COPING STRATEGIES FOR LEADERS DURING AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR

in
Organizational Behaviour

in the

FACULTY OF ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

PRETORIA

Promoter: PROF. YVONNE DU PLESSIS

August 2010

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DECLARATION

I, Marlise van Zyl, the undersigned, hereby confirm that the thesis, with title: *Coping strategies for leaders during an economic downturn*, submitted by me in fulfilment of the degree PhD Organisational Behaviour to the University of Pretoria is my independent work and has not been previously been submitted by me for a degree at another faculty or university.

I, Marlise van Zyl, declare that this thesis has been language edited by Idette Noomé (MA English, University of Pretoria).

____________________
Marlise van Zyl

Date: 31 August 2010
I would like to thank the following people and organisations for their support:

- my organisation, and specifically our Managing Director, for both financial and moral support;
- my promoter, Prof Yvonne du Plessis for her support and absolute belief in me;
- Adri Grové, without whom I literally would never have started this journey;
- Idette Noomé for her invaluable work in editing the thesis;
- All the interviewees and their organisations for their time and willingness to participate in this study;
- my parents, At and Ivy Horn: I am stronger because of you!, and
- my husband Corné, for understanding me, for supporting me, for loving me.

_Die Allerhoogste vir gawes en talente –_

...en wat julle ookal doen, doen dit van harte soos vir die Here en nie vir mense nie.

_Kol. 3:23_
ABSTRACT

COPING STRATEGIES FOR LEADERS DURING AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

by

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A preliminary review of the literature on coping revealed a gap in the existing knowledge of coping, particularly in the context of an economic downturn. Coping is a process that unfolds in the context of a situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Somerfield and McCrae (2000:624) appeal to researchers to focus on coping responses to specific situations within a specific context instead of general coping strategies, in this case, coping strategies for leaders during an economic downturn.

A grounded theory methodology within a constructivist-interpretive paradigm was employed in this study. The population consisted of individual South African mining leaders employed by three mines. For the purposes of the study, 'mining leaders' were defined as members of a mine or mining group’s South African executive committee. Sampling took place on an institutional (mine) level, as well as on an individual (mining leader) level, although the unit of analysis was individual leaders. Mines involved in beneficiating a variety of commodities were selected purposively. Individual leaders (executives) within each company were also selected purposively from the executive committees to form the sample of individual sampling units.
Data were obtained through intensive interviews with one pilot respondent and a further seven respondents. Data was analysed using grounded theory methodology, resulting in a conceptual framework of coping strategies for leaders during an economic downturn. The literature was then linked to the conceptual framework developed in this study, showing the relevance of the findings in relation to the existing body of knowledge in organisational behaviour and coping.

The findings provided some understanding of how leaders cope during an economic downturn. In addition, this study managed to contribute methodologically to the field of coping research by demonstrating that alternative methodologies (in this case, grounded theory) using narrative approaches (interviews) can uncover ways of coping that are not included in traditional coping inventories. This methodology also allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied in the particular context of an economic downturn, in answer to Somerfield and McCrae’s (2000:624) appeal. Recommendations were made to assist leaders to cope better during an economic downturn in turbulent times. Opportunities for further research were also highlighted.
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