate behaviour connected to each role. Places, people and ideas that seem linked, similar or functionally related are given their own "mental fences" to separate them from other, unrelated areas. "Mental fences" are erected when a person wants to reduce the complexity of their surroundings and give it a sense of organising. Examples of social domains that are developed because of borders are home, job and church. The "mental fences" make it possible for one to

focus more intently on the domain that is most important or salient at the moment, and less on the domains that are not as important. Thus, boundaries isolate the salient role from the irrelevant role in a particular moment or situation (Ashforth, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000). Consequently, boundaries between domains are not always drawn the same way; for example, one middle manager will allow simultaneous interaction with senior management and subordinates, whereas another middle manager will keep the interaction separate. In essence, the boundaries of a role help people figure out who they are in that role since they indicate what tasks fall under its purview and which ones are the responsibility of other roles.

2.5.4. Summary of theories

Table 2 presents a summary comparison of the key elements as explored in the theories to assist the researcher in answering the research questions. The literature review suggested that the role identity theory and the role transition theory are more aligned with the aim of the research to understand the impact of executive turnover on vertical code-switching. The investigation into the social identity theory leads to the conclusion that the theory cannot be used to assist the researcher in gaining insights into the aim of the study. The social identity theory did, however, assist with comprehension of the organisational environment and its corresponding hierarchical structure (senior, middle and lower operational levels). In contrast, the role identity theory is beneficial for the study since it emphasises awareness of the existence of multiple roles or identities for completing responsibilities. The role transition theory furthermore contributes to the study of the mental and emotional process of moving between power states, including the investigation of whether any mental models of engaging in transitional behaviour exist.

Table 2: Comparison of the key elements as in theories

	Social identity	Role identity	Role transition
Relevant question	Understand the organisational environment	Describe individual within a role and provide explanation for behaviour	Focus on the transition process between different power levels
Framework	Classify groups or categories in organisation	Multiple identities coexist within a single individual	"Wearing different hats" or "shifting gears"
Main idea	Define individual as part of a group or a category in a social environment	Each identity or role has its own expectations	Successful transition implies individual adopts the motivation and competence of each role
Purpose 1	Divide and organise the social environment	Make sense of social environment	Facilitate a smooth move between different roles to occupy
Purpose 2	Individual defines themselves within the context of connection or belong to a group	Provide sense of self-worth to individual	
Purpose 3		Inform expectations, attitudes and behaviours	
Importance of "Who am I?"	The theory answers this question only partially, since it looks at the individual as part of a group or category, and not the individual as a single entity	Self-identification: perception of oneself and associated qualities and characteristics in a role	Explain "Who I am" in a particular situation based on the role and behaviours adopted
Critique	Does not explain behaviour patterns or performance of the individual	Does not explain the transition process between power states	

Return to the literature discussion regarding Social_identity_theory, or the literature discussion regarding Role_identity_theory, or the literature discussion regarding Role_transition_theory.

This is the closing of the literature discussion regarding the role theories. It provided the return to the introduction about the chapter's structure Framework_literature_review.

2.6. Conclusion

The purpose of the literature review was to comprehend the most recent findings and discussions surrounding the influence of executive turnover on middle managers' code-switching between high and low power states.

2.6.1. Executive employee turnover

A review of the literature about executive turnover has revealed that it is seen as a significant event with substantial implications for an organisation (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019; Wang & Sun, 2022). According to research, turnover at executive level depletes the organisation of valuable and difficult-to-replace resources such as knowledge, skills and abilities (Hancock et al., 2017). However, the literature tends to show a greater number of negative impacts on organisations, while only a small number of studies examine the beneficial impacts on the performance of organisations. In addition, several studies investigated turnover intentions.

Insights from the literature suggest that executive turnover can have far-reaching consequences for an organisation and its workforce as a whole, but also for everyone engaged with the organisation, such as customers. The event of turnover has a ripple effect, altering the organisation's functionality and the middle manager's connectivity to the executive and operational levels. However, there is a gap in the existing literature about the comprehension of the depth of the impact on the procedure of vertical code-switching. Therefore, the researcher sought to investigate the changes occurring above and below the middle organisational layer through the perspectives of middle managers because of executive turnover as an organisational pressure.

2.6.2. Vertical code-switching

What is known is that, in order to fulfil organisational obligations, vertical code-switching enables the middle manager to shift mentally or physically between several roles. The result is an increased ability for the middle manager to interact with different audiences.

The existing literature to date failed to provide insights into the power transition within vertical code-switching. It was found that existing literature focused on code-switching in language relation to linguistic and cross-cultural contexts, but with limited consideration of its relation to power dynamics in organisations (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017).

The literature demonstrates that a turnover event at executive level has an impact on the functionality of the organisation and, consequently, on the functionality of the middle manager as an integral part of the organisation functions. However, there is

a gap in the literature that explains how vertical code-switching reacts to internal pressures such as executive turnover.

Literature calls for further research into the unknown factors that prompt the middle managers to switch roles, "the mental and emotional process of transitioning, including mental models of engaging in transitioning behaviour, motivation to transition, self-efficacy in playing different roles, and social pressure to play different roles" (Falls & Allen, 2020, p. 35). The study aims to determine the impact of internal organisational pressure on the ability of the middle manager to move between multiple roles.

2.6.3. Middle management

The purpose of this literature review was to gain insight into the phenomenon of vertical code-switching by middle management in response to internal organisational pressure. The research revealed that there is a wealth of knowledge regarding middle managers, including their leadership philosophies and the crucial strategic role they play in an organisation. However, under internal organisational pressure, academics have not yet investigated the idea of vertical code-switching between the various power states associated with being a middle manager. Anicich and Hirsh (2017) proposed further research is needed to comprehend an employee's perception of authority and power in relation to organisational structure.

The research questions that resulted from the gap analysis of the literature review are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Research questions

3.1. Introduction

This chapter lists the research questions. The purpose of the research is to explore the impact of turnover at executive level on the vertical code-switching capacity of the middle manager between the multiple roles while performing their daily responsibilities. Three research questions were formulated in response to the literature review to address the objectives of the study. These are discussed in the sections that follow.

3.2. Research Question 1

In what ways is turnover at executive level viewed as added pressure on vertical code-switching?

Research Question 1 aims to determine if turnover experienced at executive level offers any obstacles to the middle manager's continued ability to fulfil both the leader and follower roles. Or, if the turnover conditions restrict the middle manager to a single function of either leader or follower. In essence, it will determine if the nature of the middle manager's work changes during turnover event conditions. This will provide deeper insight into the working conditions caused by a turnover event to determine if the event qualifies as an internal organisational pressure. This question therefore helps to understand and gain knowledge about organisational pressure. Anicich and Hirsh (2017) called for more research needs to be done to learn how individuals analyse and digest the situation caused by the increased demands they face in the workplace while still carrying out their responsibilities.

3.3. Research Question 2

In what ways does vertical code-switching impact on the performance of the middle manager?

The purpose of this research question was to gain a deeper understanding of the behaviour and feelings of the middle manager while entering and exiting different roles since little is known about the phenomenon of vertical code-switching (Falls & Allen, 2020). The researcher sought to comprehend how a middle manager's ability

to carry out their responsibilities is impacted by their position as a leader and follower respectively, since the behaviours in the two distinct roles can impact on performance (Geys et al., 2020). The research question will give the researcher an understanding of the mental and physical health of a middle manager during an executive turnover event, as the ability to perform one's responsibilities is strongly linked to one's mental and physical health (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017).

3.4. Research Question 3

How does vertical code-switching influence the middle manager's role identity?

The research question centred around the relationship between the quality of the role transitioning act and the identity of the middle manager during an executive turnover event. Deeper insights will be gained in the frequency of the transitioning as well as into the mental models utilised for the transition process. Anicich and Hirsh (2017) suggested that frequent transitioning between the different roles is likely to create role conflicts since there is an imbalance between the role identity and the role behaviour adopted by the middle manager. In turn, role conflict impacts negatively on the well-being of the middle manager. Additional studies on the mental and emotional aspects of transitioning, such as transitional behaviour models, were required by Falls and Allen (2020).

Chapter 4 will explain the research design and methodology used to address the three research questions.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design and the rationale behind the chosen methodology to answer the research questions raised in Chapter 3. A qualitative, exploratory research design was adopted. Data for this study were collected through virtual, semi-structured interviews with middle managers who experienced turnover at executive level. Subsequently, the data were analysed, and similar findings were grouped into themes that either corroborate or challenge the summary of the literature review reported in Chapter 2.

Furthermore, the chapter includes information on the specific methods used to conduct the study, the sampling method and size, the measurement instrument, the data gathering and analysis approaches. The elements for ethics are considered. Lastly, quality control, such as data validity and reliability, and the limitations of this research are also discussed in this chapter.

4.2. Choice of research methodology and design

4.2.1. Research method

In Chapter 2, we demonstrated the lack of empirical research on the phenomenon of vertical code-switching. Therefore, the objective of the current study was to gain a holistic understanding of how turnover at executive level impacts the transition of the middle manager between high and low power states known as vertical code-switching (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). The interpretivist school of thought has been utilised to gain insights from the experiences of the social identity group of middle managers in "their role as social actors" (Saunders & Lewis, 2018, p. 109). Experiences as professionals, rather than the individuals themselves, were the primary focus of the study. Opportunity was provided to the middle managers to voice their perceptions and interpretations by sharing their reality through real stories and experiences lived. Hence, the researcher gained an understanding of the human behaviour in the significant role the middle manager plays in an organisation (Creswell, 2014, p. 29; Leitch, Hill, & Harrison, 2010, p. 70).

A qualitative, exploratory methodology allowed the researcher a depth of understanding into the thinking, motivations, behaviour, attitudes and perceptions of the individual. The researcher approached the research problem from the perspective of the middle manager, inquiring as to the causes of actions and behaviours during the executive level turnover (Creswell, 2014, p.29). Complementarily, Saunders and Lewis (2018) claimed an exploratory study is appropriate since the researcher wanted to learn more about an unusual social occurrence, named vertical code-switching.

4.2.2. Data collection and measurement instrument

Given the limited research into the phenomenon of vertical code-switching among middle managers, the research followed an inductive approach "to discover new knowledge" (Woo, O'Boyle, & Spector, 2017, p. 257) about an unfamiliar topic. Hence, the authors described the process as "exploratory and data-driven" (p. 258). Saunders and Lewis (2018) explained that the theory will be built from what the researcher observed. Creswell (2014) concurred and extended the explanation as a bottom-up approach whereby data are gathered and subsequently organised into more informational units to build patterns, categories and themes. Therefore, data were gathered through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews conducted virtually with middle managers who had experienced executive turnover.

Maxwell (2013) labelled the researcher as the interviewer and the interview guide as the measurement instrument. The researcher is considered to use her senses during the interviews to interpret the interview situation and to gather data. In support, Saunders and Lewis (2018) argued the interview guide led the researcher during the interview process in collecting the required data through answers to the research questions.

The existing literature served as a foundation for the adoption of the interview guide. The 16 interview questions addressed the 3 research questions as specified in Chapter 3. Table 3 below lists the interview questions that address the appropriate research questions. Questions 1 to 3 in the interview guide were asked to determine whether the candidates to be interviewed fit the sample criteria. Question 1 inquired the current occupancy of the candidate. Question 2 prompted the candidate to share the reporting line upwards and downwards, thus determining the middle manager

position. Question 3 requested the candidate to share the specific turnover at executive level experienced as a middle manager. Please see Appendix_3_Interview_guide for the detailed interview guide that was used during the interviews.

Table 3: The research questions with interview questions

RESEARCH QUESTION	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Research Question 1: In what ways is turnover in executive level viewed as added pressure on vertical code-switching?	**Research objective is to gain knowledge about the added pressures such as turnover event.** 4. In what ways was the organisation prepared for the change? 5. In what ways were you prepared for the change? 6. How did the change affect the functionality of the organisation? Please elaborate on the changes you have witnessed. 7. How did the change affect your ability to move between being a follower and a leader?
Research Question 2: In what ways does vertical code-switching impact on the performance of the middle manager?	**Research objective is to gain insight into vertical code-switching.** 8. How would you define vertical code-switching? If incorrect, I will explain the concept. 10. What is it like to be a leader in a middle management position to perform your duties? 11. What is it like to be a follower in a middle management position to perform your duties? 13. Share about a situation where you applied the incorrect level of power or wearing the wrong hat when interacting with others; what were the consequences of the performance?
RESEARCH QUESTION	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Research Question 3: How does vertical code-switching influence middle manager's role and identity?	**Research objective is to gain insight into sense of power and the subsequent impact thereof.** 9. Now that you are familiar with vertical code-switching, could you elaborate the distinct roles you play in the organisational context and if any overlapping exists? 12. How do you understand role transition? If incorrect, I will explain the concept. 14. How do you transition or switch cognitive gears into a new role? That is, enact the role of boss toward subordinates and then enact the role of subordinate toward her boss. Are there any processes that you go through to move from one role to another?

| | 15. Can you elaborate on the frequency of these role transitions you undertake during a day? |
| | 16. In summary, how would you describe your position and are you leaning toward a more salient position? How does it influence the separate roles you are required to perform? |

The detail of the Discussion of interviews can be found in Chapter 5 section 5.6.

The interview guide allowed the researcher to adjust the order of the questions to ensure a smooth flow during the interview process. The responses of the participants guided the researcher on which questions to ask, as well as the order of the questions (Saunders & Lewis, 2018, p. 163). This implied that the sequence of the questions was not fixed. However, the interview guide ensured consistency across all the interviews in the manner how the interviews were conducted.

A consistency matrix ensured that the interview guide kept the interview within the scope of the research and that relevant data were obtained. Furthermore, the consistency matrix ensured the alignment for the literature review that formed the research questions, and the research questions gave rise to the interview questions. Please see Appendix_4_consistency_matrix for the detailed golden thread application. This process ensured the alignment between the research components.

One pilot interview was conducted formally in advance by the researcher as proposed by Saunders and Lewis (2018, p. 165). The pilot test assisted the researcher to determine the effectiveness and credibility of the interview guide, examine the interviewing technique and, lastly, to determine if the participants would understand the questions to ensure that relevant data would be collected to answer the research questions. This exercise validated the alignment between the interview guide and the research questions with no interview questions being excluded from the interview guide. However, the order of the questions was altered to ensure a better flow for the conversation between the researcher and the participant. Saunders and Lewis (2018) are in favour of pilot exercises as this process assures future enhanced effectiveness by providing the researcher the opportunity to make changes. Despite this, the participant of the pilot interview met the criteria for the interview, but the data were not included in the research.

Finally, the analysis of the data enabled the emergence of patterns and themes. This

study was not based on prior research with already reported findings or beliefs, but entailed the conduction of a new study. This process answered the research questions as stipulated in Chapter 3.

4.2.3. Time horizon

A cross-sectional study was used as the researcher conducted interviews only once in 2022 and collected the data from various participants at a single point in time, specifically from 11 August 2022 to 1 September 2022. Saunders and Lewis (2018) described this as a snapshot (p. 129). This is because of the time constraint of the research project.

4.3. Population

Saunders and Lewis (2018) described the population as the complete set of group members, therefore, it can comprise people, organisations or places. The population identified for the study was middle managers from various industries within South African.

The definition of a middle manager is described by Gjerde and Alvesson (2020), who used the metaphor "Janus-faced" (p. 129) to simplify this social category. The metaphor refers to the Roman god Janus. Janus has, according to legend, two faces, which enables him to look in two opposing directions at once. Likewise, the middle manager simultaneously interacts with upper management and subordinates. This position is referred to as a sandwich effect.

Furthermore, the population of middle managers was representative over multiple industries and were not industry or company specific. This ensured that diverse perspectives were heard, compared to a single company that provides a more culturally focused insight (Woo et al., 2017).

4.4. Unit of analysis

Bhattacharjee (2012) described the unit of analysis as "a person, group, organisation, country, object, or any other entity that you wish to draw scientific inferences about" (p. 65). This refers to the source of the data. For this research, the unit of analysis was the middle managers' perspectives about their lived experiences of turnover at executive level.

4.5. Sampling method and size

A sample is defined as a fraction of all the group members in the population (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A complete list of the population of middle managers was not known. Hence, a random performance was not possible in the selection of a sample. Therefore, the researcher inquired from fellow MBA students as well as the researcher's own network whether any were interested in participating in the study. This is known as non-probability sampling. In the absence of a sample frame, Saunders and Lewis (2018) suggested this sample method is the best to use. The different networks delivered quick responses and 14 candidates indicated their willingness to participate. In addition, one candidate was identified through snowball sampling, which is a volunteer sampling technique.

Thereafter, purposive sampling was conducted where the interview participants were evaluated using the following criteria set (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013) to participate in the research. Participants had to be:

- employed in a middle manager position, meaning reporting upwards with subordinates reporting to them (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020);
- experienced internal organisational pressure of turnover at executive level; and
- working for an organisation based in South Africa.

The participants of the interviews are introduced in Chapter 5 discussing the Findings_interview_summary_and_methods. In addition, the findings of the criteria are discussed in Sample_eligibility_interview_participant.

The criteria assisted the researcher to select relevant participants for the interviews to ensure that pertinent, rich information could be collected (Saunders & Townsend,

2016). According to this perspective, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007, p. 111) argued that researchers must "select participants that maximise understanding of the phenomenon … meaning they are information rich". This contributed to "breadth, depth and saliency of data necessary for authentic analysis and reporting" (p. 836). Creswell (2014) simplified this view by explaining rich data are provided when the participant provides data that are detailed and diverse enough to offer a complete and illuminating picture of what happened.

As a result of the preceding methods followed, the sample included participants from various industries with an unequal representation. Knowledgeable participants were prioritised over randomly selected ones, as representational equality was overlooked (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

The sample size was set as 15 participants for the interviews with saturation in mind. Saunders and Lewis (2018) recommended a sample size of between 12 and 30 will be sufficient to provide answers on a student project. In this research study, saturation was reached at the 15th interview and the researcher decided to cease conducting interviews. Saunders and Lewis (2018) further claimed that focus must be on the quality of the interviews, thus the depth of the insights, and not the quantity.

4.6. Data gathering process

McCracken (1988) argued that there are three data sources accessible to the researcher. First is the literature review as condensed in Chapter 2, followed by a cultural review that is an understanding and acknowledgement of the researcher's own experience and assumptions about the research topic. Both these reviews start the search for categories and relationships. However, the third source, the interview itself, is crucial to pursue as a source of information.

The researcher personally conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 middle managers as data collection. This method was followed since the main purpose of the study was to develop an understanding of an unknown social impact that has not yet been adequately explained in the literature, namely the impact of internal organisational pressure in the form of turnover at executive level on middle managers. Saunders and Lewis (2018) referred to semi-structured interviews as a helpful technique for gathering information to get fresh perspectives on how reality is seen.

Semi-structured interviews are a flexible process where the researcher uses predetermined questions, but with the ability to change the order in which the questions were asked. Additionally, the researcher chose to disregard some questions where it was revealed that the question was irrelevant to the participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2018, p. 158). The responses of the participants to the questions influenced this process and thus not all interviews followed this practice. As a result, this approach enabled the researcher to engage in conversational behaviour with the participant to promote a two-way discussion of perspectives. This enabled the participant to describe a situation from their own perspective, and not in the language of the researcher (Yin, 2016).

The individual interviews were the most suitable to share confidential information given the delicate research topic. The researcher requested the participants to speak without restrain and, as a result, rich insights were delivered, of which some are shared in Chapter 5. The participants felt relaxed in knowing that no judgement would be placed upon them, and they were protected by the confidentiality agreement. As a result, they were candid about their realities. The qualitative interviews opened a Pandora's box full of infinitely varied and plenty facts (McCracken, 1988).

King, Horrocks and Brooks (2018) stressed that the setting in which an interview is conducted has an impact on the activities in the interview itself. The authors suggested that consideration must be applied to factors like privacy, comfort, disruptions and background noises when interviews are scheduled. Therefore, the participant had options to conduct the interview face-to-face or virtually according to their preferences. The pilot interview was conducted face-to-face, while all other participants opted for virtual interactions. The virtual option allowed the researcher to conduct interviews nationally and thus not limited to the researcher's place of residence (King et al., 2018). Although the majority of participants resided in the Gauteng province, a participant from the Free State and one from Mpumalanga were included in the sample. This implied that the researcher had the benefit of collecting data over a large geographical area.

A consent form was distributed to each participant before the interview. Please see Appendix_2_consent_form for an example of the consent form distributed to the participants. A signed copy thereof was returned to the interviewer as indication of the participant's willingness to join in the research study. The consent form introduced the research study and briefly shared the purpose of the research. It also stated that the participation of the interview was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any stage. These factors were reiterated at the start of each interview. The interviewer also assured the confidentiality of each participant.

Virtual interviews were conducted with the software program, MS Teams, which also facilitated the audio-recording. Using the interview guide (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), the interviewer started posing open-ended questions. The participants were requested to provide their own personal experiences on how they transitioned between the different power states. This method enabled interaction and situational adaption. The interviewer asked clarification questions if the responses were unclear. Maxwell (2013) referred to this process as "respondent validation" (p. 244), and it eliminates the chance of misunderstanding the intent behind the participant's words as well as their perspective of the situation. Additionally, it is a critical technique for recognising one's own biases. Likewise, for questions answered inadequately, the interviewer probed the participant for further information. These interactions from the interviewer ensured high-quality data as deeper insights were gained in the perspectives and experiences of the participants and kept within the scope of the research questions (Creswell, 2014; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The duration of interviews ranged from 33 minutes to 1 hour and 52 minutes. The researcher did not detect a fear of judgement in any interview that prevented the participants to share their lived experiences.

The researcher took field notes during the interview process (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Additionally, the interview was audio-recorded upon permission of the participant (Bhattacherjee, 2012). No participant was under any pressure from the researcher to persuade them for recording purposes. Both the field notes and audio-recording acted as prevention on misreporting of the participants. Creswell (2014) encouraged the practice of field notes in the event of the recording equipment malfunctions. In addition, these procedures strengthen the transparency and trustworthiness of the data collected.

Each audio-recording was "transcribed verbatim" into a text format (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 96). The researcher reviewed the transcriptions as a preparation for data analysis (Saunders & Lewis, 2018, p. 204) and used the field notes to confirm for accuracy. The aim was to improve the quality of the data for the analyses. The researcher kept the transcripts in a Cloud storage. Furthermore, the recordings were password-protected. This ensured further confidentiality protection of the participants (King et al., 2018).

The researcher acknowledged that the trustworthiness of the data may have been compromised by the researcher's personal biases (Maxwell, 2013) that are formed through experiences, personal beliefs and education. Similarly, Bhattacherjee (2012) warned that the researcher's interpretation of the data may be skewed due to her existing lived experience with the research topic. To reduce the risk of biases, the researcher was conscious of the biases; she ceased to believe her own assumption, and accepted the participants' statements as normal and true during data collection and in-text transcribing (McCracken, 1988). This required the researcher to question the respondent and elicit their comprehension of the relevant questions asked.

Creswell (2014) described this process as an emergent design. Emergent design is the capacity to adjust to novel theories, notions or insights that surface throughout the course of qualitative research. In contrast to more organised methods, an emergent design invites unexpected information, frequently enhancing the richness of the data.

4.7.   Data analysis approach

The researcher preferred the thematic approach to analyse the collected data as Saunders and Lewis (2018) argued this is a flexible method to use for qualitative data. The intent was to make meaning out of the data by dissecting and breaking it down, and assembling it again (Creswell, 2014, p. 195). By following this process, themes have emerged through examination of the data to answer the research questions.

For the purpose of conducting an analysis of the qualitative information gathered from all interviews, Creswell (2014) specified the following stages:

Step 1:   The audio-recordings were organised and submitted to a transcription software program for delivery of in-text transcription. Accuracy checks were done on the interview transcripts. Thereafter, the in-text data were structured and prepared for further analyses; transcriptions were cleaned with regard to the removal of the identities of the participants from the transcripts. The names of the participants were replaced by identifiers Participant nr 1, Participant nr 2, et cetera. The participant's gender and racial groups were not reported, considering it had no bearing on the study. Chapter 5 gave a thorough description of the transcription procedure that was followed.

Step 2:   The researcher reread the data and got familiar with the meaning thereof.

Step 3:   Transcripts were imported into ATLAS.ti software, a computer program for analysing qualitative data. Dissecting of the data commenced and codes were created from the data that most accurately reflected the responses of the participants. This is known as open coding. The researcher allowed data to reveal the codes and did not use preconceived codes based on the literature review. Preconceived codes would limit the unique insights collected from the middle managers during the interviews. McCracken (1988) used an archaeologist to illustrate this process, gathering relevant information and discarding irrelevant information without considering how the relevant information would be put together.

Step 4:   The data were assembled again through the searching of patterns and grouped similar codes into categories, termed axial coding, and then grouped into themes, named selective coding.

Step 5:   Themes were reviewed to answer the research questions discussed in Chapter 3.

Step 6:   Lastly, facts and outcomes were interpreted to complete the analysis.

This was an iterative process and, during a second round, all codes, categories and themes were evaluated against the research questions and improved to ensure answering thereof. Yin (2016) asserted that the examination of the data must be a continuous process as it ensures data accuracy. The author also advises the researcher to always keep in mind that one's own values can influence the interpretation of the data. Several iterations were used to refine the categories and themes to cut down on repetition and increase transparency. Please see Appendix_5_thematic_map for the final coding thematic map.

Furthermore, the findings of the interview data are discussed in Chapter 5 section 5.5 Finding_coding_and_analysis_of_data.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) argued that the trustworthiness of the study improves by closely following an analytic procedure or applying a set of codes, called a coding scheme.

4.8. Quality controls

Quality controls are concerned with the trustworthiness of the data (Stiles, 1993). This is echoed by Stahl and King (2020), who explain that qualitative researchers viewed reality as created, based on the experiences of the middle managers interviewed. Qualitative research does not seek to establish a level of validity; rather, it aims for the quality of credibility or trustworthiness. This indicates that the reader will have a sense of trust in what the researcher has reported. The trustworthiness of qualitative research can be assessed using a standardised set of criteria, for example credibility, transferability, reliability and confirmability. These are discussed in the sections that follow.

4.8.1. Credibility

Credibility is concerned with the close alignment between the findings and reality (Stahl & King, 2020). Thus, credibility demonstrates how certain a qualitative researcher is of their findings. Myers (2018) echoed Klein and Myers (1999) that it is necessary for the findings to seem reasonable for making sense. Ultimately, a qualitative researcher must show that they have a firm grasp of the cultural and social context of their research.

The researcher used the method of triangulation to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the findings. During the interviews, the researcher asked the same questions to multiple participants and received similar answers. Examples of the similar answers can be seen in the Appendix_6_frequency_analysis that shows various participants agree on a single topic.

Furthermore, "rich, thick descriptions" were used to communicate the findings of the research (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). The original quotes from the perspectives of the participants have been preserved and shared in Chapter 5. This practice allowed the reader to hear the voice of the participants. Myers (2018) postulates that this method can help elevate a story's overall appeal.

4.8.2. *Transferability*

Generalisability in quantitative research refers to the idea that the findings of a particular study can be applicable to all environments relevant to the setting being studied (Given, 2008). In this perspective, it is the ability to apply the research findings to situations outside of the research topic. Stahl and King (2020) pointed out that the understanding of the study deepens with applying findings from one environment to another. Therefore, the researcher made the current study transferable by describing the circumstances and fieldwork in detail as seen in Chapter 4.

In addition, the thorough selection of the participants in this study, under the assumption that they accurately reflect the entire population, further boosted transferability. This was achieved by conducting interview checks to ensure the suitability of the participant. Participation in the interviews signified that the participant fitted the criteria of having experienced an executive turnover event and being employed as middle manager within a South African organisation. Morse et al. (2002) argued that the participant must have knowledge of the research topic to be able to contribute towards the study. Participants were chosen that best reflected the characteristics of the study, the scope of the study and the research strategy. This ensured relevant data were collected to answer the research questions.

Lastly, the researcher took care to ensure the research questions were adequately addressed. An interview guide, as developed by previous quality research, was used during all interviews. This provided consistency with data collection through the

middle management sampling. In addition, this ensured that the interview process was conducted within the scope of the research questions and that irrelevant questions were not prompted.

To conclude, an accurate portrayal of the setting is the obligation of the researcher, who allows the reader to decide whether the findings are applicable to their own situation (Given, 2008).

4.8.3. Confirmability

Quantitative research frequently equates confirmability with objectivity. In return, objectivity is a measure of the accuracy with which the study expresses the truth or meaning. Therefore, confirmability refers to the extent to which the researcher can demonstrate that their interpretations of the participants' constructs are grounded in the participants' constructions, accompanied with the data analysis, result findings and conclusions. In this perspective, confirmability is defined as the extent to which the findings of the research are in line with the objectives of the investigation and are not impacted by the beliefs or biases of the researcher (Jensen, 2008).

Confirmability necessitates that the researcher acknowledged any possible biases by being forthright and honest about them, and then employing the appropriate qualitative methodological techniques to respond to those biases. Retaining this argument, the researcher was conscious of the influence and possibility of being deterred by biases from both the participant and researcher. An inherent risk of the research process is the continuous involvement of the researcher from the beginning of the study. Hence, a pilot interview was conducted as a means of a pre-exercise for the researcher to lead an interview. In addition, it assessed the responses of the researcher to ensure no influencing of the participants, and made the researcher aware of possible leading. It also allowed the researcher to gain confidence in the interview process (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Subsequently, the researcher reflected at frequent intervals during the interview process to ensure collection of the correct data from the participants, and to guard against researcher biases. This created a debriefing process for the researcher to ensure usage of correct data in the content analysis process.

Additionally, the researcher kept detailed field notes during the interview and ensured

recordings were made during the interview process. The audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim. This ensured accuracy during the data analysis process.

Lastly, the research study was subjected to an audit, allowing an external reviewer to ensure that the research process and data interpretations were compatible with the literature and the methods used (Jensen, 2008). As an audit trail, transcripts and supporting materials for constructing the coding system are submitted with the final research report.

4.8.4. Dependability

Dependability is the degree to which the research may be replicated by other researchers to produce comparable results (Given, 2008). To fulfil this requirement, the researcher provided sufficient and appropriate methodological details that would allow others to conduct a similar study as stipulated in Chapter 4.

4.9. Research ethics

Ethics is defined as the moral difference between right and wrong. Hence, unethical behaviour does not always violate the law, yet it dictates how the researcher must act during their research. Specifically, "scientists are still expected to be aware of and abide by general agreements shared by the scientific community on what constitutes acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours in the professional conduct of science" (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 137).

Prior to initiating data collection, the researcher acquired ethical approval from Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) Ethics Committee. The ethical clearance was obtained through an email as can be seen in Appendix 1 ethical clearance. Prior to the interviews, all participants were provided with a consent form outlining their options for declining participation and withdrawing from the study. During the interviews, the researcher again emphasised their freedom to withdraw without occurring negative repercussions, and their participation or lack thereof in the research has no negative consequences for them. The researcher kept the consent forms following the conclusion of data collection (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

In addition, the researcher gave assurance to the participants that their privacy and

confidentiality would be preserved to ensure their safety and well-being. This was conducted in accordance with the principles of confidentiality (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 138). All the names of the participants were replaced with numerical identifiers prior to reporting the results to maintain their confidentiality. Anonymity cannot be provided during face-to-face interviews. In comparison to anonymity, confidentiality offers less protection. Although the researcher had the ability to identify an individual's responses, she agreed not to reveal that individuals' identity in any report, article or public forum. Therefore, data files were scrubbed of all personally identifying information by the researcher.

All participants agreed to the voluntary interviews and returned a signed copy of the consent form to the researcher.

4.10. Research limitations

The researcher acknowledged several limitations in the study that had to be considered when evaluating the results. These limitations necessitate further research by other scholars.

Qualitative research is inherently tainted by researcher bias (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This prevents the researcher from hearing the rich insights shared with the life stories of participants, due to the experience of the researcher. It should be noted that the researcher has personal experience as a middle manager who has dealt with turnover at executive level. This might have influenced some of the participants' responses. Similarly, the emphasis on a certain theme may have been overdone. Creswell (2014) advised that the researcher must focus on understanding the perceptions of the participants on the issue, and refrain from adding their own meaning to the interview or what was stated in the literature.

The aim of the study was to understand the lived experiences of middle managers during an internal organisational pressure. The data collection process was limited to interviews that provided the perspectives of the participants. However, the insights gained were limited according to what the participants shared with the researcher. Consequently, there is the risk that the data did not fully depict how the participant actually responded to that internal organisational pressure (Yin, 2016). Thus, the data are dependent solely on the participant's thoughts and one-sided comprehension of the event (Creswell, 2014).

The data obtained were limited to only 15 semi-structured interviews. The population does not completely encompass the industry representatives; hence, this is a limitation. Thus, the findings cannot be generalised to all organisations within the South African context.

In-depth interviewing is not the researcher's area of expertise; thus, this limitation could introduce bias. This impacted the quality of the data and findings communicated. The researcher conducted a pilot interview to mitigate this risk and, for consistency, the researcher followed the interview schedule. In addition, the lack of skill to conduct a research project might have missed important insights shared by the participants (Bhattacherjee, 2021).

Lastly, healthcare was the most represented sector in the study with seven participants participating in the interviews. Hence, there was not a balanced representation of industries. This was a result of the existing connections between the researcher and participants and the sampling method of using personal networks to attract participation in the study. Thus, findings cannot be generalised across the population.

Chapter 7 presents further Limitations_design_and_scope.

4.11. Summary

Overall, the chapter described the entire procedure of a qualitative methodology as acceptable, given the exploratory character of the study. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews to gain insights on the lived experiences of middle managers during an internal operating strain identified as turnover at executive level.

Fifteen (15) middle managers were recruited with a non-probability sampling strategy through the researcher's personal networks. Furthermore, purposive sampling was employed to apply well-defined criteria set to evaluate the participants and to ensure that appropriate individuals were picked to offer significant rich information.

Data collection involved utilisation of an interview guide with 16 predetermined questions. Open-ended questions were asked to ensure participants described openly their experiences. The interview questions were designed to ensure they addressed the three research questions outlined in Chapter 3. One face-to-face pilot

interview was undertaken, and 15 virtual interviews were conducted. The data were preserved by the researcher's field notes, recordings of the interview and subsequent verbatim transcription.

Thematic data analysis was used, which involved searching across a data set to uncover, analyse and report on repeated units. Themes emerged once the data had been dissected, broken down and put back together.

The trustworthiness of the data was attained through the deployment of certain measures to improve the credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability of the data. In addition, extensive consideration was given to implement techniques that ensured that ethical conduct was achieved in the research. Finally, the researcher noted several limitations that warrant future research.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1. Introduction

The interviews with middle managers offered valuable insights into their perspectives and experiences regarding their ability to execute vertical code-switching during a time of executive turnover pressure. This chapter presents the key findings from the research along with concise commentary after analysing the data collected from 15 in-depth interviews with middle managers.

The chapter starts with a summary of the interviews conducted and the interview methods applied to collect the data, including a discussion regarding data saturation. This is followed by a discussion of the processes applied during transcription of the interviews and developing the coding scheme to ensure that accuracy and trustworthiness is maintained. This is followed by a discussion of the interviews, organised around key themes that surfaced during the qualitative analysis process and reflecting on the research questions posed in Chapter 3. The key themes are derived inductively from the insights shared by the participants. Finally, insightful quotations support the key themes shared; however, they have been anonymised and the participants' identities have been concealed in compliance with the confidentiality consent.

5.2. Interview summary and methods

The information regarding the 15 interviews for this study is presented in Table 4, sorted by the date of each interview. The study's participants were selected using a combination of non-probability and one snowball sampling procedure in accordance with Sample_criteria_for_interviews specified in section 4.5. All participants fell within the interview criteria where the findings are discussed under section 5.6.3 Sample_eligibility_interview_participant. An anonymous participant code has been assigned to each participant to protect their identity. For the purposes of this study, all references made by the participants to actual people or actual companies were substituted with fictitious ones. All 15 interviews were conducted virtually while none of the participants had access to the interview questions in advance.

Table 4: Interview summary

Date	Participant	Industry	Length (min)	Word Count
11 August 2022	Participant nr 1	Healthcare	81.18	6,265
15 August 2022	Participant nr 2	Financial	32.28	2,966
15 August 2022	Participant nr 3	Healthcare	34.20	2,073
16 August 2022	Participant nr 4	Financial	73.14	5,424
19 August 2022	Participant nr 5	Healthcare	48.08	1,908
19 August 2022	Participant nr 6	Arts	38.24	2,565
20 August 2022	Participant nr 7	Financial	55.27	6,696
20 August 2022	Participant nr 8	Technology	51.07	3,761
21 August 2022	Participant nr 9	Aviation	57.25	4,620
22 August 2022	Participant nr 10	Healthcare	62.33	7,316
23 August 2022	Participant nr 11	Healthcare	38.20	4,569
23 August 2022	Participant nr 12	Healthcare	112.3	4,042
25 August 2022	Participant nr 13	Aviation	42.27	4,276
27 August 2022	Participant nr 14	Healthcare	60.42	6,013
1 September 2022	Participant nr 15	Financial	32.16	2,733

Return to the discussion regarding detailed transcript and verification process of the interviews Findings_transcription_and_verification under section 5.4.

All interviews were planned and conducted within one month, often with two scheduled on the same day. The timing of these interviews was determined by the participant's availability. Consequently, the final interview occurred five days after the preceding interview.

The researcher herself conducted all the virtual interviews through MS Teams, which also served to record the audio. An interview guide was used to help direct the interview, and field notes were taken as the conversation progressed (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Following each interview, the audio-recording was immediately uploaded to the Cloud. Despite this, each interview was transcribed in a single sitting once the last interview had been completed.

The initial interview, with a familiar acquaintance to the researcher, acted as a pilot test (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The pilot participant was eligible to participate since she fulfilled all of the study's criteria requirements, but her responses were excluded from the final analysis. The interview was recorded using the Record Voice Memo app on an iPhone. The pilot test interview revealed a disjointed sequence of questions, prompting the researcher to rearrange the order of questions for future interviews to better guide the conversation. There were no omissions or additions to the list of interview questions. The final interview questions are provided in Appendix_3_Interview_guide. No transcript was made of the pilot interview because its data were not incorporated into the analysis of the study.

Consequently, seven interviews were conducted with participants in the healthcare industry, four interviews were conducted with participants in the financial services industry, two interviews were conducted with participants in the aviation industry, one interview was conducted with a participant in the arts industry, and another in the technology industry. The researcher acknowledged that the majority of interviews were conducted in the healthcare industry. This was not done purposefully, but merely due to the researcher's having established relationships in this industry. The other industries were included in the research to prevent the reporting of findings on a culture within a specific industry.

The participants were able to share their insights on the topics under consideration in a manner that was both comprehensive and in depth. The interviews lasted on average 55 minutes each; audio recordings accumulated covered 13 hours and 38 minutes in duration (818 minutes in total). There was one interview that stood out as being nearly two hours in length at 112 minutes long. As a direct consequence of the accumulated audio hours recorded, 65,227 words were transcribed, with 4,348 words constituting the average length of a transcript.

5.3. Data saturation

Per definition, data saturation is reached when the different participants provided the same data as the other participants. This implied that no new data were obtained, and the same themes occurred during the interviews (Fush & Ness, 2015). Therefore, collecting any additional data after saturation has been reached will not significantly advance the research. Figure 3 depicts the new codes identified by the

inductive analysis approach. In this study, saturation was achieved with interview 15.

There was a total of 79 new codes developed during interviews 1 to 4. The number of new codes decreased in interview 5, with just 2 new codes being generated, but this pattern reversed itself in interviews 6 and 7, with an increasing number of codes being generated in each of these interviews. A second reduction transpired in interview 8, with only 1 new code being generated. As a result of the process of saturation, the researcher considered terminating the interviews. Nevertheless, the researcher, who was relatively inexperienced, opted to conduct further interviews to test the saturation point. Thereafter, 10 new codes were created again in interviews 9 and 10. A similar situation occurred in interview 11, with only 1 new code being created; however, an increase in new codes was again generated in interviews 12 to 14. After interview 15 yielded the same reduced pattern of only 2 new codes generated, the researcher stopped conducting interviews owing to data saturation. Upon reflection, it became evident that the saturation point had been reached at the 10th interview; after that, 12 more responses were identified and labelled.
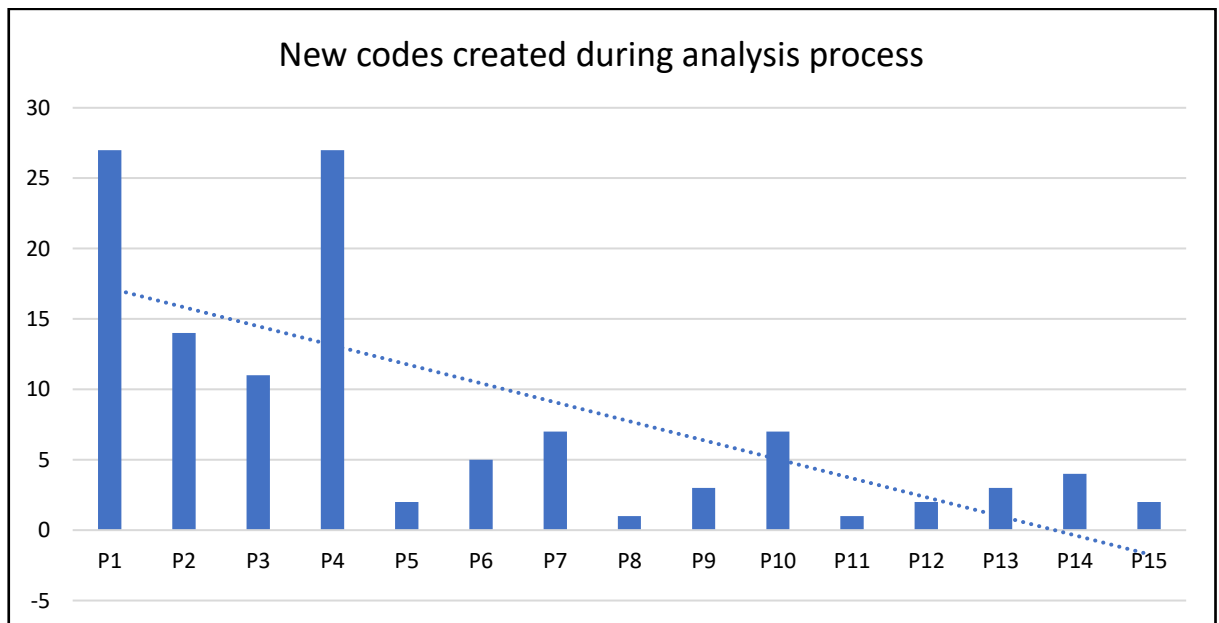
Figure 3: Data saturation from interviews

5.4. Transcription and verification of interviews

All 15 interviews were uploaded as a single practice to software that converts speech into text. Each transcript was reviewed by the researcher, who checked for accuracy by comparing it to the concurrent field notes she had taken during the interviews.

The verification exercise required the researcher to correct misspelled words, remove filler words such as "okay" and "you know", and eliminate common parts of speech. In addition, each transcript's formatting was standardised to use the same font size, type and line spacing. The researcher also eliminated text transcripts where the participant diverged from the topic at hand. In light of this, it can be shown in Table 4 Table_4_interview_summary that the interview with Participant 12 was recorded for 112 minutes, yet only 4,042 words were counted in the transcript. Lastly, the researcher was tasked with drawing a distinction between references to senior managers and executive managers; only the latter is appropriate since the study focused on executives and not on senior managers. The speaker of each paragraph was denoted by the word "Researcher" or "Participant Nr" at the beginning of the paragraph. Each transcript required approximately two hours of cleaning and verification work.

5.5. Coding and analysis of interview data

ATLAS.ti, a program that was developed to aid the analysis of qualitative data for the purpose of conducting qualitative research, was used to examine the interview transcripts as per the proposed data analysis strategy specified in subsection 4.7 Methodology_data_analysis_process as described in Chapter 4.

In ATLAS.ti., the researcher conducted an independent analysis of each transcript and assigned codes before proceeding to the next transcript. Dissecting the data entails searching for comments from participants that were surprising, interesting or relevant to the study's topic. Consequently, the data were structured by assigning codes to these selected passages. This process was repeated for each individual transcript. A coding table with 450 different codes was developed as a result of this process.

Thereafter, the quotations and codes were exported to a MS Excel spreadsheet for additional review and refinement. The researcher is more competent with Excel, and therefore leveraged the filter function to conduct a more sophisticated analysis than the untrained observer is capable of doing. During the process of analysis, as new insights were revealed, comparable codes were merged, or they were removed in the event that it was judged that they did not contribute anything beneficial. An example of merging codes is where "workplace was messy", "workplace was chaotic"

or "workplace was hectic" were merged into a final code of "workplace becomes difficult". Finally, the coding process was concluded and resulted in a coding table with 108 codes, 33 categories and 11 overarching themes. Please see Appendix_5_thematic_map for the final coding table.

5.6. Discussion of interviews

5.6.1. Introduction

The middle manager carries out their everyday responsibilities by juggling a variety of audiences and power dynamics (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al., 2021; Falls & Allen, 2020). Despite its prevalence, vertical code-switching as a power play is still poorly understood in the business world (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020). Therefore, the research questions intended to explore how vertical code-switching is impacted by turnover at executive level, which has been identified as an internal organisational pressure. This study will add to the existing literature on vertical code-switching, enhancing the corporate world's indirect understanding of this topic and its implications.

The findings of the interviews that were conducted for this study are discussed in terms of the thematic analysis. The patterns that emerged from the examination of the participants' responses to the interview questions, corresponding to the research questions discussed in Chapter 3, are referred to as themes. The research question is related to the themes through the interview questions, as shown in Table 3 of Section 4.2.2 Table_research_and_interview_questions, which presents the thematic map that connected the research questions to the interview questions. Consequently, the answers that emerged from the interviews were organised in a manner that was consistent with the research questions.

The presentation of the findings according to the research questions, which are now being presented as themes, follows a natural progression from highest frequency to lowest frequency. A theme's popularity, as measured by the number of participants who shared their perspectives and experiences, is represented by its frequency rating. Nonetheless, the top rankings and the surprising and interesting themes for findings were the key points of discussion.

5.6.2. Triangulation

Appendix_6_frequency_analysis summarises the most frequently reported themes from each research question. As a result, the frequency analysis identifies which participants contributed to which themes; thus, themes are validated by the remarks of other participants who are also middle managers but work for a variety of organisations. The trustworthiness of the research is enhanced by using this strategy.

5.6.3. Sample eligibility for interview participants

This section discusses the findings of the Sample_criteria_for_interviews discussed under section 4.5. It is based on the introduction of the participants as listed under Findings_interview_summary_and_methods under section 5.2.

5.6.3.1   Eligibility for middle management criteria

The second interview question, as seen in Appendix_3_Interview_guide, challenged the participants to describe their reporting structure upwards and downwards. This was to determine if the participants met the first requirement to be employed as a middle manager, as outlined in the criteria in section 4.5. The samples of participant responses below confirm their presence in a middle management capacity.

Participant nr 1:

"I report directly to the X manager… Reports into me will be the Z manager... And also, that reports into me is the senior accounts clerk..."

Participant nr 2:

"I reported to the Executive Officer for finance. It's the CFO, basically. I was the Head of X, which is a middle management role in organisations. The Risk manager and the Compliance manager with the compliance team reported to me."

Participant nr 4:

"I have the PMO administrators, or coordinators that report to me. I report to the Head of Program, what is called the Head of Change... I have five direct subordinates. My role involves the regional countries as well, then I have the PMO officers from the countries indirectly reporting to me; there are 10 countries. One PML officer per country."

Participant nr 5:

"I report to the Z managers at both different facilities. And as well as in a sense the Regional ZZ manager. The person that reports to me is the X Manager, two account ladies both two separate facilities and the driver..."

Participant nr 6:

"In that middle manager role, I had a number of candidate architects who recently graduated with masters and report to me, as well as all the technical drafting staff, graphic designers. In return, I reported to the directors and associates of the company… So, when I was a middle manager, I might report to four different directors, sometimes depending on which projects I was on."

Participant nr 7:

"So, my reporting line is into a senior manager who's basically a head of a function. And that functional head report to our executive which is our Chief Audit Executive. And below me in terms of the reporting line in and subordinates, I've got three subordinates reporting into me, all three of them are specialists, internal auditors."

Participant nr 8:

"I reported to the X manager. So, in other words, the Senior Manager, and then, when the external candidate came in, they renamed that role Chief Information Security Officer. I initially only had an external team that reported to me, so my function, the execution of my function was outsourced."

Participant nr 9:

"At the moment, I only report to the Accountable executive... I only have one person reporting to me..."

Participant nr 10:

"And I have a reporting line of structure from operational staff to base managers, my reporting is to a X manager and to a Group Executive directly. Oh, I've got lots of hospitals now. There are six effective hospitals that are reporting to me..."

Participant nr 12:

"So, I'm reporting to the X manager. Reporting to me directly, I only have two people that is Y Manager and a senior accounts clerk. Indirectly, there is about 50 different people ranging from Case Manager to reception supervisor, admission clerks, private credit control, system controller and they add admin assistants..."

Participant nr 13:

"Then I moved into the position of manager of the X & Y specialists. So that is my full-time job… But because we in the Z Office, have to review you as a Z manager, you must report directly to the CEO or Chairman accountable Executive. I've got two HF specialists, a PD specialist, three T specialists, three IS specialists and a secretary. 10 in total."

5.6.3.2   Eligibility for turnover at executive level criteria

The third interview question in Appendix_3_Interview_guide required the participants to share their personal experiences with executive level turnover. This was to determine if the participants met the second requirement as outlined in the criteria section 4.5.

The samples of participant responses below confirm personal anecdotes of their exposures to turnover at executive level.

Participant nr 1:

"…the CFO, the CEO and then throughout the years various changes in the chief operating officers (COO)."

Participant nr 4:

"In the last four, five years, we had three CEOs, two interim acting CEOs, three board member changes."

Participant nr 5:

"Sure, there was a lot yeah. There are constantly new positions being developed within the structure. Since I started, we were really had one CEO, now we have a South African CEO and an International CEO. And then underneath the CEO, South African, they filter down new positions like was Group Financial manager. We've got a CFO, South African CFO and International CFO."

Participant nr 6:

"I experienced three associates who immigrated, and two directors who immigrated in terms of turnover. And I suppose recently, one other director has started there in practice."

Participant nr 7:

"In this function, we've had our executive change, the Chief Audit Executive. She came in, she was there for a year, and then she left. That was the direct impact in terms of the CEO level."

Participant nr 8:

"The first turnover was top down, our Chief Information Officer left, and one of the senior managers was promoted to the Chief Information Officer role. Then my line manager filled that person's role."

Participant nr 9:

"I haven't had a lot. It's been quite stable…At X Aviation, the CEO was promoted to VP, Vice President."

Participant nr 10:

"Only at Group CEO level that I've been exposed to, that I've been aware. And then also with the IT, the information technology, level as well as turnover has been quite significant..."

Participant nr 11:

"I saw 1-2-3-4 CEOs come and go. So, 3 x CFOs, 2 HR executives that I can quickly remember, 2 nursing executives. And then there's numerous other executives that come and go…"

Participant nr 12:

"CEO three or four times. CFO three times."

Participant nr 13:

"Very high at the moment…So we've had very high turnover. The CEO itself…We've had a lot of resignations..."

Participant nr 15:

"…And what that required is the executives that were looking after our space, moved into our xxx... Our new Managing executive…was announced… So yeah, it's actually been a fairly recent restructure."

5.6.3.3 Eligibility for working for South African organisation criteria

The first interview question Appendix_3_Interview_guide required the participants to describe their experiences and specific role occupied in the company. This was to determine if the participants met the third requirement of working for an organisation based in South Africa, as outlined in the criteria section 4.5.

The samples of participant responses shown below confirm their specific roles within a South African based organisation.

Participant nr 1:

"My experience in private health care in a middle management position. Private healthcare for 17 years, started at Hospital X in Town. Then transferred to Hospital Y, as a xxx manager."

Participant nr 5:

"My experience, I started in 2019 as a manager at Hospital X, combined with Hospital Y, two separate entities. Been almost three years now."

Participant nr 6:

"In the architecture industry, that is a seven-year degree, masters degree. And when you exit that degree, you typically enter directly into a lower management role... Then I've worked about five years or so before I entered a middle management role..."

Participant nr 7:

"I actually started off at one of the big four accounting firms as a consultant. And then I moved inhouse into an internal audit function that only services a particular organisation."

Participant nr 9:

"Experiences certainly been in aviation. I started in aviation in 2002. That's 20 years, almost 21 years of experience in aviation in different roles, from lower management or from very basic clerk work to lower management, middle management..."

Participant nr 11:

"Y manager at Hospital x…been the Y manager since 2010. So that's closing in on 12, almost 13 years this July already."

Participant nr 12:

"In my current role as Y manager at a specific unit have been for eight years, but in total Y manager probably for 15 years. And then well basically in a similar role now for 24 years."

Participant nr 13:

"And experience wise, I have in the current company that I work for 31 years of experience."

Participant nr 14:

"I was a X manager in a middle management role. I was a X manager for seven years. Prior to that I was a reception supervisor, and prior to that a case manager..."

See discussion on the experience of the middle manager as presented in the findings on RQ2 awareness of vertical code switching in exploring the performance of the middle manager.

5.6.4. Findings for Research Question 1

Research Question 1:

In what ways is turnover at executive level viewed as added pressure on vertical code-switching?

The purpose of Research Question 1 is to establish if middle management faces new obstacles, difficulties or constraints in carrying out their obligations as a direct result of executive turnover. The objective of Research Question 1 will be achieved by exploring how the middle manager analysed and digested the work conditions during an executive turnover event.

In addition, the power of the middle manager is determined by the interaction with different hierarchical levels within the organisation. Therefore, Research Question 1 also needs to determine if these work conditions during the executive turnover event allow the middle manager to transition between the different power stages. Vertical code-switching, as the ability of the middle manager to navigate between multiple levels of power, is vital for success in this profession.

Table 5 contains a list of the interview questions that were prepared to acquire the required information relating to the working conditions and the degree of vertical code-switching during the interview.

Table 5: Interview questions for Research Question 1

RESEARCH QUESTION 1	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
In what ways is turnover in executive level viewed as added pressure on vertical code-switching?	4. In what ways was the organisation prepared for the change? 5. In what ways were you prepared for the change? 6. How did the change affect the functionality of the organisation? Please elaborate on the changes you have witnessed. 7. How did the change affect your ability to move between being a follower and a leader?

The information gathered from the interviews revealed themes and categories, while the most frequent themes were the primary focus in selecting the answers to the research questions. Figure 4 offers a summary of the key themes together with their

respective categories and frequencies as they pertain to Research Question 1. The key themes that emerged through the interviews were portrait of the organisation, and leadership practices. Appendix_5_thematic_map contains a comprehensive frequency analysis of all the themes, categories and codes. In addition, the findings for Research Question 1 are discussed in Chapter 6 Discuss_finding_research_question_1.
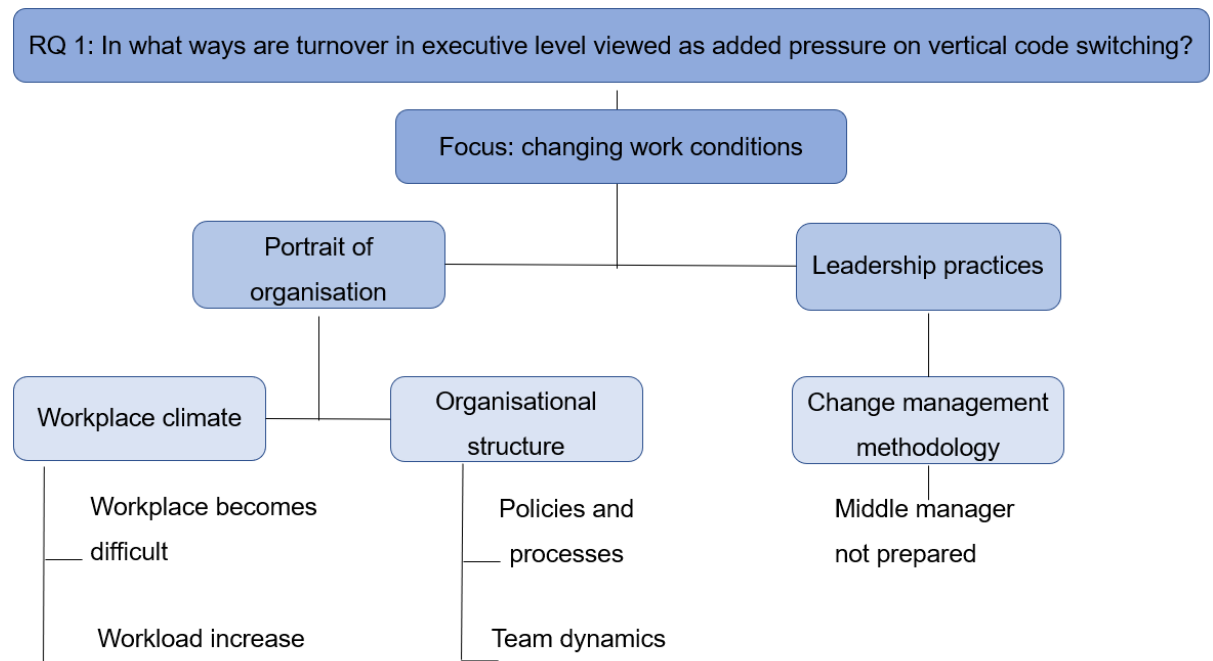
Figure 4: Overview of findings – Research Question 1 regarding changes to work conditions

5.6.4.1   *Explore work conditions during turnover event*

The purpose of the research question was to determine if middle managers experienced altered work conditions during an executive level turnover event and to collect their perspectives on what the changes involve. Research Question 1 was partially answered by the participants, reflecting on the portrait of the organisation as an emerging theme during a turnover event at executive level.

(a) Portrait of the organisation

The key categories that emerged from the participants' frequent and recurring responses are used to present the theme, portrait of the organisation. The key categories are workplace climate and organisational structure.

(i) Workplace climate

With 11 of the 15 participants in agreement, the work environment is described as becoming difficult during turnover at executive level. The responses include the workplace being described as chaotic, confused, stressed and destructive:

Participant nr 7: *"It caused more chaos than anything else."*

Participant nr 9: *"There was absolutely a lot of tension in the office, because we all want to make this change work. So, the pressure is extremely high ... So, there's a lot of tension and demand."*

Participant nr 11: *"It's much, much worse; it's much more stressful. It's high pressure. It's a build-up continuously."*

Yet, another participant described the work dynamics as becoming destructive.

Participant nr 6: *"And a big mess. We learned a lot over that period. I think it destroyed culture, destroyed work life, destroyed a number of things. It was almost like a survival space because we weren't focused forward. We honed in to keep existing clients rather than looking for new ones. So, you can say there was a monetary loss in us not having the ability to look forward and gain new clients. We did not strategise, but just focusing on the current."*

It was evident from the responses that the confusion state is exacerbated by the multiplicity of requests for investigations or feedback that the incoming executive sends to the middle manager during the integration period. Three of the participants concurred that the middle manager is overwhelmed with the requests for information, as these requests amount to the same question but worded in different ways. This finding balances the finding under the discussion of Degree_of_vertical_code_switching regarding the transition process of the middle manager.

Participant nr 1: *"I think, in many cases, it created confusion because they send so many requests through to the hospital level that is basically the same thing that is requested or the same report that is needed; they just name it differently. But they don't talk to each other or come together and see if there is a common goal and let's send one request in. Now you get 10 requests maybe from 10 different people and*

you need to answer all. So, I think it created for me more confusion, more silos. Everyone chasing their own tail almost."

Subsequently, 10 of the 15 participants agreed that the middle manager's workload has increased. The participants expressed that middle managers are subjected to such a steady stream of pressure from all sources that they rarely get a break from their work, and their work often takes priority over their personal lives.

Participant nr 11: *"Now with new managers coming in, they've got new initiatives, they would add something to your role, which almost makes those peaks and valleys equal. It almost took the valleys and in turn made them come in line with the peaks. In the past, you clearly had very stressful times versus a bit more relaxed time. But all these changes and initiatives meant that something new comes in every year. And it's not just a focus for this year; it's a focus going forward. When the new CEO comes in, the older initiatives still stay in place, because that stable CFO function never changes. So, the concentration of that never goes away. But the new leadership adds new initiatives and new ideas to your function, which means that it's almost as if there's never quiet time anymore."*

Participant nr 13: *"It's all a blur. Your work hours increased and your life outside of the work, just decreased."*

(ii) Organisational structure

Likewise, with 8 of the 15 participants in agreement, policies and processes were another key topic discussed that prompted the altered work conditions during turnover at executive level. Only 1 of the 15 participants agreed that the executive turnover event was not associated with any changes to the policies and procedures, while 7 participants indicated that the incoming executive was responsible for implementing policy and procedure changes based on their prior experiences and expertise. What emerged from the responses was that the changes or initiatives that were implemented caused further confusion. This was because the existing systems within the organisation were not equipped to handle these changes, or that the initiatives did not fit the culture of the organisation.

Participant nr 5: *"Is that everyone brings in a different way of working and new processes are implemented every month. However, the new processes cause*

system problems because our system is not equipped to handle all the new processes."

Participant nr 7: *"Processes, yes. Policies, no. They couldn't change the policy, but what they would end up doing is changing the process based on their experience. They would say, oh, but this is actually quicker, or this is faster. So do it in this way. But from an organisation point of view, that's not how we operate. So that's where the clashes would generally come in."*

Participant nr 7: *"And he tried to change the way we were doing our work and change our methodology. But that's where it didn't fly, because it was not aligned to how we do reviews within the organisation. In fact, the organisational culture is very different. The way that we've structured ourselves is to be business partners, and not actually xxx. We have a balance between xxx, where we actually go out and like really xxx and provide assurance that controls are working. And we have another section where we do a lot of consultative work. We'll go in with management and say, okay, let us together and identify where the risk and controls are. This particular senior manager couldn't understand why we had a consultative role, and why we provide advisory services."*

In the course of further investigation of altered working conditions, 8 of the 15 participants agreed they experienced changes to the team dynamics during turnover at executive level. Consistent with the comments, it appeared that the new executive brings in their own team to work. Therefore, the middle manager must not only adjust to reporting upwards to a single new executive, but also to a different reporting team with different leadership dynamics. This is because the reporting structure has changed.

Participant nr 4: *"I think that's also one of the effects of executive turnover; that these executives come with their own teams. One of the CEOs actually brought in her people when she started."*

Participant nr 7: *"That example, this guy comes in as a head of department; he brings somebody else with him that automatically signals that the team is not good enough."*

The main finding is that while there is turnover at the executive level, 87% of participants observed changes to the portrait of the organisation. These changes are

a result of the changes experienced in the work conditions, as well as the organisational structure changes.

(b) Leadership practices

In response to Research Question 1, it became evident that the organisation's leadership practices during periods of executive turnover are also an emerging theme. A key category that emerged from the responses was the use of a change management methodology.

(i) Change management methodology

From the responses, 10 out of 15 participants agreed that their respective organisations did not adequately prepare them for the upcoming changes in executive level turnover as insufficient change management methods were implemented. In contrast, only 4 out of 15 participants reported feeling prepared. These ineffective change management strategies have sown discontent among the employees well in advance of the actual turnover event at executive level. A negative attitude will have a further detrimental impact, resulting in uncomfortable work conditions regarding involvement and motivation of their team.

Participant nr 14: *"I don't think I was prepared for it. I think you adapt to it."*

Participant nr 12: *"We are sort of kept in the dark; then you don't have much information to feed back to your own staff. So, at the end of the day, my staff is just as in the dark as I am, because I really don't have much information, I can follow the mail to them that I'm getting."*

Participant nr 9: *"They did it when everyone was present. There were people present with the same level as me; there were people with lower gradings than me. It was just this one meeting and I was informed this is what you're going to do."*

The main finding is that 66% of the participants agreed that the leadership practices ingrained in the organisation and within the new executive have an effect on the work environment.

5.6.4.2 Explore degree of vertical code-switching during turnover event

The second purpose of Research Question 1 was to determine if the middle manager is restricted in his ability to engage with the different audiences and subsequently adopt and disabled the different power states in serving the different audiences. The degree of transitioning, or vertical code-switching, was answered by the participants' reflecting on the portrait of the organisation as an emerging theme during a turnover event at executive level.

Figure 5 is a summary of the key category workplace climate, illustrating the codes restricted and unrestricted transitioning impacted by the turnover event at executive level.
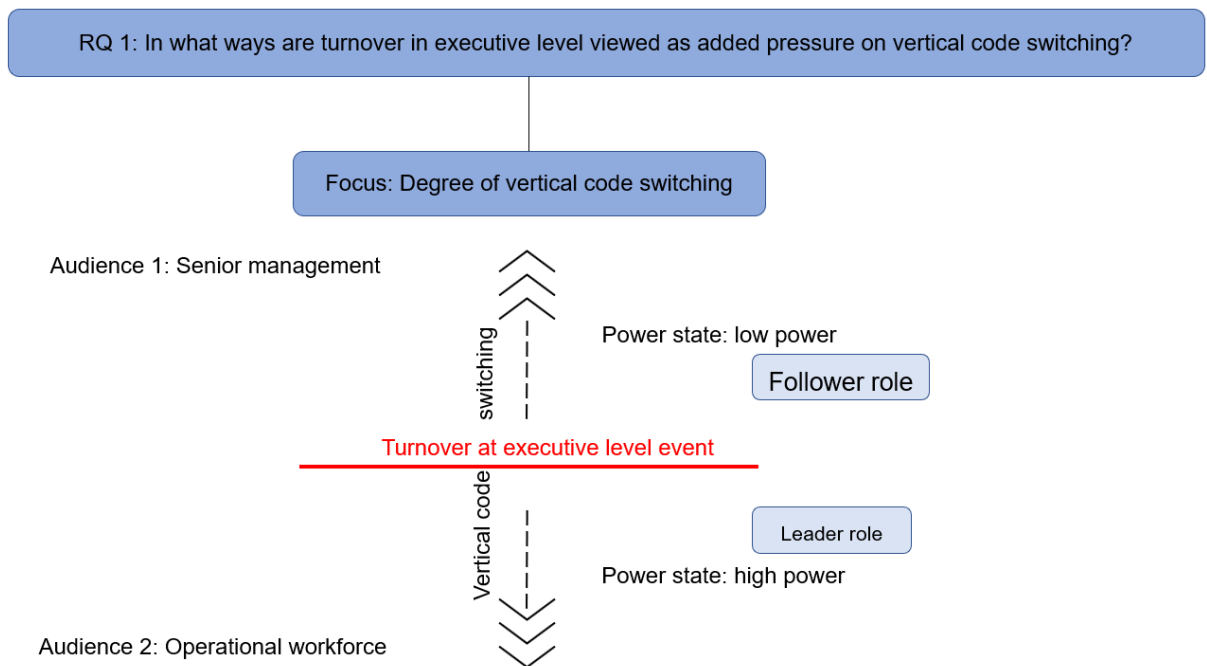
Figure 5: Overview of findings – Research Question 1 regarding degree of vertical code-switching

The findings elicited that 9 out of 15 participants revealed they experienced limitations in the process of vertical code-switching during the turnover event at executive level. As a result, the middle manager is pressured to take on only a single role.

Interesting, it emerged from the data that the middle manager was constrained to either a follower or a leader role, as responses differed. A total of 6 out of 9 participants indicated that they were restricted to the role of a follower. However, all six participants agreed that the restriction is only for a certain period while the new executive is integrated. During this period, the new executive questions the middle manager for information to gain a better understanding of the organisation. This finding was discussed under [Multiple requests](#) under the theme portrait of the organisation within answering Research Question 1. Consequently, the middle manager is reserved in a consistent upwards engagement and kept in a state of lesser power, which suggests a position of deference as a follower. This prevents the middle manager from exercising leadership responsibilities, as they are restricted from communicating with lower-level operational workforce. However, once the executive has acquired business knowledge, the middle manager is free to transition between the various power states as a follower and leader as they deem appropriate. The [Experience_as_a_follower](#) was also a finding which was discussed in answering Research Question 2.

Participant nr 1: *"Because, as I said, you get so dangled in all these requests that you are the whole time almost busy with … deadlines, just to get the info out already for all of these requests that it felt for me almost a whole day that you are more of a follower than a leader."*

Participant nr 12: *"You get this type of life and death email. You're under so much pressure that at that stage it feels to you like I'm a follower. And then you don't get the time to actually go and be a leader. Because the time that you compose yourself, you will find that 90% of the people that you're supposed to lead have gone home already. And then come tomorrow, you come with new challenges."*

In contrast, 3 out of 9 participants indicated they were restricted to a leader role.

Participant nr 7: *"I think during that period, I had to be a leader. I was 100% pushed to that spectrum of it. The team that was reporting to me, they were so afraid of what was going to happen on their side. They're a young team, they're probably between 25 and 30, and they still getting into their career, they're still trying to understand how to manage their own emotions. So, I had to make sure that, as a leader, I was providing enough direction to them, to give them comfort. I had to show them that tomorrow will be better, and it's not going to be the same every day. I had to show*

them that we're not going to have the same type of tension and conversations with management, but that we're going to build this relationship, and we'll make it better. I had to assure the team that it's going to be better, and also assure them that the way that we have been operating, and all the stress will be relieved. And also let them understand that their voices are heard. So, when they felt frustrated, or when they've had a really difficult conversation with the client, it's to make them feel that they're not alone in it, but that we are together, and they're supported. So, they shouldn't feel like they have to be quiet and just take all of the heat, they must come back and share what has happened."

The finding on the degree of transitioning indicated that 60% of the participants were restricted from engaging in vertical code-switching activity and, thus, from performing in both leader and follower positions. Furthermore, in 66% of the cases, the middle manager must act as a follower until the new executive becomes acquainted with the business setting.

5.6.5.   Findings for Research Question 2

Research Question 2:

In what ways does vertical code-switching impact on the performance of the middle manager?

The purpose of Research Question 2 is to determine how the middle manager manages and responds to internal organisational pressures, notably turnover at executive level. The decision to adapt to the changing conditions and the emotions associated with the decision impact on the behaviour of the middle manager. The middle manager's ability to manage their behaviour and emotions determines how well they will carry out their responsibilities and, as a result, indirectly affects the various audiences they must address. This objective of Research Question 2 will be achieved by examining the middle manager's behaviour during executive level turnover, as well as the middle manager's emotions and attitude in response to embrace changes in the work environment.

Table 6 contains a list of the interview questions that were prepared to acquire the required information during the interview relating to the behaviour and the emotions

of the middle manager in the event of turnover at executive level.

Table 6: Interview questions for Research Question 2

RESEARCH QUESTION 2	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
In what ways does vertical code-switching impact on the performance of the middle manager?	8. How would you define vertical code-switching? If incorrect, I will explain the concept. 10. What is it like to be a leader in a middle management position to perform your duties? 11. What is it like to be a follower in a middle management position to perform your duties? 13. Share a situation where you applied the incorrect level of power or wearing the wrong hat, when interacting with others; what was the consequences on the performance?

The information gathered from the interviews revealed themes and categories, while the most frequent themes were the primary focus in selecting the answers to the research questions. There were only two key themes that showed up repeatedly throughout the interviews, namely behaviour and attitude, and emotional response. Appendix_5_thematic_map contains a comprehensive frequency analysis of all the themes, categories and codes. In addition, the findings for Research Question 2 are discussed in Chapter 6 Discuss_finding_research_question_2.

5.6.5.1 *Middle manager manages and responds to internal organisational pressures*

The purpose of the research question was to determine how the middle manager manages and responds to the changes in the workplace during the event of turnover at executive level. Research Question 2 was answered by the participants' reflecting on the behaviour and attitude of the middle manager as an emerging theme during a turnover event at executive level.

(a) Behaviour and attitude

The key category, namely level of vertical code-switching, that emerged from the participants' frequent and recurring responses is used to present the theme, behaviour and attitude. Figure 6 illustrates the category level of vertical code-switching.
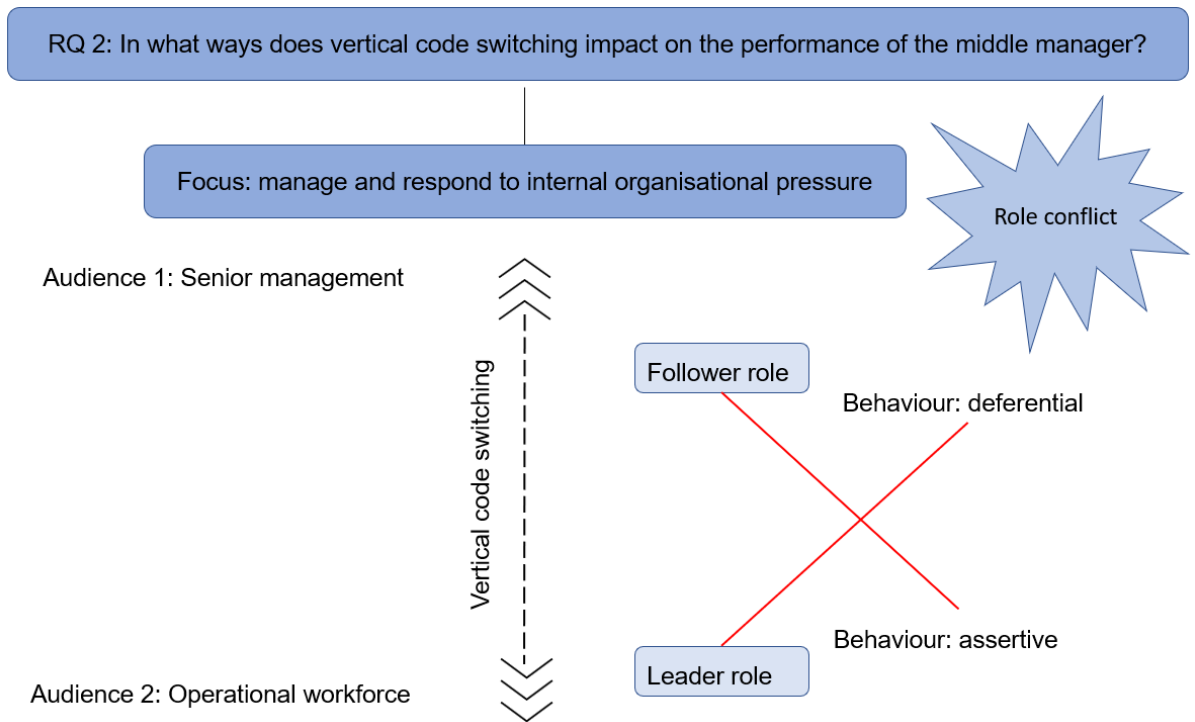
Figure 6: Overview of findings – Research Question 2 regarding management and response to internal organisational pressure

(i) Level of vertical code-switching

A total of 4 of the 15 participants agreed they did not experience role conflict during turnover at executive level.

Participant nr 2: *"No, I don't think so."*

Participant nr 5: *"No, I do not like conflict."*

There was an interesting view from only 3 out of the 15 participants, who reported they experienced role conflict during the executive turnover event.

Participant nr 4: *"I think with all the confusion, and I wasn't sure on my role, I said some incorrect things, or I asked them to do something that was completely incorrect, and not part of the role. Afterwards, I needed to have a call to rectify what has been said or done. To rectify took a long time, but it took a lot of strength also. Because you had to admit that you didn't know what you're doing. Basically, you had to condemn it."*

Participant nr 9: *"I have confused it a few times, not middle to lower but middle to*

higher. I have disagreed with the VP and acted as his leader. I guess I could have been a bit more subordinate."

The main finding is that while there is turnover at executive level, 27% of participants revealed they experienced no role conflict during the turnover event at executive level. Thus, the appropriate behaviour was displayed by the middle manager in adopting either the follower or the leader role as depict in Figure 6.

5.6.5.2 Behaviour and emotions of middle manager

The purpose of Research Question 2 was to gain an understanding of the emotions and attitudes held by middle managers in reaction to embrace the changes in the working environment during the turnover event at executive level. Research Question 2 was answered by the participants' reflecting on the behaviour and attitude, and emotional response of the middle manager as emerging themes during a turnover event at executive level.

a) Behaviour and attitude

The questions pertaining to the experience of acting as a leader or a follower during an executive turnover event seems to have inspired some interest, since the theme of behaviour and attitude gathered the most responses.

Figure 7 is a summary of the key themes together with their respective categories and frequencies as they pertain to Research Question 2. The key theme that emerged through the interviews is behaviour and attitude with key categories awareness of vertical code-switching, and leader role experience. The category of follower role experience was not the most frequent topic, yet it elicited surprising responses.
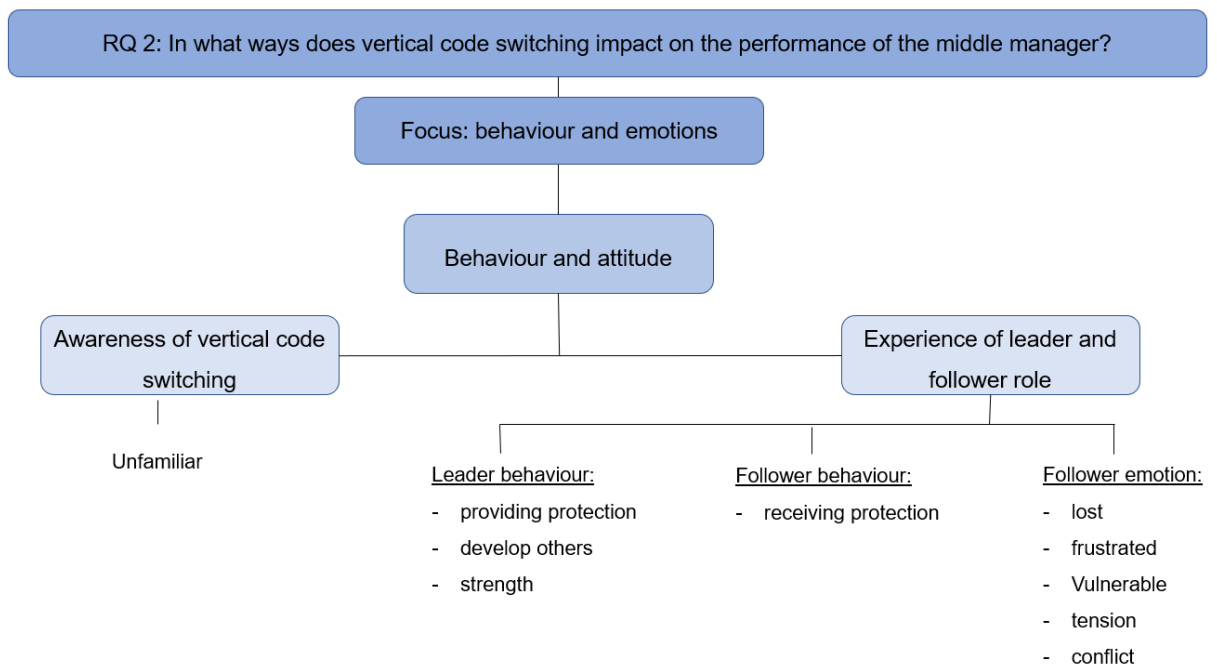
Figure 7: Overview of findings – Research Question 2 regarding behaviour and emotions of middle manager

(i) Awareness of vertical code-switching

Out of the 15 participants, 13 admitted that they are unfamiliar with the term vertical code-switching. Though the term "vertical code-switching" may be unfamiliar, the participants have more than enough experience as middle managers for execution, as demonstrated in section 5.6.3.3, which covers the eligibility requirements for working in a company in South Africa as presented in Criteria_working_SA_company. These are some of the responses referred to when the participants were prompted to declare if they are familiar with the term:

Participant nr 1: *"You can explain to me."*

Participant nr 6: *"No, not at all."*

The main finding is that 87% of participants revealed that they are not familiar with the term vertical code-switching.

(ii) Leader and follower role experience

The question was focused to gain an understanding of the behaviours of the middle manager in the leader as well as in the follower role during a turnover event at

executive level.

Ten (10) out of the 15 participants responded that the category experience in the leader role seemed to be the most recurring. The responses revealed a variety of leader-related behaviours adopted by participants as they carried out their responsibilities. The act of providing protection to subordinates was mentioned the most frequently among the behaviours discussed.

Participant nr 7: *"I really tried to make it better for my team by shielding them from what was happening and reassuring them that everything was fine."*

Participant nr 8: *"And you have a bigger responsibility in maintaining calm in your subordinates and making sure that they don't get impacted by that."*

Participant nr 14: *"It was very difficult. And it was very exhausting. I always had that umbrella type of thing where I protect my staff. I tried to protect them from the bad and the ugly, the hurtful stuff, the stuff that demands, or the ultimatums, or the threats. I saw it as my role. But it was very difficult to stay strong."*

The responses also emerged around development of subordinates:

Participant nr 1: *"And to see also the contribution that you could make to someone, if it was a relief on their face, when they realise the problem was not as bad as what I thought. How much they have grown maybe over a period of time. But also, your own learnings. I think that's also something that is for me very nice of being able to do. You then spend a lot of time developing people. Um, yeah, I think that that's one of my, my passion is to invest in people as well, to share my own learnings and knowledge. And also, to see sometimes how they grow with your guidance, they get themselves to the answer. And not necessarily that you as a leader to give the answer straight from the start; sometimes you need to guide them to get to that answer themselves."*

In addition, strength was also identified as a behaviour associated with being a leader:

Participant nr 7: *"So at some point you say I am here now; I cannot continue being frustrated. How do I turn this around to control the aspects that I can? I can't control everything, but I need to focus on what I can control."*

Participant nr 4: *"I was saying to myself, you know, you're a manager, you need to keep things together. You don't show any weakness. Be strong, be strong."*

Comparatively, only 8 of the 15 participants shared their experiences in the follower role, suggesting the leader role was more comfortable for them. Considering the participants' prior revelations that they are largely constrained to the follower position during the turnover event at the executive level, the low response rate on this topic comes as a surprise. In section 5.6.4.2, the findings of Restricted_to_follower_role were discussed. Again, varying experiences were shared when occupying the follower role. Protection, similar to that addressed in the scope of the leader role, was the most frequently discussed type of behaviour:

Participant nr 12: *"But if you have a good leader, then I suppose it just becomes a little bit easier. Because, if you have a settled team, you're sort of working as a team, it becomes easier to manage or to cope with changes in the executive level. So, I can't really put myself in a situation where I was on my own."*

Participant nr 15: *"I've got an extremely good relationship with my manager. Someone that I have immense trust in. We've worked together for the last five years. I'm really chuffed that he is in the role; he was obviously selected to act in this exact role because he was best suited for it while we're going through the whole restructure. So, from a follower perspective, it's really good. It's really easy. I can go to him at any point in time, for anything. So yeah, for me, it's really easy."*

Similarly, the Difficult_emotions_as_a_follower is also presented as a recurring topic.

The main finding is that the participants exhibited distinct behaviours while assuming the position of leader or follower role. Interestingly, in both the role of leader and follower, protection was the most frequent behaviour.

(b) Emotional response

The question was focused to learn about the middle manager's emotions in both the role of leader and follower during turnover at executive level. The theme of emotional response emerged from the responses shared with the category experience difficult emotions as a follower recurring as the key topic.

(i) Experience difficult emotions as a follower

A total of 8 out of the 15 participants shared responses to the follower role, the category "experience difficult emotion as a follower" seemed to be the most recurring. Based on the responses, it appears that the participants went through a variety of emotions while occupying the role of a follower in the course of carrying out their responsibilities. Interestingly, this category garnered a lot of responses where the participants were willing to express their negative emotions as a follower, but they seemed quiet in exposing their experienced behaviours in the follower role. Similarly, the Experience_as_a_follower was discussed. However, the most occurring difficult emotions as a follower were feeling lost, frustrated and vulnerable.

Participant nr 6: *"I would say very much, very much lost. And it was mostly because the leaders did not show much time for the staff. You never knew are you doing the right thing? Every decision became a gut feel, not based on experience."*

Participant nr 7: *"Because you follow but thinking I don't agree with you. I don't agree with this chat. But, at the same time, you know if you say anything, it can go on the wrong side. And you don't want to get on someone's bad side. So, you kind of keep quiet. And you just get on with it. And at times you feel as if you're being dishonest because you're being quiet about things you don't agree with. And I've done that quite a few times."*

Participant nr 8: *"I also think, as that leader then stepped into the role and how he managed the team, I felt exposed. I didn't feel a sense of accountability coming from them. So very quickly, our relationship was ruined. Because I did not feel safe under his leadership. I felt like I always had to watch my back. Watch what I say."*

One participant revealed the tension and conflict while acting in a follower role:

Participant nr 8: *"There were a lot of conflict and tension in that environment."*

The main finding is that the participants experienced different feelings in adopting the follower role. The participants reported more negative emotions in the follower position than in the leader role, and the former was more heavily represented.

5.6.6. Findings for Research Question 3

Research Question 3:

How does vertical code-switching influence the middle manager's role identity?

The purpose of Research Question 3 is to explore the act of vertical code-switching. Vertical code-switching is the ability of the middle manager to adopt and disable multiple roles in carrying out work responsibilities. Therefore, the understanding of vertical code-switching will assist in understanding the different roles the middle manager is capable of occupying and the associated identity related to each role. The objective of Research Question 3 will be achieved by gaining deeper insights into vertical code-switching by focusing on the frequency of transitioning and the mental models the middle manager applies to implement the transitioning act.

Table 7 contains a list of the interview questions that were prepared to acquire the required information during the interview relating to the act of vertical code-switching, and the identity occupied by transitioning between the different roles within the field of die mid-hierarchical level during the event of turnover at executive level.

Table 7: Interview questions for Research Question 3

RESEARCH QUESTION 3	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
How does vertical code-switching influence middle managers' role and identity?	9. Now that you are familiar with vertical code-switching, could you elaborate on the distinct roles you play in the organisational context and if any overlapping exists? 12. How do you understand role transition? If incorrect, I will explain the concept. 14. How do you transition or switch cognitive gears into a new role? Thus, enact the role of boss toward your subordinates and then enact the role of subordinate toward your boss. Are there any processes that you go through to move from one role to another? 15. Can you elaborate on the frequency of these role transitions you undertake during a day? 16. In summary, how would you describe your position and are you leaning toward a more salient position? How does it influence the separate roles you are required to perform?

The information gathered from the interviews revealed themes and categories, while the most frequent themes were the primary focus in selecting the answers to the research questions. There was only one recurring theme throughout the interviews, namely the quality of vertical code-switching. Appendix_5_thematic_map contains a comprehensive frequency analysis of all the themes, categories and codes. In addition, the findings for Research Question 3 are discussed in Chapter 6 Discuss_finding_research_question_3.

5.6.6.1   *Understanding vertical code-switching*

Figure 8 is an illustration of the key theme, quality of vertical code-switching, together with the respective categories and frequencies as they pertain to Research Question 3.
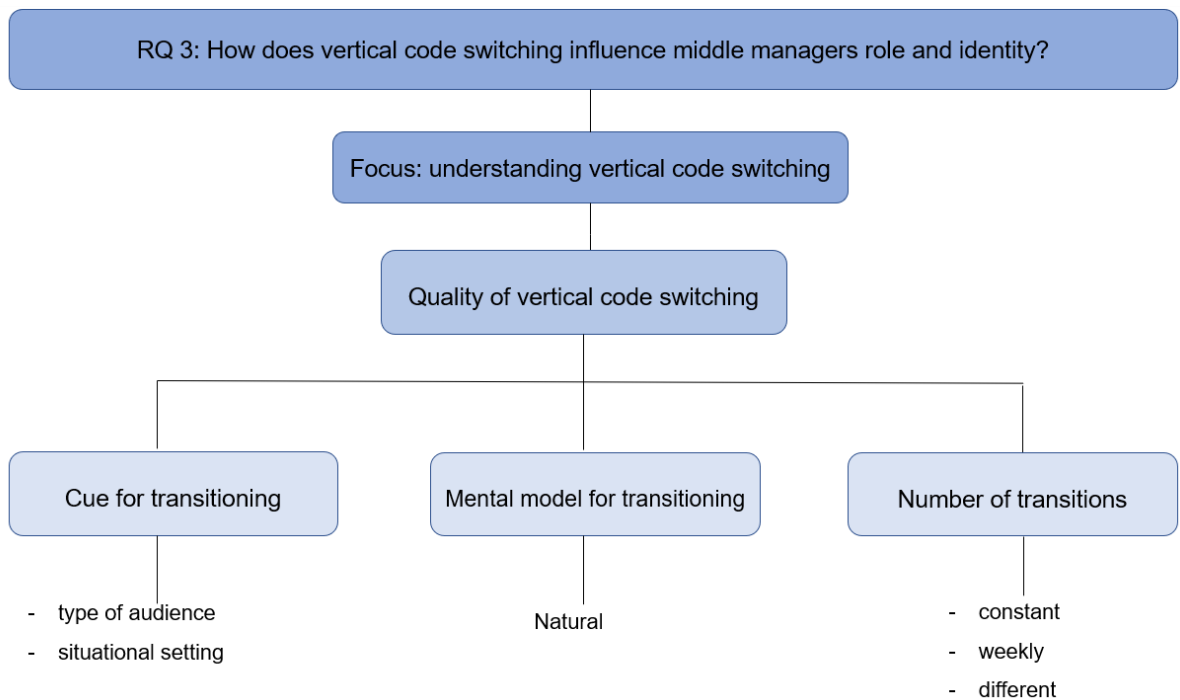
Figure 8: Overview of findings – Research Question 3 regarding investigation of vertical code-switching

(a) Quality of vertical code-switching

The purpose of the research question was to gain deeper insights into the dynamics of vertical code-switching during an event of turnover at executive level. Participants responded to Research Question 3 by giving their perspectives concerning the quality of vertical code-switching activity. This topic became a popular theme due to

the fact that all 15 participants engaged in responses pertaining to this theme. The conversations also revealed key recurrent categories, such as cue for transitions, the mental model for making the transition, and the number of transitions.

(i) Cue for transitioning

A total of 10 of the 15 participants agreed that there are triggers that initiate the process of vertical code-switching in order to transition between the various roles that need to be occupied in the execution of duties during the executive turnover event.

Six (6) of the 15 participants agreed that the presence of and contact with the type of audience triggers the transitioning to a different role, which in turn allows for the entry and departure of the many roles. Some of the responses mentioned regarding the audience as the inspiration for the transitioning are:

Participant nr 1: *"You must know your audience and you must speak on the level of your audience. So, it's a more relaxed switch. Use their language."*

Participant nr 3: *"If you move between the two roles, you have to think about the person that you are addressing – whether it is one of your staff members, or your manager."*

In addition, the remaining 6 of the 15 participants were of the opinion that the situation signals the onset of the transfer into a different role:

Participant nr 2: *"The frequency of the transitioning between the different roles depends. For example, if there is a project we are working on, or particular issue or crisis; I need a lot more interaction."*

Participant nr 11: *"So it's during the day, it's not once a week, or once a month. But it also depends. Sometimes it happens daily for two or so weeks. And then it happens once in a week. Again, it depends on what the focus is from the top. But during budget times, it's easy and only changes in two weeks, because you focus on one thing. And then all of a sudden, budgets are over, and they go back to reporting and austerity measures and you have to change 2 to 3 to 4 times a day."*

The main finding is that 66% of participants revealed the type of audience and the current situational setting is the triggers to engage in vertical code-switching.

(ii) Mental model to transition

A total of 10 of the 15 participants agreed that the switching of cognitive gears to transition between the different roles is a natural process that requires little conscious effort. As a result, the automatic processing requires minimal effort and thought to switch. Some quotes provided by the participants are as follows:

Participant nr 7: *"It's not a conscious switch in any way; it actually just happens naturally."*

Participant nr 12: *"At the end of the day, it's probably something that just becomes a habit."*

The main finding is that 66% of participants revealed switching between leader and follower positions is a fairly effortless process.

(iii) Number of transitions

Seven (7) of the 15 participants were in agreement that the frequency of switching between the various roles is recognised as a constant process throughout the day. The responses indicate participants continually alternate back and forth between the different power states:

Participant nr 11: *"Um … I think it varies, but it's mostly multiple times during the day. It's not a case of in the morning you are a leader, and in the afternoon, you are a follower. It happens during the day that it shifts back and forth. And you may see one day in a certain position and continue the next day, but it's more of a constant shift."*

An interesting response was made about weekly transitioning:

Participant nr 4: *"The vertical code-switching does not happen on a daily basis. I do touch base with my manager more on a weekly base."*

It is clear from another response how variable the frequency can be:

Participant nr 10: *"Each day is different."*

The main finding is that 47% of participants claimed to constantly switch between roles throughout the day.

5.7.   Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings to the three research questions as posed in Chapter 3.

The findings to Research Question 1 demonstrated that, during turnover at executive level, there is a change in the work conditions, which prompts the middle manager to be constrained to the follower position during the activity of vertical code-switching. The study indicated that the new executive's behaviours contributed to the participants' negative perceptions of the workplace. However, the work environment is also impacted by the leadership practices of the current executive teams in terms of the level of preparation for the arrival of the new executive at the organisation.

The findings for Research Question 2 revealed that, during the event of turnover at executive level, the middle manager continues to deliver what was expected and requested without suffering any role conflict. It was unexpected that only a few people admitted to experiencing role conflict due to the demanding work environment. Tension related to taking on too many responsibilities, often known as role overload, was more common during an executive level turnover.

Additionally, none of the participants had any prior knowledge of the term "vertical code-switching". This reaction was expected, given the novelty of the term in the scholarly literature and its subsequent lack of common usage in business.

Furthermore, the participants were more open to discuss their experiences as a leader than as a follower. This was unexpected, given the participants' previous admissions that they spend more time in the follower position than the leader position during the executive level turnover event. It was also interesting to note that, in both the leader and follower roles, protection was the primary focus. However, the participants were eager to share more negative emotions experienced in the follower role than in the leader role.

The findings for Research Question 3 revealed insights into the nature of vertical code-switching. The study found that the presence of the audience type or a specific situation triggers vertical code-switching. Since the middle manager serves different audiences, there is constant switching between the different power states throughout the day. In addition, it was revealed that vertical code-switching is regarded as a process that occurs without conscious effort or thought.

The findings of this section are discussed in further depth and their relevance to the literature is demonstrated in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion of findings

6.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of executive turnover on the prevalence of vertical code-switching among middle managers. The aim of the research was to explore the dynamics and the adaptability of vertical code-switching during pressured work conditions as introduced in Chapter 1.

The findings of the analysis of the data that were acquired through the process of semi-structured interviews, which were documented in Chapter 4, are discussed in Chapter 6. These outcomes are provided as a discussion of the findings that were presented in Chapter 5. The discussion is organised around the research questions, its key findings and its relevance to the existing literature. The findings are compared and contrasted with those of the existing literature, as mentioned in Chapter 2, to deepen the current understanding of vertical code-switching.

6.2. Discussion of findings for Research Question 1

Research Question 1:

In what ways is turnover at executive level viewed as added pressure on vertical code-switching?

The aim of Research Question 1 is to determine if the middle manager is allowed to transition between the leader and follower role during the period of executive turnover event by ways of exploring the work environment. Literature suggested that vertical code-switching needs to be explored to determine how different organisational pressures influence an individual's sense of identity (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). Similarly, Laulié and Morgeson (2021) argued that there is a big gap in what is known about how people who remain in an organisation are affected by turnover events. Hence, information was gathered through open interviews using the interview questions listed in Table_5_interview_question_1 in Chapter 5.

The discussion of the findings was consistent with the inductive approach that was commissioned to analyse the interview data. This indicates that the discussion of the findings was guided by the themes emerging during the coding process, and were

simultaneously connected to the interview questions. The themes created for Research Question 1 were portrait of the organisation, and leadership practices.

6.2.1. Portrait of organisation

Portrait of the organisation emerged as a theme from the responses of the participants, which are organised into the key categories of workplace climate, and organisational structure. First, the workplace climate indicates the participants' perceptions about the work environment as they were given the opportunity to express their feelings about work. Second, the organisational structure provides an in-depth description of the elements that contribute to the perspectives of the workplace.

6.2.1.1 Workplace climate

The findings revealed the workplace has become difficult during the event of turnover at executive level as the participants used adjectives like "chaotic", "confused", "stressed", "destructive" and "feeling of loss" to characterise the environment at work.

This finding is supported by Blom (2018), who described organisational changes as being "chaotic, messy, unpredictable, disordered and disorganized" (p. 9). It is claimed that the workforce finds it difficult to adapt and accept the changes.

These perspectives about the workplace are heightened as the study's participants explained the new executive sends numerous requests for investigation and information input to the middle manager as they acclimate to their new position. The participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the current situation, citing that they are struggling to meet the demands for the increased work expectations.

There is evidence from several previous research studies that claim that turnover at executive level has a detrimental effect on the organisation. The results of the current study are unexpected but still consistent with those of Laulié and Morgeson (2021), who found internal organisational resources are often diverted and utilised for different goals during executive turnover events. The researchers argued that a turnover event can impact the requirements of an employee's position, leading to an increase in their workload; more specifically, make new and different demands on the work.

Subsequently, the study has found that the middle manager's workload has increased due to the new executive's increasing demand requests. Participants shared that there is an ongoing demand for high performance delivery with little possibility of holiday entitlement.

This finding was unexpected based on the literature review conducted in relation to vertical code-switching as the influence of executive level turnover has not been previously addressed in the literature. In this perspective, the current research extends to the body of knowledge that already exists in the literature regarding the dynamics of vertical code-switching carried out by the middle manager in the presence of executive level turnover. The findings revealed that role conflict is not likely to arise during executive level turnover, but that role overload is likely to emerge during internal organisational pressured times.

Anicich et al. (2021) described role overload as when the middle manager has too many duties and not enough time to fulfil them. The researchers explained the middle manager's stress and exhaustion stem from the numerous demands placed on them by the various groups they are tasked with serving. Consequently, it was claimed that the middle manager became too thinly stretched while trying to fulfil the different audience's needs, which in turn contributed to the negative effects on the well-being of the middle manager.

As a result, the current study revealed that the middle manager is restricted in their ability to switch vertically between positions of leader and follower. The elevated demands for upward feedback to the executive level forced the middle manager to adopt and continue acting in the role of a follower during the turnover event that occurs at executive level.

This finding was unexpected based on the literature review conducted in relation to vertical code-switching performed by the middle manager as the impact of turnover at executive level was not previously explored by other researchers. In this perspective, the current research extends to what is already known in literature about the dynamics of vertical code-switching by the middle manager during executive level turnover. The existing literature defines vertical code-switching as the capacity of a middle manager to transition between distinct power positions while respectively assuming either the role of a leader or a follower in a situation. As a result, the middle manager can interact with both more powerful and less powerful groups (Anicich &

Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al., 2021; Ashforth et al., 2000). The current study extends to the existing knowledge by introducing a limitation on vertical code-switching during times of internal organisational pressure. The findings revealed that the reporting upwards role of the middle manager is kept busy by the rising demands of audience of the higher tier during the executive turnover event. It should be noted that the leader role assumes a less prominent position of importance during the integration phase of the new executive.

6.2.1.2   Organisational structure

The study found that, in addition to increasing the responsibilities placed on the middle manager, the new executive also makes changes to the way the organisation operates to enhance procedures that, from their point of view, are not performing at their full potential. Responses indicate that changes to policies and processes are based on what the new executive believes to be appropriate or what he is accustomed to. The participants explained that these modifications exacerbated the existing issues, since, in their perspectives, the additional modifications were not suitable for the system or the operations of the organisation.

This finding is supported by Laulié and Morgeson (2021), who claimed that structural changes in the work environment are more likely to occur during a critical turnover event, such as changes to policies and processes.

In addition, the research also revealed the new executive brings in a new team, which further impacts on the company's organisational structure. According to the findings, the new executive has prior experience working with the new team or employees. This instantaneously results in a change in the structure of the team as well as the structure of the leadership, both of which the middle manager is required to embrace and adjust to.

This finding was unexpected since the introduction of a new team, together with the new executive, had not been previously explored by other researchers as part of organisational structural changes. In this perspective, the current research extends to what is previously known in the literature on the organisational structure changes that have been identified as reviews and rewrites of policies, processes and job descriptions (Laulié & Morgeson, 2021).

6.2.2. Leadership practices

Surprising results emerged from the responses to Research Question 1 about the allowance of vertical code-switching under conditions of turnover at executive level; these were categorised under the theme of leadership practices. The implementation of a change management method emerged as a key category of responses under this theme.

6.2.2.1 Change management methodology

The findings from the responses revealed that the majority of participants believed they were not prepared by the existing executives for the impending change of turnover at executive level. The study found a limited quantity of information was communicated to the middle management team, which suggested that only a limited quantity of information was conveyed downwards to the operational level. There was a feeling among the participants of being misinformed. Alternatively, the message delivered was in a general format suitable for all hierarchical levels and was not personalised according to authority level. The lack of a coordinated strategy for preparing and supporting employees through a change period is indicative as this answer indicates that organisations do not use formal change management methods.

The finding was surprising, but it is supported by Blom (2018), who claimed that leadership involvement in the change process can lessen the negative consequences of executive turnover. The researcher argued that higher leadership should help employees adjust to their new conditions. It is suggested that, during periods of change, leaders should open fresh channels of communication. The findings are consistent with those of Mumtaz et al. (2022), who suggested that employee satisfaction would increase if management actively sought to address employees' concerns.

6.2.3. Summary of discussion for Research Question 1

The research study concluded that turnover at executive level is claimed as pressure on vertical code-switching performed by the middle manager. During turnover at executive level, the middle manager continues to occupy the upwards reporting structure, also known as the follower function. The follower is synonymous with

having little influence upwards, hence the middle manager's position is stripped of power during turnover at the executive level. This implies that the dynamics of power change during turnover at executive level, as the leader role and the feeling of authority are less prevalent during this phase of integration of the new executive. In addition, during the event of a change in executive leadership, vertical code-switching is no longer flexible.

The salient follower role is a result of the new executive's repeated queries to the middle manager for information on which the new executive needs to report. The study found the middle manager faces challenges in meeting rising demand expectations as well as an increase in the volume of work they are expected to complete. This situation is described as a redirection of resources and used for other objectives.

Therefore, the study concluded that the middle manager experiences role overload during the occurrence of executive turnover. This suggests that there are too many demands placed on the middle manager and not enough time to fulfil them. As a result, it is also concluded that no role conflict occurs during a turnover event at executive level. It is also concluded that the middle manager does not engage in the inappropriate behaviours of a leader while acting in the capacity of a follower, as role conflict suggests that the behaviour of one role is adopted while acting in another role.

Furthermore, the study concluded that while the nature of the work performed by middle managers changes during turnover at executive level, the work environment also changes across all levels of the organisational hierarchy. The middle manager has a negative perception of the workplace during turnover at executive level. Correspondingly, the study found that policies and procedures are altered during executive turnover, supporting the hostile work environment. In addition, the leadership dynamics and team structure at higher hierarchical levels are subject to change because of the introduction of new teams into the organisation by the newly appointed executive.

Lastly, the study concluded that organisations rarely use formal change management strategies to help and prepare their employees for executive level turnover events. However, there is a deficiency of communication across the various tiers of the organisation, and what little there is tends to be presented in a generic format rather

than tailored to each tier.

Return to Chapter 5 for a presentation of the findings per theme in Research Question 1 Present_themes_research_question_1.

6.3.   Discussion of findings for Research Question 2

Research Question 2:

In what ways does vertical code-switching impact on the performance of the middle manager?

The aim of Research Question 2 is to gain an understanding of the middle manager's behaviours and emotions while entering and exiting the multiple roles in serving the distinct audiences. Literature suggested that each role has its own set of distinct behavioural practices and expectations (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017, Ashforth et al., 2000). As a result, the middle manager will connect or behave differently with high power individuals compared to the behaviour they exhibit while interacting with lower power individuals (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2020; Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Ashforth, 2000; Falls & Allen, 2020). This suggested the management of behaviours. Therefore, the awareness and further investigation into the transitioning between the different roles will enable the middle manager to apply the appropriate required behaviour to the current situation (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017, Ashforth et al., 2000). Similarly, Falls and Allen (2020) also expressed the need for a greater understanding into vertical code-switching. Hence, information was gathered through open interviews using the interview questions listed in Table 6 as in Chapter 5 Table_6_interview_question_2.

The discussion of the findings was consistent with the inductive approach that was commissioned to analyse the interview data. This indicates that the discussion of the findings was guided by the themes emerging during the coding process, and were simultaneously connected to the interview questions. The themes created for Research Question 2 were behaviour and attitude, and emotional response.

6.3.1.   Behaviour and attitude

The behaviour and attitude theme emerged from the responses of the participants, which are organised into the key categories of awareness about vertical code-

switching, level of vertical code-switching, and experiences in the leader and follower role. First, a high level of awareness about vertical code-switching indicates the participants' knowledge and understanding about the term vertical code-switching. Second, the level of vertical code-switching indicates the possibility of missed or successful transitions during turnover at executive level. Last, the experiences in the leader and follower roles indicate the awareness of the participants of the multiple roles and identities a middle manager must adopt to succeed.

6.3.1.1   Awareness of vertical code-switching

The research study revealed that, prior to participating in the current study, the participants were unfamiliar with the term vertical code-switching. However, once the researcher had explained the notion of vertical code-switching as entering and exiting the many positions the middle manager needs to hold during the day to serve the distinct audiences, the concept seemed to make sense to the participants.

This finding was expected since it is supported by literature, stating that the business world has a poor grasp on the complexities involved in managing the power dynamic between upper and lower management, as well as how middle managers respond to performance expectations and deal with feelings of helplessness (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020).

6.3.1.2   Level of vertical code-switching

The research study revealed executive level turnover is not accompanied by the existence of role conflict at the middle management level. This finding is consistent with the conclusion reached in Research Question 1, which states that role overload manifests as role tension during the integration period of the new executive. Thus, the participants had smooth transitions with zero or minimal missed transitions despite the high levels of organisational pressure.

This finding is supported by Ashforth et al. (2000), who claimed the middle manager will not experience role conflict if they conduct themselves in the manner that was anticipated of them. This aligns with the claims of the literature that role conflict is most pronounced when the middle manager is repeatedly put in a position of both high and low authority and, as a result, comes to have competing views on which roles must be played to accomplish the task at hand (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich

et al., 2021). Falls and Allen (2020) agreed that role conflict arises when a middle manager is required to perform several various social roles, each of which brings with it its own unique set of behavioural expectations.

6.3.1.3   *Experience as leader or follower*

The research study revealed that the participants viewed themselves more as leaders than as followers when they were asked to reflect on their time spent performing the responsibilities of a variety of roles. Words like "shielding them", "maintain calmness", "protect", "developing people" and "be strong" indicated that the participants felt more at ease in describing experiences in the leader role. However, the participants encountered greater difficulty when asked to reflect on their time spent in the role of follower, due to the wide range of perspectives expressed and the lack of any recurring topics emerging beyond the perception of receiving protection. The participants' reflections of their own experiences made it evident that they distinguish between the roles of leader and follower.

The finding is supported by literature that claimed middle managers can adopt the role of either a follower or a leader, therefore possessing a variety of positions while they carry out their responsibilities (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2020; Anicich et al., 2021; Falls & Allen, 2020). This is in line with the social identity theory's categorisation and labelling of the organisational environment into tiers, with the top and bottom tiers corresponding to the positions of leader and follower, respectively (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Furthermore, the finding is also in line with the role identity theory that explains an individual can simultaneously assume different roles, such as that of leader and follower (Maurer & London, 2018). Ashforth et al. (2000) pointed out that each role has its own identity or persona. The process of "doffing one persona and donning another", as described by Ashforth (2000), is essential to the notion of the persona (p. 21).

6.3.2. Emotional response

The emotional response theme emerged from the responses of the participants, which contain the key category being "experienced difficult emotion as a follower".

6.3.2.1 Experience difficult emotion as a follower

When asked to reflect on their time spent performing the responsibilities of a variety of roles, participants shared more challenging emotions while acting in a follower role than when acting in a leader role. Phrases such as "feeling lost", "felt frustrated" and "felt lost" were used repeatedly in describing the follower position. The participants assessed themselves to be leaders as opposed to followers as demonstrated by their more negative perceptions of the follower role.

This finding was surprising but supported by Falls and Allen (2020), who found that middle managers were reluctant to accept a follower identity. Both Kelly (1998) and Alegbeleye and Kaufman (2020) explained that followers are stereotyped negatively.

Furthermore, the finding is supported by the social identity theory that argues social categorisation assists in defining an individual within the social organisation. As a result, the social identity theory explains how people develop their identities in response to the roles they play (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

In addition, Selenko et al. (2018) claimed that only one of the multiple roles tends to be active and overpowering in any given setting, even if the role identity theory explains the presence of multiple roles within a single individual (Maurer & London, 2018). The middle manager benefits from role identity theory since it helps them feel valued as they discover who they are in a certain role (Selenko et al., 2018; Tempelaar & Rosenkranz, 2019).

6.3.3. Summary of discussion for Research Question 2

The research study concluded that the middle manager is sensitive and adaptable regarding the demands placed on them by the organisational environment. The study has revealed that the performance of the middle manager suffers from role overload as a kind of role tension when there is turnover at executive level. This was also evident in the conclusion from Research Question 1 that the middle manager is pressured to adopt the follower role. This implies no leader role is entered during turnover at executive level. Therefore, there is no repetitive transitioning between the follower role and the leader role, which stimulates the emergence of role conflict if improper behaviour is adopted in a given situation.

Furthermore, the study concluded that the middle manager is cognizant that conflicting roles of the follower and leader need to be assumed to fulfil the responsibilities effectively. However, the findings revealed that the middle manager was more comfortable adopting the position of a leader and would rather be viewed as a leader than a follower. This was evident in the findings that the participants were more inclined to discuss their experiences as a leader than a follower.

The study concluded that the middle manager built up a dislike of the follower role as more negative sentiments were conveyed in the follower role than in the leader role. This is because the middle manager is pushed towards the follower role during turnover at executive level, which is a role that they do not want to be portrayed as.

Lastly, the research study concluded that the corporate sector is unfamiliar with vertical code-switching because it has a limited understanding of the intricate power dynamics involved in assuming and abandoning the many personae. The lack of information regarding vertical code-switching allows the middle manager to favour the role of leader above completely optimising both the leader and follower roles.

Return to Chapter 5 for a presentation of the findings per theme in Research Question 2 Present_themes_research_question_2.

6.4. Discussion of findings for Research Question 3

> Research Question 3:
>
> How does vertical code-switching influence the middle manager's role identity?

The aim of Research Question 3 is to explore the multiple hats a middle manager needs to wear to better understand vertical code-switching during periods of executive level turnover. Falls and Allen (2020) requested further research to be conducted on vertical code-switching by investigating variables such as the transition itself, the reasons for making the switch, the methods used to make the switch, and the incentives and pressures of wearing different hats and adopting the different identities.

The role identity theory states the middle manager must execute a variety of roles, each of which equates a different identity (Maurer & London, 2018). The identity inhabited by the middle manager is a description of the middle manager's perception of themself and the activities they engage in (Maurer & London, 2018; Reay et al., 2017; Tempelaar & Rosenkranz, 2019). Hence, information was gathered through open interviews using the interview questions listed in Table 7 as in Chapter 5 Table_7_interview_question_3.

The discussion of the findings was consistent with the inductive approach that was commissioned to analyse the interview data. This indicates that the discussion of the findings was guided by the themes emerging during the coding process, and were simultaneously connected to the interview questions. Quality of vertical code-switching emerged as a recurrent theme for Research Question 3.

6.4.1. Quality of vertical code-switching

The quality of vertical code-switching theme emerged from the responses of the participants, which are organised into the key categories of cue for transitioning, the number of transitions and the mental models for transitioning. First, a transitional cue highlights the importance and urgency of assuming a new identity and role. Second, the number of transitions offers insight into the ease of adopting a variety of roles and persona. Last, the mental models for transitioning reflect on the simplicity or complexity of the transition process.

6.4.1.1   Cue for transitioning

The research study revealed that entering and exiting the leader and follower role depends on the characteristics of the interacting team and the circumstances. These factors are classified as the audience and situational triggers. The current study's responses pointed only to external cues, with minimal mention of internal cues, that trigger the desire to abandon one position to assume another. The audience's language and the type of work being done were mentioned as recurring topics during the interviews.

This finding is surprising as it extends the research conducted by Falls and Allen (2020), who argued that internal and external stimuli can serve as triggers for role switching. The researchers claimed internal cues include emotions and goals, whereas an example of an external trigger is a manager entering a room. In the current study, only external factors were found to prompt a middle manager to switch roles during a turnover at executive level event. Thus, no internal incentives for the middle manager to make a role switch during a period of high internal organisational pressure were identified in this study.

6.4.1.2   Number of transitions

The research study revealed the middle manager frequently and constantly shifts roles in the hierarchy between those of leader and follower. The inquiry was not intended to find out how often middle managers switch between leading and following. However, the purpose of the inquiry was to assess the participant's level of comfort acting in both a leading and a following capacity.

The current finding extends the existing literature that the middle manager can easily switch between the roles of leader and follower during a typical workday (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al, 2021; Ashforth et al., 2000; Falls & Allen, 2020). However, the adoption of the follower position becomes prominent, and the leader role becomes muted during periods of internal organisational pressure like executive turnover.

6.4.1.3   Mental model to transition

The research study revealed switching positions in the hierarchy between leader and follower occurs naturally during the period of turnover at the executive level. The participants declared they had not given the process of transitioning any thought before taking part in the study, but they agreed the process is subconscious and requires no effort. The responses demonstrated the process had become habitual.

This finding is supported by existing research that argued that transitioning between the multiple roles becomes natural and easy with little mental preparation after frequent transitions for a prolonged period. This finding is reinforced by the previous finding that the middle manager regularly and constantly switches between the roles of leader and follower. Prior research explained the subconscious process is a result of the development of role transition scripts due to the consistent engagement in micro-role transitions (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al, 2021; Ashforth et al., 2000; Falls & Allen, 2020).

6.4.2.   Summary of discussion for Research Question 3

The study concluded that, during a period of internal organisational pressure identified as executive turnover, external stimuli act as triggers for the middle manager to shift gears or commence the process of donning a new hat. There were no identified internal factors that would have triggered a shift to a new role during the time of executive turnover. Both the demographics of the audience and the situations served as the external triggers for this study.

Furthermore, it was concluded that the middle manager is at ease in adopting both roles of leader and follower, as evidenced by the frequent and constant adoption and deactivation of the distinct roles.

In addition, it was also concluded that the frequent and continuous cycle between the roles of leader and follower resulted in the creation of role transition scripts that the middle managers employ in the process of transitioning between roles. The use of role transition scripts has the advantage of making the shifting gears a natural process, which is carried out with minimal conscious effort.

Return to Chapter 5 for presentation of the findings per theme in Research Question 3 .

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion of the findings that were gained through the process of analysing the data.

Vertical code-switching is the power play that is conducted by the middle manager while serving and satisfying the performance expectations of high-power seniors and low-power subordinates. This indicates that vertical code-switching enables the middle manager to perform the duties of either a leader or a follower (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2020; Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al., 2021; Ashforth, 2000; Falls & Allen, 2020; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020).

It was established that the occurrence of turnover at executive level imposes challenges onto the work environment. Consequently, the middle manager faces difficulties in performing both the role of leader and follower. It was established that the turnover event at executive level limits the vertical code-switching flexibility for the middle manager, forcing them into a subordinate role. This indicates the middle manager loses influence (becomes powerless in a follower role) during the turnover event at executive level, since the middle manager must focus on meeting the needs of the new leadership.

The increased expectations placed on the middle manager did not result in a transition between the roles of follower and leader; nevertheless, it demonstrated that the middle manager is adaptable and responsive to the demands that have been imposed. Therefore, it was established that role overload is prevalent during the period of executive turnover. Executive level turnover does not result in role conflict since the middle manager does not frequently switch between the follower and leader roles.

Research Question 1 was therefore answered, and the findings indicated that executive turnover is regarded as a restraint on vertical code-switching.

The second research question aimed to identify the actions and feelings exhibited by a middle manager that constitute their performance while they are assuming the distinct roles of follower and leader during the process of role transitioning. The

findings in Research Question 2 confirmed the presence of role overload during the turnover event at executive level.

Research Question 3 found that the middle manager produces role transitions scripts, which aid in the unconscious process of transitioning between the follower and leader roles with minimum physical and emotional effort, corroborating the low profile of role conflict found in Research Question 2.

Finally, it was established that external stimulus triggers are prevalent during the turnover event at executive level. These triggers prompted the middle manager to switch gears between the follower role and the leader role. It was revealed that the external triggers for this study were the demographics of the audience as well as the situations settings. During the turnover event at executive level, there was no identification of internal stimuli that acted as triggers for the transitioning between the distinct roles.

Research Question 3 was therefore answered by exploring the various roles and identities acquired by the middle manager throughout the turnover event at executive level. This revealed insights into the power play that occurs between follower roles and leader roles.

The results were used to construct a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of executive turnover on the vertical code-switching process. The framework is presented in the concluding chapter that follows.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations

7.1. Introduction

The middle manager must play a variety of roles and adopt several distinct personas to meet the expectations for the day's performance. The middle manager occupies a special niche in the organisation since they simultaneously address the needs of both the higher power strategic level and the lower power operational level (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Falls & Allen, 2020). Consequently, the middle manager faces conflicting demands from both groups (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017).

The flexibility of a middle manager is essential for serving these groups, as is the ability to assume varying degrees of power to meet the demands of each group. The middle manager, then, can never have less power than the operational level, nor more than the higher strategic level. Indeed, the middle manager derives his power through the interactions with these audiences. As a result, the power of the middle manager is unstable since it ebbs and flows throughout the day (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). It also means that the middle manager can exert authority one minute and have no say in any decisions the next. How a middle manager interacts with power is complicated (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2020; Anicich et al., 2021; Ashforth, 2000; Falls & Allen, 2020).

For this reason, the research explores the ability of the middle manager to adopt the different levels of power. As presented in Chapter 1, a middle manager's power lies in his ability to "vertically code switch" between the roles of a leader and a follower (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al., 2021). This study aimed to explore how vertical code-switching performs under internal organisational pressure, which has been identified as turnover at executive level. This research examined specifically how middle managers manage to find a balance between challenging working conditions and high expectations for performance.

This chapter outlines conclusions based on the research topic established in Chapter 1 and the findings reported and discussed in chapters 5 and 6. These findings are incorporated into a framework that describes the behaviour of vertical code-switching during executive turnover. This is then followed by a discussion of the study's contributions to scholarship and business sector implications. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

7.2. Principal findings

The findings of this research emerged through a process of analysis of data obtained through interviews. Key themes were developed from the most frequently occurring and heavily stressed themes to provide insight into the three research questions. The key findings of the study are presented below.

7.2.1. Findings of turnover at executive level as added pressure on vertical code-switching

The aim of Research Question 1 was to determine if turnover at executive level places additional stress on the vertical code-switching process of the middle manager. This exploration of vertical code-switching abilities set out to answer the question, "Does the middle manager still hold the roles of leader and follower throughout the executive level turnover event?"

The key finding revealed that the middle manager has little influence in the company when there is executive turnover. This is due to the middle manager's experiencing role overload because of an increase in demand expectations from the high-power strategic audience. Consequently, the middle manager is relegated to a position of powerless subservient follower, whereas the leadership position is deemphasised.

This finding adds to the existing body of literature of vertical code-switching, which defines this phenomenon as the ability of a middle manager to move upwards and downwards between different power groups, assuming the role of either a leader or a follower (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Anicich et al., 2021). The findings of the current study revealed that the dynamics of the transitioning movement have changed, resulting in less frequent adoption and the disabling of the follower and leader roles. Thus, the flexibility of vertical code-switching is weakened.

7.2.2. Findings of middle manager's performance impacted by vertical code-switching

Research Question 2 sought to examine how middle managers deal with the pressures caused by executive turnover, because the middle manager's performance and the way they interact with their various audiences are both affected by his attitude (Geys et al., 2020).

The key finding revealed in Research Question 2 explains the reason why the middle manager is contained in a follower role, which was revealed in the key finding in Research Question 1. Responses in answering Research Question 2 revealed that role overload keeps the middle manager from transitioning to the level of leader by limiting the opportunities to lead. As a result, the middle manager is relegated to the follower role, where they respond to the increased expectations placed on them by the organisation's high-power strategic level. This means there is less potential for interaction with subordinates, and hence less likelihood of role conflict.

7.2.3. Findings of the influence of vertical code-switching on the middle manager's role identity

Research Question 3 explored the behaviour of the middle manager in terms of the role that they fulfil to gain a better understanding of the dynamics involved in vertical code-switching.

The key finding revealed that, during the event of turnover at executive level, the transition of the middle manager is spurred by the presence of external stimuli that cause the middle manager to switch roles, also known as changing hats. The study revealed external triggers can be factors like the composition of the audience during a conversation or the situations themselves. There were no observable internal cues during the executive turnover event that prompted the transition between the distinct roles. Based on the findings, it can be drawn that the middle manager is both attentive to and able to adjust to the growing expectations of the most influential audience and to shifting working conditions, as was established in Research Question 1.

In summary, the higher demand expectations that were discovered in Research Question 1 as role overload are identified as external stimuli in Research Question 3, which contains the middle manager in a follower position.

7.3.   Proposed framework

The findings to the research problem stated in Chapter 1 are summarised in Figure 9.

The present study revealed the challenges that middle managers encounter while attempting to play the roles of leader and follower during times of executive level turnover. The vertical code-switching capacity reacts differently in a typical work environment compared to one that has been disrupted by an organisational pressure event, such as executive level turnover.

The executive turnover has interrupted the interaction between the managers and the low-power operational workforce, resulting in fewer possibilities for the middle manager to engage with the latter. As a result, the middle manager has limited opportunities to hold a leadership role and establish a powerful state by demonstrating behaviours of assertiveness and dominance in their daily interactions with the workforce.

In fact, the high-powered senior executive level produces a role overload at the middle management layer due to the greater demand expectations placed on the middle manager. The middle manager reacts to the heightened performance requirements and, as a result, continues to assume the position as a follower. The middle manager acts in a deferential manner as they occupy a less powerful position. Therefore, the middle manager's transition into the follower role was prompted by external cues in the form of rising demand expectations, allowing for fewer movements between the two roles of being a follower and a leader. This implies the turnover event at the executive level reduces the flexibility of the vertical code-switching and it provides a stable low-power role for the middle manager.
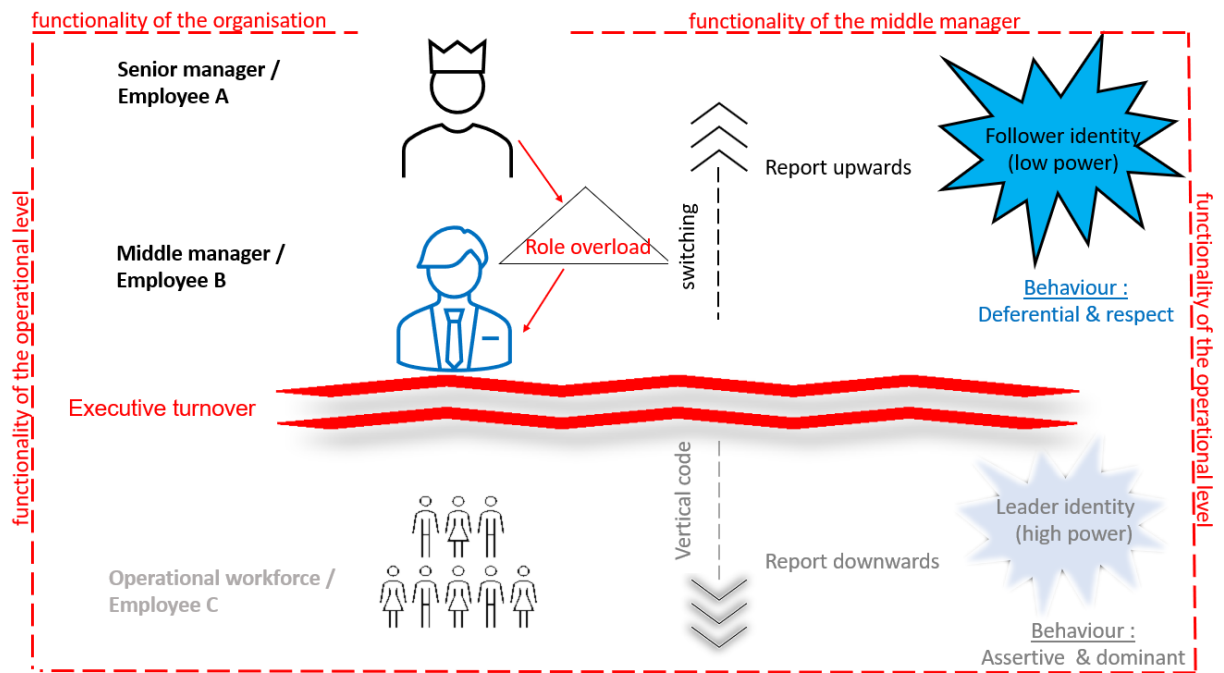
Figure 9: Framework of executive turnover influence on vertical code-switching

Figure 9 differs from Figure 2 Framework_turnover_vertical_code_switch, which illustrated a collaborative relationship between turnover at executive level and vertical code-switching during normal work conditions.

7.4. Academic contribution of this study

Anicich and Hirsh (2017) argued that not much research has been conducted on the power play of the middle manager in the middle tier of the organisational hierarchy setting. Therefore, vertical code-switching is still a relatively novel concept and has not yet been thoroughly explored in the organisational setting. It was discovered that the majority of the literature on code-switching dealt with the phenomenon in the context of other languages and cultures. In addition, the existing body of literature emphasises the need for additional investigation into unknown factors, such as the transition itself, the motivations for making the switch, the techniques that were utilised to make the switch, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of donning and doffing a variety of hats and assuming several different identities (Falls & Allen, 2020). This research study contributes to the existing literature on vertical code-switching by raising awareness of the challenges of vertical code-switching at the mid-level of the organisational hierarchy during the period of internal organisational

pressure, namely during turnover event at executive level.

In addition, Anicich and Hirsh (2017) advocated for more research to be conducted to investigate how the pressures of an organisation affect an employee's view of their own status. Numerous studies have been conducted with the sole purpose of determining the factors that influence employees' decisions to quit their job (Mumtaz et al., 2022). Similarly, Laulié and Morgeson (2021) said that there is a big gap in what is known about how turnover events affect people who stay in an organisation. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing insight on the ripple effects that executive turnover has throughout an organisation.

7.5.   Implications for business

This study aims to provide insights into how turnover events at executive level impact the performance of the middle manager. Therefore, the study provides the leaders of the organisation with knowledge and understanding of how the middle manager balances their sense of power and the work climate of the organisation, as well as the means to combat the adverse effects that turnover at executive level has on the organisation in general.

It is evident that the executives do not interact much with the workforce at the lower levels of the organisation. The research revealed that the onus of proving one's worth is heavy on the shoulders of the new executive, leading to a priority on getting down to business right away. The workforce becomes acquainted with the new executive through the emails they send and, as a result, a new sort of electronic relationship is established with the lower-level workers. This leads to a disconnect between the executives and the lower-level workforce.

As soon as they start working, executives should set aside some time to interact with and get to know the workforce at the lower levels of the organisation's hierarchy. This will provide the executive with significant insights into the operations and establish shared goals, which will foster an atmosphere or culture that is inclusive and promotes a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, the study provides insights that turnover at executive level impacts the entire organisation, not only the top tiers. The working environment, organisational structure, interpersonal interactions and team dynamics were all altered. This results

in instability inside the organisation, and not all members of the workforce are able or willing to adapt to new circumstances.

The leadership of the organisation should introduce a change management model when there is turnover at executive level. Employees will consequently find it easier to adapt and adjust to the constantly shifting work environment, while also maintaining their sense of value. It will feel to the employees as though their concerns have been acknowledged, which will avoid disengagement and the build-up of resentment.

The middle manager was significantly affected by turnover since it brought with it uncertainty, volatility and an increase in complexity. The middle manager's role demands that they modify their managerial approaches to the dynamic environment. Consequently, colleagues end up competing against each other rather than cooperating. Relationships were under a lot of strain.

The existing executive team needs to be aware of the shifts occurring inside their own departments or organisations and the difficulties their team is encountering. Existing top management should exhibit people-centric, supportive leadership by protecting their teams from uncertainty through visibility and accessibility. Existing top leaders have a responsibility to ensure that the workplace is humanised and individualised, creating an atmosphere in which employees feel acknowledged, respected and appreciated in their job.

7.6.   Limitations

The limitations that the research has in terms of its methodology were discussed in Chapter 4 Limitations_methodology. The research design and scope are also limited by the following:

7.6.1.   Researcher bias

The context of the researcher will play a role in how the findings of the research are perceived; thus, it is important to be aware of the possibility that the researcher's own biases and assumptions will alter the findings of the research (Creswell, 2014; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to note that the researcher has a great deal of experience working as a middle

manager and has been exposed to turnover at executive level. It is possible that this played a role in the responses of some of the participants or put too much emphasis on a specific topic. This potential was acknowledged by the researcher, and she was able to lessen the impact by examining and revising the coding system on numerous occasions.

7.6.2. Sample size

The study involved a relatively small sample size of 15 interviews carried out among a population of middle managers. This may not be an accurate representation of the population. Consequently, extending findings needs to be done with care.

7.6.3. Industry representation

The research did not adequately reflect the various industries; instead, 7 of the 15 participants worked in the healthcare sector, which received a significant amount of coverage. This transpired because of the researchers' use of a non-probability sampling method that relied on her pre-existing network of personal connections. A drawback of using a sample that is neither random nor representative is that it increases the likelihood of obtaining identical results, which in turn could produce conclusions that are not applicable to the larger population (Morse et al., 2002).

7.6.4. Researcher inexperience

The quality of the data gathered might have been affected by the researcher's inexperience. The researcher did a pilot interview to improve her abilities to mitigate the potential for negative effects of inexperienced interviewing.

7.7. Recommendations for future research

Some recommendations for future research are made based on the findings of this research:

- This study's findings and its suggested framework should be quantitatively confirmed in other industries.

- The study's findings should be validated by organisations who adopted a change management strategy.
- Another study should be conducted to determine how long executive level turnover affects the workforce that remains in the organisation.

7.8. Conclusion

This research has provided insights into the challenges regarding power that the middle manager encounters in transitioning between the role of the leader and the follower during circumstances of turnover at executive level. The study's findings are based on 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with middle managers who have experienced executive turnover. The findings were then analysed and conclusions were reached by comparing and contrasting the findings from the various perspectives. The findings were integrated and a framework was built to depict the challenges encountered by middle managers.

This study has contributed to the overall understanding of vertical code-switching as a power play for the middle manager. There is limited information in the reviewed literature about the activity of vertical code-switching and how it reacts to the pressure of the executive turnover event. The developed framework may be useful to better understand how vertical code-switching unfolds in the event of executive turnover. Therefore, it is concluded that this study was successful in bringing attention to the complexity associated in switching between different forms of power, thus contributing to the body of existing knowledge and serving as a future point of reference.

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Appendix 1: Ethical clearance approval

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Ethical Clearance Approved

Dear Belinda De Meyer,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Ethical Clearance Form

Kind Regards

Return to the methodology chapter discussing the Research_ethics process.

Appendix 2: Consent form

Informed consent form:

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research on middle management's vertical code switching and am trying to find out more about the lived experiences of middle managers during an event of executive turnover. Our interview is expected to last about an hour and half and will help us understand how the middle manager engage in daily activities by transitioning between different levels of power when there is organisational pressure. **Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.**

All data will be reported without identifiers. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher: Belinda de Meyer   Research Supervisor: Dr Dorothy Ndletyana

Email: dmeyer.belinda@gmail.com   Email: NdletyanaD@gibs.co.za

Phone: 083 272 1667   Phone: 082 378 5769

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

Return to the methodology chapter discussing the data gathering process regarding the consent form Data_gathering_consent_form.

Appendix 3: Interview guide

The Doctoral dissertation from Crespo (2020) has been used as a guideline to formulate the following questions:

1) Tell me about your age, your experience, and the specific role you occupy currently.

2) Tell me to whom do you report to and who reports to you. Please elaborate as much as possible.

3) What turnover in executive level have you been exposed to?

4) In what ways was the organisation prepared for the change?

5) In what ways were you prepared for the change?

6) How did the change affect the functionality of the organisation? Please elaborate on the changes you have witnessed.

7) How did the change affect your ability to move between being a follower and a leader?

8) How would you define vertical code-switching? If incorrect, I will explain the concept.

9) Now that you are familiar with vertical code-switching, could you elaborate the distinct roles you play in the organisational context and if any overlapping exists.

10) What is it like to be a leader in a middle management position to perform your duties?

11) What is it like to be to be a follower in a middle management position to perform your duties?

12) How do you understand role transition? If incorrect, I will explain the concept.

13) Share about a situation where you applied the incorrect level of power or wearing the wrong hat, when interacting with others; and what was the consequences on the performance?

14) How do you transition or switch cognitive gears into a new role? Thus, enact the role of boss toward her subordinates and then enact the role of subordinate toward her boss. Are there any processes that you go through to move from one role to another?

15) Can you elaborate on the frequency of these role transitions you undertake during a day?

16) In summary, how would you describe your position and are you leaning

toward a more salient position? And how does it influence the separate roles you are required to perform?

Return to the methodology Chapter 4 discussing the data collection and measurement instrument Table_research_and_interview_questions.

Alternatively return to Chapter 5 discussing the Findings_interview_pilot_test under interview summary and methods.

Or return to the discussion on the findings of the sample eligibility of the interview participants under Chapter 5 Sample_eligibility_interview_participant.

Appendix 4: Consistency matrix

Research problem - Theoretical (what about the construct has not been studied / conceptualised) - Business/ Practical (What business/ practical problems exist or will persist?)	Research Purpose	Research Objective	Lit Review / Theory	Main Research Qs/ HOs/ Propositions	Interview questions per sub question	Data Collection Tool	Analysis Method
Limited knowledge available on how people synthesise added pressures while performing duties in organisational setting.	Understand vertical code switching and how it respond to pressure identitied as turnover event.	Gain knowledge if turnover at executive level is a test factor / added pressure that impact on sense of power within the middle manager.	Anicich & Hirsh (2017) Blom (2018) Connolly (2018) Gjerløv-Juel (2019) Hancock, Allen & Soelberg (2017) Laulié & Morgeson (2021) Mumtaz et al. (2022) Wang & Sun (2022)	In what ways are turnover in executive level viewed as added pressure on vertical code switching?	How was the organisation prepared for the change?	Q4	Content analysis will be applied.
					How were you prepared for the change?	Q5	
					How did the change impact on the functionality of the organisation? Please elaborate on the changes you have witnessed.	Q6	
					How did the change impact on your ability to move between being a follower and a leader?	Q7	
Vertical code switching in organisational power setting is unexplored in literature.		Understand how vertical code switching changes in organisational setting. What is the risks and consequences?	Anicich & Hirsh (2017) Anicich et al. (2021) Ashforth et al. (2000) Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate (2000) Falls & Allen (2020) Gjerde an Alvesson (2020) Livijn (2019) **Role transition theory. Author:** Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate (2000)	In what ways do vertical code switching impact on the performance of the middle manager?	How would you define vertical code switching?	Q8	Content analysis will be applied.
					What are the characteristics related to be a leader in the middle management position to perform your duties?	Q10	
					What are the characteristics related to be a follower in the middle management position to perform your duties?	Q11	
					Could you share a situation where you applied the incorrect level of power or wearing the wrong hat, when interacting with others; and what was the consequences on the performance?	Q13	
Limited knowledge available about ones sense of power in context of organisational setting. Thus how middle manager deal with role being in middle of senior and subordinate.		Understand if ones sense of power influence who you are in the organisation, and how it impace your interaction with others. Who am I? Leader or follower?	Anicich & Hirsh (2017) Anicich et al. (2021) Ashforth et al. (2000) Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate (2000) Falls & Allen (2020) Gjerde an Alvesson (2020) Livijn (2019) **Role transition theory. Author:** Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate (2000) **Role identity theory. Author:** Yoshikawa & Hu (2017)	How does vertical code switching influence middle managers role and identity?	Could you elaborate the distinct roles you play in the organisational context and if any overlapping exists.	Q9	Content analysis will be applied.
					Can you explain what is role transition?	Q12	
					How do you transition or switch cognitive gears into a new role? Thus, enact the role of boss toward her subordinates and then enact the role of subordinate toward her boss.	Q14	
					Can you elaborate on the frequency of these role transitions you undertake during a day?	Q15	
					How would you describe your position and are you leaning toward a more salient position? And how does it influence the different roles you are required to perform?	Q16	

Return to the methodology chapter discussing the data collection and measurement instrument Data_collection_consistency_matrix.

Appendix 5: Thematic map

Codes for Research Question 1	Frequency	Categories	Themes
Delay in decision process	5		
Decision process improved	2		
Workplace becomes difficult	11		
Culture changed	3		
Economic disadvantage	1		
Middle manager normalised situation	1	Workplace climate	
New executive has their own pressures	3		
Relationships affected	4		
No impact on status quo	3		Portrait of organisation
Workload increase	10		
Poor work-life balance	3		
Restricted transition	9		
Unrestricted transition	5		

Loss of skills	2		
Team dynamics	8	Organisational structure	
New executive change direction / views	2		
Policies and processes	8		

Middle manager felt prepared	4		
Middle manager not prepared	10	Change management methodology	
Organisation prepared	5		
Organisation not prepared	7		

Allowed to make decisions	2		
New executive practice inclusiveness	6	Beneficial behaviour of new executive	Leadership practices
New executive is knowledgeable	4		

Different management styles	2		To be continued…
New executive is a visionary	1		
New executive display authenticity	1	Characteristics of new executive	
New executive is the determinant of pressure level	1		
New executive wants to proof himself	1		

Codes for Research Question 1	Frequency	Categories	Themes

Supportive leader	4

Existing senior management

New executive express ostracism	1
Criticism of employees	1
Leader absence	5
Limit developmental opportunities	1
New executive creates conflict	1
New executive is ignorant about business	5

Unbeneficial behaviour of new executive

…continued

Leadership practices

Felt restricted	2
Felt confused	4
Felt exhausted	1
Felt anxious	5
Felt lost	3
Felt uncertain	4
Low staff morale	2

Experienced difficult emotion

Felt exhilaration	3
Felt resilient	1
Felt secured	2
Staff morale is higher	1

Experienced positive emotion

Emotional response

IV drips to prevent burnout	1

Measures to address

Experienced burnout	2

Mental illness

Health of employee

Codes for Research Question 1	Frequency	Categories	Themes
Type of line manager	1	Determinant of vertical code switching	
Broadens perspective and knowledge	2	Developing new skills	Professional and personal development
Building strength	2		
Leader skills improved	1		
Period of learning	3		
Insufficient succession plan	4	Poor opportunity for	
Turnover event communication understood	1	Clear communication	Quality of communica-tion
Insufficient communication	10	Poor communication	
Turnover event communicated via email	2		

Codes for Research Question 2	Frequency	Categories	Themes

Familiar with term vertical code switching	1
Unfamiliar with term vertical code switching	13

Awareness about vertical code switching

Felt stressed	1
Staff show lack of respect	1
Being reprimanded	1
Receive sarcasm	1

Consequence of role conflict

No role conflict	4
Role conflict exists	3

Level of vertical code switching

Responsible for implementation	1
Being respectful	1
Not held accountable	1
Receive or provide protection	4
Provides upward feedback	1
Not entitled to own opinion	1

Experience in follower role

Practice human capital management	1
Develop others	2
Stay strong	1
Has a vision	1
Has more responsibilities	1
Practice continuous learning	1
Leads with empathy	1
Manage deadlines	1
Manage targets	1
Provides protection	6
Practice resilience	1
Remain operational	1

Experience in leader role

Personality of line manager	1

Antecedent of behaviour

Behaviour and attitude

Codes for Research Question 2	Frequency	Categories	Themes
Felt confused	1		
Felt fear	1		
Felt pressured	1		
Felt tension	1		
Felt frustrated	2	Experienced difficult emotion as a follower	
Felt lost	3		
Felt uncertain	1		
Felt vulnerable	2		
Felt controlled	1		
Trying to cope	1		
Felt inadequate	3	Experienced difficult emotion as a leader	Emotional response
Felt uncertain	2		
Felt stressed	1		
Felt updated	1	Experienced positive emotion as a follower	
Felt empowered	1		
Felt empowered	2	Experienced positive emotions as a leader	
Felt supported	1		

Codes for Research Question 3	Frequency	Categories	Themes
Depends on line manager	2		
Audience awareness	6	Cue for transitioning	
Situational context	6		

Frequency differs per day	1		
Frequency is constant	7	Number of transitions	Quality of vertical code switching
Frequency is daily	2		
Frequency is weekly	1		

Easy process	1		
Formal process	1	Mental model to transition	
Natural process	10		
Stressful process	1		

Additional role during turnover event	5	Coexistence of multiple roles in one person	Role multiplicity
No additional roles fulfil during turnover event	4		

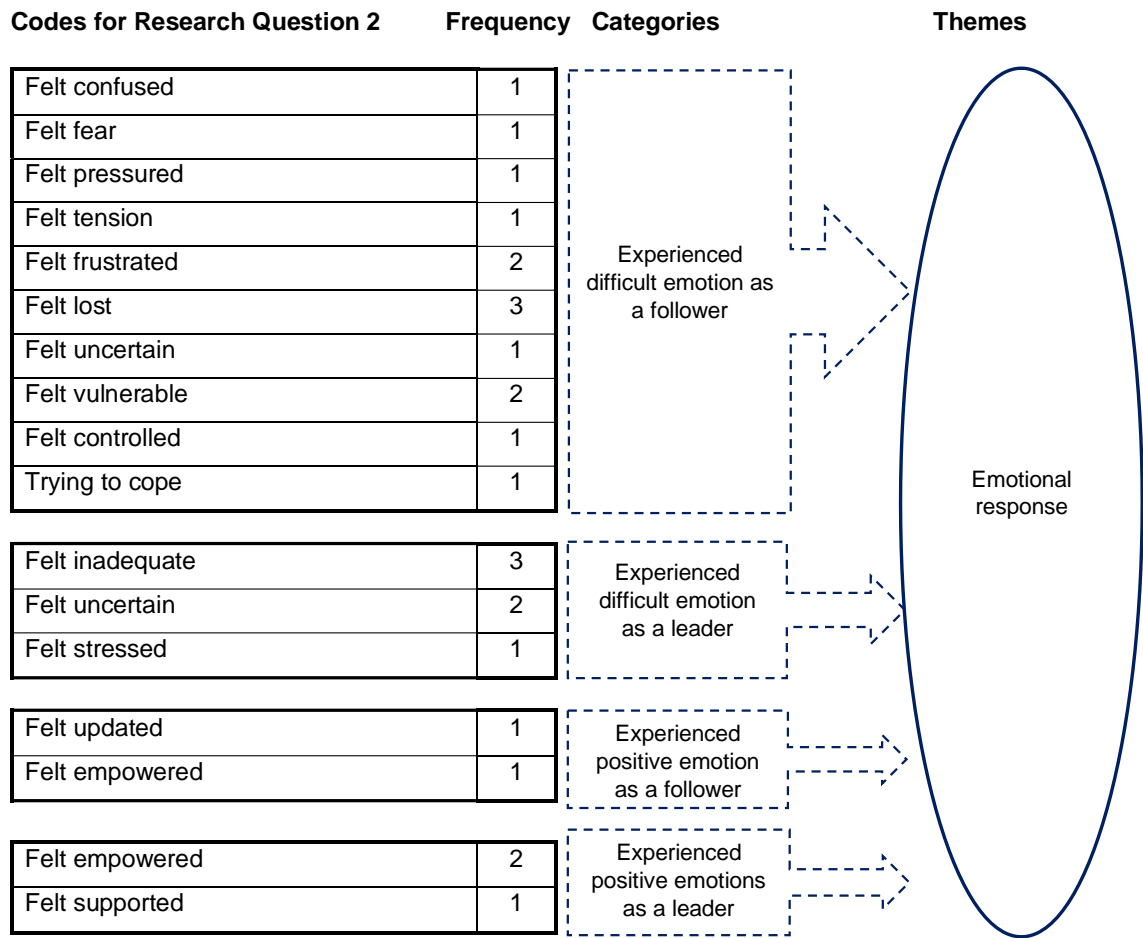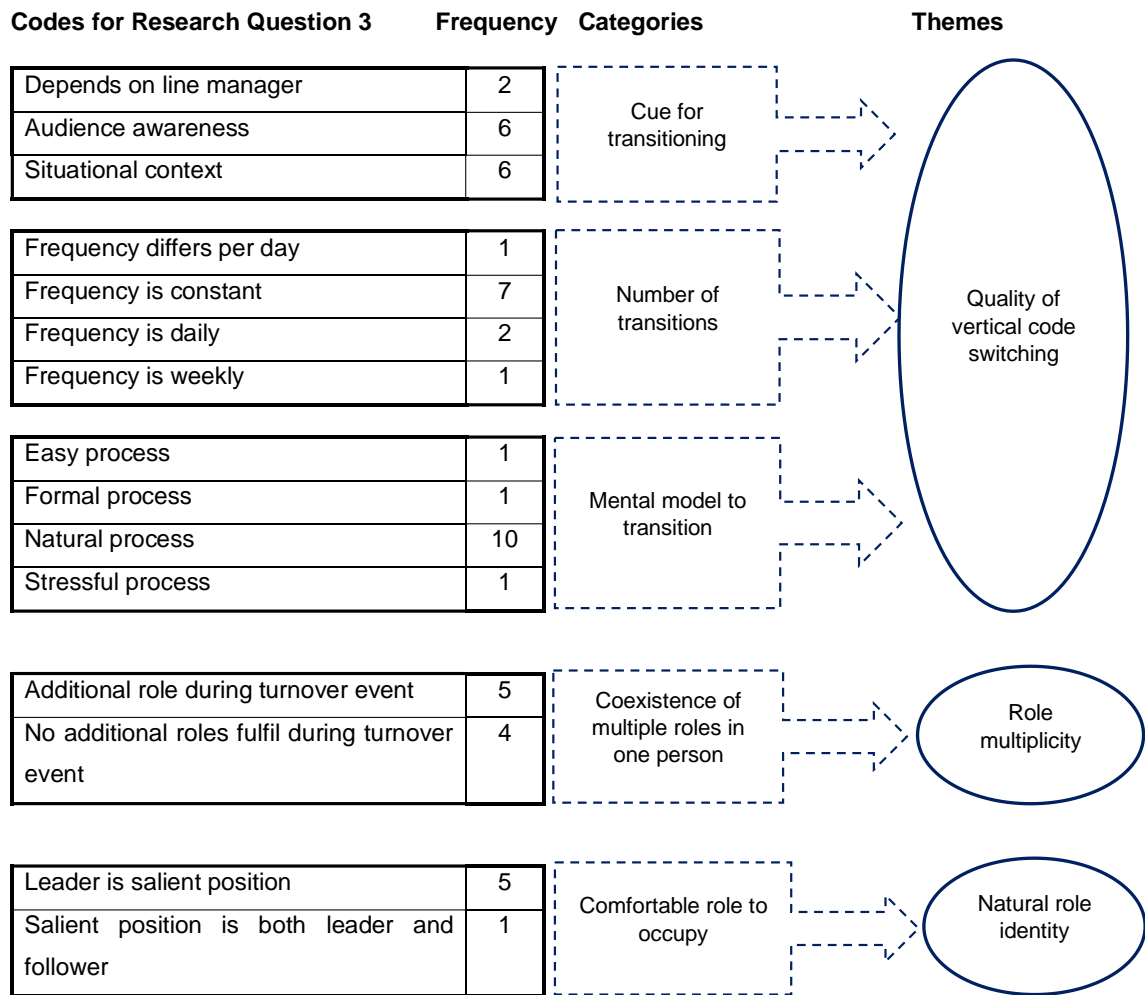|			
Leader is salient position	5	Comfortable role to occupy	Natural role identity
Salient position is both leader and follower	1		

Return to the methodology chapter discussing the data analysis approach Data analysis iterative coding process; or alternatively return to the Finding coding and analysis of data as discussed in chapter 5.

Return to presentation of the findings on research question 1's themes Present_themes_research_question_1; or return to findings on research question 2's themes Present_themes_research_question_2; or return to findings on research question 3's themes Present_themes_research_question_3.

APPENDIX 6: FREQUENCY ANALYSIS

Research Question 1 final codes and frequency responses on key themes

Theme	Category	Code	Response details	Count of responses
Portrait of organisation	Workplace climate	Workplace becomes difficult	P1, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14	11
		Relationship affected	P2, P4, P11, P12	4
		Restricted transition	P1, P3, P4, P5, 7, P8, P9, 11, P12	9
		Unrestricted transition	P2, P10, P13, P14, P15	5
Leadership practice	Change management methodology	Middle manager felt prepared for turnover event	P4, P8, P10, P15	4
		Middle manager not prepared for turnover event	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9, P12, P13, P14	10
	Beneficial behaviour of new executive	New executive practice inclusiveness	P3, P6, P7, P10, P12, P14	6
	Unbeneficial behaviour of new executive	New executive is ignorant about the business	P1, P4, P7, P12, P14	5

Research Question 2 final codes and frequency responses on key themes

Theme	Category	Code	Response details	Count of responses
Behaviour and attitude	Awareness about vertical code-switching	Unfamiliar with term vertical code-switching	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P13, P14, P15	12
	Level of vertical code-switching	No role conflict	P2, P5, 12, P15	4
		Role conflict exists	P4, P8, P9	3
	Experience in follower role	Receive or provide protection	P7, P11, P12, P15	4
	Experience in leader role	Provides protection	P2, P4, P7, P8, P11, P14	6
Emotional response	Experience difficult emotion as a follower	Felt frustrated	P1, p4	2
		Felt lost	P6, P7, P13	3
		Felt vulnerable	P4, P8	2

Research Question 3 final codes and frequency responses on key themes

Theme	Category	Code	Response details	Count of responses
Quality of vertical code-switching	Cue for transitioning	Audience awareness	P1, P3, P8, P11, P13, P14	6
		Situational context	P2, P5, P6, P8, P10, P11	6
	Number of transitions	Frequency is constant	P1, P6, P7, P9, P11, P14, P15	7
	Mental model to transition	Natural process	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P12	10
Role multiplicity	Coexistence of multiple roles in one person	Additional role during turnover event	P5, P6, P7, P10, P11	5
		No additional role fulfils during turnover event	P2, P3, P9, P15	4
Natural role identity	Comfortable role to occupy	Leader is salient position	P2, P3, P12, P13, P15	5

Return to the methodology chapter discussing the quality controls regarding Quality_credibility_triangulation; or alternatively return to Chapter 5 discussion on Finding_triangulation within the interviews.