



Experiences of employees in a public sector organisation during periods of uncertainty and instability: Exploring the nexus between employee empowerment and organisational agility.

23023423

A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science,
University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy: Business Management Specializing in Corporate
Strategy.

25 November 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
DECLARATION	ii
LIST OF TABLES	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	iii
ABBREVIATIONS	iii
1. PROBLEM STATEMENT	
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Research Problem	1
1.3. Research objectives	2
1.4. Research purpose	3
1.5. Research question	3
1.6. Study Contributions	4
1.6.1. Theoretical Relevance	4
1.6.2. Practical Relevance	5
1.6.3. Research setting	6
1.7 Structure of the report	7
2.LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1. Introduction	8
2.2. Theoretical anchor: Dynamic Capabilities	9
2.2.1. Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA)	9
2.2.2. Dynamic capabilities as higher-order capabilities	11
2.2.2.1. Sensing capabilities	12
2.2.2.2. Seizing capabilities	12
2.2.2.3. Transforming capabilities	13

2.2.3. Dynamic capabilities and the public sector.....	13
2.2.3.1. The South African context.....	14
2.3. Organisational Agility.....	15
2.3.1. Organisational agility & Dynamic capabilities.....	18
2.3.2. Categories of Organisational Agility.....	19
2.3.2.1. Agility Drivers.....	20
2.3.2.2. Agility Enablers	20
2.3.2.3. Agility capabilities.....	21
2.3.2.4. Agility Dimensions.....	22
2.3. 3. Employee Agility.....	24
2.3.3.1. Resilience.....	25
2.3.3.2. Adaptability.....	25
2.3.3.3. Proactivity.....	25
2.4. Employee empowerment.....	26
2.4.1. Structural empowerment	27
2.4.1.1. Opportunities.....	28
2.4.1.2. Information.....	28
2.4.1.3. Support.....	28
2.4.1.4. Resources.....	28
2.4.2. Psychological empowerment.....	29
2.4.2.1. Meaning.....	29
2.4.2.2. Competence	30
2.4.2.3. Self Determination.....	30
2.4.2.4. Impact.....	30
2.4.3. Employee empowerment and impact on engagement, motivation, and commitment.....	31

2.4.3.1. Work Engagement.....	31
2.4.3.2. Motivation.....	31
2.4.3.3. Commitment	31
2.4.4. Employee empowerment in the VUCA environment	32
2.5. Conclusion.....	34
 3.RESEARCH QUESTIONS	 36
3.1. Introduction.....	36
3.2. Research question 1.....	37
3.3. Research question 2.....	37
3.4. Research Question 3.....	37
 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	 39
4.1. Introduction.....	39
4.2. Research Philosophy.....	39
4.3. Research Design.....	40
4.4. Unit of Analysis.....	41
4.5. Population.....	41
4.6. Sampling Approach and Sample Size.....	41
4.7. Data Collection Tool.....	44
4.8. Data Collection Process.....	45
4.9. Data Analysis Approach.....	48
4.9.1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.....	49
4.9.2. Delineating units of meaning.....	49
4.9.3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes.....	49
4.9.4. Summarising each interview, validating it, and where necessary modifying it.....	50

4.9.5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.....	50
4.10. Quality Control Measures.....	50
4.10.1. Credibility.....	50
4.10.2. Transferability.....	51
4.10.3. Dependability.....	51
4.10.4. Confirmability.....	51
4.11. Research Ethics.....	52
4.11.1. Avoidance of harm.....	52
4.11.2. Informed consent.....	53
4.11.3. Privacy.....	54
4.11.4. Preventing deception.....	55
4.12. Limitation and Delimitation of the Study.....	54
5. FINDINGS.....	56
5.1. Introduction.....	56
5.2. Participants' responses describing unforeseen events that have led to uncertainty and instability within the organisation.....	57
5.3. Results for Research Questions.....	58
5.3.1. Research Question 1.....	58
5.3.1.1. Empowerment.....	58
5.3.1.2. Attitude towards the organisation.....	71
5.3.1.3. Conclusion on results for Research Question No. 1.....	75
5.3.2. Research Question 2.....	76
5.3.2.1. Feelings of Uncertainty.....	76
5.3.2.2. Conclusion on results for Research Question 2.....	86

5.3.3. Research Question 3.....	86
5.3.3.1. Organisational agility.....	87
5.3.3.2. Conclusion on results for Research Question No. 3.....	93
5.4. Conclusion.....	93
6.DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS.....	95
6.1. Introduction.....	95
6.2. Discussion on findings.....	95
6.2.1. Research Question 1.....	95
6.2.2. Conclusion on discussion for Research Question 1.....	108
6.2.3. Research Question 2:.....	109
6.2.4. Conclusion on Research Question 2.....	115
6.2.5 Research Question 3.....	117
6.2.6. Conclusion on discussion for Research Question 3.....	120
6.3. Conclusion.....	121
7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	125
7.1. Introduction.....	125
7.2. Research findings.....	127
7.3. Theoretical contributions of the study.....	128
7.4. Recommendations for management and the organisation.....	130
7.4.1. Strengthen structural empowerment.....	130
7.4.2. Create an environment that fosters psychological empowerment.....	131
7.4.3. Managers to tailor-make empowerment strategies.....	131
7.4.4. Invest in training and development for managers.....	131

7.5. Delimitations and limitations of the research.....	132
7.6. Suggestions for future research.....	134
7.7. Conclusion.....	135

8. REFERENCE LIST.....	136
-------------------------------	------------

Annexure A: Original Interview Guide

Annexure B: Revised Interview Guide

Annexure C: Consent Form

Annexure D: List of codes

Annexure E: Permission letter from Head of Department

Annexure F: GIBS Ethical Clearance

Abstract

Modern organisations face dynamic environments of volatility, uncertainty, complexities, and ambiguity (VUCA). Public sector organisations are not exempt from the impact of these turbulent times. They must find ways to navigate and adapt to these changes to fulfil their mandate of serving their citizens. Given the bureaucratic nature of the public sector, the constraints experienced make it challenging to respond swiftly and easily to the changing environment, which became the interest in the study to explore agility in the public sector and how employee empowerment plays a role in the organisation's agility. Grounded in the dynamic capabilities framework, this study examines how employees in a public sector organisation perceive their empowerment, which influences their experiences during periods filled with uncertainty and instability and how this contributes to organisational agility.

Through a phenomenological approach, the study focused on employees' lived experiences and how they experienced periods of uncertainty. From the study, employee empowerment is driven by structural empowerment dimensions such as access to opportunities, resources, information, and support, with psychological dimensions comprised of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact on the organisation's agility. Despite the bureaucratic nature of the public sector, employees with high empowerment levels showed resilience, proactive behaviour, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities, which are essential for agility.

The study provides practical recommendations to ensure an agile workforce. It contributes to the literature by adding insights into agility in the public sector context and highlighting key dimensions that drive empowerment.

Keywords: Dynamic capabilities, Agility, Organisational agility, Employee empowerment

Declaration

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

Name & Surname

Signature

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2: Overview of VUCA

Table 2: Definitions of agility

Table 3: Grouping Table 2 definitions into three agility perspectives

Table 4: Agility dimensions from various literature

Table 5: Consolidated Agility Dimensions

Table 6: Employee Empowerment Definitions

Table 7: Research Participants

Table 8. Interview breakdown

Table 9: Unforeseen events have led to uncertainty, instability, and volatility.

Table 10. Overview of Results for Research Question 1

Table 11: Overview of Results for Research Question 2

Table 12. Overview of Results for Research Question 3

Table 13: Visual representation of empowerment levels

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Organisational agility basic framework

Figure 2: Spheres of government

Figure 3: Ordinary vs Dynamic Capabilities

Figure 4: Dynamic capabilities

Figure 5: Organisational agility basic framework

Figure 6: Dimensions of psychological empowerment

Figure 7: Coetzee's framework of change responses

Figure 8: The support dimension of employee empowerment as a driver for agility

ABBREVIATIONS

VUCA Volatility Uncertainty Complexity Ambiguity

MRS Market Research Society

CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the foundation for the study. It will discuss the research problem that has been identified as well as the objectives and purpose of the study. It will provide the theoretical and practical relevance of the study, providing an overview of how this research contributes to existing literature on the constructs identified. The section will also introduce the research setting with a justification of the chosen specific setting.

1.2. Research Problem

'The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic' (Weir, 2017, p. para.1)

Today's organisations face the challenge of navigating turbulent and uncertain periods and have to adapt to these to survive and thrive. The quote by Peter Drucker above paints a picture of the challenges organisations face during these times. Ludviga & Kalvina (2023) highlight the dilemma leaders face to ensure they can adapt to changing environments to ensure their organisations succeed. Organisations' ability to navigate turbulent environments is no longer optional but an essential requirement for organisations hoping to succeed in these times. Organisations must operate in turbulent environments that scholars such as Baran & Wonzyi (2020) call VUCA environments. These environmental changes bring about Volatility, Uncertainty, complexity, and Ambiguity.

The research problem that the study addresses is centred on how organisations navigate these environments, especially looking into the public sector. One of the recent shocks in the world is the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted all sectors all over the world, showing that the ability to navigate these turbulent environments is not only the focus of the private sector but also the public sector also needs to look at how they respond to changes brought on by the changing environment. Trivellato et al. (2021) argue that the public sector encounters more complex and multi-faceted changes than the private sector and needs to heighten its responsiveness.

The dynamic capabilities theory (Teece et al., 1997) provides a theoretical anchor for this study. Dynamic capabilities are '...a collection of processes, routines, knowledge, and entrepreneurial capabilities attributable to the management team' (Walter, 2021, p. 348) that allow organisations to navigate the various changes they face. The framework explains how

organisations can adapt and thrive in volatile and uncertain environments. The theory emphasises the need for an organisation to continuously adapt its resources and capabilities through strategic adjustments, resource reconfiguration, and organisational transformation.

This study focuses on two key constructs- organisational agility and employee empowerment to contribute to the existing literature on how organisations can position themselves to navigate VUCA environments. Organisational agility is defined as ‘...a learned, permanently available dynamic capability that can be performed to a necessary degree quickly and efficiently, and whenever needed to increase business performance in a volatile market environment’ (Walter, 2021, p. 379). Organisational agility, therefore, is considered one of the dynamic capabilities that an organisation can possess that allows it to adapt quickly and respond to the changing environment.

Walter’s (2021) framework on organisational agility provides a lens under which organisational agility can be understood with agility enablers, agility capabilities, and agility dimensions discussed as categories that lead to organisational agility. This framework identified a dynamic workforce as one of the overarching themes that could be an agility enabler, agility capability and an agility dimension. Baird et al. (2021) state that in changing environments, employees have emerged as a critical resource, with employee empowerment being recognised for its significant role in influencing employee behaviour and, ultimately, organisational performance.

By examining organisational agility and employee empowerment through Walter’s (2021) framework, the study seeks insight into how empowered employees contribute to building agile organisations.

1.3. Research objectives.

The study aims to better understand the relationship between employee empowerment and organisational agility. It will explore the experiences of employees in a public sector setting who have experienced the organisation navigating periods of uncertainty and volatility. It will seek to understand how employees perceive their level of empowerment, how it influences their responses to organisational changes, and their ability to adapt and contribute to organisational agility. The study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how fostering employee empowerment can strengthen organisational agility, enabling public sector organisations to respond more effectively to dynamic and unpredictable environments.

1.4. Research purpose.

The study is anchored on the dynamic capabilities framework. This framework highlights the need for organisations to adapt by acquiring new skills and resources and transforming existing ones to respond to the changing environment. Employees are a significant resource in the success of an organisation and play a role in identifying, building, and aligning resources for the organisation's dynamic capabilities. With this understanding, employees are crucial in driving organisational agility.

A study by Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) explored the relationship between cooperative management, employee empowerment, and organisational agility in the public transportation sector. Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) referenced studies by scholars such as Azizi Asl et al. (2015), Alzoubi et al. (2011) and Horabadi-e-Farahani and Salimi (2015), who have identified a relationship between organisational agility and employee empowerment suggesting that empowering employees does have the ability to enhance the organisation's agility.

While these studies have established a relationship between the two constructs, limited studies have sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceived level of empowerment, how this affects how employees experience periods of uncertainty, and how this influences organisational agility.

The study addresses this gap through a phenomenological approach that seeks to understand employees' lived experiences. The study aims to capture employees' personal perspectives, feelings, and insight as they navigate periods of change and uncertainty. By studying this in-depth, the study seeks to uncover the nuances in the relationship between employee empowerment and organisational agility. This will contribute to current literature and provide practical insight into how public sector organisations can foster an empowered and agile workforce better equipped to navigate the constantly changing environment.

1.5. Research question.

The research question has been crafted as follows:

How do employees' perceived level of empowerment impact their experiences during periods of uncertainty in a public sector organisation, and how does this influence organisational agility?

The following sub-questions have been developed to assist in answering the research question:

1. How do employees perceive their level of empowerment within the organisation, and how does this affect their attitude towards the organisation?
2. How do employees experience periods of uncertainty, instability, and volatility?
3. How does the sense of employee empowerment contribute to organisational agility?

1.6. Study Contributions

Current literature on dynamic capabilities rarely focuses on dynamic capabilities in the public sector context (Mazzucato et al., 2021). This study aims to contribute to literature on dynamic capabilities in the context of public sector organisations. By exploring empowerment through employees' experiences, valuable insight will be gathered on what factors employees consider essential when it comes to empowerment, which can be regarded as in public sector organisations.

Although the public and private sectors are usually seen as very different due to their focus and mandate, both sectors still have to navigate changing environments. With a call for a public sector that is responsive to the needs of communities, conversations need to be had on how the public sector creates organisations that are responsive to what is currently happening in the environment. The study will provide valuable insights into how public sector organisations can foster agility.

1.6.1. Theoretical Relevance

Mazzucato et al. (2021) questioned the public sector's ability to activate its dynamic capabilities by looking at the dire state of the public sector, demonstrating that most public sector organisations do not have ordinary capabilities in place, let alone dynamic capabilities. The dynamic capabilities framework is even more relevant in the public sector context due to its cascading nature, as highlighted by Teece et al. (2020). The framework proved relevant as it showed that departments, units, and individuals can possess dynamic capabilities that enable them to navigate periods of uncertainty and instability.

This study has theoretical relevance as it contributes to the broadened understanding of the two constructs in the context of the public sector setting. Walter (2021) developed an organisational agility framework that provides a sense of organisational agility, as illustrated in Figure 1.

According to the illustration below, three components must be at play for the organisation to achieve agility: agility enablers, capabilities, and dimensions. These components work in

unison where agility enablers provide the foundational support needed, agility capabilities can drive responsiveness and adaptability, and agility dimensions define the specific areas where agility needs to be realised. Together, these components form the framework Walter (2021) outlined and drive organisational competitiveness.

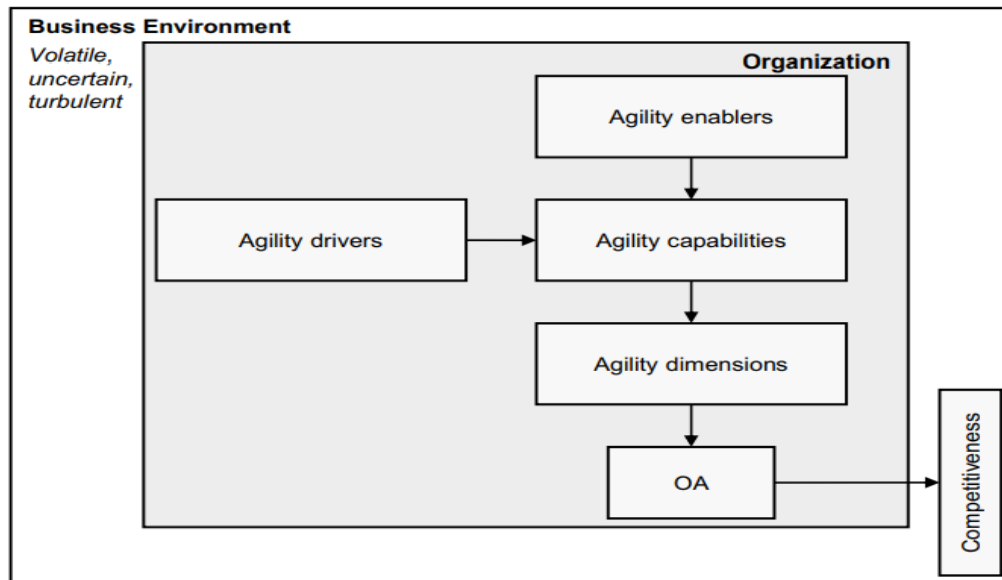


Figure 1: Organisational agility basic framework (Walter, 2021, p. 355)

Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) have stated that employee empowerment positively affects organisational agility. By framing empowerment as a contributor to agility, the study seeks to add to the literature on how empowerment fits into the three categories by Walter (2021). This is done by examining the relationship between the two constructs and understanding employees' experiences and perceptions of empowerment. Although scholars such as Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) identified the relationship between the two constructs, this study gathered insight into how employee empowerment affects agility. In periods of uncertainty and instability, empowerment structures are not only able to empower employees with tools needed to navigate these challenges at an organisational level, but they are also able to activate individual dynamic capabilities that allow employees to respond to the changes.

1.6.2. Practical Relevance

The study's practical relevance lies in its potential to enhance the current understanding of how employee empowerment affects how employees experience periods of uncertainty and how the levels of empowerment also contribute to organisational agility. By examining how the various levels of empowerment affect employees' abilities to navigate uncertain environments, the study aims to provide steps that public sector organisations could use to foster a workforce that is adaptable and resilient. It will also provide valuable insight into how managers can create an environment that supports employees who are having to navigate the changes in the organisation.

1.6.3. Research setting.

The South African public sector is divided into three government spheres: national, provincial, and local. Chapters 4, 6, and 7 of the Constitution outline the responsibilities of each sphere (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). Although autonomous, all three of these spheres are interconnected with the national mandate, which needs to filter down to the local government sphere. Figure 2 below illustrates the different spheres of government.



Figure 2: Spheres of government (<http://2013.legacy.gcro.unomena.net/governance/complexity-government-gcr>)

The study is conducted in one of the large municipalities in Gauteng. South Africa has 257 metropolitan, district, and local municipalities, including eight metropolitans, 44 districts, and 205 local municipalities (South African Government website). Municipalities' functioning comprises regulations with mandates, structure, and reporting processes governed by various

acts, such as the Municipal Structures Act of 1998, the Municipal Systems Act, and the Municipal Financial Management Act.

The selection of the local government sector was an intentional choice as an ideal environment to examine issues of empowerment, especially in a bureaucratic context. By their nature, public sector organisations are bound by regulation, hierarchical structures, and processes that could be seen as a limitation to autonomy and flexibility given to employees. Speed is one of the components of agility (Baran & Woznyj, 2020). The nature of the public sector does not necessarily allow for quick decisions and responses. This setting provides for exploring empowerment in an environment with inherent constraints.

Empowerment is described as a shift in power dynamics where managers transfer authority, power, and responsibility from managers to employees (Kanjana et al., 2023). In the context of local government, where roles, procedures, and responsibilities are regulated, a unique challenge is posed regarding empowerment and what that looks like. While the nature of local government cannot be altered, and this is not the focus of the study, it is valuable to explore how empowerment is cultivated within these constraints.

The researcher is interested in shedding light on the specific dynamics of empowerment in bureaucratic environments and contributing to strategies for fostering empowerment and building agility in a way particular to the public sector.

Further information on the department selected for the study and the methods used to conduct the research will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

1.7. Structure of the report

This chapter will be followed by Chapter 2, which will discuss the relevant literature applicable to the study. This chapter will establish the theoretical foundation of the research and provide an in-depth discussion of the primary constructs. Chapter 3 will discuss the research questions pertinent to the study, setting the stage for data gathering and analysis.

Chapter 4 will discuss the research methodology, detailing the data collection and analysis process in conducting the study. Chapter 5 will present the findings in alignment with the research questions identified in Chapter 3.

Chapter 6 will discuss and interpret the findings of existing literature. The report will conclude with Chapter 7, which will provide a conclusion for the study and practical and theoretical recommendations based on research findings.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will provide a foundation for the literature review that underpins this study. It will discuss the works of various scholars and identify the key constructs that form the basis of the research and the relationship between them. It will begin by exploring dynamic capabilities theory, which will serve as the theoretical framework for the study. This theory emphasises the importance of adaptability and responsiveness in achieving and sustaining competitive advantage.

The concept of organisational agility as a critical capability that enables organisations to respond to environmental changes swiftly will be discussed. The chapter will also discuss employee empowerment as an antecedent for agility, thereby examining the relationship between employee empowerment and organisational agility.

2.2. Theoretical anchor: Dynamic Capabilities

Dynamic capabilities (DC) have received considerable attention in management studies as a theoretical model (El Idrissi et al., 2022). Emerging from the foundation of resource-based theory, dynamic capabilities aimed to reconcile some gaps identified within the resource-based theory. The Resource-Based Theory suggests that an organisation achieves a competitive advantage by effectively utilising its resources (Teece, 2022). To qualify as "right resources," these assets must exhibit the VRIN attributes: valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Teece perceived this approach as insufficient in explaining how organisations cultivate, manage, or acquire new resources considering changing environmental dynamics (Teece, 2022).

Teece et al. (1997) and Ilmudeen et al. (2021) introduced the Dynamic Capabilities model to highlight the importance of capabilities in building, integrating, and reconfiguring resources to navigate volatile environments. In this model, possessing resources alone is insufficient, as there is a need to continuously adapt and develop internal and external resources to meet external changes.

Ilmudeen et al. (2021) compared the two theories, noting that while resource-based theory focuses on organisations selecting suitable resources for gaining competitive advantage, dynamic capabilities emphasise the renewal and reconfiguration of internal and external resources to address the evolving demands of the environment.

In explaining the meaning of dynamic capabilities, Trivellato et al. (2020) break down the concept with 'dynamic' referring to the ability to adapt and transform in response to environmental changes and 'capabilities' referring to skills, resources, competencies that can be redesigned to meet changing demands brought on by shifts in the environment.

The model has undergone significant changes since Teece's inception in 1997. El Idrissi et al. (2022) assert that three predominant conceptualisations are widely recognised despite various definitions surrounding dynamic capabilities. These stem from the works of Teece et al. (1997), Eisenhardt & Martin (2000), and Zollo & Winter (2002).

Teece et al. (1997, p. 516) define DC as "the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments." This was then later refined by Eisenhardt & Martin (2000, p.1107) by considering DC as "the firm's processes that use resources - specifically the processes to integrate, reconfigure, gain, and release resources – to match and even create market change. Thus, Dynamic capabilities are the organisational and strategic routines by which firms achieve new resource configurations as markets emerge, collide, split, evolve, and die. Zollo & Winter (2002, p. 340) later defined a DC as "a learned and stable pattern of collective activity through which the organisation systematically generates and modifies its operating routines in pursuit of improved effectiveness."

Teece et al. (1997) and Eisenhardt & Martin (2000) address environmental dynamics in their definition of dynamic capabilities. Teece et al. (1997) talk about a "rapidly changing environment" (p.515), while Eisenhardt & Martin (2000) discuss markets that "are very dynamic or what is termed 'high velocity', where change becomes nonlinear and less predictable" (p.1111). They both acknowledge the necessity for organisational adaptation in response to contextual changes to ensure survival. The third definition by Zollo & Winter (2002) emphasises an organisation's inherent learning system, enabling continuous enhancement of its effectiveness.

2.2.1. Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA)

In defining attempting to define dynamic capabilities, most authors talk about the unpredictable environment organisations face. This unpredictable environment can best be described as 'VUCA'. 'VUCA', an acronym for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, was introduced by a social scientist at the U.S. Army War College about three decades ago (Baran & Wonznyj, 2020). This was used to describe the unpredictable, challenging environment that students would face in the future. Fergnani et al. (2020) state that the concept, which was

initially conceived as a military concept, has gained relevance as organisations increasingly recognise that operating in a VUCA environment is a constant reality instead of a rare and unusual occurrence; therefore, view VUCA as an integral component of the decision-making process.

VUCA is a simple reference to a robust framework that describes organisations' dynamic, complex challenges. Nowacka & Rzemienak (2021) see the acronym as a way for managers and leaders to '...easily define the chaotic and continuously changing environment that marked the entry into the new normal' (p.3). This 'new normal' refers to the dynamic nature of business contexts driven by rapid and unpredictable changes. Table 1 below provides a summary of each of the components of VUCA.

Table 1: Overview of VUCA

V	Volatility	Nowacka and Rzemienak (2021) describe volatility as a situation where '...the established pattern of action is changed or violated' (p.3). These are instances where new, untested ideas and approaches disrupt traditional ways of doing things. These are usually ideas that the organisation or employees are unsure about as they are untested, and it is not yet clear how these will work.
U	Uncertainty	'...associated with a lack of control and uncertainty about what will happen shortly' (Nowacka & Rzemienak, 2021, p 3). In an uncertain environment, one cannot rely on past information to make current or future decisions, as it is unclear what will happen next and what the future holds.
C	Complexity	In complex situations, it becomes difficult to understand and pinpoint why certain things happen due to multiple explanations of why something happens with various effects (Nowacka & Rzemienak, 2021). The complexity and multiplex nature of the causes seem to be infinitely long, and this consequently means that they are impossible to define
A	Ambiguity	Ambiguity speaks of an environment where the problem is not well defined and understood but with multiple ways of being addressed. Nowacka & Rzemienak (2021) describe it as a situation '...where there are many possibilities of choices for one situation' (p 3).

Baran & Wonznyi (2020) conducted an extensive study identifying five categories contributing to VUCA conditions. These are (1) Technological advancements and innovation, (2) economic and financial challenges, (3) environmental and societal concerns, (4) geopolitical, regulatory, and societal issues, and (5) workforce dynamics. According to the dynamic capabilities model, organisations must utilise their internal resources to navigate VUCA environments and meet changing conditions.

2.2.2. Dynamic capabilities as higher-order capabilities

From the definitions above, Idrissi et al. (2022) then proposed that dynamic capabilities are capabilities that an organisation possesses that go beyond its ordinary capabilities and have the potential to strategically transform the organisation as well as its external ecosystem and environment.

Barrutia et al. (2022) indicate that dynamic capabilities need to be differentiated from ordinary capabilities and that "...capability is considered dynamic if, in rapidly changing environments, it enables the organisation to adapt itself to improve its circumstances and the circumstances of its customers (citizens in the context of this study) through innovation/change (e.g., new service offerings)" (p. 5). This acknowledges that organisations have ordinary capabilities.

Teece (2018) differentiated dynamic capabilities from the firm's ordinary capabilities, seeing ordinary capabilities as everyday, ordinary routines and processes that ensure that an organisation functions effectively. These capabilities include basic operational tasks such as human resources management systems, financial processes, governance structures, and administrative activities. These are important in ensuring operational stability but are not enough to help the organisation navigate environments marred with uncertainty and unpredictability. Dynamic capabilities position the organisation to evolve continuously in response to the changing climate.

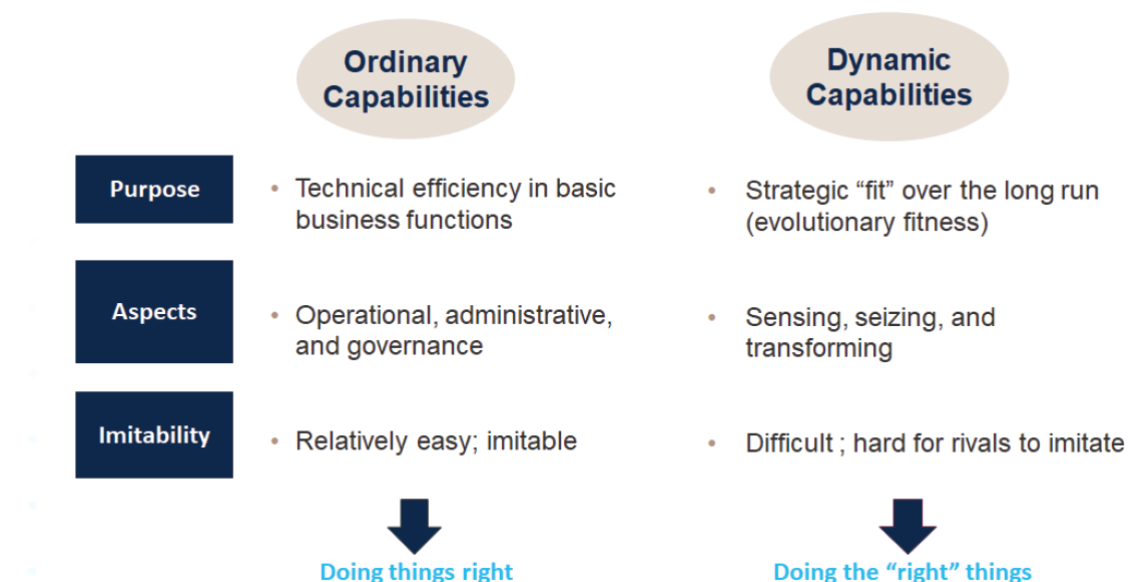


Figure 3: Ordinary vs Dynamic Capabilities (Teece et al., 2020)

Figure 1 illustrates the critical difference between ordinary and dynamic capabilities. Organisations with ordinary solid capabilities excel efficiently with best-practice outcomes even though the existing strategies may not be relevant (Teece, 2018). These best practices are easy to imitate, while dynamic capabilities are more complex for rivals to imitate.

Zahra et al. (2022, p. 586) assert that scholars have identified three crucial clusters of activities that foster the emergence of Dynamic Capabilities (DCs), namely: (1) sensing opportunities and threats, (2) seizing (and neutralising) them, and (3) reconfiguring organisational processes, assets, and routines.

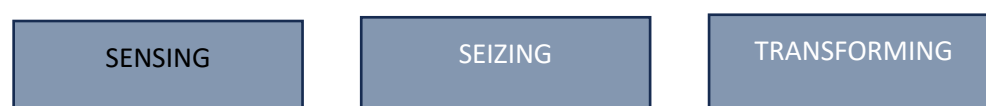


Figure 4: Dynamic capabilities

2.2.2.1. Sensing capabilities

The sensing capability allows the organisation to scan the external environment for threats and opportunities (El Iddrisi et al., 2021). Scanning is an integral part of sensing, and 'it generally involves detecting patterns and trends in the business environment that can point to change, discontinuities, or disruptions that could impact the future of the firm' (Fergnani et al., 2020, para. 11). This capability allows the organisation to be proactive through identifying changes in the environment that might not be visible and analysing it to understand the potential impact it could have on the organisation.

Furnival et al. (2019) explain sensing as follows:

'Sensing focuses on the organisation identifying ideas and changes within the ecosystem that require responses. This includes viewpoints, opinions, technological advances and external requirements, such as continuously changing regulations and ongoing developments from stakeholders, suppliers and changing service-user requirements' (p. 827).

2.2.2.2. Seizing capabilities

Once an organisation has identified opportunities and threats, 'seizing' is the next step, which involves how quickly and effectively the organisation acts on the information gathered. According to Teece (2018), seizing refers to the ability of the organisation to make timeous decisions and mobilise resources to respond to opportunities and threats. The critical elements

to seizing are speed and decisiveness, as delays and indecision can lead to missed opportunities and increased risk exposure for the organisation. Seizing involves assessing strategic options, reallocating resources, and, where necessary, reconfiguring operational processes to respond effectively. Effective seizing allows an organisation to maintain and enhance its competitive advantage in VUCA environments, enabling it to swiftly adapt its strategy to align with what is happening in the environment.

2.2.2.3. Transforming capabilities

According to Teece et al. (2020), transforming, also referred to as transforming, 'involves redesigning the organisation to increase its effectiveness and its alignment with the strategy' (p. 8). This might involve the decentralisation of authority and the integration of information systems across work units. Transforming the organisation ensures that its structure, processes, culture, etc, allow it to thrive in the evolving environment. It may involve changing organisational culture, reshaping roles, reconfiguring workflows, and investing in new technologies or training programs. Teece et al. (2020) give examples of decentralising decision-making power and integrating information systems across different work units. These structural changes empower the organisation to adapt effectively to a VUCA environment. Decentralisation shifts decision-making powers from central authority to various levels within the organisation, allowing for swift decision-making processes and responsiveness to external changes.

Reflecting on the three dynamic capabilities discussed above, the crucial role that learning plays in organisational dynamic capabilities becomes apparent. While sensing, seizing, and transforming, organisations must learn to interpret environmental shifts, understand how they affect them, and respond. Learning is what allows adaptation, whether this is done through acquiring new knowledge or reconfiguring existing practices to navigate changing conditions.

2.2.3. Dynamic capabilities and the public sector

Extensive literature focuses on firm-level dynamic capabilities, with little attention given to dynamic capabilities in the public sector and how these have evolved (Mazzucato et al., 2021). Most literature on dynamic capabilities and the public sector cites Piening (2013), whom Mazzucato & Katel reference as a more comprehensive literature review. Piening (2013) is also cited by Trivellato et al. (2021) when attempting to understand dynamic capabilities in the private sector. This speaks to the gap in the literature in this regard and a need for more studies to be conducted on this model in the context of the public sector.

Public sector organisations face various changes in the environment in which they operate. Trivellato et al. (2021) argue that they experience even greater volatility in their operating environment compared to the private sector.

While the private sector's focus is on maintaining and gaining competitive advantage, Mazzucato & Katel (2022) highlight the public sector's role in the 'responsibility for the long-term resilience and stability of societies, and for shaping public outcomes through policy-making and public institutions' (p. 2). While not profit-driven like the private sector, the mandate of the public sector is to protect and effectively use public resources to promote equity and foster the social well-being of citizens through policy formulation and effective functioning of public institutions. The dynamic capabilities model is well-suited for the public sector, as these organisations frequently confront the need to rapidly adapt to new circumstances and changing requirements while also going through their internal transformations, as Trivellato et al. (2021) argue. In their article, Mazzucato & Katel (2022) explored how the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic emphasised how critical it is for governments to utilise their dynamic capabilities, which are described as the 'capacity to adapt and learn, capacity to align public services and citizen needs; capacity to govern resilient production systems; and capacity to oversee data and digital platforms' (p. 2). These speak to the three activities of sensing, seizing, and transforming that were discussed previously.

The public sector is not immune to VUCA environments, and even in these, it is still required to deliver services to its citizens, facing heightened demands for these services and increased expectations regarding service quality (Trivellato et al., 2021).

2.2.3.1. The South African context

In painting a picture of the state of the municipalities in South Africa, COGTA (2014), as cited in Mazzucato et al. (2021), stated the following:

In its 2014 Diagnostic Back to Basics report, Cogta indicated that only 7% of municipalities were doing well on implementation; 30% were considered reasonably functional, 32% almost dysfunctional, and 31% completely dysfunctional (p. 16).

A previous discussion distinguished between ordinary and dynamic capabilities; the statement above highlights a disturbing reality for local governments: They often lack foundational ordinary capabilities to function efficiently and effectively. Mazzucato et al. (2021) further state that little has been done to build dynamic capabilities in local government. Enhancing local government capabilities remains a significant obstacle with dire consequences for service

delivery, especially since it has been established that VUCA is a reality for both the private and public sectors.

Teece et al. (2020) indicate the uniqueness of dynamic capabilities because they are scalable and can be applied at various levels, from individual to large organisations. It helps in this instance when looking at what is said about local government and capabilities to note that dynamic capabilities can also be observed in smaller units, such as teams and individuals expanded to the macro environment. This scalability allows for examining how units within the public sector, despite broader challenges, can still 'integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments' (Teece et al., 1997, p. 516). Therefore, even in challenging situations such as those faced by the public sector, dynamic capabilities can be utilised at multiple levels to drive adaptability.

2.3. Organisational Agility

VUCA environment affects all sectors, including the public or private sector (Naqvi & Naqvi, 2023). Although these are focused on different outcomes, they are not immune to the effects of the VUCA environment. Therefore, Organisational agility is a concept applicable in both sectors. The public sector must continually adapt and maintain a high standard in providing services to citizens (Ludviga & Kalvina, 2023). This is done while also faced with changes in the environment.

The concept of agility in organisations became popular in the late 20th century as a mix of flexibility, quickness, and responsiveness, which is advantageous for companies operating in fast-paced industries (Ludviga & Kalvina, 2023). An essential component of agility is the expediency with which an organisation can mobilise and reconfigure its resources. The speed of these actions, within the organisational context, has been deemed a crucial determinant of managerial success, as demonstrated in the work of Lee et al. (2015), which emphasised the criticality of swiftness and responsiveness in achieving sustained organisational performance.

Several attempts in the literature aim to conceptualise agility (Idrissi et al., 2023). Žitkienė & Desksnys (2018) discuss different approaches by researchers on agility: one group views agility through the enablers and capabilities lens, another one focuses on the practices that agile organisations employ, while the third group of researchers view agility with regards to

how an organisation interacts with a changing environment as it senses and responds to the changes.

To understand the concept of organisational agility, it is essential to examine various definitions in the literature. Table 3 below highlights some of the existing definitions of agility in literature. From the table, it is clear that organisational agility is a multifaceted concept beyond responsiveness. It includes speed, flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to take advantage of the changes in the environment to create opportunities. While these definitions might differ, they all emphasise agility in navigating dynamic environments, highlighting the importance of agile organisations to maintain a competitive advantage.

Table 2: Definitions of agility (Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020, p. 19)

Author(s)	Conceptualization of agility
Sharifi & Zhang, 2001).	Agility refers to the use of changes as inherent opportunities in turbulent environment
(Dove, 2002).	Agility refers to the ability to survive and progress in the variable and unpredictable environment
(Erande & Verma, 2008).	Agility is the ability to respond to unpredictable changes with quick response and profitability
Janssen (2010)	Agility is an organizational ability to react quickly and effectively to an environment which can change radically
Alzoubi et al (2011)	Agility as a quick and preventative adaptation of organizational elements to unexpected and unpredicted changes.
Cegarra-Navarro et al (2016)	Organizational agility refers to the ability of the company to adapt to change.
Teece et al (2016)	Organizational agility is roughly synonymous with flexibility.
Baškarada & Koronios (2018)	Organizational agility refers to the ability of flexibility to environmental changes by setting up products and delivering faster and more inclusive services to achieve sustainable competitive advantage
Matthiae & Richter (2018)	It refers to the companies responses to environmental changes as easily as possible. For example, organizational agility consists of two components: sensitivity and response.
Li & Holsapple (2018)	Agility is defined as being able to identify market changes and take timely action and provide new solutions to deal with a dynamic and complex environment.

The researcher attempted to group the definitions in Table 1 above into the three perspectives previously discussed, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 3: Grouping Table 2 definitions into three agility perspectives (own elaboration)

Group	Authors
Agility through the enablers and capabilities lens	Sharifi & Zhang (2001)
	Teece et al. (2016)
	Başkarada & Koronios (2018)
Agility as practices employed by agile organisations	Erande & Verma (2008)
	Alzoubi et al. (2011)
	Matthiae & Richter (2018)
Agility is the way organisations interact with a changing environment (Sense-respond)	Dove (2002)
	Janssen (2010)
	Cegarra-Navarro et al. (2016)
	Li & Holsapple (2018)

Several scholars consider organisational agility a form of dynamic capability, sometimes called a higher-order capability. From this viewpoint, organisational agility is described as the organisation's ability '...to recognise opportunities and threats, mobilise the needed resources and capabilities to launch an appropriate response, judge the benefits and risks of initiating action, and execute actions with competitive speed and success' (Lee et al., 2015 as cited in El Idrissi et al., 2022, p. 30). Agility is, therefore, not a reactive attribute but a strategic capability key to organisations thriving in volatile and uncertain environments.

Al Jabri et al. (2024) combine various perspectives on the relationship between dynamic capability theory and agility, suggesting that agility directly results from an organisation's dynamic capabilities. This view suggests that an agile organisation can rapidly adapt to changes in the market, taking advantage of opportunities and navigating threats. Thus, the connection between dynamic capabilities and agility is apparent, with the assertion that a dynamic organisation is inherently agile.

Walter (2021) discusses some views that organisations with strong dynamic capabilities are inherently agile. From this viewpoint, dynamic capabilities which allow an organisation to '...integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments' (Teece et al., 1997, p. 516) are the foundations for agility. Although these are different viewpoints, they emphasise the close relationship between dynamic capabilities and agility. They underscore the importance of an organisation being flexible, responsive, and proactive in uncertain and rapid change.

This study views organisational agility as a capability, a view that the researcher believes aligns with current literature on the construct. The researcher understands agility as an organisation's strategic asset that enables it to stay competitive and resilient in changing environments. This also offers a practical definition of the term and how it is applied.

2.3.1. Organisational agility & Dynamic capabilities

Lee et al. (2003), as cited in Walter (2021), viewed organisational agility as a 'two-dimensional' dynamic capability consisting of offensive and defensive aspects. In this view, for an organisation to be agile, both these aspects must be developed. An organisation needs to proactively seek to understand what is happening in the environment in terms of opportunities, threats, etc, in a dynamic environment while also being able to respond effectively to unexpected disruptions or challenges.

Lee et al. (2003) further expand on this idea by describing organisational agility as a 'higher-order dynamic capability to configure and reconfigure organisational resources in response to the environment or emerging competitive realities' (Walter, 2021, p. 349). From this definition, agility is not only about responding to immediate changes but continuously adapting and evolving the organisation's resource base, whether human, financial, technological, or strategic, to suit the thrive in the changing environment.

Walter (2021) states that an agile organisation can spot opportunities and threats, gather the resources needed to respond, assess risks and benefits, and act quickly. A critical aspect of agility is the speed of the response, which emphasises the importance of rapid decision-making, implementation, and responsiveness in a volatile environment.

The study adopts the following definition of organisational agility by Walter (2021). Organisational agility is defined as '...a learned, permanently available dynamic capability that can be performed to a necessary degree quickly and efficiently, and whenever needed to increase business performance in a volatile market environment' (Walter, 2021, p. 379). This definition highlights the following critical elements of agility:

- Learned capability: agility is developed over time through learning and experience.
- Permanently available: Once developed, it is an embedded capability within the organisation, and when environments change, the organisation can respond.
- Swiftiness and efficiency: Agility allows organisations to pivot swiftly, whether sensing threats, seizing opportunities, or reconfiguring resources.

- Performance-driven: The goal of agility is for the business to continue performing despite environmental changes. The organisation can maintain or even enhance its competitive edge.
- Volatile environment: Agility is a crucial capability in VUCA environments. It is activated in these environments, allowing an organisation to be flexible, adaptive, and resilient.

By adopting Walter's (2021) definition, the research study places organisational agility at the core of the dynamic capabilities model. Organisational agility is critical in helping organisations navigate VUCA environments and is a strategic asset that organisations need to ensure long-term success.

2.3.2. Categories of Organisational Agility

Following an intense study of literature on organisational agility, Walter (2021) developed the framework below (Figure 4) that seeks to break down the various components of agility. These components are called agility categories, and the figure below shows how they interplay. The categories are agility enablers, capabilities, and dimensions, leading to organisational agility.

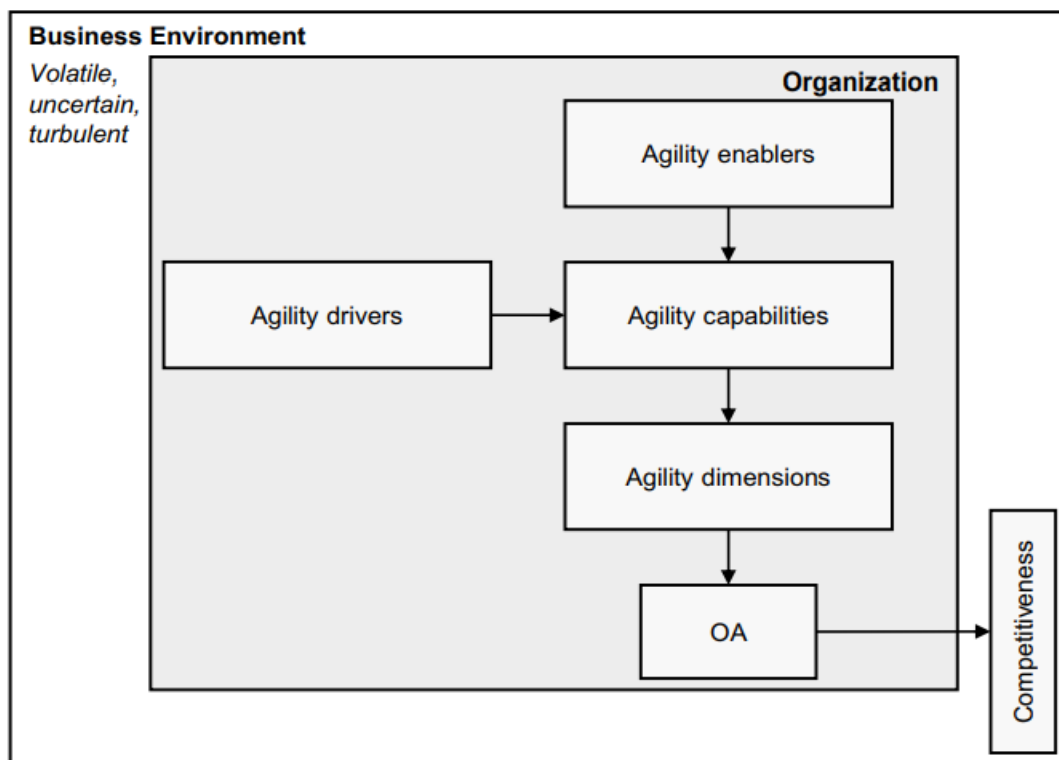


Figure 5: Organisational agility basic framework (Walter, 2021, p. 355)

2.3.2.1. Agility Drivers

Zhang & Sharif (2007), as cited in Walter (2021), refer to agility drivers as 'driving forces for agility' (p. 355). These drivers can also be seen as triggers that force an organisation to respond to maintain a competitive advantage. Walter (2021) notes that historically, literature focused primarily on external agility drivers. These are changes outside the organisation, such as technological advances, market fluctuations, regulatory shifts, etc., that result in a VUCA environment. There is a growing acknowledgement of internal agility drivers: organisational changes or disruptions. These internal changes impact the organisation and can result in a VUCA environment. These changes could be leadership changes, restructuring processes, internal processes, etc. Internal disruptions can erode the organisation from within, hampering its ability to perform.

2.3.2.2. Agility Enablers

Citing various literature, Walter (2021) describes agility enablers as '... tools, practices and crucial technologies facilitating' (p. 355). Tools such as cutting-edge technology, automation, and data analytics support the organisation's agility. Walter (2021) further goes on to identify various enablers as found in the literature:

'Virtual enterprise formation tools and metrics; physically distributed manufacturing architecture and teams; rapid partnership-formation tools and metrics; concurrent engineering; an integrated product, production, and business-information system; rapid prototyping tools; and electronic commerce...a multi-skilled, flexible, and empowered workforce; continuous improvement and change and risk management; and information technology. The following enablers were also identified: the use of internet-based and advanced technology, the modularisation of products, cross-functional integration, a culture of market orientation, the improvement of supplier relationships, customised manufacturing, service management, the active support of top management, a supportive organisational structure, optimal workforce, and machine utilisation, pull production, optimal inventory, and an agile strategy' (p. 359).

These enablers allow an organisation to respond to changes, anticipate them, and proactively align with the new realities.

Walters (2021) highlighted various enablers, which the researcher has grouped into five categories: People and Workforce, Information and Technology, Organisational structure and Governance, Customer and Market Responsiveness, and enablers related to Collaborative partnerships.

- **People and Workforce Agility:** The workforce is critical to an agile organisation. This includes employees' empowerment, flexibility, and adaptability in responding to changes. This also speaks to culture and HR systems. Ludviga and Kalvina (2023) highlight the importance of human capital in ensuring organisational agility.
- **Information and Technology Agility:** This includes cutting-edge tools and IT systems that support communication and data integration in organisations.
- **Organisational Structure and Governance:** These refer to governance frameworks that allow for decentralised decision-making to ensure rapid responses to changes.
- **Market responsiveness** refers to enablers that allow the organisation to quickly adapt to changing customer needs and market conditions.
- **Collaborative partnerships:** An organisation that builds and manages strong relationships with various stakeholders is a vital agility enabler. This allows for the sharing of information and expertise during periods of uncertainty, creating opportunities for renegotiating contracts, co-creating value, etc,

2.3.2.3. Agility capabilities

Agility capabilities refer to an organisation's ability to respond to environmental changes. These include 'responsiveness, competency, flexibility, and speed' (Walter, 2021, p. 354).

Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to '...the ability to identify changes, respond rapidly to changes either reactively or proactively and recover from changes' (Sharif & Zhang, 1999 as cited in Walter, 2021, p. 360). Responsiveness starts with the organisation first being able to sense environmental changes. An organisation with systems in place to track and assess changes early on can respond to these changes without being caught off guard. The definition above also highlights both reactive and proactive responses to changes. While a reactive response quickly adjusts to changes as they occur, a proactive response anticipates changes before they happen and prepares accordingly. An organisation needs to have both the ability to respond and reactive responses proactively.

This definition also highlights that change can be disruptive, but a responsive organisation can recover quickly. They have systems and processes embedded into the organisation that allow them to heal, ensuring stability and operations can continue smoothly with minimal downtime. The sub-capabilities associated with responsiveness are '...sensing, perceiving and anticipating changes, an immediate reaction to change and recovery from change' (Walter, 2021, p. 360).

Competency

Walter (2021) explains competency as the organisation's skills to attain its goals and objectives. These skills assist the organisation in achieving 'productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness' (Walter, 2021, p. 360). The identified sub-capabilities are: 'strategic vision, appropriate technology or sufficient technological capability; products/service quality; cost-effectiveness; high rate of new product introduction; change management; knowledgeable, competent, and empowered people; operations efficiency and effectiveness (leanness); co-operation (internal and external); and integration' (Walter, 2021, p. 360).

Flexibility

Flexibility and agility capabilities refer to the ability of the organisation to perform different tasks and achieve other objectives with the same resources that the organisation has (Walter, 2021). This is crucial for organisational agility as it allows the organisation to respond to changing demands without changing its core resources. The capabilities are applicable in different dimensions such as: 'product volume flexibility, product model/configuration flexibility, organisation and organisational issues flexibility, and people flexibility' Walter, 2021, p. 360). Developing and fostering these various flexibilities allows an organisation to be agile as it navigates dynamic environments.

Speed

Walter (2021) identifies speed as 'the ability to carry out tasks and operations in the shortest possible time' (p. 360). He identifies four sub-capabilities: the swiftness in responding to a dynamic environment achieved by three sub-capabilities. The first one is the speed at which new products are brought to market, the second one is the speed of delivering services, and the third is the speed of operations (Walter, 2021)

Agility consists of all four capabilities—responsiveness, competence, flexibility, and speed—allowing an organisation to anticipate, adapt, and react promptly to the ever-changing environment. Integration of multiple capabilities is required for an organisation to thrive in a dynamic world.

2.3.2.4. Agility Dimensions

The last category Walter (2021) identified as not so clearly defined or understood is agility dimensions. Often mistakenly mixed with agility capabilities, dimensions refer to the different areas contributing to overall organisational agility (Walter, 2021).

Walter (2021) identified various literature on the different agility dimensions identified in literature which the researcher grouped and presented in Table 5 below:

Table 4: Agility dimensions from various literature (Walter, 2021)

No.	Agility Dimension	Description
1	Strategic Agility	The ability to adapt organisational strategies in response to changing environments
2	Operational Agility	Flexibility in the day-to-day process
3	Technological Agility	Capacity to integrate and leverage technology to foster adaptation and innovation
4	Market Agility	Ability to respond to market trends
5	Workforce Agility	Flexibility of the workforce to adapt to changing environment
6	Partnership Agility	Ability to form, maintain, and adjust partnerships
7	Organisational structure	The ability of the organisation's structure and governance models to enhance quick decision-making and reconfiguring of resources

Idrissi et al. (2022) identify three agility dimensions: customer, operational, and partnering. Customer agility refers to the organisation's ability to sense and respond to the needs of its customers (Idrissi et al.,2022). Operational agility refers to the organisation's ability to redesign its processes to react quickly to changes and uncertainties and to make the most of new opportunities (Idrissi et al.,2022). Finally, partnering agility is about utilising partners' knowledge, competencies, and resources to maximise opportunities (Idrissi et al.,2022).

Based on the agility dimensions discussed by Walter (2021), the researcher has consolidated them into the three agility dimensions identified by Idrissi et al. (2022) in Table 6 below.

Table 5: Consolidated Agility Dimensions: Own elaboration

No.	Agility Dimension	Agility Dimension
1	Customer	Strategic Agility
		Market Agility
2.	Operational	Operational Agility
		Strategic Agility
		Technological Agility
		Workforce Agility
		Organisational structure
3.	Partnering	Partnership Agility

Walter's (2021) agility model demonstrates that organisational agility results from the three categories discussed. Agility enablers foster agility capabilities, which enhance agility across various dimensions. The cumulative effect is an agile organisation that can adapt quickly to environmental changes, ensuring organisational performance, success, and resilience in volatile environments.

Ludviga and Kalvina (2023) propose that agility should be incorporated into every facet of an organisation, including its structure, culture, technology, leadership, and management. One of the recurring themes in the categories discussed above and in the literature is employees and their role in agility.

Walter (2021) identifies one of the agility enablers as 'a multi-skilled, flexible, and empowered workforce' (p. 359). The importance of 'empowered people' (p. 360) is highlighted in discussing agility capabilities. The discussion on the 'four major dimensions of organisational agility is an agile strategy, agile processes, agile linkages, and agile people' (p. 362). Nouri & Mousavi (2020) have also emphasised the crucial role of employees in fostering agility.

To fulfil this crucial role, Naqack & Chaouki (2023) emphasise that workforce agility is critical to ensuring that organisations can achieve overall organisational agility.

2.3.3. Employee Agility

In understanding the concept of employee agility, the researcher considered the ability and attitude perspectives discussed by Naim et al. (2023). From the ability perspective, Kidd (1004), as cited in Naim et al. (2023), refers to employee agility as '...the individual capacity to adequately respond to change in a timely fashion and exploit the benefits of change' (p. 668). This perspective focuses on individuals' abilities to adapt and thrive in changing conditions and contribute positively to the organisation's success.

The attitude perspective defines employee agility as 'learning-oriented, self-development-oriented, good problem-solvers, comfortable with change and new technologies, able to develop innovative ideas, and ready to take on new responsibilities' (Plonka, 1997 cited in Naim et al., 2023, p. 668). This perspective highlights the importance of a proactive mindset where employees not only adapt but also seek continuous improvement, are open to new challenges, and view changes as opportunities for learning and personal and organisational growth.

From both these perspectives, employee agility can be explained as a skillset that enables employees to adapt quickly to changes and identify opportunities created by the changes.

Saeed et al. (2022) propose that employee agility be understood as the possession of specific ‘...skill, behaviour, or capability that is indispensable for employees operating within an ever-changing global economy’ (p. 6), with some scholars such as Al-Foui et al. (2014) cited in Naqack & Chaouki adding the importance of employees ‘leveraging their broad business and technical expertise’ (p. 6).

Agile employees are highly adept at solving complex problems, approach challenges with creativity, curiosity, and resourcefulness, and ensure that they remain effective and efficient in dynamic environments (Naqack & Chaouki (2023). They are committed to ongoing learning and self-improvement to seek opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge. These are critical skills in navigating changing environments.

Naqack & Chaouki (2023) identified three sub-dimensions that characterise employee agility: Resilience Behaviour, Adaptability Behaviour, and Proactivity Behaviour:

2.3.3.1. Resilience

According to Naqack and Chaouki (2023), employees need to possess skills such as stress management, problem-solving, and others to navigate uncertainties with a positive attitude and a high tolerance for uncertainties. Resilience speaks to the ability to handle challenging situations effectively. A resilient employee can respond to adversity by maintaining a hopeful attitude.

2.3.3.2. Adaptability

In the VUCA environment, adaptability is crucial where a ‘business as usual mindset’ is no longer viable. Raut & Das (2021), cited in Naqack & Chaouki (2023), describe adaptability in employees as the ability to ‘seamlessly transition between roles, manage multiple tasks, and play a vital role in organisations facing changes or uncertain circumstances’ (p. 7). In line with this, Naqack & Chaouki (2023) stress the critical role that learning plays in adaptability behaviour. Employees must be able to learn what the new environment demands and adjust their behaviour, skills, and mindset accordingly.

2.3.3.3. Proactivity

Proactivity is about anticipating what will happen and preparing in advance instead of being caught off guard. Rather than waiting for instructions or reacting after changes occur, proactive employees take the initiative to respond to anticipated changes. Naqack & Chaouki (2023) describe this as a ‘...mindset where individuals actively seek opportunities to contribute to the organisation's success’ (p.7). Proactive employees can contribute to shaping their environment rather than merely being shaped by it.

Having synthesised literature, it is evident that fostering an agile workforce is essential for achieving overall organisational agility. The three sub-dimensions- resilience, adaptability, and proactivity make employee agility practical and identifiable and form part of what makes employees agile. This study builds on these insights by exploring employee empowerment as an antecedent to employee agility, thereby enhancing organisational agility.

2.4. Employee empowerment

In a dynamic environment comprised of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), organisations need to consist of effective and efficient individuals (Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi, 2020). Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) emphasise that employees are essential to the organisation's ability to understand environmental changes and identify appropriate response methods. As the experts on the ground, employees can provide valuable insight into the decision-making process.

According to Ivanova and Scheve (2020), the concept of employee empowerment emerged in management theory towards the end of the 20th century, and since then, various definitions have appeared in the literature. Table 7 below provides a summary of some standard definitions.

Table 6: Employee Empowerment Definitions (Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi, 2020).

Author(s)	Conceptualization of Employee empowerment
Baird & Wang (2010)	"The basic objective of empowerment is redistribution of power between management and employees most commonly in the form of increasing employee authority, responsibility, and influencing commitment"
Fernandez & Moldogaziev (2013)	employee empowerment is a relational construct that describes how those with power in organizations share power, information, resources and rewards with those lacking them.
Ghafuri & Mansouri (2014)	Employee empowerment includes a collection of systems, approaches, and measures which are used through development of people capability and competency for improving and increasing productivity, excellence, and prospering the organization and human resources considering organizational
Oloko & Ogutu (2017)	This is a common theme that emphasizes the power of confident people, passionately committed to meaningful goals, acting in accordance with own higher values, taking risks and demonstrating imitativeness and creativity in the service of these goals
Baird & Munir (2018)	Employee empowerment involves the delegation of decision making authority to lower levels in the organisational hierarchy, with employees provided with the autonomy to make day-to-day decisions about job-related activities
Idris & Coughlan (2018)	An employee empowerment approach is composed of practices aimed at sharing information, job related knowledge and authority with employees

Although the concept of employee empowerment varies, several common themes emerge from the definitions above. The first is redistribution of power, where some definitions highlight the importance of shifting power from management to employees. This involves allowing employees more autonomy and responsibility over their work. This can also be seen as decentralising power, moving from centralised authority. Employee empowerment is also seen as sharing information, allowing employees to be aware of what is happening and make informed decisions. The third emerging theme is enhancing employees' skills and competencies to support their development. The researcher also takes away from the definitions above that employee empowerment fosters confidence and creativity, where employees can take initiative and manage tasks independently.

Kanjanaka et al. (2023) state that employee empowerment is a shift in power dynamics where authority, power, and responsibility are transferred from managers to employees. This is informed by the idea that employees have valuable knowledge, expertise, and experience that can be leveraged as a helpful resource for the organisation.

Kanjanaka et al. (2023) emphasise that granting employees autonomy can lead to intrinsic motivation and greater commitment toward the organisation as employees are entrusted with greater responsibility that allows them to be part of the decision-making process. Alavi & Wahab (2023), cited in Naim et al. (2023), suggests that giving employees more power positively impacts their agility. Two approaches to empowerment are identified in the literature: structural and psychological.

2.4.1. Structural empowerment

Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) view structural empowerment as processes that are in place to allow employees to have decision-making power. It removes barriers between managers and their subordinates, enabling open communication and information sharing to allow employees to engage in decision-making and thereby reduce hierarchical restrictions.

Referencing Kanter (1977), Monje-Amor et al. (2022) define structural empowerment as 'certain social workplace conditions and policies at work that facilitate access to opportunities, information, support and resources' (p. 780). This definition underscores the existence of specific workplace conditions that can influence the level of empowerment that employees experience. These are opportunities, information, support, and resources.

2.4.1.1. Opportunities

'Opportunities for learning and development include access to challenging work, new skills, and knowledge that allow professional growth' (Monje-Amor et al. 2022, p. 780). For employees to be empowered, meaningful career advancement or personal development must exist within the organisation.

2.4.1.2. Information

To meaningfully contribute towards what is happening in the organisation, there needs to be sharing of information where employees have access to information on the changes that the organisation is experiencing, policies that exist within the organisation, the strategy of the organisation, and information such as vision, mission goals etc. According to Kanter (1977) in Monje-Amor et al. (2019), 'power is gained when employees have access to the necessary information, learning and development opportunities, support and resources at work' (p. 2).

2.4.1.3. Support

Systems must allow management to provide guidance, feedback, and encouragement. Colleagues are also identified as support systems, where an opportunity is provided for information sharing and learning from the team.

2.4.1.4. Resources

Employees must have the tools to perform their tasks confidently. These tools are tangible resources such as equipment, budget availability, etc.

According to the definition above, the above elements together form the backbone of structural empowerment. By ensuring that employees have access to opportunities, information, support, and resources, employees feel empowered to perform in their roles and contribute to the organisation's success (Monje-Amor et al. 2019).

In their study, Baird et al. (2020) used Pardo de Val and Llyod's (2003) empowerment instrument to identify four dimensions of structural empowerment: collaboration, formalisation, directness, and degree of influence. These dimensions capture the degree to which processes allow employees to participate in decision-making.

Although the researcher notes the adaptation made by Baird et al. (2020), this study will apply Kanter's (1977) condition to structural empowerment. Current studies still refer to Kanter's conditions as appropriate in understanding structural empowerment.

Kanjanaka et al. (2023) suggest that this empowering behaviour can also impact employees' levels of psychological empowerment. Empowering behaviour refers to '...actions taken by leaders to delegate decision-making authority to subordinates' (Kanjanaka et al., 2023, p. 3).

2.4.2. Psychological empowerment

Psychological empowerment is defined by Kanjanaka et al. (2023) as '...a motivational construct manifested in four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact' (p. 3). These four dimensions are illustrated in Figure 5 below.

Meaning Feeling that your work or activities are personally valuable and aligned with your values.	Competences Having confidence in your knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform tasks effectively.
Self-determination Having a sense of autonomy and control over your work and personal life choices.	Impact Believing that your actions can make a meaningful difference and influence outcomes.

Figure 6: Dimensions of psychological empowerment (Naqack & Chaouki, 2023, p. 5)

2.4.2.1. Meaning

Naqack & Chaouki (2023) explain meaning as 'the perception an individual has of the purpose and value of their work about their values and identity, creating a sense of purpose and personal connection to work' (p.5). when employees see their work as meaningful, they will likely experience greater job satisfaction, motivation, and engagement. A sense of meaning enhances employees' emotional investment in their role as there is a feeling that the work they do not only contributes to the organisational goals but also reflects what they stand for.

2.4.2.2. Competence

This dimension of psychological empowerment is critical as it allows employees to work independently. Competence refers to employees' confidence in their abilities, skills, and knowledge to perform their tasks effectively (Naqack & Chaouki, 2023). Beyond the technical skills needed to perform their roles, competence also encompasses employees' belief and confidence in their workability.

2.4.2.3. Self-determination

Mishra & Spreitzer (1998), cited in Naqack & Chaouki (2023), define self-determination as 'the sense of autonomy and control individuals have over their work' (p.5). This dimension of psychological empowerment leads to employees having a sense of freedom and control to figure out how to perform their roles and have ownership over their work. Employees with a feeling of autonomy can take the initiative and identify opportunities for improvement as there is a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their work.

According to Naqack and Chaouki (2023), self-determination and competence contribute to employees' confidence, as there is self-assurance of the ability to perform tasks and the freedom to figure things out and discover the best approaches to work. Providing employees with this type of freedom also contributes to intrinsic motivation (Naqack & Chaouki, 2023).

The four dimensions create an environment where employees feel motivated, confident, and empowered. Through psychological empowerment, employees feel trusted to make decisions about their work and have the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to the organisation (Naqack & Chaouki, 2023). This also leads to a sense of ownership and investment in the organisation, increasing motivation and engagement.

Kanjanaka et al. (2023) have suggested that psychological empowerment helps employees fit into their roles, motivating them to put in more effort and increase performance. Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) stated that psychological empowerment creates a sense of belonging, making employees feel connected to the organisation. During times of uncertainty, a workforce that feels psychologically empowered and connected to the organisation is critical in weathering the storm and emerging stronger on the other side.

2.4.3. Employee empowerment and impact on engagement, motivation, and commitment

Employee empowerment is not only identified as crucial in organisational agility (Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi, 2020) but also impacts employees' work engagement, motivation and commitment to the organisation. Empowering employees to feel more valued influences their commitment to the organisation and encourages innovation and proactive behaviour qualities necessary for agility.

2.4.3.1. Work Engagement

Engagement is defined as a mental state where employees feel fulfilled in their roles, which results in them approaching their work with 'vigour, dedication and absorption' (Monje-Amor et al., 2019, p. 3). Baek-Kyoo et al. (2019) identified three dimensions of employee engagement: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural. Cognitive engagement refers to the mental investment employees put into their work, while emotional engagement refers to the extent to which employees feel emotionally attached to their work.

According to Baek-Kyoo et al. (2019), behavioural engagement is the physical manifestation of cognitive and emotional engagement. When employees experience all three dimensions of engagement, they are more likely to be motivated, productive, and able to contribute positively to the organisation.

Monje-Amor et al. (2010) indicate that leaders can create an environment that encourages engagement by promoting open communication, feedback, and collaboration. These can also be seen as empowering behaviours; therefore, creating an environment that fosters employee empowerment can contribute to employee work engagement.

2.4.3.2. Motivation

Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) argue that environments where employees feel that they have an influence and can contribute meaningfully can promote employee motivation. They see empowerment as meeting employee needs for autonomy, which enhances motivation levels. Employees with freedom and control over their work are more motivated to engage in their roles and work towards organisational goals.

2.4.3.3. Commitment

There has been a link between empowerment commitment and dedication to the organisation (Nilsen et al., 2019). They argue that employees who feel trusted and empowered are likelier to develop strong commitment and loyalty to the organisation. Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir

Mousavi (2020) add that empowered employees tend to see meaning in their work and have a greater sense of purpose, which aligns with organisational goals and shows commitment. Employee empowerment influences engagement, motivation and commitment, essential components in building a robust and resilient workforce. A workforce that will be an asset as the organisation navigates uncertainty and volatility.

2.4.4. Employee empowerment in the VUCA environment

External or internal environmental changes that impact an organisation also inevitably affect its employees. Change is interpreted differently by people. Scheepers & Swart (2020) state that when employees perceive change as a potential threat due to anticipated job disruption or fears about their ability to adapt, they may respond with resistance, anxiety, or diminished engagement. This can be common when change appears sudden and uncertain, typical of what VUCA presents.

This is why Scheepers & Swart (2020) highlight leadership's role in shaping employees' experiences of change. How employees respond to these changes also impacts the organisation's ability to be agile. Nie et al. (2023) highlight that as organisations undergo shifts due to VUCA, employees could also experience corresponding changes in different areas, such as their work environment, workload, and job responsibilities, which could lead to psychological stress.

Rasheed et al. (2024) identify four categories that influence employee job satisfaction and ability to cope with changes: task resources, relational resources, administrative resources, and legislative resources. When these resources are threatened due to changes, Rasheed et al. (2023) argue that it can lead to stress, burnout, or fatigue. These resources are explained as follows:

- Task resources: autonomy over work being done, competency and confidence in the role, and understanding of what is expected.
- Relational resources refer to cohesion and belonging in the team and colleague support.
- Administrative resources: support and supervision from management
- Legislative resources: control that employees have

Losing these resources can adversely impact employees' mental well-being (Rasheed et al., 2023). During periods of uncertainty, there is heightened concern over these resources being threatened. The resources discussed tie in with employee empowerment and support the view that employee empowerment is also essential in helping employees navigate change.

When discussing organisational change, Nie et al. (2023) raise the fact that it can sometimes result in distress for employees through psychological and job insecurity. To understand employees' experiences and expectations of adapting to these changes, one needs to be aware of how they are affected by these changes.

In their study on change in the healthcare sector, Nielsen et al. (2019) identified seven responses to employee changes. Figure 5 below illustrates the change responses by employees. The study found that most employees showed involvement and support for change when there was engagement during changes, understanding why the changes are happening, and information on the changes, allowing employees to prepare for such. These responses echo the conditions discussed in structural and psychological empowerment. Nie et al. (2023) highlight the importance of managers communicating changes to employees so that there is an understanding of what is going on.

Forms of response	Description
Commitment	Powerful acceptance of change, requiring employee empowerment, and a recognition of their contributions and efforts, as well as employees' understanding and acceptance of values and goals for achieving the organization's mission
Involvement	Strong form of acceptance of changes, which involves taking part in or "doing" the changes, as manifested by willing cooperation and participative behaviors
Support	Expressing a positive view of changes but it does not mean that one acts to promote or participate in the changes
Indifference	A neutral or transition zone that lies between the three forms of acceptance (commitment, involvement, and support) and three forms of resistance (passive, active, and aggressive resistance). It is also described as a (fourth) form of resistance to change, but it is characterized by fairly neutral attitudes and passive resignation. It involves a lack of positive or negative attitudes and no behavioral responses to changes
Passive resistance	Mild opposition to changes, demonstrated by voicing negative views and considering quitting the job
Active resistance	Strong opposition to changes, displayed through negative attitudes and impeding behaviors such as protesting
Aggressive resistance	Destructive opposition to change, which may involve active efforts to hinder change, such spreading of destructive rumors, strikes, subversion, and sabotage

Figure 7: Coetzee's framework of change responses (Nilsen et al. 2019., p.2)

One of the factors that Nie et al. (2023) identified as crucial in helping employees navigate changes is job autonomy and work meaning. These two concepts have been discussed as dimensions of psychological empowerment, which can lead to engagement and motivation. In helping employees navigate change, employee empowerment is crucial in contributing to employee agility and providing support for employees navigating change. Nie et al. (2023) highlight that even when faced with work stressors such as job insecurity and job uncertainty, employees who are passionate about their work are better at initiating personal self-regulation processes. Uncertainties are seen as '...opportunities and challenges at work, and actively change their tasks and work styles, or craft their work by learning to enhance their skills' (p.6).

Looking at Figure 5, one of the responses that employees sometimes display during periods of change that are categorised as indifferent is change fatigue. This is described as 'exhaustion associated with feeling drained and depleted beyond one's capacity to handle

workplace demands and everyday tasks' (Nilsen et al., 2019, p. 8). This results in employees who are disengaged instead of voicing their discontentment.

Baek-Kyoo et al. (2019) highlight literature by Chiles & Zorn (1995), who reported on issues such as 'bureaucratic workplaces, inappropriate communication with management and poor information from management' having adverse effects on employee empowerment. Bureaucratic workplaces tend to create rigid structures where decision-making authority is centralised, stifling employees' autonomy and resulting in long decision-making processes.

Inappropriate communication entails a lack of open, transparent and effective channels for communication between employees and leaders, which might leave employees disconnected from what is happening. This also feeds into poor information flow from management, where critical information is withheld from employees, creating an environment of uncertainty. These three challenges identified by Baek-Kyoo et al. (2019) restrict access to resources, support and autonomy needed to navigate uncertain times.

Employees who are empowered can have better experiences during periods of uncertainty, which 'also lead them to have better expectations for the organisation and to be more proactive in making changes to meet the new requirements for the company in dynamic environments' (Nie et al., 2023, p.6).

2.5. Conclusion

The literature review discussed the two constructs that inform this study: organisational agility and employee empowerment within the context of the VUCA environment. The literature review establishes a strong link between employee empowerment and organisational agility. Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) indicate that when employees feel empowered, they are motivated and engaged, which results in improved performance. Scholars such as Monje-Amor et al. (2019) highlight the impact of empowerment on factors such as employee engagement, motivation and commitment, which are essential characteristics for employees to possess as they navigate periods of uncertainty. The study will seek to explore these relationships and how employee empowerment levels impact the three dimensions.

There are numerous references to studies demonstrating a strong correlation between employee empowerment and organisational agility, with most studies conducting quantitative methods to examine the relationship between the concepts (Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi, 2020). Baird et al. (2020) call for qualitative research to better understand the interplay between employee empowerment and organisational agility.

This is supported by Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020), who recommended that further in-depth studies be conducted to gather in-depth data on the relationship between employee empowerment and organisational studies. While various studies referenced by Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) conducted quantitative data to establish and identify the connections between the two constructs, the researcher has identified a need for deeper first-hand insights from employees, especially in the public sector.

Mazzucato et al. (2021) have also highlighted the lack of attention given to the public sector when looking at dynamic capabilities issues. The researcher adds to this the limited focus on agility in the public sector. The researcher identifies the gap in the need for a qualitative study examining the relationships between empowerment and agility. It also captures employees' personal experiences and perceptions of their empowerment and their experiences during periods that could be considered VUCA. By focusing on their experiences, this study aims to offer a richer, more nuanced understanding of the empowerment-agility dynamic contributing to existing literature in this area. The study will also explore how empowerment levels influence how employees navigate VUCA periods and whether empowerment has a role in creating a supporting environment for employees during periods of uncertainty and instability.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1. Introduction

Organisations today operate in dynamic environments that are constantly changing, leading to uncertainty, instability, and volatility. Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) identify new information technology and globalised consumer culture as just some of the changes organisations encounter. In a public sector setting, organisations must create value despite political and environmental changes as mandated by legislation. The environments organisations face are called VUCA environments, an acronym for volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. A simple description describes the dynamic and complex challenging environment organisations encounter ((Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi, 2020). Agility has been recognised as critical for navigating the VUCA environment.

Workforce emerged as one of the recurring themes in Walter's (2021) organisational agility framework. Employees were identified as agility enablers, agility capabilities, and agility dimensions. Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) have also highlighted that employees are crucial in ensuring an organisation's success in navigating uncertainty. Naim et al. (2023) are just some of the scholars identified in the literature review chapter who have highlighted the positive impact that employee empowerment has on organisational agility.

Using a phenomenological approach, this research study sought to examine employees' perceived levels of empowerment within a public sector organisation and to understand how these levels influence their experiences during periods of uncertainty. Additionally, the study explored how employees' sense of empowerment contributes to organisational agility.

To do this, the following main research question was crafted:

How do employees' perceived level of empowerment impact their experiences during periods of uncertainty in a public sector organisation, and how does this influence organisational agility?

Following the process of reviewing the literature, the following research sub-questions were formulated:

3.2. Sub-Research question 1: How do employees perceive their level of empowerment within the organisation, and how does this affect their attitude towards the organisation?

This research question aims to explore and understand employees' perceived level of empowerment and the factors contributing to their sense of empowerment. Kanjanaka et al. (2023) view empowerment as a shift in the power dynamics between managers and employees and as a way for employees to contribute to the decision-making processes within the organisation. Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) stated that it allows employees to feel more connected to the organisation and think they are part of what is happening. By answering this question, the study will be able to understand employee empowerment through the perspective of employees and what this means to them.

Monje-Amor et al. (2019) highlight the impact of empowerment levels on employees' engagement, motivation, and commitment levels. As much as the question aims to establish empowerment levels for employees, it also seeks to gain insight into how these perceived empowerment levels affect their engagement, motivation, and commitment to the organisation. These are identified as essential elements in working towards agility (Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi, 2020).

3.3. Sub-Research question 2: How do employees experience periods of uncertainty, instability, and volatility?

Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) highlighted employees' central role in fostering organisational agility, especially during periods of environmental change. Building on Research Question 1, this question seeks to explore how employees experience and navigate VUCA environments and to gain insight into whether there is a link between empowerment levels and their experiences.

3.4. Sub-Research Question 3: How does the sense of employee empowerment contribute to organisational agility?

This research question explores the relationship between employee empowerment and organisational agility. Walter (2021) identifies one of the agility enablers as 'a multi-skilled, flexible, and empowered workforce' (p. 359); in discussing agility capabilities, the importance of 'empowered people' (p. 360) is highlighted and in the discussion on the 'four major dimensions of organisational agility is an agile strategy, agile processes, agile linkages, and

agile people' (p. 362). Similarly, Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) highlighted employee empowerment as playing a role in fostering organisational agility. Using this as a building block, the question explores how empowerment contributes to agility. This question aims to deepen understanding of how empowerment directly influences agility in complex, bureaucratic environments often characteristic of the public sector.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology approach utilised to conduct the study. The study aimed to investigate employees' experiences of unexpected, unpredictable environmental changes that cause uncertainty and instability in the organisation. It also examined their level of employee empowerment and how this influences organisational agility. The research design, data collection, and analysis were all conducted using a qualitative phenomenological approach. Face-to-face interviews were done with employees of a public sector organisation to learn about their experiences and understand how the concepts of employee empowerment and organisational agility are related. The chapter will also examine the quality control measures used during the investigation, how ethical concerns were addressed, and the study's limitations.

4.2. Research Philosophy

The study used interpretivism, a research philosophy that strives to understand human behaviour and experiences (Bell et al., 2019). Its goal was to understand employees' experiences during times of uncertainty and unpredictable environmental change and how their level of employee empowerment affects these experiences and, as a result, organisational agility. Saunders and Lewis (2018) define interpretivism as "the study of social phenomena in their natural environment" (p. 109). The study's goal was to understand better employees' subjective experiences about the constructs defined in the literature review chapter, namely employee empowerment and organisational agility. Conclusions were drawn based on participants' perspectives.

Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020), citing Ghafuri & Mansouri (2014), highlight employees as a critical asset for organisations to gain a competitive advantage. An interpretive approach is suitable for this study as it focuses on understanding the lived experience of the participants in the organisation. Interpretivism encourages researchers to approach questions with an open mind, allowing for a more honest investigation of people's views and interpretations of their surroundings (Bell et al., 2019, p. 16). The researcher's curiosity in the participants' world encouraged them to open up and discuss their experiences and how they felt about what was happening around them, resulting in rich data and insight into their lives. This philosophical foundation led to the selection of a qualitative research design, which is well suited to the interpretive nature of the inquiry.

4.3. Research Design

According to Bell et al. (2019), a study design 'provides a framework for the gathering and analysis of data' (p. 38). This study took a qualitative approach, allowing the researcher to delve deeply into the topic under investigation and understand the participants' experiences and perspectives. The qualitative approach is defined as:

‘an approach in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspective (i.e. the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue-oriented, collaborative, or change-oriented) or both’ (Cresswell, 2003, p.14).

The study investigated employees' experiences in a public-sector organisation during periods of uncertainty, instability, and volatility. In seeking to understand this, the phenomenological method was deemed an appropriate qualitative approach for this study.

When undertaking this study, the researcher sought to ‘reveal the essence of human experience related to a particular phenomenon as described by the participants’ (Creswell, 2003, p.15). Several types of phenomenological methods are identified in the literature, such as descriptive, transcendental, hermeneutic, and interpretative (Bartholomew et al., 2021). This study employed the interpretative process, which focuses on understanding how individuals uniquely experience certain events and the emotions and meaning they attach to them (Bartholomew et al., 2021). It was not the intention of the researcher to draw generalisations from this study; instead, it was to understand the lived experiences of the participants and to capture their voices regarding the experiences that they had had. Going through the transcripts, one can see the researcher’s focus on enquiring about how participants felt about particular incidents shared with curiosity about how these affected them.

Finlay (2014), as cited in Bartholomew et al. (2021), ‘adopting a phenomenological attitude is reflected in researchers’ seeing a phenomenon newly and approaching participants’ lived experiences with curiosity, openness, and genuineness’. (p. 2). In conducting the study, the researcher was careful to set aside pre-existing biases and ideas and approach the study by focusing on allowing participants to share their experiences to make meaning from the data collected in a way that reflects as much as possible their voices.

4.4. Unit of analysis

Individuals, primarily employees who were interviewed, serve as the unit of analysis in this study. The data gathering site was a public sector institution, specifically a municipality. It is one of South Africa's largest metropolitan municipalities and a key player in providing basic services. As a Category A municipality with exclusive municipal and legislative authority, it is a critical public sector organisation responsible for delivering vital services, such as water, electricity, sanitation, housing, and waste management, to its citizens.

The Municipality has undergone several transitions, from an apartheid-era system to a democratic and inclusive post-apartheid system (2022/2023 COJ Annual Report); this depicts an organisation that has had to navigate various changes in the environment, adapt, and respond effectively to environmental dynamics. It has also been at the vanguard of a new political paradigm of coalition government, which has resulted in unprecedented volatility since 2016. It is currently led by a coalition government, which has undergone substantial changes since its formation.

The unit of analysis and observation for this research was employees within a chosen Department in the organisation. This group encompasses employees such as researchers, ward administrators, office administrators, and community workers, so mostly frontline workers. The managers interviewed in the study were still on an operational level and very involved with the organisation's day-to-day work. More senior positions, such as Directors and the head of the department, were excluded from the study.

4.5. Population

The participants for the study were employees of a selected department within the municipality that was studied. This department has 238 employees, according to the organisation's annual report for 2022/2023. The 238 became the sample frame for the study. The study focused on employees from positions of Assistant Directors and below. The designed interview guide ensured the interview participants met the selection criteria outlined below. It was essential to interview employees who have been with the organisation long enough to have witnessed and experienced some of its changes.

4.6 Sampling approach and sample size

The sample was selected based on employees who have been with the organisation for over 5 years and were able to provide insights based on their personal experience, which provided

valuable data for analysis. Interviewing the entire population being examined is not feasible. In this case, it is impossible to interview all 238 employees from the selected department. This study used a small sample size to acquire insight into the phenomenon being investigated.

Boyd (2001), as cited in Groenewald (2004), recommends that smaller, more intimate groups allow for a detailed exploration of the phenomenon under study for phenomenological research. This is echoed by Bartholomew et al. (2021), who also recommend a small sample size. In a study they conducted to determine an appropriate sample size for phenomenological studies, they found that collecting a sample small enough to adequately describe expressions of consciousness and centre participants' voices' (Bartholomew et al., 2021, p. 9) aligns with phenomenological methods. For this research study, 15 employees were interviewed, which the researcher deemed small enough to focus on each participant and sufficient to answer the research question.

Bartholomew et al. (2021) suggest a sample size of 11.61 for the interpretative method of phenomenology. The researcher opted for a sample size of 15 to allow for the possibility that some interviews might not go as expected or fail to answer the research question. The 15 interviews provided enough data to answer the research questions while capturing the participants' unique experiences.

The breakdown of the research participants is indicated in Table 7 below:

Table 7: Research Participants

Participant Code	Position	Unit	Gender	No. of years in the organisation
RP001	Committee Officer	Caucus Support	F	6
RP002	Researcher	Committees	M	5
RP003	Regional Manager	Community participation	F	15
RP004	Operational Manager	Integrity commissioner	M	16
RP005	Operational Manager	Councillor support	M	14
RP006	Committee Officer	Caucus Support	M	14
RP007	Assistant Director	Section 79 Committees	M	9
RP008	Human Resource officer	Human Resource	F	10
RP009	Researcher	Caucus Support	M	6
RP010	Researcher	Caucus Support	M	6
RP011	Committee Officer Acting Assistant Director	Caucus Support	M	8
RP012	Office Manager	Caucus Support	F	18
RP013	Community & Liaison Specialist Acting Chief of Staff	Speaker's office	M	21
RP014	Manager: Ward Committees	Ward Committees	F	16
RP015	Manager: Ward Committees	Ward Governance	F	16

Participants for the study were chosen based on a specific set of criteria that the researcher believed would contribute to a richer and more coherent data collection. The selection criteria included characteristics and experiences the researcher anticipated would add depth and insight to the study. Carefully considering these criteria during the participant selection process ensured that each participant added value to the study, providing a wealth of information that proved meaningful and relevant to the research objectives.

The selection criteria were as follows:

- Gender: The study included participants of all genders to provide a diverse range of experiences and prevent biases or patterns that may be gender specific. Six females and nine males were interviewed.
- Work Tenure: Only personnel with at least five years of experience with the organisation were included in the study to guarantee a thorough overview of the organisation's history. According to the table above, employment experience ranged from 5 to 21 years.
- Position Level: The study included all employees except for top management (Deputy Directors and above). This allowed for a more excellent representation of those with firsthand knowledge of the organisation's day-to-day activities. The participants for this study were employees at all levels, from managers to those below, who work directly with communities. The study aims to capture diverse perspectives and experiences related to organisational change, empowerment, and agility by targeting employees across different hierarchical levels and roles. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from multiple angles and highlights areas of agreement or disagreement among employees of various ranks and responsibilities.

The participants were selected using purposive non-probability sampling, a sampling technique that involves the researcher selecting participants based on their judgment of their relevance to the study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Participants were also selected based on their potential to provide valuable insights that address the research questions. The researcher used existing networks to identify potential participants and referrals based on the set sampling criteria.

The researcher also used snowball sampling to locate additional possible participants. The snowball sampling method offers a practical approach to securing a broader and more representative sample for the study. Bella et al. 2019 describe snowball sampling as follows:

‘Snowball sampling is a technique in which the researcher initially samples a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants

propose other participants who have had the experience or characteristics relevant to the research' (p. 116).

Following some of the interviews, the researcher asked the participants whether they knew of any colleagues who would be willing to take part in the study. Since the onset of COVID-19 and the closure of one of the department's buildings, it has been challenging to access employees because most work from home, and others are spread across different regional offices. However, snowball proved an effective method that allowed the researcher to access the participants.

The literature differentiates between sequential and non-sequential approaches to purposive sampling. This study adopted the non-sequential approach, where the sample remains consistent throughout the research process. The focus was solely on employees, and there were no modifications to the sample, as is characteristic of non-sequential sampling. Unlike sequential sampling, where the sample evolves as the research progresses and new relevant participants are identified, the study maintained a fixed sample (Bell et al., 2019).

4.7 Data collection tool

The researcher developed an interview guide as a practical interviewing tool. The interviewing guide presented in Annexure A was created following the literature review and research questions mentioned in Chapter 3. The questions were prepared by considering each research question and ensuring alignment between the literature, research questions, and questions answered during the data collection process. The questions were created with the following in mind:

- Creating exploratory questions aligned with the interpretivist paradigm, avoiding factual questions that lean towards a positivist paradigm.
- Designing questions to address the research question while steering clear of theoretical questions and conceptual language, opting for standard business language instead.
- Refraining from leading questions that assume specific answers or closed questions that elicit yes/no responses.
- Focusing on participants' experiences rather than their beliefs or perceptions.
- Keeping the number of questions manageable, with approximately five main questions in addition to an opening and closing question.
- Prioritizing quality over quantity and anticipating additional questions for probing and clarification purposes, ensuring not to steer the interview in a particular direction.

After drafting the interview guide, the researcher performed two pilot interviews with employees to test the guide. This approach also tested interviewer techniques to discover areas that needed to be worked on before conducting the actual interviews. The pilot interviews revealed that the interview guide was too extensive, and some questions were repeated and addressed in other questions. The interview guide was then changed, and the revised interview guide, Annexure B, was used.

The pilot also highlighted the need to update some of the identifying information, such as qualification, that was previously included in the interview guide in Annexure A. Qualification was deemed useless because it offered nothing to help us answer the research questions. The researcher took field notes about the pilot experience, which are in the research folder.

The pilot interviews proved valuable in refining the interview guide and making the researcher aware of areas she needed to enhance her interviewing abilities. It helped prepare the researcher for the actual interviews. The information gathered during the pilot interviews was considered pilot data and was not included in the data analysis.

4.8. Data collection process

The research approach adopted in this study was phenomenological. Green (1997), as cited by Groenewald (2004), defines phenomenology as a research approach that "is concerned with the lived experiences of the people" (p.5). This informs the approach that the researcher undertook in conducting the study. It focused on understanding how employees perceive and experience a particular phenomenon in their daily lives, such as employee empowerment. This approach enabled the researcher to capture the nuances of the participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations, providing valuable insights into the studied constructs.

Semi-structured interviews were done over two weeks to gather data for this study. Although there was a pre-determined list of questions, the nature of this study permitted the interviewer to explore pertinent issues as they came up. Looking at the transcripts (included in the research folder), one can see that no series of similar questions were asked. The choice to conduct semi-structured interviews was motivated by the desire to acquire objective insight into employees' experiences without imposing preconceived notions on the participants. According to Bella et al. (2019), 'with a more unstructured approach, the researcher is less likely to come at participants' world views with presuppositions or expectations and is more likely to see things as the participants see them' (p. 150).

Even with the choice of using semi-structured interviews, the study maintained a distinct focus on employee empowerment within the Department, seeking to understand the perceived level of empowerment employees had and how this subsequently impacts organisational agility. To effectively answer these research issues, specific questions must be asked to ensure alignment with the study's objectives. According to Bella et al. (2019), semi-structured interviews are preferable when the inquiry begins with a precise topic since they allow for exploring more particular issues.

Fifteen face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants, as shown in Table 1 above. The interviews were face-to-face to facilitate rapport-building between the researcher and the participants. This decision was grounded in the understanding that non-face-to-face interviews can weaken rapport, as suggested by Bella et al. (2019). By engaging in face-to-face interactions, the researcher aimed to foster an environment where participants feel comfortable sharing profound, insightful, and rich information. Furthermore, in-person interviews enabled the researcher to observe and respond to body language, non-verbal cues, and other subtle communication elements that could be overlooked in different data collection methods, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences through probing.

Three video conference interviews had to be conducted due to the participants' preferences. Two participants worked from home and, while willing to participate in the study, were unwilling to meet at the workplace or a neutral location. Following the cancellation of the interview due to an urgent problem, the third participant requested a video conference. To accommodate his uncertain schedule, he asked for a video conference on the evening of the cancelled interview date. The remaining in-person interviews were conducted at the participants' workplaces or homes. The researcher had to be flexible to accommodate participants' preferences and schedules. The breakdown of these interviews is shown in Table 8 below. As is evident from Table 8, the total length of interviews was 658 minutes, and the total number of transcript pages was 240.

Table 8. Interview breakdown.

Participant Code	Mode	Duration	No. of pages for transcript	Location
RP001	In-person	40 minutes	14	Participants Office
RP002	In-person	35 minutes	15	Office
RP003	In-person	40 minutes	20	Participants home
RP004	In-person	46 minutes	16	office
RP005	In-person	37 minutes	12	Participant's office

RP006	In-person	40 minutes	13	Office
RP007	Video conferencing	42 minutes	28	Virtual
RP008	In-person	37 minutes	13	Central location
RP009	In-person	50 minutes	15	Central location
RP010	In-person	57 minutes	17	Central location
RP011	In-person	50 minutes	13	Participant's office
RP012	In-person	27 minutes	9	Central location
RP013	In-person	41 minutes	15	Participant's Office
RP014	Video conferencing	59 minutes	21	Virtual
RP015	Video conferencing	57 minutes	19	Virtual
Total		658	240	

Research participants were urged to communicate freely without fear, and they were assured of their privacy and that their identities would not be used in the study. The interview process began with the participants receiving the consent form, presented as Annexure C, and signing it, indicating their agreement to participate in the interview. All interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. The recording allowed the researcher to focus on the interview, resulting in a more natural flow of discourse without documenting every detail. According to Bella et al. (2019), attempting to document all material during the interview manually can lead to distractions, potentially causing the researcher to ignore inconsistencies or fail to explore specific responses more deeply.

Before moving on to the questions, the interviewer asked for identifying information to establish that the participants were suitable for the study. The questions aimed to get employees to describe unforeseen, unpredictable changes within the business based on their experience. The researcher took field notes after each interview. The researcher gathered significant insights that helped with the data analysis procedure. Data collection was completed following the 15th interview. By the 15th interview, the researcher gathered sufficient data to answer the research questions and provide insights into the participants' experiences under study. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data should be collected until data saturation is reached, when no new information emerges from the obtained data, and the information collected adds minimal value to the data.

As shown in Table 8, the length of each interview varied from 27 to 59 minutes. The researcher had to be mindful of time because the participants had other responsibilities and could not devote more time than they had allotted.

The researcher performed a validity check by confirming with the participants that the information gathered accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives. This ensured no nuances or complexities were lost in translating lived experience to written data (Hycner,

1999, cited in Groenewald, 2004). This was done throughout the interviews, with the interviewer using skills like clarification to ensure that the material recorded accurately reflected the employees' experiences.

4.9. Data analysis approach

The study's phenomenological nature influenced the data analysis approach, referred to as "explicitating" Groenewald (2004). This technique was based on respecting the participants' in-depth experiences and honouring their viewpoints while seeking to find the underlying patterns and relationships characterising their encounters. The researcher sought to see the participants' experiences while identifying the common threads that linked their experiences.

Groenewald (2004) warns against using the phrase analysis when performing phenomenological research. Therefore, the researcher uses it with caution. In his article, he states:

‘The “term [analysis] usually means a ‘breaking into parts’ and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon... [whereas ‘explicitation’ implies an] ...investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (1999, p. 161). Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p. 9) regard analysis as the “systematic procedures to identify essential features and relationships” (pg.17).

Software such as ATLAS.ti. is frequently used to analyse data in qualitative research. However, Groenewald (2004) emphasises the unique nature of phenomenological research. Phenomenological research requires understanding, meaning it is not algorithmic and, therefore, cannot be automated. The researcher was aware of this, and instead of using ATLAS. ti followed the steps outlined by Groenewald (2004) below in ‘explicitation’ of the data:

- Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.
- Delineating units of meaning.
- Clustering of units of meaning to form themes.
- Summarising each interview, validating it and, where necessary, modifying it.
- Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite

4.9.1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction

Bracketing and phenomenological reduction are critical first steps in the phenomenological analysis process because they require the researcher to set aside any preconceived notions, personal experiences, or theoretical frameworks that may impact the interpretation of the collected data. Even though it was difficult and needed deliberate effort, the researcher approached the data with curiosity and pushed aside preconceived notions about how the data might appear. This intentional effort allowed for an open, unbiased engagement with the data, allowing the researcher to "open him/herself up" to the meaning that emerges from the participants' lived experiences.

Holloway (1997) and Hycner (1999), as quoted in Groenewald (2004), recommend that researchers listen to the audio recordings of each interview several times. They argue that intentional repetition allows the researcher to immerse oneself in the interviewee/informant's words, resulting in a more full and holistic understanding of their lived experiences. The audio recordings were transcribed into text using the transcribing application Otter. The researcher then had to clean the transcripts to ensure that the words uttered were appropriately captured and accurately represented the interview. While clearing out the transcripts, the researcher listened to each interview multiple times, spending hours on each. This process allowed the researcher to refresh her recollection of the interviews and get immersed in the participants' world.

4.9.2. Delineating units of meaning

The researcher's next step involved evaluating the interviews to identify critical statements that provide insight into the studied constructs (Groenewald, 2004). This process involved carefully analysing printed transcripts and highlighting significant statements. In addition to the transcripts, the researcher used field notes and interview recordings to identify nonverbal cues that added context. As the researcher reviewed each interview, research questions were revisited, responses were grouped accordingly, and relevant participant quotations were highlighted.

4.9.3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes

In this step, the researcher grouped the identified units of meaning into clusters that formed significant themes (Groenewald, 2004). The researcher reviewed the grouped responses from all transcripts and the list of units identified for each research question to pinpoint central

themes that emerged from the data. These themes were then used to structure the presentation of findings in the next chapter. This information can be found in Annexure D.

4.9.4. Summarising each interview, validating it, and, where necessary, modifying it

This step was crucial in the analysis process, where the researcher returned to the research participants to ensure that their experiences were accurately captured. Groenewald (2004) refers to this as a "validity check," which confirms that the central themes accurately reflect the essence of each participant's interview. The central themes were presented to the participants as per the research questions, identifying the themes related to them in the previous step and ensuring that they agreed with how they were captured. These checks were conducted via video conferencing, leveraging the rapport established during the interviews and distinguishing this process from the original interviews.

3.9.5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

The final step involved the researcher compiling a comprehensive, detailed summary reflecting the cultural, social, and individual contexts from which the themes emerged. This forms part of the next chapter titled: Presentation of results. The chapter will outline findings from the interviews in a way appropriately framed within an academic context.

4.10 Quality control measures

Scholars argue that the evaluation criteria for qualitative research should differ from those used in quantitative research. Rather than focusing on validity and reliability, qualitative research assesses a study's trustworthiness through four key components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bell et al., 2019: 89). This approach ensures a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation of qualitative studies.

4.10.1. Credibility

Credibility in research includes following known good practice norms and correctly reporting participants' experiences throughout the study process (Bell et al., 2019). By adhering to these criteria, researchers can ensure their findings are credible and trustworthy. The researcher used respondent validation to establish credibility, which involves sharing the study's findings

with the participants. This allowed them to comment on the results' correctness and authenticity, ensuring their experiences and opinions were fully represented (Bell et al., 2019).

4.10.2. Transferability

Qualitative research understands that data collected from one group may not be appropriate for participants in other circumstances (Bell et al., 2019). Despite this limitation, researchers can contribute valuable insights by creating a comprehensive database that allows for assessments of the possible transferability of findings to different settings. The researcher developed a well-structured interview guide to maintain consistency throughout the interview. During the interviewing procedure, the interview questions were examined and altered to meet the study's objectives. Performing pilot interviews ensured that the interview guide was appropriate for the research and was updated as needed.

4.10.3. Dependability

Guba and Lincoln (1985), as mentioned in Bell et al. (2019), suggest the idea of dependability as an alternative to the term reliability used in quantitative research. This strategy focuses on keeping detailed records of the research process, including problem formulation, participant selection, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, and data analysis decisions. The researcher made sure to maintain track of the entire research process. The interviews were recorded and transcribed correctly, and field notes were retained to provide insight into part of what the researcher had learned. The researcher preserved an electronic file containing all study-related documents.

4.10.4. Confirmability

Bella et al. (2019) state that:

Confirmability is concerned with ensuring that, while recognising that complete objectivity is impossible in business research, the researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith; in other words, it should be apparent that he or she has not overtly or manifestly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research and findings deriving from it' (p.92).

Maintaining a comprehensive collection of documents enables an external auditor to assess whether the researcher has influenced the findings or manipulated conversations. By

recording the interviews, the researcher can demonstrate that the entire study was conducted objectively without leading participants toward predetermined outcomes. This transparency further contributes to the trustworthiness and integrity of the research.

4.11. Research ethics

Ethical principles can be categorised into four key areas: (1) preventing harm, (2) obtaining informed consent, (3) respecting privacy, and (4) avoiding deception, as outlined by Bell et al. (2019). Briefly state that this is also in line with the UP/GIBS standards that were followed.

4.11.1. Avoidance of harm

Bell et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of preventing harm to research participants by referencing the Market Research Society (MRS) code of conduct, which requires researchers to take necessary measures to ensure participants are not negatively affected by their involvement in research projects. They address challenges related to obtaining consent from vulnerable groups, such as children. In this study, however, the focus was on employees capable of providing full consent, which reduces the potential risks of harm.

The nature of this study allowed for the protection of participants' anonymity, as their details are not crucial to the research. While the municipality has been identified as the focus of the study, measures were taken to preserve participants' privacy. The researcher obtained permission from the Head of Department, as presented in Annexure E, to conduct the study.

Bell et al. (2019) emphasise that identifying all potential areas of harm may not always be possible. After the interview with RP014, the participant expressed feelings of discouragement and disheartenment regarding her current job situation. She specifically stated, "...just thinking about it makes me very depressed. I'm. I'm. I'm depressed." Concerned for her well-being, the researcher provided information about the employee wellness program and encouraged her to access these services for emotional support. Although this reaction was unforeseen, the researcher prioritised ensuring the participant's well-being in response.

The guiding principle for this research has been to maintain a constant awareness of ensuring the safety of both research participants and the researcher.

4.11.2. Informed consent

Informed consent involves providing prospective research participants with relevant details about the study, allowing them to make well-informed decisions on their research involvement, as Bell et al. (2019) noted.

This study prioritised obtaining informed consent from participants to ensure they understood the nature of the research. To achieve this, the consent form was provided to participants, offering details about the study to enable them to make informed decisions about their participation. Signed consent forms were scanned and electronically stored in a secured folder. The forms provided information about the study, the researcher's contact details, and a statement indicating that participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn without repercussions. The approval from the Head of the Department accompanied the consent form so that participants were rest assured that permission had been granted for the research. The approval of the Head of the Department assured the participants that their involvement in the study was acknowledged by the organisation, fostering a sense of security and trust in the research process.

4.11.3. Privacy

The researcher valued the participants' confidentiality and kept their information and involvement in the study confidential. The names of the participants have not been revealed, and the researcher has not discussed their views with anyone else. Each participant was given a code without using their true identities, the same code used when saving the recordings and transcripts. When participants mentioned their or other names during the interview, these were blacked out in the transcripts. Their recordings and transcripts were saved using the same code. All the data collected was stored electronically and saved in password-protected files to ensure the confidentiality of the collected data.

Their recordings and transcripts were saved using the same code. When participants mentioned their or others' names during the interview, they were blacked out in the transcripts.

While informed consent and privacy are inextricably linked, Bell et al. (2019) contend that gaining consent does not imply waiving all privacy rights. No questions were asked in the interviews, which made the participants uncomfortable answering. The researcher followed the recommendations of the Social Research Association as described by Bell et al. (2019), and each participant was treated with compassion and given a genuine opportunity to withdraw.

4.11.4. Preventing deception

Gravetter & Forzano (2009) distinguish between two types of deception: passive and active. Deception in research involves providing misleading or inaccurate information about the study to participants. Passive deception refers to intentionally withholding information, while active deception entails providing false or misleading details to participants.

To prevent deception, the researcher included relevant documents as annexures, such as the permission letter and consent form, for participants to review. This allowed for verification that the study's purpose was accurately outlined and that no information was withheld or misleading.

In summary, concerning ethical considerations, this research ensured that it aligned with the four moral principles outlined by Bell et al. (2019). Participants' safety was prioritised, and personal information was kept anonymous to maintain confidentiality. The consent form provided details about the study, enabling participants to make informed decisions regarding their involvement, thus preventing deception. Additionally, the researcher guaranteed confidentiality by not disclosing participants' details within the organisation. The researcher also received ethical clearance from GIBS (Annexure F) before the study commenced.

4.12. Limitations and delimitations of the study

The use of snowball sampling in this research study may introduce a limitation in that the added participants recommended by the original participants might share similar experiences, leading to a certain degree of homogeneity in the data collected. To mitigate this limitation, the researcher attempted to ensure that a diverse range of participants is recruited, encompassing employees across different hierarchical levels, roles, and experiences.

Another potential limitation is the possible presence of biases from both the researcher and the participants. On the participants' side, despite the researcher's efforts to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, some respondents may provide responses they believe are expected or desired rather than being entirely candid. The researcher could pick up on non-verbal cues indicating inconsistencies or deviations from the truth, allowing a more accurate understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

The researcher is aware of the possibility of confirmation bias, which occurs when a researcher seeks or interprets evidence in ways that confirm prior ideas or assumptions, thus skewing the study's conclusions. Efforts have been taken to address this by the researcher

striving for self-awareness and actively addressing any biases held, which are documented in the field notes. The supervisor's supervision and feedback throughout the procedure were critical in assisting the researcher in remaining neutral and impartial.

The researcher not being experienced in interviewing could compromise the quality of the data that has been collected. Two pilot interviews were held to minimise this and improve the researcher's interviewing skills.

An identified delimitation of this study pertains to the chosen research method. While the qualitative approach aims to provide in-depth insights into employees' experiences, the findings may not be generalisable to broader populations. This study focuses on employees within a large municipality in the chosen department. As a result, the applicability of the findings to other departments or organisations may be restricted.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the data analysis process, which aimed to understand employees' experiences during times of organisational uncertainty, instability, and volatility. The analysis is presented through the three research sub-questions that serve as a guide for the thematic analysis of the data. The researcher focused on information that answered the three research questions which are:

1. How do employees perceive their level of empowerment within the organisation, and how does this affect their attitude towards the organisation?
2. How do employees experience periods of uncertainty, instability, and volatility?
3. How does the sense of employee empowerment contribute to organisational agility?

In this Chapter, to ensure smoother readability, some quotations were slightly edited to remove repeated words, and vernacular expressions were replaced with their English equivalents. The original wording is preserved in the transcripts, and the raw data is included in the supporting documents for reference.

5.2. Participants' responses describing unforeseen events that have led to uncertainty and instability within the organisation

In conducting the study, participants were first asked to describe any unforeseen events that caused uncertainty and instability within the organisation. Political instability emerged as the primary event that has affected employees and intensified the sense of uncertainty and instability. The information gathered from the participants started after the 2016 local government elections, which resulted in no political party securing an outright majority for the municipality and led to the era of coalition-led administrations.

The coalitions were filled with uncertainty and instability as agreements between parties collapsed and other coalitions formed, resulting in an unusually high turnover in critical political offices such as the mayor, the council speaker, and mayoral committees. This cascaded down to the administrative aspect of the municipality, where political instability also seemed to result in leadership instability within the organisation. This appears to be a shared experience amongst all participants interviewed, with only one participant, RP010, identifying the COVID-19 pandemic as a significant event that resulted in uncertainty and instability.

Table 9 below provides a high-level view of the responses gathered from all the participants regarding what they perceived as events that led to uncertainty and instability.

Table 9: Unforeseen events have led to uncertainty, instability, and volatility.

RP001	'We had seen the mayor of the city of Joburg change more than thrice in less than five years. And every time the mayor changes, the executive is most likely going to change, or even the MMCs'
RP002	'...in the space of eight years. We have had eight mayors. When we're supposed to be ...we're supposed to be having the second mayor now...so even in my committee, the chop and changing because I work with councillors, I support the MPAC committee. So, the chop and changing of committee members affected how we do things because you get a committee member, you'll get a new chairperson, and you adjust why you do things. Two months down the line, they're chopping, they're changing the committee...'
RP003	'I think politics, changing politics, yeah. Remember, every five years, we go to elections. So, it happened in 2016...chop and change. I think we had almost five mayors in one political term'.
RP004	'What is happening now... the first election, the elections that led to coalition... Since then, we have experienced many unexpected, unforeseen events, especially at the political level, where you see parties that don't see eye to eye.
RP005	'It's mainly within the political space. When you look at our political office bearers, there is no consistency in leadership. Leadership is forever changing for unforeseen reasons. We could refer them to blind spot, known to themselves and unknown to others. Of which, if you could look at the organisation's nature when other things are still in the pipeline, they are unannounced so that you wouldn't know of the processes.
RP006	'...Mayors coming mayors going in the long term affects the performance of the municipality in the sense that when mayors come. Mayors go they usually want to come with their own people, starting with the city managers who are administration, who are at the centre and the core of service delivery and implementation of policies, who are the driving force behind the expenditure of the budget, the IDP...and service delivery to the people now, when they made the new mayor comes, who wants to change everything.
RP007	'I'm currently under the Legislative and Oversight Directorate, which mainly consists of council and committees, and our Principal Head is the Speaker of the Council. So, as you are aware, with all these new eras that we are in, now and then, we get to get a new political principle, which is the speaker, so that comes to a lot of uncertainty.
RP008	'And then when I refer to the political dynamics, I would obviously zoom into the political administration that came in the year 2016, where we had high turnover. Where, like I said, mentioned earlier on, with political bearers, office bearers, being changed as and when. And it doesn't really link to the five-year process or the five-year term. It just happens as and when.'
RP009	'The change that has happened, that has affected me, given the environment, because it's a political environment, is the change of political leadership, especially given now that it's a coalition era, so this idea is new to different political parties as such. When such change happens, people panic, both politicians and at the administrative level. But in addition to that, some see it as an opportunity to exercise their power, and that brings about a whole lot of uncertainty.'
RP010	'The biggest change that happened in the past two, three years, it's we were hit by global pandemic, covid. You know, covid hit us globally, and were affected as South Africa as well. So even as a city, we were affected, you know, because as it was, it was affecting so many people, and a lot of people needed to be at home in order to contain the spread of COVID. So that change really affected us because it was then we realised that we needed to be adaptable as an organisation and find new ways of working.'
RP011	'Since I've been here, there's never been stability in the organisation that I'm going, to be honest; this has impacted on service delivery, the changes in political administration. You know, to be honest with you, I've worked under seven different administrations, if I may call it that way. The coalitions, by the way, they called coalitions whereby different political parties come together to form a government of local government, if I may put it that way...
RP012	'What was very much unforeseen was the political climate first of all, the change, like the growth of some political parties and the decline of some political parties, has led to a new era of politics...'
RP013	'I think a lot of the unpredicted change that has affected the organisation in the past five years is the instability, the instability of the political atmosphere within the organisation. And I think the political atmosphere, or the political sphere of this, brings a lot of instability and uncertainty because you go to bed one night knowing that this is what is happening, and this is the mandate that there is, and wake up the next morning and you are told to shred that mandate and start anew.'
RP014	'The unexpected one is when the motion of no confidence against somebody when they decide to say we have got no confidence against so and so, and then when you wake up in the morning to come to work, the person you are used to working with has been removed and then yeah so that is the uncertainty that we talk about.'
RP015	'I work in the political environment and one thing I would say it was unexpected for us is the change of the political leadership that we had.'

5.3. Results for Research Questions

5.3.1. Research Question 1: How do employees perceive their level of empowerment within the organisation, and how does this affect their attitude towards the organisation?

Research question No.1 sought to understand how employees perceive their level of empowerment and what contributes to these perceived levels. It also sought to know how this has affected their attitude towards the organisation. The findings are presented in the table below.

Table 10. Overview of Results for Research Question 1

Topics	Categories	Sub-Categories
Empowerment	Structural Empowerment	Opportunities
		Information
		Support
		Resources
	Psychological Empowerment	Meaning
		Competence
		Self-Determination
		Impact
Impact of Empowerment Levels	Attitude	Engagement
		Motivation
		Commitment

5.3.1.1. Empowerment

Regarding what was categorised as empowerment, this looked at responses related to employees' ability to contribute within their departments and whether their input was valued, especially during periods of change. What also came through during the data analysis was employees reflecting on how valued employees felt within their units, their sense of competence in their roles and the trust placed in them. What also emerged from the interviews was how these experiences affected their attitude toward the organisation. In the presentation of the findings, empowerment was grouped into two types: structural and psychological.

Structural Empowerment

Under structural empowerment, research findings will be presented, examining participants' access to opportunities, information, support, and resources.

Opportunities

Participants experienced the organisation as providing opportunities for growth and access to education. Participants such as RP007, RP015, RP014, RP003, and RP005 saw career growth through promotions. Some of them, like RP005 and RP014, started as interns in the organisation and are now managers. These are experiences that the participants shared:

'As appointed as the Assistant Director from the 1st of February 2024' RP007.

*'15 years in the * organisation from 2008. To date, this is my third position' RP003.*

*'I literally grew in the *organisation, grew up personally and professionally' RP014.*

'there are other opportunities where you can apply for either you know jobs or other job opportunities and things like that to improve your salary' RP015.

Most of these employees studied further through the organisation's subsidised education scheme, which allowed them to not only further their studies but also take advantage of opportunities that resulted in career progression. Insights gathered from the interview reveal that the organisation seems to have a strong opportunity dimension, with growth opportunities creating a sense of empowerment.

Employees with this experience seemed more motivated and displayed a more positive mindset. Other participants, such as RP006, who expressed being demoralised due to challenges relating to management and lack of access to information, were currently enrolled in an education program and were hopeful that this would provide growth opportunities for him within other departments in the organisation. These show that the organisation has opportunities as a foundation which supports empowerment.

Other employees expressed being demotivated and demoralised because of the lack of progress and opportunities.

'I feel useless. Okay, it's just mundane. It's the same routine every day. You know exactly when you go to the office, what you going to do, You know, like I said, also, there's no challenge' RP008.

This is the sentiment of RP008, who expressed feeling that there are no opportunities for growth and has applied numerous times without being considered. This seems similar to what RP011 also shared:

'Working in an environment, doing the same thing over a period of five years, and seeing no movement in your party, obviously, your morale is bound to hit the low. Mm, your morale is bound to hit the low. So, that is the situation that I find myself in. That's why I say the moral is down' RP011.

This shows that participants with little to no access to opportunities in growth areas get demotivated with low morale. For RP011, regarding opportunities, he also highlighted the lack of internal training provided when new systems and policies were introduced, especially in relation to his work, which is mainly procurement, leading to frustration. This is also shared by RP001, who highlighted the lack of internal learning regarding newly introduced policies or processes.

'but there were sessions where the staff within the legislature would go on a strategic session, and would learn about each other's work, how it interrelates, how it correlates' RP004.

'There is a policy on hybrid working. It would be nice, actually, sometimes for a manager to say let's talk about this policy, or how to go about implementing it. But then it's not happening' RP001.

Opportunities have emerged as an essential dimension of employee empowerment. Employees expressed the need to develop career growth and have access to opportunities to enhance their education and learn things as they are introduced and change. Employees with access to opportunities for growth, education, and internal learning showed more positivity and motivation than those who expressed a missing element in the opportunity dimension.

Information

Access to information emerged as a critical factor influencing employee's sense of empowerment. Participants who were more empowered were those with access to

information, providing a clear understanding of what is happening within the organisation and the potential impact of changes and providing the opportunity to provide input on the unit's response. RP007 shares his experience to be as follows:

'We usually have our unit meetings monthly by we talk about new ideas on ways to improve a committee' RP007.

These meetings provide a platform to be updated on what is happening, discuss new ideas and opportunity to discuss potential solutions to challenges experienced. This contrasts with employees who were not provided with information and would instead get information from unofficial sources such as 'corridor talks' amongst colleagues, the media, etc. For example, RP014 recounted an incident where a fire damaged their office block, and they learned about it from a news report on the radio while on the way to work, even though the line manager knew about the incident hours earlier. This lack of communication prevented participants from feeling prepared concerning issues affecting their work. Employees who shared limitations about information expressed frustration, demotivation, and disconnection. These employees shared the following experiences:

'a decision has been taken instead of you being engaged... it is communicated with you via was it a WhatsApp' RP002.

'Decisions were made without communicating with us directly. We were just informed later' RP010.

'There was no clear guidance or communication on how to navigate the changes we were experiencing'. RP015

'There wasn't any platform to voice out concerns because it was something that affected most of us' RP012.

'There were moments where a lot of things were happening, and they were just all silent. I mean, it would have been better, whether they've got a definite solution or a definite answer to any parties or any changes, it would be better for them to communicate to say, yes, we are aware that there are these particular changes. But then at the moment, we haven't reached a definite solution or answer to them. So as soon as we get to a finality, we are going to update to rather than waiting' RP001.

'During each change in leadership, communication often breaks down, leaving us in the dark about what's happening' RP014.

Most of the participants interviewed had similar experiences when it came to information. Only a few employees reported having sufficient access to information. Not only was a concern raised about the lack of information, but incorrect mediums were used, which diminished the seriousness of the matter being communicated. This is reflected in RP006, who learned about possible changes to his job status through a message sent on WhatsApp.

Some participants experienced inconsistencies regarding sharing information where there were instances where information was shared. Still, the same line manager did not share other critical information in other instances. Statement by RP001 underscores the importance of employees having a platform to discuss issues and raise uncertainties, which is more empowering than silence, which leads to fear, worry, and anxiety.

From the data gathered, access to information plays a critical role in employees' sense of empowerment. The availability of a platform for sharing and receiving information, even when there are no immediate answers, can foster empowerment. From the data obtained from participants, access to information must be consistent and timely with the correct medium that shows consideration and care for employees.

Support

Support from management and colleagues emerged as a critical area contributing to empowerment levels. Employees who showed higher levels of empowerment described their managers as supportive, communicative, and appreciative of their efforts. RP007 shared some of the words from management:

'I appreciate you guys. I'm shining wherever I'm shining because of you because of the hard work that you put in' RP007.

RP007, one of the employees with a higher sense of empowerment, shared the above as he described his manager acknowledging contributions made by the team and recognising their efforts. These managers also ensured open lines of communication and that the unit had regular meetings to discuss what was happening in the organisation, providing a platform for engagement. RP007 also shared experiences where challenges were faced in a committee

meeting, and the manager could attend the conference and assist the employee in addressing these issues.

Employees such as RP005, who spoke about being provided with making decisions, also showed a higher level of empowerment where the opportunity to make decisions made him feel trusted and have autonomy over his work.

These experiences by RP007 and RP005 sharply contradict the experiences of participants such as RP008, who describes her manager as someone who only looks out for himself and would not hesitate to throw employees under the bus to save himself. This is similar to the experience of RP009, who reported erosion of trust due to learning that he cannot rely on his managers for support.

Most of the participants describe their experiences with managers as follows:

'When you do right no one is going to appreciate and say you guys! When things are okay, no one claps and says you've done well' RP011.

'I had to find ways to motivate myself because there was little support or recognition from management' RP014.

'The organization doesn't provide any guidance or direction. You have to find your own way' RP013.

'So, you start to give up and say, I'm on my own here, because the line manager doesn't even know what to do' RP006.

'No one really cares. You know, on your personal well-being, there's never, ever been an opportunity where a person will come and sit down with you, or your line, or your superior coming and sitting down with you, and you're like saying how have you been, you know, how's life? RP008

'If I am important to you, you will be okay; there are things that they don't really need my consent. But something that affects them on a daily basis. Please consult with me, please talk to me, hear my feelings. You know, it's so sad that some management they don't care how the junior staff feel and those people are more important' RP003.

From the participants' experiences, there are significant gaps in the support from management. Their experiences reflect a lack of recognition, guidance, emotional support and concern. This results in participants feeling excluded and unimportant. Through interviews with employees in this category, they struggled to maintain a positive attitude toward their work and showed signs of being demotivated and disengaged. The stark difference between the two shows that management can create a positive and inclusive culture that promotes empowerment and enhances the overall experiences that employees have in the workplace.

Some participants highlighted varying levels of support provided by different tiers of management. RP015 described her direct line manager positively yet noted a lack of support from senior management. This is the same for RP009, who, despite having a good relationship with his manager, acknowledged that the manager lacks influence and can only offer emotional support without the power to effect change. He referred to his manager as the missing middle, emphasising the limited authority and control that the manager holds. RP008 seemed to echo this sentiment, expressing frustration that her manager has no power but instead has to do what he is told.

These reveal a complex hierarchy of support within the organisation where different levels of management provide varying degrees of support. From the data gathered, hierarchical structures limit direct managers' capacity to support their teams fully. This also reveals line managers who are possibly disempowered and, therefore, cannot provide the empowerment structures their subordinates need.

Resources

Most of the participants were given access to resources to perform their duties. Out of the fifteen participants, only three could highlight the challenge experienced with resources. RP010 shared his experience when the organisation had to plan for remote working following the COVID-19 pandemic.

'Communication was sent to us, you know, and things like remote work environment was was proposed to say, Those who don't have 3Gs, three Gs, they need to be collected. Those who don't have VPN, it needs to be arranged and what so the support was given from the organization' RP010

This shows that the organisation has a foundational empowerment structure, such as providing resources for employees to do their work. Exceptional cases were those experienced by RP014 and RP015, who have struggled with resources such as office space, printing and photocopying equipment, telephone, etc. Even with no resources, they are expected to deliver on their work, leading to frustration.

'You're confused. People are asking for reports. You don't know where you're going to print. This this person, they want you to work, but they don't even give direction to say. Where are you going to be doing your job from, so it's frustration, frustration and lots of anger' RP014.

RP013, who has been placed in an access pool with no reporting line or being provided with any duties, is also one of the exceptional cases where access to resources was a problem.

'my laptop, the password expired, and. Laptop blocked. I couldn't access the laptop anymore' RP013.

The organisation provides essential resources for employees to perform in their roles. Most of the participants did not identify this as a challenge. Although this is the case, empowerment levels amongst most employees were moderate to low, indicating that the provision of resources alone is not enough to foster empowerment. RP006, who shared numerous challenges that hamper his empowerment abilities, is currently studying through the organisation's subsidised education program and has resources to do his assignments, such as access to a laptop, data, etc, but still has moderate empowerment levels due to other empowerment structures lacking.

Psychological empowerment

Meaning

Most participants talked about the need to find meaning in what they do. Participants such as RP015 expressed being driven by something more significant:

'I'm the one that I would I really love to, to help my community or a community to or somebody that needs you know, to be assisted' RP015.

Even with the challenges experienced that result in low structural empowerment levels, she spoke about being driven by a bigger purpose and believes that her work makes a difference and aligns with who she is. This keeps her motivated and dedicated to continuing to serve the community. Other participants, such as RP009 below, had a different experience regarding the meaning attached to his work.

'I realised that the organisation's direction didn't align with my values, leading to disengagement' RP009.

RP009 reported having to disengage as he realised that besides having a transactional relationship with his employer, they were nothing further that he would get. He expressed accepting that for other things, such as purpose, happiness, and fulfilment, he would have to look elsewhere to find it.

Some participants expressed the need to feel part of something bigger and the work not just something that pays their bill but that they were part of making a difference. With this missing, there was a feeling of feeling detached, as expressed by RP010:

'My work feels like a transaction; it's no longer about purpose or contributing to the greater good'.

Most of the participants expressed a need for the work to have meaning and a greater sense of purpose. Participants who did not view their work as meaningful and aligned with their goals expressed feelings of disconnectedness or disengagement with RP009, describing it as compartmentalizing. RP008 experienced her work as mundane and not meaningful, leading to questioning why she is even in the role to begin with.

Competence

RP015 was one of the participants who highlighted this, where she felt that she was in a position that allowed her to make certain decisions, but in reality, that was not the case, as she was limited in making those decisions.

RP015: ...it just makes you feel like, ok, I'm just a puppet. I'm just, you know, doing a runaround job. I'm not actually doing what I've been what I'm employed to do, you know, being strategic...you are given to do administration like a lower-level lower responsibilities...

Researcher: it's like you have this position and this position supposedly supposed to have certain authorities and powers, but in actual fact it doesn't really.

RP015: Umm. It's only has it on paper.

For RP015, she described it as undermining her abilities and competence. RP010 shared how it feels when he is trusted with work where he feels that he adds value to the department and his skills are appreciated.

'I sometimes get to be asked to do other tasks out of my scope that show confidence and reliance. And I sometimes have to assist my other colleagues when they struggle, especially technology-wise, presentations and all that. So my contribution, I feel like, is valued, and it moves the department forward' RP010

Participants identified trust as a critical challenge in the organisation, particularly with frequent changes in political leadership. Incoming leaders often viewed existing employees with suspicion, questioning their alignment with the previous administration. This threatened some of the participants' levels of competence as for RP006 and RP013, their duties were taken away from them.

'There are some duties or responsibilities that are taken away from you. And then you end up being not given duties. So, then you have to you ask yourself, I was doing this and this and this now it has been taken away from me. So, is it a matter of being not being trusted?'RP006.

He further went on to describe how this felt for him:

'You're made a lame duck. You are made a lame duck. You have nothing to do...'

This erosion of trust negatively impacted empowerment, as employees were sidelined and left without clear roles, as highlighted by RP006. For other employees who experienced similar issues of lack of trust, such as RP007, he approached the situation with calmness and confidence. It is noted that the structural empowerment structures in place likely contributed to how he handled the challenges he experienced:

'So rather than complaining, I acknowledge that they didn't trust me. But what I did was I worked hard to earn their trust to ensure that they can. They can see that although there there's a lack of trust, but I'm working overboard to ensure that the committee works, and when you do that is in is inevitable.' RP007

RP008 shared her experience and frustration over her role limitations, feeling that her skills and capabilities are underutilised, resulting in a sense of unfulfillment.

'It feels like, what am I doing there in the first place? And it just makes a person not feel worth your position, because HR is broad. You know, as a HR personnel, you need to be able to advise, you know, to coach, to mentor. There's so many other aspects than just what we are doing as a mundane administrative role that we are performing' RP008.

This experience leaves her questioning her value in the organisation, diminishing her worth and leading to dissatisfaction.

From the data gathered, it is crucial for employees to feel confident about the work that they do and know that they are trusted to do it well. When employees' competence is compromised, it affects their confidence in their capabilities.

Self-Determination

Some of the participants expressed a level of autonomy over how they do their work and get to have control. This seemed to boost employees' confidence levels and allow them to feel trusted. The following captures the experiences of some of the participants relating to self-determination, which highlight the different levels of autonomy and control over their work:

'I had autonomy in how I assisted councillors, using WhatsApp and other means to adapt to the 'new normal.' RP010

'my supervisors, they are giving me the space to run the show they've never had any doubt on me. I think it's one of the advantages that are for I've always had within the city. I would be often given the platform to make decisions' RP005.

'We don't have that directive to say this is what you need to follow. So we brainstorm about the issue. And they just agree on one particular direction' RP001.

These experiences contrast with experiences shared by RP008, who describe a restrictive work environment that doesn't allow flexibility or innovation.

'There's a template for each and everything, and you have to stick to that template, even if you come and revise and amend the template and say, you know, we could do it in this way. It's not looked into because of the processes that we follow in the city' RP008.

This shows a lack of autonomy, which undermines the participant's self-determination and contributes to her feelings of being demoralised. Employees given autonomy over their work could determine the best way to perform their duties and find creative ways to work effectively.

The participants showed a spectrum of self-determination, with some participants feeling empowered to decide how their work is done while others face rigid structures hampering their autonomy.

Impact

The majority of the participants showed the belief that impact is the driving force behind what they do and driving their engagement levels. RP002 expressed the following:

'My children, they go to school here. So everything you see, it's not like it's an environment, you can say, even if I leave this organisation, what happens here will still affect me as a citizen. Because it's a different environment where it affects my day to day life, what happens here, so it's very difficult to make that decision to say I can even if I can find another job, I will still drive on the road' RP002.

From this, he viewed his role as more than just a job; he viewed it as a way to contribute to society at large. He believed that his work influenced his life and that of others around him, which gave him a sense of purpose and motivated him to continue striving for things to work. This highlights how being impactful contributes towards engagement.

Participants such as RP007 highlighted the importance of impacting the unit he is in and felt that he could influence decisions and contribute to solutions towards identified challenges.

'So, we do that by having our own strategic planning session. We also do that by having workshops whereby we provide our own input on the way forward' RP007.

For employees to feel valued, there is a need to feel and see that the contributions are taken and implemented, making a difference in how the unit or department functions. Allowing employees to contribute to the organisation gives them a sense of purpose.

Most participants felt there were no platforms for meaningful contributions. Even during performance management coaching sessions, which are supposed to provide a platform for discussion and contribution, were viewed as mere box-ticking exercises. As RP008 expressed:

'We don't have such conversations in our department. It's just work instructional. You get an instruction. You do your work, and that's it. Coaching is just a matter of ticking the boxes...' RP008.

Given that RP008 expressed feeling useless and demoralised, this sentiment indicates the lack of impact on employees' ability to be engaged with the organisation.

Similarly, RP003 noted:

'I couldn't even contribute because they are decision-makers. They take the decisions and wena you must just abide. You must just follow' RP003.

RP006 and RP011 also shared a similar experience:

'my contributions are not valued. They are not valued. You give contributions, and you can see that they're not being heeded. No one is giving, giving, giving attention to them. They're just there' RP006.

'I think I'm not positively contributing towards the growth of my city' RP011.

However, participants like RP001 and RP007, who were given opportunities to contribute to decision-making, reported feeling more empowered. RP001 mentioned,

'We don't have that directive to say this is what you need to follow. So, we brainstorm about the issue'.

RP007 added:

'...they do provide a platform of consultation whereby the form of consultation ensures that all the employees that are involved, they feel needed, they feel wanted, they feel appreciated because all of these changes as much as they are leaders, we are on the ground, we understand what's happening on the ground...'

Employees given a platform to contribute to the unit showed more enthusiasm and optimism towards their work than those who reported a lack of involvement in the decision-making process. Even in cases where the contribution was inconsistent, there was a greater sense of empowerment than those who perceived decisions as being continuously imposed on them.

The interviews revealed that psychological empowerment was compromised among the participants. Recurring themes of limited competence, lack of trust, and disconnection from the organisation indicated that most participants felt undervalued and disconnected from the organisation's mission and direction. Exceptions were noted among participants like RP002, RP005, and RP007, who demonstrated higher levels of empowerment, further highlighting management's crucial influence in fostering employee empowerment.

5.3.1.2. Attitude towards the organisation

A noticeable difference emerged between employees with higher levels of empowerment and those without. The few participants with high levels of empowerment seemed fully engaged in their work, motivated and committed to it.

Work Engagement

Employees with a lower level of empowerment displayed a negative attitude and an almost bleak view of the organisation. Employees used words such as 'demotivated', 'disengaged', and 'demoralised', when sharing their experiences. For some, this affected their level of commitment to the organisation. Some of the comments were:

'I realized that you know all I have is me. I have to make things work for me' RP009.

'No matter how hard I work, it feels like my efforts are overlooked, which is disheartening' RP014.

'You lose interest, you accept the your current conditions you hope for the better' RP005.

'Such changes personally lead to a situation where what preoccupies you as an individual employee is trying to find other means of making a living because it affects livelihood' RP009.

The above comments speak of discouraged employees who have lost trust in the organisation. RP009's statement about realising that all he has is himself shows employees who go into self-protective mode and start making decisions about what is best for them and no longer have a vested interest in the organisation's success.

The data also revealed several employees who expressed a sense of disengagement from the organisation due to insufficient access to information, lack of support, and inadequate resources to perform their duties. RP015 specifically highlighted how the absence of resources impacted her ability to fulfil her responsibilities. After their building caught fire, no alternative office space was provided, and essential tools like printers were unavailable, yet they were still expected to perform their tasks. RP014 captured the emotional toll this took on her engagement, stating:

'I used to be passionate about my work, but with all the changes, I've lost that drive'
RP014.

Some of the ways that disengagement emerged was through the following insights:

'you lose interest, you accept your current conditions you hope for the better' RP004.

'I realised that the organisation's direction didn't align with my values, leading to disengagement' RP009.

An interesting takeaway from all the interviews was the employees' strong desire for things to improve, their commitment to their work, and their belief in its more significant purpose. However, for some, this dedication was undermined not only by the ongoing uncertainty, instability, and volatility but also by their perceived lack of empowerment. RP003 was able to explain this when she said:

'I am left behind. I don't think I am valued and such things. I'm not important. ... I had to catch up with them. I had to follow them... I must comply. I must abide by the rules. So, I had to follow them and catch them'.

Some participants expressed a sense of cynicism stemming from the prolonged political instability. They felt that it likely wouldn't last even with new leadership, leading them to disengage from the changes.

Motivation

There was a notable difference in motivation levels between employees with high and those with low to moderate empowerment levels. RP005 viewed the challenges experienced as exciting and seemed to experience increased motivation levels.

'It's quite challenging. It's something that I love also looking at my personality. I'm not that individual who often likes just sitting around. I could say my calibre; it's only a few of my male counterparts who can multitask. Yes. So, I enjoy that pressure; RP005.

Those with greater empowerment displayed a more positive attitude toward their work, even amid uncertainty and instability that affected their daily tasks. Despite the challenges, they maintained a more optimistic outlook on their situation compared to less empowered employees, were more committed towards the organisation and had a higher level of engagement.

'So it's really quite interesting and for my work, I actually quite enjoy it as well because it's the first time after in so many years that you get to see different political parties having to work together for the betterment of our residents. And it's quite a pleasure to be involved in the process where get to see it firsthand happening' RP007.

The participant viewed this period as an opportunity to be a pioneer, helping the organisation navigate the coalition era and share valuable lessons. Throughout the interviews, participants with a stronger sense of empowerment appeared more upbeat and optimistic. For instance, RP007, despite rescheduling the interview due to an urgent meeting, remained positive and energetic during the late-night discussion, even though he was tired, showing a lighter demeanour compared to others. The statements below reflect low levels of motivation and morale amongst some of the participants who displayed low to moderate levels of empowerment.

'I think you do what needs to be done. And you comply, because things are going to be expected of you need to tick those boxes' RP004.

'Working in an environment and doing the same thing over a period of five years and seeing no, you know, movement in your party, obviously, your morale is bound to hit the low. Mm, your morale is bound to hit the low. So, that is the situation that I find myself in. That's why I say the morale is down' RP011.

'You don't really look forward to what you are supposed to do, but you do it because it's the only job that you have' RP008.

From what participants have shown, most of them perform their duties because it is what is expected, but there is a lack of meaningful connection to their work. This shows their level of discouragement as they find their work unfulfilling and stagnant.

Work commitment

There were interesting insights when looking at positive attitudes towards work through the lens of commitment. It was notable that employees such as RP002The following are just some of what drives employees:

'If the system is not working, it will eventually back bite, you see, because unfortunately, this is what drives everyone's life. My children, they go to school here. So everything you see, it's not like it's an environment, you can say, even if I leave this organisation, what happens here will still affect me as a citizen' RP002.

Although most employees exhibited low to moderate levels of empowerment, only two brought up the issue of looking for opportunities elsewhere, with RP006 still hoping to find better opportunities within the organisation but in different departments. At the same time, RP009 indicated that he has started looking for opportunities even outside the organisation. Although they indicated feeling discouraged, disengaged, and undervalued, other participants showed commitment to their work. This is seen in participants such as RP001, RP003, RP010, and RP015 exhibited low to moderate levels of empowerment but still demonstrated commitment to their work. The interviews revealed that this commitment was driven by their conviction and belief in the importance of their work. Despite an environment that may not be particularly empowering, these employees remain dedicated and motivated by their own sense of purpose and alignment with the organisation's mission. These are some of the statements made to explain their commitment:

'I love my job. And I still want to be employed' RP003.

'I love my role. I love the work that I do. I love the profession' RP008.

'I'm the one that I would really love to help my community or a community or somebody that needs, you know, to be assisted' RP015.

This indicates that, even with low levels of employee empowerment, individuals still show commitment and dedication to their work. As some have mentioned, this commitment goes beyond staying for the sake of a salary; it stems from a genuine desire to see the organisation succeed and make a positive impact.

5.3.1.3. Conclusion on results for Research Question No. 1

The majority of participants showed low to moderate levels of empowerment, with participants feeling sidelined by the political instability and lack of communication and thereby feeling disempowered. Very few employees felt they could contribute towards the organisation's success or how it was navigating the challenges faced. Limited platforms were provided to share with employees what was happening within the organisation, leading to confusion, frustration, and overall feelings of uncertainty.

This affected the overall attitude towards the organisation. Some participants showed a lack of commitment towards the unit as they started looking for opportunities elsewhere, while others disengaged from the organisation. Participants expressed not feeling valued, trusted, or even cared for. In some cases, employees with low to moderate levels of empowerment still demonstrated a positive attitude towards their work, remaining committed, hopeful, and eager to be engaged.

This insight suggests that empowerment and attitude towards work are not always directly correlated. While higher levels of empowerment typically lead to increased engagement and a positive attitude, there are instances where employees with low to moderate empowerment still maintain a positive outlook and strong commitment to their work. This indicates that factors beyond empowerment can drive employee dedication and engagement.

However, it also highlights the resilience of certain employees, who remain hopeful and committed despite feeling disempowered. While this is encouraging, it suggests a missed opportunity for organisations: if these employees were empowered with greater autonomy, resources, and decision-making authority, their commitment and positive attitude could be harnessed more effectively.

This insight reveals that while empowerment enhances attitude and performance, a strong sense of purpose or personal investment can sustain positive engagement, even without full empowerment.

5.3.2. Research Question 2: How do employees experience periods of uncertainty, instability, and volatility within their organisation?

Research question 2 sought to explore employees' experiences during periods of uncertainty, instability, and volatility within the public sector organisation under study. As a phenomenological study, it sought to gain a deep understanding of the participant's lived experiences during these times and their empowerment levels' impact on these experiences.

5.3.2.1. Feelings of Uncertainty

The analysis revealed a common theme of feelings of uncertainty as the organisation navigates these challenging times. Employees described feeling 'fear', 'anxious', 'unsure', and being in positions where they didn't know what would happen next.

These experiences were categorised into three areas: factors contributing to feelings of uncertainty, the impact of uncertainty on employees, and the coping strategies employees employed to manage the feelings of uncertainty.

Table 11: Overview of Results for Research Question 2

Theme	Category	Subcategories
Feelings of Uncertainty	Factors contributing to feelings of uncertainty	Uncertainty about job security
		Uncertainty about the direction of the organisation
		Changing roles and responsibilities
		Management & Communication
	Impact of experiencing uncertainty	Emotional distress & mental health
		Uncertainty as a driver for personal growth
	Coping strategies used by employees to manage uncertainty	Reliance on existing systems and policies
		Adaptability & flexibility
		Detachment from organisation

Factors contributing to feelings of uncertainty.

With regards to what the researcher categorised as factors contributing to feelings of uncertainty, these included experiences that employees shared that resulted in feelings of anxiety. Issues such as uncertainty regarding job security, the direction of the organisation, and changes in their roles and responsibilities during periods of uncertainty were identified. Findings also revealed the role of management and communication in contributing to employees' feelings of uncertainty.

Uncertainty about job security.

Most participants spoke about the uncertainty they faced concerning their job security following the political instability within the organisation. Research participant RP003 shared her experience during the 2016 political transitions that the organisation was faced with.

'It was shaking in a way because you're never sure of your future in the city... am I still going to be here, maybe we will get fired because in politics, whether we like it or not, you are being associated with the people you work with' RP003.

She again spoke deeply about how this fear translated into how losing her job would affect her family.

'I'm the only person who's a breadwinner. So, imagine losing a job. And my kids are still in school. So even health-wise, I think it would affect you...' RP003.

One of the employees, RP009, shared his experience of his employment being terminated following political changes in the organisation. Although the court system eventually won the case, the employee's experience has been lasting. He said:

'Literally, I was told that the contract has ended... I had already signed the contract which said I am permanent. Later due to court processes that decision was rescinded...' RP009.

Even though most of the employees are permanently employed an experience such as that of RP009 is one of the reasons employees experience such feelings of uncertainty around their job security. RP001 echoes this by saying:

'So it shows that, irrespective of whether something is documented, is finalized or not, it can always change depending on who's at the helm, at that particular point' RP001.

In some instances, although employees might not be dismissed, participant RP013 shared his experience of still being employed but left in an 'access pool' where he is basically officially employed but has no department where he is placed. He spoke about his one-year experience where he was in limbo without any work to do.

'There's no security. There's no job security. Even though you are told you are permanent, there's no job security in the permanency, because as much as you are permanent, if someone else comes in tomorrow, you are thrown into the access pool. I was thrown into an access pool for a year where I was just floating around' RP013.

When the interview was conducted, he had been seconded into another department temporarily with no indication of what would be in store for him when the short-term secondment ended. Talking about his experience, he further went on to say:

'It's extremely frustrating. It's extremely frustrating to the point where it went to depression. I became depressed. I became a very nasty person. I'm not someone that was keen to be around, where my wife and kids didn't really want to be around me because of the person that I became, I became withdrawn. I just sat in my room all the time and really just became quiet and silent and started questioning a lot of things. So depression settled in because of this, the fear of the unknown...' RP013.

These experiences by some of the employees reflect their feelings of having no control over what happens to them or having no say in how the organisation navigates instability and uncertainty. Participant RP011 seems to capture what seems to be the feelings of some of the employees interviewed:

'It's a wait and see. You wait and see if you'll still have a job when a new administration comes in' RP011.

The insights shared by participants and the comment by RP011 highlight how employees have had to navigate periods of instability and uncertainty while fearing for their job security and the impact of these changes. Witnessing colleagues lose their jobs, even those with permanent positions, eroded the sense of stability that typically comes with permanent employment.

Uncertainty about the direction of the organisation.

Participants have also expressed uncertainty about the organisation's direction, which directly impacted in their work. Many felt that the organisation's path was unclear, with numerous participants highlighting how constant shifts and changes affected their work. As one participant (RP002) explained:

'In my committee, the constant changes with councillors and committee members really affected how we operate. You'd adapt to a new chairperson and adjust your work, but just two months later, they'd change again, forcing us to start over after having trained them' RP002.

This ongoing uncertainty disrupted their ability to feel stable or engaged about where the organisation is going and how they can plan their work. RP002 shared some of the challenges he experienced in his committee. They even started having discussions with the MEC for COGTA to start a conversation around regulating coalition-led administration to address an

unforeseen challenge due to the coalition government. As the conversations started, national elections happened, which led to changes in the MEC's position, completely destroying any progress made in the engagement with the COGTA MEC. Several participants expressed that they have lost track of the organisation's priorities and vision due to the ongoing instability.

'...we are no longer focused on the work, the quality of our work, our systems, I think there was a time when we all understood we may be doing different work, focusing on different areas, but there were sessions where the staff within the legislature would go on a strategic session, and would learn about each other's work, how it interrelates, how it correlates...' RP004.

Frequent changes in political leadership, often resulting in staff being reassigned or moved, have created a sense of confusion, with employees often unsure who holds which position or who is responsible for what tasks. RP004 described a shift in focus, noting that employees no longer concentrate on their work but are instead distracted by the ongoing, unpredictable changes. The changing political administration has brought shifting priorities, leaving employees feeling uncertain about the organisation's current priorities.

RP006 spoke intently about how he is slowly losing the institutional knowledge that he used to have.

'And in that sense, you start to lose that institutional knowledge that you have in the unit, you know, you start to not to know who is the...spokesperson on this portfolio...' RP006.

There was also a sense of frustration that seemed to come from the interviews with the constant changes, which made it difficult for employees to keep track of what was happening in the organisation.

'You know, in terms of my department, unless I dig information by myself is not really freely given to me, you know, so knowing what's happening, who's there, you know, like, who's there? Who has resigned, who's a new who's a what...' RP010.

'And during the evening or in the morning, you might be informed that there's an extraordinary Council meeting which means we must go back and cancel all or postpone all those logistics that we have paid for ...' RP007.

Based on the experiences shared by some of the employees, the political changes that have caused uncertainty and instability have also hindered their ability to plan their programs and initiatives effectively, as there have been instances where plans were made only for sudden shifts to occur overnight, completing changing their unit plans and departmental strategies.

Changing roles and responsibilities.

One of the factors that contributed to the feelings of uncertainty was the changing roles and responsibilities concerning the tasks that were expected of them.

Some of the participants shared their experiences of uncertainty regarding their roles and responsibilities. One of the participants, RP006, spoke of his duties being taken away from him with no explanation of what would happen.

'there are some duties or responsibilities that are taken away from you. And then you end up being not given duties. So then you have to you ask yourself, I was doing this and this and this now it has been taken away from me...' RP006

Several employees highlighted the changes in their roles and responsibilities due to the uncertainty and instability. This was mostly done without communication with employees, who were just informed of the changes.

'The title was changed from 'researcher' to 'political content analyst,' but we were not consulted' RP10.

Changing roles and responsibilities without explanation or employee involvement leads to confusion, frustration, and concern about job insecurity. These experiences of uncertainty led to the erosion of trust, which emerged from the interviews where employees highlighted distrust in the organisation and management.

Management and Communication

From the interviews, the data reveals that an essential contributor to the feelings of uncertainty experienced by employees is how management handles the changes and communicates these to employees. A critical contributor to the sense of uncertainty among employees during this period was the lack of effective communication. Some employees expressed being left in the dark, unsure of what was happening.

'There were moments where a lot of things were happening, and they were just all silent. I mean, it would have been better, whether they've got a definite solution or a definite answer to any parties or any changes, it would be better for them to communicate to say, yes, we are aware that there are these particular changes. But then at the moment, we haven't reached a definite solution or answer to them. So as soon as we get to a finality, we are going to update to rather than waiting' RP001.

It is clear from this statement that, even though managers might not have answers, employees are seeking a platform for discussion and communication where these uncertainties can be raised because, in these situations, silence breeds fear, worry, and anxiety.

'During each change in leadership, communication often breaks down, leaving us in the dark about what's happening' RP014.

Interestingly, employees who expressed similar feelings of uncertainty but had supportive and communicative management were able to navigate these uncertainties differently and employed more adaptability and flexibility in dealing with the uncertainty.

RP007 shared about his line manager and the team's relationship, where there are monthly meetings to discuss issues and ensure that employees know that they are appreciated and cared for. This is the same with participant RP002, who, although management acknowledged the challenges experienced and the fact that they also did not have solutions, they were there to support and provide guidance. Participants such as RP010 and RP004 highlight that there are no longer meetings held with RP010, sharing that for him to know what is going on within the organisation, it is when he proactively looks for information, but platforms for engagement are no longer there. This is the same sentiment shared by RP015, who stated:

'There was no clear guidance or communication on how to navigate the changes we were experiencing'. RP015

Impact of experiencing uncertainty

The period of uncertainty had a noticeable impact on employees' emotional and mental health, and uncertainty was a motivator for personal growth.

Emotional Distress & Mental Health

The feelings of uncertainty that employees experienced during these periods had an adverse impact on some of the participants' emotional well-being and mental health. The following sentiments are just some of the emotional states that the employees shared:

'Just thinking about it makes me very depressed. I'm. I'm. I'm depressed' RP014.

'The constant changes took a toll on my mental health; it's exhausting to always adapt to new demands and expectations' RP014.

'Nna (me) I was worried. I was really worried' RP003.

'The instability in it really comes back down to an extremely negative effect in your personal life' RP012.

When asked how he felt about some of the experiences he had, RP004 said, "No, we stopped feeling a long time ago," during an interview. It is a sombre portrayal of an employee who is emotionally detached from the organisation. Most of the employees reflected and shared these emotions in various ways throughout the interviews; some terms they used to describe their experiences include "fear, detached, worried, anxious, confused and frustrated."

Even at the time of the interviews, there was still uncertainty, and even though some initial worries, like job security, may have been minimised, there has been an ongoing process of instability that has lasted for nearly eight years. The period of uncertainty, instability, and volatility has been prolonged, with participant RP014 sharing insight into change fatigue, where the prolonged state of constant uncertainty and instability has left her emotionally and mentally exhausted.

This was something that RP009 also shared:

'I was emotionally drained by the instability and uncertainty'.

Uncertainty as a driver for personal growth

Many employees reported uncertainty and instability as a wake-up call for some of them, prompting them to recognise complacency in their personal and professional lives. Faced with the possibility of job loss, they began to reflect on their career prospects. Some identified gaps in their qualifications and decided to pursue further education to better prepare for potential job loss.

For instance, RP003, who had worked as a senior secretary for many years with only a secretary diploma, responded to the uncertainty about job security by pursuing additional qualifications. She earned a national diploma and later a Postgraduate diploma, which led to her promotion from secretary to ward administrator and ultimately to regional manager—a career progression she directly attributes to the wake-up call brought on by the uncertainty.

'I did my degree that time. I had to push during that time... I started in 2019 2021 done. 2022 I did my postgrad, so you understand I was so relaxed...I had a secretarial diploma, I'm fine. But during...bona, I had to be shaken gore 'hei, wake up'. RP003

RP015 also reflected on how this period made her realise she needed to be more intentional about her career. When describing the period, she said:

'It was a moment of awakening when I realised I needed to take charge of my career'.

RP015 was also promoted and is currently a regional manager after realizing that she needed to be proactive in her career path and took steps toward career growth. This is also echoed by RP006, who has decided to further his studies due to the instability and uncertainty he faces in his current roles and responsibilities.

'That's why I have taken a decision to study further. So, when I'm done with my studies, I will choose whether to go into parties, or to stay with the legislature.' RP006.

This suggests that uncertainty can serve as a driver for personal growth and career development, where individuals faced with instability and job insecurity take proactive steps to improve themselves rather than be complacent. As some participants have done, it can provide an opportunity to identify gaps in abilities and take proactive steps to improve and be competitive, thereby taking a challenge and creating opportunities. RP012 stated:

'I have become stronger and more adaptable because of the challenges I faced within the organization' RP012.

Coping strategies used by employees to manage uncertainty.

As employees faced feelings of uncertainty, what also came through in the interviews was the coping strategies they deployed to manage the feelings of uncertainty. These are reliance on existing systems and policies, adaptability and flexibility, and detachment as coping mechanisms.

Reliance on existing systems and policies

One of the ways participants coped with uncertainty and the lack of guidance within the organisation is by focusing on and relying on existing systems and policies. Despite the instability and volatility, the organisation remains highly bureaucratic, with established systems and processes. As RP008 explains:

'There's a template for each and everything, and you have to stick to that template...'
RP008

These systems provided direction amid periods of uncertainty. The policies that employees referred to included their job descriptions, which helped them stay grounded when there was no clarity regarding changes. As units navigated these shifts, employees continued to focus on their core responsibilities, with RP001 stating:

'one has to do what they have to do difficult as it might be, you constantly have to remind yourself that you do have a job description that you have to stick to' RP001

This is insightful as it highlights the stabilising role of existing systems and policies during uncertainty. These seem to offer a sense of structure, clarity, and direction. For example, systems such as employment contracts, job descriptions, or conditions of service served as guidelines that allowed some employees to focus on their core responsibilities even when broader organisational changes were unclear.

Adaptability & Flexibility

In coping with uncertainty, some employees adopted a flexible mindset, adjusting to changes in various aspects of their work. They seem to have reached a point where they have accepted instability and uncertainty as the new normal.

'being able to adjust. And then you also look at the nature of offices that have been working for within the city, it has been, always been about confidentiality, being able to adjust, adapt, absorb, and also perform under enormous pressure' RP005.

'Because if it's our new normal, we need to think about it how we make it work because now as it stands, is it's just coming is not regulated' RP002.

Participant RP007 coordinates committee meetings and describes the disruptions that occasionally impact his plans, forcing him to adjust his work schedule to accommodate these changes. As he shared his experiences, he now takes these disruptions in stride and accepts that his plans may frequently change.

'..and during the evening or in the morning, you might be informed that there's an extraordinary Council meeting which means we must go back and cancel all or postpone all those logistics that we have paid for that section 79 and go and find another date and which means those other day it might be clashing because some of the officials might not be there...I must sit down and check who's available, and who's not available and check the logistics again to say if we can get it for another alternative date so it's prioritising' RP007.

However, with some of the employees, this adaptability also seemed to suggest a sense of resignation where the frequent disruptions to their plans have diminished their enthusiasm for future projects, as many have failed to materialise. RP0014 captures this sentiment:

"I've learned not to get too excited. I must wait for results before I get too excited."

This reflects her experience with programs that were derailed by political shifts.

'You live in the now, you cannot make long-term plans. It's just too volatile' RP013.

There was a noticeable difference between employees who demonstrated adaptability through flexibility and those who showed signs of resignation with a "wait and see" attitude. Employees who had reported having supportive managers who communicate and provide guidance indicated more adaptability and flexibility, while those lacking such support seem to have merely adjusted to changes. This is seen with RP014, who adopted an approach of having no expectations and being prepared for either outcome.

The participants' responses reveal that adaptability and flexibility are essential coping mechanisms in environments of constant uncertainty. Employees adjust to frequent disruptions and accept instability as the new normal, but there is a clear difference between proactive flexibility and resignation. While some employees adapt enthusiastically, others are more resigned, passively accepting changes with diminished excitement.

This also shows the critical role that leadership and communication play in shaping adaptability. Employees who receive clear guidance from managers demonstrate greater flexibility, while those lacking support tend to respond with indifference, merely adjusting to change out of necessity rather than engagement.

Detachment from the Organization

Detachment emerged as a coping strategy, with employees using it as a form of self-protection in response to feelings of uncertainty. During his interview, RP004 explained how he no longer identifies with the organisation's priorities, viewing them as separate from him. He no longer feels connected to the organisation's overall direction and has lost interest in its broader goals. Instead, he focuses solely on what directly impacts him.

'The priorities of the political elites. As long as they don't directly affect you. You continue doing what you've been doing' RP004.

RP010 shared a strategy he describes as compartmentalising, where he distances himself from being emotionally invested in what is happening to avoid negative emotions from the current work environment. He stated:

I compartmentalise my work to avoid the negative emotions that come with feeling disengaged. RP010

The majority of employees who adopted this coping strategy are the ones who have reported uncertainty as having taken a significant emotional and mental toll on them. There has also been a distinction between employees who reported receiving support and guidance from managers and those who reported communication regarding ongoing organisational changes. The participant who deployed these strategies were not receiving support and advice from their manager with little communication on what was happening within the organisation.

Conclusion on results for Research Question 2

The results from Research Question 2 provide deep insight into understanding how employees experience periods of uncertainty, instability, and volatility within the organisation. Research participants expressed significant emotional strain primarily driven by fears about job security, lack of organisational direction, and changes in roles and responsibilities. These uncertainties undermined their sense of control and stability, leading to employees deploying various coping strategies. The responses to answering Research Question 2 highlighted the critical role of leadership and communication in helping employees navigate uncertainty. Strong leadership and effective communication have emerged as essential in mitigating the adverse effects of uncertainty and providing support to employees.

5.3.2. Research Question 3: How does the sense of employee empowerment contribute to organisational agility?

The interviews that were conducted with the participants did not have direct questions on organisational agility, the researcher drew on responses gathered from Research Questions 1 and 2 to find answers to this Research Question. The analysis identified themes such as adaptability, proactivity, employee engagement, and commitment to the organisation and organisational learning. An overview of the results of this research question is presented in Table 12 below.

Table 12. Overview of Results for Research Question 3

Topic	Theme	Categories
Empowerment and Organisational Agility	Adaptability	Ability to adjust to changes
		Adaptive decisions making
	Proactivity	Sensing ability
		Ability to take initiative
		Innovation and creative problem-solving
	Engagement & commitment	Engagement with organisational objectives
		Attitude towards work

5.3.3.1. Organisational agility

Adaptability

From the data collected, the adaptability of the organisation to respond to the changes that were happening was raised. This was categorised as the ability of the organisation to adapt to changes and adaptive decision making.

Ability to Adapt to Changes

The low level of employee empowerment affects the organisation's ability to adapt to ongoing changes. RP002 highlighted a challenge regarding attendance at a committee he oversees. Due to political shifts, where the majority party lost seats and PR councillors, the committee is now largely composed of ward councillors who are often unavailable for meetings, preventing the committee from reaching quorum and functioning effectively. Since section 79 committees and council proceedings are regulated, RP002 and his team have been lobbying COGTA to adjust the composition of these committees—particularly MPAC, which plays a critical role in passing service delivery reports. Their proposal to make committee members full-time requires COGTA's regulation, but this issue, which has persisted since the 2022 local government election, remains unresolved.

'what we're trying to do now is even especially for MPAC, we tried to write few letters. We try to lobby GOGTA and SALGA because they are regulators of this thing to intervene especially MPAC. There were proposals of making the members full time, where they have to be available for council work because now, another disadvantage these people are part-time they are ward councillors on top of that, so, we tried to engage COGTA for making them full time organizing training because even those trainings those people are ward councillors you will organize training they don't because they have other things to do'.

The process that RP002 and his colleagues started was disrupted when a new MEC was appointed resulting in the team having to start the engagement processes again. As environmental changes impact how employees carry out their duties their ability to adapt to changes is often affected by regulations and processes which create roadblocks to adaptability and the ability to respond in an ever-changing environment.

The interview with RP008 also shed some light on the organisation's limited ability to adapt to changes:

'...remember, the city is standard. There's certain policies and procedures that are in place that you need to follow. You cannot deviate from them, you know? So even if you want to contribute or come up with these, this brilliant idea, it doesn't get taken into consideration because you follow the specific process that's been there for so many years, you can't deviate from it'.

This provides some insight into how the organisation's processes can create significant barriers to adaptability. Even with suggestions on possible ways to address identified challenges employees find themselves limited by processes and procedures that do not necessarily provide meaningful solutions to challenges arising from changes limiting the organisation's ability to be agile and responsive to dynamic environments.

We are doing what we have always been. That's it. There is no alignment to whatever the changes that are happening. RP004

Adaptive decisions making

The low level of empowerment significantly hinders adaptive decision-making within the organisation. Some of the employees expressed feeling powerless when it came to making important decisions, which negatively impacted the organisation's ability to respond swiftly and effectively to changes. The lack of decision-making authority leads to delays and fosters a culture of hesitation, where employees feel unable to act without approval from higher-ups.

For example, RP015 shared,

"I had to wait for approval before making decisions, which made me feel like I wasn't trusted."

This statement reflects how the lack of autonomy slows down the decision-making process and erodes trust between employees and management. When employees feel they are not trusted to make decisions independently, it reduces their confidence and willingness to take initiative, further limiting the organisation's adaptability.

Similarly, RP008 noted,

"He's indecisive. He can't make decisions. Directors come to him for advice, for input, for support, but he lacks that ability to really guide them and direct them."

In this interview, RP008 was referring to her direct manager and his tendency to take instructions without questioning and his inability to make decisions. She described an

environment within the office where it is merely instructional with limited contribution. This is also reflected in her line manager, who, also at a higher level, is not able to make decisions.

The inability to empower employees with decision making creates bottlenecks where decisions get delayed. This is reflected with participants such as RP006 whose line manager has centralized decision making leading to delays in decision making.

Proactivity

Sensing ability

Several responses raised concerns about the organisation's ability to anticipate and prepare for upcoming changes. Rather than adopting a forward-looking approach, many employees seemed to operate in a reactive mode, waiting for changes to happen before responding, rather than anticipating them. RP006, for example, observed this reactive mindset in his manager, who he believed should have prepared the unit for potential shifts. He explained:

"It's understandable for admin assistants, officers, and lower-level staff to sometimes lack proactivity. But as an assistant director, you need to be forward-thinking. Instead, the assistant director just waits for tasks to come in, and then we deal with them."

This comment illustrates a broader issue of the organisation's limited capacity for environmental scanning and sensing. The absence of proactive leadership at key levels further exacerbates this problem, as teams are not guided to anticipate changes, and decision-making becomes reactionary.

Moreover, the organisation's ability to scan for and prepare for changes is hampered by the lack of open dialogue and collaboration platforms. Without spaces for teams to engage in discussions about upcoming changes and their potential impact, the organisation struggles to be proactive.

RP006 reflected on this challenge during national discussions about the Government of Unity. He expressed concerns about how these political shifts might affect local government and his office's preparedness. However, feeling undervalued and unsure if his input would be considered, RP006 remained silent. His decision to disengage ultimately limited the unit's ability to prepare for changes in advance, demonstrating how lack of communication stifles proactive adaptation.

When employees are empowered to contribute and when leadership fosters a culture of proactive thinking, the organisation is better positioned to anticipate and respond to external

changes rather than merely reacting to them. Without these elements in place, adaptability is significantly weakened.

Similar experiences are shared by participants such as RP005, whose role is also dependent on external factors and another department.

Ability to take initiative and creative problem-solving

Employees with higher levels of empowerment can take initiative and engage in creative ways of solving problems presented by changes in the environment. From the interviews, it emerged that employees who were empowered were more likely to contribute ideas and solutions. RP007 shared his experience that shed light on this:

'...my contribution it is valued to a certain point. There can be maybe the how certain challenges are being addressed and committees. We usually have our unit meetings monthly by we talk about new ideas on ways to improve a committees. So, if I we do send out our inputs, our comments and they tell us, ok, it's fine. Let's try them. Let's implement them'.

This shows that when employees are empowered, they are willing to take initiative. When there are platforms that allow for engagements and contributions, this is where ideas flow on how to improve or address certain challenges, contributing to the organisation's ability to respond to changes.

The experience shared by RP007 is a different picture for the majority of participants who have limited opportunities to contribute towards improving their units or how their respective units can respond to changes:

'We filter them where they have to be filtered. And then they're taken and then put somewhere we don't know where' RP006.

'...so there is no room for you to come up with innovative ideas and to make decisions that you see that ok, this is going to improve the unit' RP015.

'the department that I work in is with people who are going to tell you that this thing we tried it seven years ago, it didn't work. So they're not, it's not the department that wants to see change' RP015.

These experiences reflect an environment where there is no space for ideas to be shared stifling the organisation's ability to benefit from possible great solutions to address some of the challenges that are faced. This also highlights the difference between empowered

employees who can engage in problem-solving processes and those who are not and are instead constrained.

Engagement & Commitment

Research Questions 1 and 2 provided insight into the participants' experiences during periods of uncertainty and their level of empowerment. One of the themes that emerged from the interviews was the participants' level of engagement and commitment to the organisation. Despite the uncertainty and its impact on them, many employees remained highly committed, demonstrating a strong desire to see improvements and expressing hope for positive change. When examining how engagement and commitment influence organisational agility, two important aspects surfaced: employees' alignment with organisational objectives and their overall attitude towards their work.

Engagement with organisational objectives

The majority of the participants showed a lack of engagement with the objectives of the organisation. The following quote from RP004 demonstrates this:

'The wind blows yeah, we, we get a sense, we get to be directed that, for instance, you will have these citywide priorities. But you're not...they will tell you what these are these are the priorities of the new administration, but they're never workshopped. You will not have departmental sessions that will talk about those priorities. So, you just know that these are the priorities' RP004.

This shows an employee who is not able to engage with the priorities and figure out how he fits into achieving these priorities. This means that he also doesn't take ownership over the achievement as during the interviews, he even described the priorities as 'their priorities'. Without understanding the organisational objectives, employees are less likely to take initiative or contribute to the direction of the organisation, thereby impacting organisational agility.

This contrasts with employees like RP005 and RP007, who demonstrated higher levels of empowerment despite uncertainty and instability. While RP007 acknowledged the challenges of high turnover and the difficulty of tracking different leaders' goals, he adopted a mindset focused on understanding each new set of goals and adjusting accordingly. This highlights how higher levels of empowerment can enhance organisational agility by enabling employees to adapt more effectively to changing circumstances.

Attitude towards work

The following provide some of the employee's attitudes towards their work:

'it was obvious harsh reminder that the relationship you have with an employer is that of employee /employer. You must not maybe you can, but it's not very safe to expect anything beyond that, in a sense that at some stage, one realized, I realized that, you know, all I have is me. I have to make things work for me. Because, yeah, in as much as it is, say that work passion and whatnot and whatnot but the primary goal is surviving' RP009.

'I'm committed to the organization forever because it's part of my passion is part of my calling, mainly because of that, I'm always committed to the organization. I can say on the scale of one to one to 10. I'm sitting at seven, but I want to sit at nine to 10' RP010.

'But if an opportunity can come, then I want to move so that I can be more effective somewhere within the legislature' RP006.

'You don't really look forward to what you are supposed to do, but you do it because it's the only job that you have' RP008.

Employees such as RP008 and RP009 who have shown low employee empowerment also show disengagement, which can impact the organisation's ability to respond to external changes. Looking at the employees who show disengagement, they also seem to have disconnected from the organisation's goals and priorities, as expressed by RP004 previously. The focus on survival means that they do not necessarily look to be engaging in problem-solving, take initiative or find ways to adapt. Sentiments such as the one below speak of employees disengaged, thereby affecting the organisation's ability to look to employees to adapt to changes:

'...we stopped feeling a long time ago' RP004.

The varied attitudes captured above highlight employees who are committed and those who are disengaged and focused on survival. For an organisation to adjust to changes employees need to be engaged so that they can contribute to what the organisation needs to adapt to the changes.

5.3.3.2. Conclusion on results for Research Question No. 3

From the findings, the sense of employee empowerment plays a role in shaping organisational agility. Empowered employees showed levels of adaptability, proactivity and engagement which are important factors for navigating changes. To be able to navigate changes, there needs to be initiative and a problem-solving attitude, which has been demonstrated in employees who were empowered.

On the other hand, employees such as RP008 and RP009 showed that employees with lower levels of empowerment were disengaged, reactive and waiting for instruction rather than anticipating changes. The absence of decision-making powers and lack of involvement limited their ability to contribute to the organisation's adaptability. In conclusion, the level of employee empowerment impacts organisational agility.

5.4. Conclusion

Chapter 5 has presented key findings on how employees experience periods of uncertainty, how these experiences influence their sense of empowerment, and how empowerment contributes to organisational agility. The results revealed that political instability and frequent leadership changes were major contributors to organisational uncertainty, causing employees to feel insecure about their roles and the organisation's direction.

Most of the participants showed what could be termed as moderate levels of empowerment. This sense of ambivalence seems to stem from inconsistencies in certain areas that contribute to fostering empowerment levels. This is seen in participants such as RP010, who describe his line manager as providing information in some instances and not in others. Other participants like RP003 were provided with opportunities to study and develop themselves further but described her manager as someone who was not interested in hearing her feedback or not showing concern with regard to anxieties that arose from the shifts that were happening in the organisation. As a result, it cannot be said that participants were disempowered as, to some degree, they acknowledged the availability of some empowerment structures.

What also emerged from the findings is the impact of empowerment on how employees navigated the shifts that were happening. Most of the participants with low to moderate levels of empowerment faced feelings of uncertainty relating to their job security, while those who

were considered empowered, although unclear about what was happening due to instability caused by the political shifts, job security was identified as a concern they had. This was identified by the participants as resulting from not knowing what would happen next and how these would affect them, whereas the more empowered participants shared that there were platforms to engage with management, and it is possibly in those platforms that such issues were raised.

From the findings, participants who faced issues of instability and fear of job security used this period as a driver for personal growth, with some managing to study further and being promoted to other positions and units. Some of the participants were currently studying to leave the current units that they were in. For more empowered employees they focused on adapting their work to the changes and making suggestions on how the unit can do things better in response to the shifts happening. In between these two groups were participants who detached from the organisation and disengaged with what was happening. Even with participants who have reported disengaging, most of them showed commitment towards their work and expressed a desire to be part of the organisation's success.

The findings revealed that although there were bureaucratic limitations due to the highly regulated environment that the organisation finds itself in, employees who were empowered were able to contribute towards their units responding to the changes and coming up with some of the solutions to tackle challenges resulting from these. In contrast, participants with low to moderate levels were more reactive and waited for instructions on what to do. Even in instances where an employee can identify potential changes and the impact they could have on the unit, they choose rather to keep quiet and wait to see how management responds. This is a result of feeling undervalued, that there was no space to contribute, there is no care about their interests, and therefore disengage and only engage when required.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1. Introduction

Chapter 6 provides a comprehensive discussion of the study's findings, contextualizing them within the existing literature on employee empowerment and organisational agility. This chapter addresses the research questions by exploring how employees perceive empowerment within their organisation, navigate periods of uncertainty and instability, and the role of empowerment in enhancing organisational agility.

Through an analysis of structural and psychological empowerment dimensions, this chapter highlights the interplay between organisational support systems and employee attitudes, behaviours, and overall well-being. This is done by discussing the research findings compared to the literature, which provides deeper insights into employee empowerment and organisation agility.

6.2. Discussion of findings

6.2.1. Research Question 1: How do employees perceive their level of empowerment within the organisation, and how does this affect their attitude towards the organisation?

This section begins by exploring employees' empowerment levels based on the collected data. It explores empowerment from a structural and psychological perspective outlined in the literature. The discussion will then analyse how these empowerment levels influence employees' attitudes towards the organisation.

Structural empowerment

The table below (Table 13) was created to provide an overview of the research participants' perceived empowerment levels and to guide the discussion on answering Research Question 1. Echebiri et al. (2020) discussed the four dimensions that result in structural empowerment for employees: Opportunities, Information, Support, and Resources. To analyse the findings to the dimensions, the findings from Chapter 5 were categorised and represented using a colour-coded system presented in Table 13 below.

Red – The dimension was perceived as lacking.

Yellow – Some dimension elements were present, though not fully experienced.

Green – Participants perceived this dimension as present.

The colour-coded table provides an overview of the perceived empowerment levels to streamline the discussion by presenting the data visually. It is important to note that the table presents a simplified representation to support the discussion process and is not intended to be an exhaustive scientific assessment of empowerment levels. It is solely to assist in interpreting the findings in alignment with existing literature.

As shown in Table 13 below, the empowerment levels of most participants can be described as ‘moderate’ with a small, almost equal number of participants’ empowerment levels seeming low or high. According to Echebiri et al. (2020), structural empowerment is achieved when employees have ‘access to information, receiving support, having access to resources necessary to do one’s job and having the opportunity to learn and grow are considered empowering structures’ (p. 4). These factors collectively are called empowering structures (Echebiri et al. (2020) and are essential for fostering an empowered workforce.

The moderate empowerment levels in the findings stem from a mixed availability/unavailability of these empowering structures. Unlike participant, RP013, whose findings suggest that all four dimensions are lacking, RP003, for example, has resources and opportunities but lacks support and information. This creates empowerment that is neither fully established nor entirely lacking. This fragmented experience aligns with Echebiri et al. (2020), where each structural dimension must be consistently available to establish a strong sense of empowerment.

Table 13: Visual representation of empowerment levels

Participant	Opportunities	Information	Support	Resources	Empowerment level
RP001	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Green	Yellow
RP002	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
RP003	Green	Red	Red	Green	Yellow
RP004	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Yellow
RP005	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
RP006	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Yellow
RP007	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
RP008	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Yellow
RP009	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Green	Yellow
RP010	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Yellow
RP011	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Yellow
RP012	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Red
RP013	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
RP014	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Red	Yellow
RP015	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Red	Yellow

Red	LOW	Yellow	MODERATE	Green	HIGH
-----	-----	--------	----------	-------	------

Opportunities

Findings from the study reveal a nuanced view of the opportunities dimension. The organisation has systems for employees to further their studies and grow, as evidenced by participants such as RP003, RP007, and RP014, who have studied further and were promoted. RP006 was also busy with an academic qualification that he is pursuing that he hopes would open doors for him in other departments. The reason behind coding it yellow in some instances was with the understanding that at the core of it, the organisation has systems in place for employees to further their studies. Still, with some of the employees, there were certain elements that they had identified as lacking.

Monje-Amor et al. (2022) suggested that learning, growth, and advancements were essential in creating an empowered workforce. This indicates that opportunities have various aspects, and it is not enough to provide opportunities partially.

Building on this, Ozbozkurt et al. (2021) highlight three components of the opportunity dimension: growth opportunities, personal advancement, and internal learning. While the organisation provides formal education, some employees experience a notable gap in learning about changes that occur in the organisation. As changes happen, some participants reported a lack of platforms to learn about new policies and how to implement them, hampering the full realisation of this dimension.

This finding is supported by Elliot (2020), who highlights the link between learning and change, stating that a learning environment must support change. According to Elliot (2020), an organisation fosters a 'fertile environment' (p.271) for change when employees are provided an opportunity to understand changes that have occurred. In the context of this study, a fertile environment is one where employees are equipped not only with academic learning but also with learning that enables them to implement changes, such as understanding policy changes. This gap is relevant in this context as an incomplete dimension affects the overall experience of empowerment. Most participants experience moderate levels of access to opportunities because of this gap identified in internal learning. While the organisation has formal training mechanisms, most employees experience a gap in learning relating to changes or a perceived lack of opportunities.

Information

The study found that most participants lacked access to information, affecting their empowerment levels. When employees lack access to essential information, it creates uncertainty, anxiety, and confusion, resulting in fear for some participants and disconnection from the organisation. Access to consistent and transparent information, however, was shown to reduce these negative emotions, with participants such as RP005 and RP007 displaying less anxiety. Access to information was found to be critical in reducing these feelings and also providing guidance and direction.

These findings align with Scheepers & Swart (2020), who emphasise communication's crucial role in alleviating fears and discomfort associated with change. For some participants, access to information from their managers served as a source of reassurance. Participants desired open communication even if the manager did not have the answers. RP001, for example, shared how she did not expect her manager to know everything, but the lack of communication was a significant source of anxiety. Scheepers & Swart (2020) highlighted that change tends to lead to fear and anxiety, and communication provides reassurance and clarity.

This is also confirmed by Kay et al. (2022), who explored the relationship between communication and employee anxiety and found that communication from managers lowers anxiety. Similarly, Batti et al. (2021) stated that adequate information ensures 'clarification of responsibilities, equal opportunities, enhancing the working atmosphere and appreciation of job satisfaction' (p. 112). The findings support this assertion where adverse effects stemming from lack of information were identified.

Participants described feeling 'left behind' and 'undervalued', indicating how the absence of information led to emotional distress and disengagement. Nilsen et al. (2019) support these findings, highlighting that effective communication is vital for employees to respond positively to changes. The flow of information allows employees to feel more connected and reduces their fears, ensuring a better way of managing changes.

There were two participants whose access to information was considered moderate due to the sporadic, inconsistent nature in which they had access to information. They identified instances where information was occasionally shared, which provided some clarity, but the inconsistency led to a general lack of transparency, therefore affecting complete empowerment in this dimension. Mbhele & de Beer (2022) also found that internal communication is essential for organisational success and employee engagement. They assert that reliable communication consists of high-quality information, and two-way

communication contributes to a positive work environment. Disengagement and disconnection are some of the attitudes of most participants with moderate levels of empowerment.

The link between information access and empowerment is further supported by Monje-Amor et al. (2022), who argued that access to information enhances employee empowerment by equipping individuals with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions confidently in their roles. Access to information is, therefore, a way to give employees power.

Support

The study identified a lack of management support contributing to participants' low or moderate empowerment levels. What was evident was that management support affected all the other three dimensions of structural empowerment, i.e. opportunities, information, and resources. This finding demonstrates that management is not an isolated empowerment component but serves as the foundation for empowerment.

Participants with low to moderate empowerment levels expressed feeling unsupported by management during uncertainty and instability. Some participants felt undervalued and as though their contributions were not recognised, which fuelled disengagement and diminished motivation. Monje-Amor et al. (2019) referred to supportive leadership as critical in fostering employee empowerment. From the study, it seemed that it was not necessarily the periods of uncertainty that resulted in employees feeling disempowered; instead, the lack of support came through as important. RP001, RP002, and RP008 are just some of the participants who felt no concern for them, whereas RP002 and RP007 seem to have had managers who showed care towards them. Monje-Amor et al. (2019) state that leaders must show concern for employees and consider their needs.

The participants with low to moderate levels of empowerment also felt disengaged and detached. This is consistent with findings by Jin and McDonald (2017), who argued that supervisor support is vital in fostering employee engagement in the public sector. Employees with the backing from their managers had higher levels of employee engagement, especially when combined with the other three dimensions of structural empowerment (Jin & McDonald, 2017).

Participants who experienced vital support from their managers described their leaders as consultative, collaborative, and communicative. These managers foster open dialogue, actively seek input, and maintain a consistent flow of information, creating an environment where employees feel acknowledged and valued. This sense of empowerment aligns with

Tripathi et al. (2021), who found that employees who had high empowerment levels are more likely to contribute positively towards organisational goals. Participants such as RP007 shared about being able to come up with ideas on how things could be done differently and how these suggestions could be implemented and contrasted with RP009, who described being at a point where he does what is required of him and nothing further.

Participants with low to moderate empowerment levels described their managers as inconsistent in communication, centralised decision making and generally indifferent to their well-being. These managers failed to foster an environment of emotional safety, leading to a lack of trust and a sense of detachment from organisational goals. The table above, where support is highlighted in yellow, speaks to the inconsistencies regarding the support received where there is no apparent lack of support. Instances such as RP010, who seems to have a good relationship with the manager where he feels trusted to perform specific duties and feels like he is an essential member of a team but also describes situations where there is no communication and where the manager does not communicate what is happening and instead would inform them of things after they have happened and in this case, it was the change of his job title without his input. This inconsistency in support, where there is support in some instances but in other cases it is non-existent, demonstrates how inconsistent support undermines empowerment.

Huq (2017) supports these findings, highlighting how inconsistent communication and centralised decision-making can erode trust and hinder employee empowerment. Without employees being included in the decision-making processes and allowed to contribute to what is happening in the organisation, the sense of ownership over their work is undermined, resulting in employees feeling undervalued and reducing their level of engagement (Huq, 2017). Jin and McDonald (2017) also support this, emphasising the importance of consistent supervisor support in fostering engagement. It is not enough to be supportive; consistency is needed to create trust and connection to the organisation.

Resources

The study's findings reveal that while employees can have the essential resources needed to perform their duties, such as tools of trade, office space, and equipment, this alone does not translate to high levels of empowerment. Only three out of fifteen participants are considered to be empowered despite the majority of participants having resources. This suggests that resources, although foundational, are not sufficient by themselves.

Monje-Amor et al. (2021) explored the relationship between structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, and work engagement. They found that although structural empowerment (such as access to resources) was essential, other factors, such as psychological empowerment, played a role. This implies that employees do not need resources alone to be empowered but an environment that actively supports their well-being and autonomy (Monje-Amor et al., 2021).

Khoker & Raziq (2017) also highlighted that empowerment goes beyond material resources and requires a holistic approach that includes psychological and management support. Their study indicates that resources alone are unlikely to yield a sense of true empowerment. Further supporting this are Dabou & Hacini (2018), who found that other elements such as decision-making authority, training and job design add to empowerment levels instead of resources alone. A structure that allows employees to exercise control over their tasks must complement the availability of resources (Dabou & Hacini, 2018).

Overall, the study found moderate to low empowerment levels among the participants due to the partial availability of the four structural dimensions. Monje-Amor et al. (2021) argue that all four dimensions must be available to empower work conditions. The availability of access to opportunities, information, support and resources is critical to fostering empowerment. Monje-Amor et al. (2021) argue that this influences employees' attitudes and behaviour towards the organisation. Study findings confirm this as participants with high levels of empowerment showed different attitudes towards the organisation than those with moderate to low empowerment levels. Some participants with moderate to low empowerment levels reported feeling disconnected and disengaged.

Psychological empowerment

Research findings found a strong link between structural and psychological empowerment levels. Although empowerment has structural and psychological components, the two are deeply interconnected rather than two distinct concepts. Employees with high structural empowerment levels exhibited similar signs of high psychological empowerment. This is similar to the assertion by Kanjanaka et al. (2023) that structural empowerment, which encompasses opportunities, resources, information, support, and information, influences employees' level of psychological empowerment.

This link between structural and psychological empowerment is also supported by Monje-Amor et al. (2021), who found that while structural empowerment creates an environment that promotes engagement, psychological empowerment drives motivation and commitment

towards the organisation. Structural empowerment could, therefore, be described as a catalyst for psychological empowerment, enabling employees to internalise a sense of control and influence over their tasks and organisational outcomes (Monje-Amor et al., 2021).

Meaning

The study found that employees who felt empowered experienced a more profound sense of meaning in their work than those who did not feel empowered. Participants like RP10 expressed a strong desire to think that their work matters and contributes to something bigger and be more than just a transactional exchange. This sentiment highlights a desire among employees for work to resonate at a personal level and connect with their values. For some participants, this desire for meaningful work has been undermined by a lack of agency and feeling that they have limited impact within the organisation.

The findings align with Nie et al. (2023), who stated that meaning is cultivated when there is a connection between the individual and the organisation. Meaningful work emerges when employees feel that their role contributes to organisational goals. This was difficult to achieve when most participants did not know what was happening in the organisation, creating a disconnection.

Competence

The study found that employees who felt empowered showed a strong sense of competence, showing confidence in their skills and abilities to perform their tasks. RP007, for example, expressed a high level of assurance in performing his work and dealing with changes that were taking place in the organisation and was confident in describing his approach to managing the transitions. This self-assurance contrasts sharply with participants with low to moderate levels of empowerment who appeared less confident, often simply going through their tasks without a sense of ownership.

RP008, for instance, viewed coaching sessions with her manager as box-ticking exercises rather than valuable opportunities for feedback and personal growth. This reflects a missed opportunity for enhancing competence, as coaching could provide meaningful insights into performance. Employees with lower levels of empowerment displayed less belief in their abilities.

This observation aligns with Bae-Kyo et al. (2020), who assert that empowered employees believe in their capability to perform tasks effectively. Empowerment fosters a sense of

competence by giving employees autonomy and trust, which enhances their confidence in handling responsibilities. Monje-Amor et al. (2021) also found that employees with high psychological empowerment experience greater confidence in their skills. This confidence is attributed to the autonomy to make decisions and the support received from management.

Employees with a high level of empowerment showed confidence in their abilities and skills in doing their work. RP007 spoke confidently about how he navigated organisational changes and was confident in how he handled them. Compared with others, they did not display the same confidence and seemed to go about their work. RP008, for example, talked about how coaching sessions were merely a box-ticking exercise, whereas this would have been an opportunity for feedback and where employees could know how they were performing. Employees with low empowerment levels did not exhibit strong belief in their work. Bae-Kyoo et al. (2019) indicated that empowered employees believe in their abilities to perform or execute tasks. When employees did not feel trusted to manage their work or were not allowed to make certain decisions even though they were part of their work responsibilities, their competence was undermined.

Self Determination

The study found that employees experienced mixed feelings regarding self-determination in their roles. For participants with low to moderate levels of empowerment, self-determination was inconsistently experienced. This variability ranged from being left entirely to figure things out independently, having control over specific aspects of their work but no control over others, and having no power. RP004, for example, did not have a direct manager at the time of the interview but had a degree of autonomy as he would make decisions about how to carry out his work. However, this autonomy came with a downside as he lacked clear direction and guidance, leaving him uncertain about organisational goals and where he fit into that.

Similarly, RP001 described her manager as someone who allows the team to work independently, figure things out independently and is available when support is needed. While this provides some level of control, it is not comprehensive enough to foster a strong sense of self-determination. The study findings suggest that self-determination requires more than leaving employees to work independently and figuring things out for themselves. It involves providing them with the foundational components of structural empowerment, access to information, resources, opportunities for learning and support. Without these elements, employees may struggle to achieve autonomy.

Naqach and Chaouki (2023) describe self-determination as 'the sense of autonomy and control individuals have over their work' (p.5). Bae-Kyoo et al. (2019) assert that empowerment involves providing employees autonomy and the necessary resources to succeed in their roles—a lack of self-determination results in uncertainty and frustration for employees (Bae-Kyoo et al., 2019).

Monje-Amor et al. (2021) also emphasise that self-determination requires a supportive environment where employees can access learning opportunities and feedback. In instances where participants felt a lack of direction and support, this undermined their sense of self-determination.

Impact

The study found that employees' feelings of not being valued could be linked to their ability to impact the organisation. Many participants, specifically those with low to moderate levels of empowerment, expressed limited ability to influence decisions within their department or unit, contributing to feelings of disempowerment and disengagement. This perceived lack of impact left employees feeling disconnected from organisational goals as they felt their contributions were not acknowledged or considered in the decision-making process.

This finding aligns with the work of Naqach and Chaouki (2023), who argue that the opportunity to influence strategic, administrative, and operational decisions is vital for creating a sense of purpose and progress. When employees are empowered to contribute to decision-making, they feel they are working towards meaningful goals, enhancing a sense of belonging.

Monje-Amor et al. (2021) emphasise that employees are motivated when they perceive their work as meaningful and capable of affecting change. It is essential for employees to feel connected to the organisational goals. When employees can influence decisions, they think their efforts contribute to something bigger than themselves (Monje-Amor, 2021). This explains the feeling of being undervalued and the disconnection among the research participants.

Impact of empowerment levels on attitude towards organisation

Levels of engagement

Findings from the study revealed that employees who displayed higher levels of empowerment also showed more significant levels of engagement in their work. This supports work by Naqach & Chaouki (2023), who found that employee empowerment allows employees to be

more engaged as they perform their work. Employees who showed engagement in work viewed their work positively and found it fulfilling. They also showed dedication and focus, which Monje-Amor et al. (2021) describe when explaining work engagement.

What was interesting about the findings on engagement/ disengagement was the nuanced form of engagement where some employees would emotionally and cognitively disengage from their work while remaining somewhat behaviourally engaged. Participants withdrew mentally and emotionally but would continue to perform their duties and remain present at work. Despite fulfilling the outward expectations of their roles, they were internally detached. While the existing literature on engagement discusses engagement and disengagement, the researcher could not find studies that address this specific dissonance where employees are engaged at a behavioural level but are disengaged emotionally and cognitively.

An example is RP008, who displayed moderate levels of empowerment with a lack of trust in her manager and team and had withdrawn emotionally from the team dynamics and discussions. However, she continues to attend to her work, complete her tasks and meet the requirements of her role. This behaviour illustrates a functional engagement where employees perform adequately despite feeling disconnected. Bak-Kyoo et al. (2019) provide three dimensions of engagement: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural. Behavioural engagement is seen as a manifestation of cognitive and emotional dimensions (Baek-Yoo et al. (2019). In the case of RP008, however, behavioural engagement is maintained without emotional and mental alignment.

This dissonance was reflected in RP001 and RP009, to mention a few who chose to disengage emotionally as a form of self-preservation. They continue to show up for work and complete their responsibilities as required but do so without emotional investment. RP015 was a related incident. Although distinct, she sometimes felt disconnected, and her deep belief in the broader purpose of her work sustains her behavioural engagement. This aligns with Baek-Kyoo et al. (2019), who suggest that personal values, commitment to the job's purpose and individual characteristics can influence how employees feel and act towards their work.

Monje-Amor et al. (2021) further contribute to this understanding by discussing how positive internal cognitions derived from meaningful or enjoyable tasks can help sustain engagement.

Tripathi et al. (2021) offer a potential explanation for the discrepancy in engagement levels by highlighting that personality also plays a significant role. They introduce the concept of locus of control, which refers to an individual's perception of control over their responses to various situations. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe they have power over their

reactions and behaviours even if they cannot control external circumstances. This allows them to maintain a resilient attitude, fostering engagement and a positive outlook regardless of external challenges.

This is seen in participants such as RP003, who, despite moderate levels of empowerment and experiencing stress and anxiety due to insufficient information and support during times of uncertainty, have shown resilience. RP003 continued to pursue development by advancing her studies, achieving two promotions, and demonstrating consistent dedication to her work. Her actions suggest an internal locus of control that enabled her to stay engaged and committed even when organisational support was lacking.

This aligns with the assertion by Tripathi et al. (2021) that individuals with an internal locus of control are more likely to remain engaged and optimistic, as this creates a buffer against external disempowerment. It should be noted that RP003 and others, such as RP015, although moderately empowered, have career progression in common. RP007 and RP005 also experienced some career progression, with RP005 having started as an intern and now an operational manager. This shows that the existence of some empowerment structures, and in this case, one of them being opportunities, does contribute. Combined with personal traits, it can compensate for partial empowerment, contributing to employee engagement.

Motivation

The study found that participants with low to moderate levels of empowerment displayed signs of demotivation, which resulted in feelings of powerlessness in their roles. Many expressed frustrations about their inability to contribute meaningfully to how their work is conducted, leading to feelings of discouragement. This is consistent with Naqach & Chaouki (2023), who suggest that employees who feel unable to make meaningful contributions are more likely to be demotivated. Similarly, Salahat (2021) also highlights the impact of empowerment in increasing employee motivation, noting that empowerment boosts motivation by instilling control, purpose, and value in one's role. When employees lack empowerment, as seen in this study, they are more prone to feeling redundant, undervalued, and demotivated.

Interestingly, some participants who reported moderate levels of empowerment managed to sustain motivation by focusing on personal growth and career development. Despite facing limitations in empowerment, such as lack of access to information and inconsistent or lack of management support, they took proactive steps to enhance their skills and knowledge, and some were promoted. This suggests that even partial empowerment, where some structural dimensions like opportunities and resources are available, can positively impact motivation.

RP006, for example, displayed moderate levels of empowerment due to a lack of management support and access to information but is investing in his personal development by pursuing his studies further. This reflects a sense of motivation driven by structural empowerment factors such as resources (tools available to study, such as laptops, data, etc.) and opportunities (studies funded by the organisation).

Scholars such as Panda and Sahoo (2021) highlight the importance of empowerment structures such as access to resources, information, support, and opportunities in maintaining employee motivation. Still, they do not necessarily discuss the impact of the existence and absence of some empowerment structures. Findings from the study suggest that the existence of specific structures, even while others are absent, could still positively impact employees.

Commitment towards organisation

The study found that some employees with low or moderate levels of empowerment actively sought other opportunities. RP006 and RP009 indicated they were looking at leaving their current positions in search of roles that provide greater empowerment and stability. These findings align with Naqach & Chaouki (2023), who argue that a lack of empowerment often leads to employees exploring alternative opportunities. Similarly, Panda & Sahoo (2021) found that psychological empowerment significantly impacts job satisfaction and employee retention, suggesting that employees are more likely to stay committed to the organisation when they feel empowered. Nie et al. (2023) also emphasise this link, highlighting that high levels of empowerment correlate with commitment, loyalty, and dedication towards the organisation.

Interestingly, the study also revealed that most participants looking for other opportunities were not looking to leave the organisation. Instead, they looked at transferring to different departments, suggesting that the dissatisfaction might not necessarily be with the organisation but related to the specific management practices or departmental dynamics, as seen in the case of RP006. The desire to remain in the organisation shows that the organisation has the foundation required to retain employees, but possible challenges at the management or departmental level affect employees' experiences and perceptions of empowerment.

Some employees with perceived low to moderate levels of empowerment were actively looking for other opportunities. Participants such as RP006 and RP009 were some of the employees who indicated that they were actively looking for other opportunities outside of their current positions. The findings are consistent with Naqach & Chaouki (2023), who stated that lack of empowerment can make employees more likely to look for other opportunities. This is supported by Panda & Sahoo (2021), who found that psychological empowerment can

mediate the relationship between work satisfaction and employee retention. Nie et al. (2023) also highlighted a connection between empowerment levels and commitment, loyalty, and dedication to the organisation.

Interestingly, the employees were not necessarily looking at moving outside the organisation but to other departments. This reflects that the issues do not necessarily relate to the organisation but can be attributed to management challenges highlighted earlier.

It is also interesting to note that the majority of participants are considered to display low to moderate levels of empowerment, but out of that majority, only a few expressed the desire to leave. An exciting example is RP013, who was placed in an access pool with nowhere to report and no work being given. He has been fighting to belong somewhere and be included but, in the discussion, did not indicate leaving the organisation. He continues looking for opportunities within the organisation and has been in different departments, trying to show his value. This suggests that the organisation itself is not the problem, as most participants want to stay there and point to more significant issues at play, such as management. This is not surprising given that most participants with low to moderate levels of empowerment perceived support from management as low.

This is supported by Monje-Amor et al. (2019), who emphasised leadership's critical role in influencing employees' work environment and perception of their work. Jin & McDonald (2016) also support this through their study that found the vital role that managers and immediate supervisors play in ensuring employee engagement.

6.2.2. Conclusion on discussion for Research Question 1

In discussion results for Research Question 1, the study indicates that most participants experience moderate levels of empowerment with access to specific empowering structures and the absence of some. This results in partial empowerment, with some areas, such as access to information and management support, missing while others, such as access to opportunities, are not fully realised. According to Echebiri et al. (2020), all four dimensions of structural empowerment must be consistently available to foster a fully empowered workforce. The study has found inconsistencies in some dimensions that lead to disengagement and disconnection from the organisation.

The discussion also touched on psychological empowerment and analysed the employees' psychological empowerment level in literature. Monje-Amor et al. (2019) argue that structural empowerment creates a supportive environment for psychological empowerment, which the

study found. Employees who displayed lower levels of structural empowerment also showed similar levels of psychological empowerment.

The answer to Research Question 1 underscores the importance of supportive management as the foundation for creating an environment that fully fosters employee empowerment. While the organisation has systems and processes to support structural empowerment, the two critical pillars for empowerment appear to be the role of leadership. Scholars such as Jin and McDonald (2017) have emphasised the vital role that supervisors or managers play in fostering a supportive work environment.

Although empowerment levels impacted motivation, work engagement, and commitment, the study also found that other factors influence these. Personality traits, beliefs, and personal values are just some factors that affect how employees interpret their experiences. Tripathi et al. (2021) help answer some discrepancies about empowerment levels and work engagement by highlighting the role of personality traits such as locus of control. Results from Research Question 1 show that empowerment levels impact employees and their attitudes towards the organisation and their work.

6.2.3. Research Question 2: How do employees experience periods of uncertainty, instability, and volatility?

The findings for Research Question 2 revealed that periods of uncertainty, instability, and volatility impact employees' emotional and psychological well-being, and the level of empowerment impacts how employees navigate these periods. This uncertain period resulted in employees feeling unsure, anxious, confused and some in a state of panic. The findings also revealed how employees with different empowerment levels were able to respond to these. These findings align with existing literature on empowerment as a support structure for organisational change.

Feelings of uncertainty

The study found that periods of uncertainty brought about intense feelings of uncertainty, which comprised stress, anxiety, and confusion as employees struggled to make sense of changes and anticipate how these would affect them. These findings align with Rasheed et al. (2024), who wrote about the impact of organisational change on employees, asserting that this threatens employees' feelings of stability and safety. This loss of stability can undermine

employees' trust in the organisation as they are unsure of their job security, intensifying fear and anxiety.

Adding to this, Scheepers & Swart (2020) explained from the neurological perspective how the brain interprets change as a threat triggering fear and anxiety. When change is perceived as something that is beyond an individual's control, the 'flight/fight' mode is activated, which releases stress hormones contributing to anxiety, stress, and hypervigilance (Scheepers & Swart, 2020). This illustrates that responses to change are not only psychological but physiological as well.

Factors contributing to feelings of uncertainty

From the study, uncertainty about job security, the direction of the organisation and changing roles and responsibilities contributed to feelings of uncertainty. These were factors that participants had identified as contributing to the feelings of uncertainty experienced, and the periods of uncertainty affected everyone, with no participants having any control or knowledge about what would happen. The study found differences between participants with empowerment levels that are considered higher compared to those with low to moderate levels of empowerment.

Most of the participants with low to moderate levels of empowerment were uncertain and had anxiety about job security and changing roles and responsibilities. As much as all participants described similar incidents in the organisation, leading to uncertainty and instability, only those with low empowerment levels experienced the most anxiety regarding their job security. The study found that the cause for this was the lack of information and support during these periods.

While a few of the participants had access to information and support, those who reported the lack of support and information expressed experiencing anxiety over their job security. While others could lean on management to provide support, clarity, and reassurance, most participants did not have this available, leaving them to navigate these independently. This supports Scheepers & Swart's (2020) assertion that leadership needs to be aware of their role in helping employees during periods of change and providing assurance and validation during periods that can feel scary for employees.

Nilsen et al. (2019) also highlighted the importance of transparent and consistent communication in reducing employee anxiety during periods of change in the organisation. In the study, some participants reported being 'left in the dark' and 'left behind' regarding what was happening in the organisation, leading to change being perceived as a threat. Nilsen et

al. (2019) indicate that a lack of information leaves employees having to speculate and make assumptions, which increases stress and anxiety.

Baek-Kyoo et al. (2019) also identified poor flow of information from management as a contributor to creating an environment of uncertainty for employees, which aligns closely with the findings. Due to lack of information, most participants were left without the clarity, guidance and assurance needed to navigate changes. Information and management emerged from the study as stabilising forces during periods of uncertainty. Participants such as RP001 expressed no expectation for management to have answers during periods of uncertainty. Still, a platform where management could communicate openly about the known and unknown would have assisted in easing the anxiety.

This is evidenced by RP007, who indicated that regular meetings are held with the rest of the team to update on what is happening, share ideas and check in. Lack of platforms such as these leaves employees unsupported, as argued by Baek-Kyoo et al., (2019). These findings highlight the role that empowerment structures such as access to information and support play in providing a supportive structure for employees in periods of uncertainty.

Participants such as RP006, RP009, RP010 and RP013 went through a process where their jobs were changed, whether in terms of changing the job title (RP009, RP010) or taking away some of the responsibilities (RP006); this was done without communication or engagement with the participants. Bhatti et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of information in providing 'clarification of responsibilities, equal opportunities, enhancing the working atmosphere and appreciation of job satisfaction' (p. 112). Without information, employees feel unvalued, demotivated, and discouraged, as evidenced in this study.

Impact of experiencing uncertainty

Emotional distress & mental health

The study found that for most of the participants, the ongoing uncertainties and changes had a detrimental impact on their mental health. Participants such as RP003, RP008, RP013 and RP014 are just some of the participants who shared how the lack of stability impacted their mental health. This aligns with Rasheed et al. (2019), who indicated that employees with little to no control and empowerment over their work struggle to manage their mental and emotional resources effectively. Most of the participants who shared the struggles of change in their mental health were those who experienced low to moderate levels of empowerment.

This is also supported by Nie et al. (2019), who argue that when employees have control over their work, it instils a greater sense of meaning and purpose, which serves as a buffer against mental health challenges. According to Nie et al. (2019), autonomy provides employees with 'psychological capital' (p.2), which empowers them to handle stressors more effectively.

The experience of RP013 supports this. Although his situation is unique amongst all the participants as he had been displaced within the organisation with no specific role, tasks, or department to report to, his experience highlights the impact of losing meaning towards work on mental health. There was no work for him to have control over. This displacement caused him to lose all sense of meaning and connection to his work, leading to him struggling with his mental health and describing the experience as having gone through 'depression'. Nie et al. (2019) indicate that autonomy and meaningful organisational engagement are essential to sustaining mental health during challenging periods.

The impact of the 'psychological capital' referenced by Nie et al. (2019) comprises self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience, which provide tools that employees need to cope with adverse work conditions. During the interviews, RP005 and RP007 attributed their positivity and adaptability to their personalities, which were part of who they were. Even if this was so, it was noted that few participants reported having access to information, resources, opportunities, and support. In addition, the four dimensions of psychological empowerment were also met. Even if their 'psychological capital' were attributed to their personalities, the presence of the empowerment structures cannot be ignored.

The study also found that some participants displayed what is referred to as change fatigue due to the constant changes that were causing uncertainty and stability. RP014 was one of the participants who expressed feeling 'exhausted' from continuously adapting to the changes. Nilsen et al. (2019) define change fatigue as 'exhaustion associated with feeling drained and depleted beyond one's capacity to handle workplace demands and everyday work tasks' (p. 8). This could also be attributed to the lack of supportive structures to support employees during periods of uncertainty and volatility. Employee empowerment is highlighted as essential to helping employees navigate periods of change (Panda & Sahoo, 2021).

Uncertainty as a driver for personal growth

An interesting finding in the study is that some participants viewed uncertainty as a catalyst for growth and self-improvement. Participants such as RP003, RP007, RP006, RP010 and RP015 regarded this period as challenging and an opportunity to learn, adapt, and invest in their personal and professional development.

This was in various forms, such as growth from gaining experience as pioneers who could put systems in place in the first coalition-led municipality, pursuing further education and career advancement. Uncertainty is a prompt to reassess their skills, address areas where there was complacency and proactively build their capabilities in response to the changes in the environment.

This response aligns with the essence of the dynamic capabilities framework. Some participants' responses aligned with the three activities that emerge from the dynamic capabilities Zahra et al. (2022) described as sensing, seizing and transforming.

The recognition of some of the participants, such as RP003 and RP015, of uncertainty as a threat to their job security reflects a sensing capability. Reflecting on where they were, the gaps in their skills and qualifications were some ways that they scanned the environment to determine the extent of the threat. As Teece (2018) described, Seizing is the ability to make decisions and act in response to perceived threats. Participants could pursue education and skill-building that allowed for career advancement. RP003, in a period of uncertainty, was promoted twice after completing her diploma and postgraduate diploma afterwards.

The transforming ability described by Teece et al. (2020), in the context of the individual, is the individual's ability to redesign themselves to increase effectiveness. They differed from where some participants started before the periods of uncertainty to where they were. This is not just in terms of the changes in positions such as RP007, who was recently promoted, but also in the knowledge and skills that were acquired, enabling them to be effective and competitive.

These activities were made possible by empowerment structures within the organisation, such as access to opportunities and resources. These structures enabled employees to activate these dynamic capabilities, underscoring empowerment's crucial role in empowering employees to navigate uncertainty. Uncertainty was not just a phase that resulted in fear and anxiety, but it became a transformational experience for some. The findings suggest that when empowerment structures are present, they allow employees to transform challenging periods into significant growth experiences. This aligns with Nie et al. (2023), who found that periods of uncertainty can create an environment for self-development and empowerment, allowing employees to develop new skills in periods of uncertainty.

Coping strategies used by employees to manage uncertainty.

As participants navigated the period of uncertainty and instability, the study found various coping mechanisms employed by different participants, underscoring how empowerment or

lack thereof shapes responses to periods of uncertainty and instability. These coping mechanisms ranged from adherence to existing policies and structures to adaptability and disengagement.

For some participants, the absence of guidance and clarity during periods of uncertainty prompted them to rely on existing policies and standard operating procedures to guide their actions. Monje-Amor (2019) identified access to information, such as knowledge about the policies of the organisation, as empowerment structures. One of the leading causes of uncertainty was the lack of access to information during periods of uncertainty and instability; one of the ways that employees sought to have stability and guidance was by tapping into the information that existed about conditions of service and job descriptions, which is information that guided employees on expectations, processes and roles. This finding reflects the inconsistencies within the organisation where, even in one dimension, it can be partially fulfilled.

By adhering to policies, job descriptions and conditions of service, employees maintained a sense of focus and stability in an ambiguous environment. This also highlights the multifaceted nature of empowerment, especially in an environment that consists of inconsistencies, partial fulfilment of some dimensions of specific empowerment structures and the absence of some. However, it underscores the value of the various empowerment structures in supporting employees.

Some participants showed adaptability in coping with the constantly changing environment that resulted in uncertainty and instability. Participants such as RP005 and RP007 described themselves as adaptable and flexible and showed a more positive attitude towards their work and their ability to respond to changes.

Echebiri (2020) et al. (2020) indicated that empowered employees have more self-efficacy and more significant opportunities for self-direction, which contributes to employees' well-being and positive attitudes. This supports the study's findings, where empowered participants could quickly adapt their work to the changing environment. RP007, who described not knowing how his day would go due to the uncertainty, could have a specific plan on what he wanted to achieve for that day, but things change, and he has to readjust. His description of how he does this shows an employee with autonomy over his work who, although he has no control over the external environment, finds a way to adjust his work. Nie et al. (2019) also support this by asserting that empowered employees can respond positively to organisational changes.

This differs from participants with low to moderate empowerment levels who responded by disengaging and detaching from the organisation. RP009 explained this as a self-protective

measure due to the impact of the periods of uncertainty on him. This is similar to participant RP014, who was disappointed with the initiatives and programs she implemented at work a few times. She decided to be no longer excited about anything but has a 'we will see when it happens' approach. RP004's sentiment that 'I stopped feeling a long time ago' echoes the words of someone disengaging from the organisation.

Rasheed et al. (2024) discussed that employees employ specific defensive approaches to cope with the threats posed by periods of change. The study found disengagement and detachment from the organisation and work as a way to cope with what was happening. Without access to information and support that provides direction, guidance, and clarity, it was difficult for employees to engage with the changes and display a positive attitude when there was a lack of information, support, autonomy and other dimensions needed to provide direction and stability.

Disengagement was particularly evident in participants who expressed a lack of management support and were left out of critical conversations and decisions, such as RP010, whose job title was changed without communication, which he indicates resulted in disengaging.

The range of coping mechanisms from the study illustrates how empowerment can enhance or hinder employees' resilience during periods of change in the organisation. Participants who felt empowered through access to information, job autonomy, and support from management showed more adaptability and flexibility in how they responded to changes. In contrast, participants without full access to empowerment structures disengaged from the organisation, while others sought direction and stability from existing procedures and processes.

This is consistent with the literature by Bhatti et al. (2021), emphasising the importance of supportive management and clear communication as critical in fostering adaptive coping mechanisms. From the findings, the organisation has systems to provide a foundation for empowerment with access to opportunities and information through policies and processes. The findings underscore the critical role that management plays in fostering empowerment.

6.2.4. Conclusion on Research Question 2

The findings for Research Question 2 revealed that periods of uncertainty, instability and volatility significantly impact employees' emotional and psychological well-being. How participants responded to these conditions varied depending on their empowerment levels, highlighting empowerment's role in shaping how employees cope with uncertainty.

For most of the participants, periods of uncertainty resulted in stress, anxiety, and fear, which is consistent with Rasheed et al. (2024), as they indicated the emotional and psychological toll that change has on employees. Bhatti et al. (2021) also emphasised the role of empowerment as a supportive structure for employees during periods of organisational change. The study found that participants with limited access to information and management support often struggled to manage the emotional toll of uncertainty, leading to disengagement or disconnection from the organisation as a self-protective mechanism. This disengagement was more evident in employees who felt excluded from decision-making processes or lacked direction on what they should be doing.

In answering this question, the study also found some complexities where, although specific dimensions of empowerment were absent, some were present, which helped employees navigate uncertainty. This is seen with participants such as RP003 and RP015, who, during this period, pursued further studies and focused on their self-development, which resulted in career advancement. This was made possible by having access to opportunities. So, while they might have experienced a lack of specific dimensions such as information, meaning, competence, etc, the availability of some dimensions resulted in their growth.

In this instance, although they had moderate empowerment levels due to the presence of some dimensions but the absence of others, they could deal with uncertainty better. Being able to grow also resulted in them displaying a more positive attitude and commitment towards their work. Through the presence of some empowerment structures, they responded to change by employing the activities of the dynamic capabilities framework of sensing, seizing and transforming.

Answers to Research Question 2 found that employees with higher empowerment levels, the minority participants, adapted better to uncertainty with no indication of uncertainty or fear of job security, possibly due to management support and information. Their autonomy also allowed them to direct their work and respond accordingly to changes.

As found in Research Question 1, the critical role managers play, as Jin & McDonald (2017) emphasised, was evidenced in creating a supportive work environment for employees. The findings also support Bhatti et al. (2021) findings of the critical role that information plays in providing clarity and guidance.

6.2.5. Research Question 3: How does the sense of employee empowerment contribute to organisational agility?

The study's findings reveal the impact of employee empowerment on organisational agility. In answering this question, the discussion focuses not only on organisational agility but will also incorporate employee agility. After all, Ludviga & Kalvina (2023) argue that organisational agility is tied to the agility of its members. By also looking at employee agility, the study provides an understanding of organisational agility.

There were no direct questions focusing on agility; insights into employee and organisational agility emerged from employees' responses about their reaction to change, and this was contrasted with the literature.

Adaptability

The study found that employees faced limitations in their adaptability when responding to organisational changes. Bureaucratic processes within the public sector emerged as a barrier restricting employees' ability to adapt quickly to changing demands. RP002 illustrates this with his experience of unique challenges brought by political shifts that required the committee to review the composition. Despite recognising the need for change, he did not have the power to restructure the committee without the intervention of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA). This example underscores how bureaucratic limitations hinder employee adaptability. Baran & Wonzny (2019) identified bureaucracy as a critical hindrance to organisational agility.

Adaptability is one of the elements of employee agility, as identified by Naqack & Chaouki (2023). This is defined as the capability for employees to 'seamlessly transition' (Naqack & Chaouki, 2023, p. 7) to adjust to changing requirements. Adaptability, however, relies on the presence of autonomy. When employees do not have the control or power to make decisions and changes in response to environmental changes, their adaptability capacity is reduced. The findings, therefore, reflect this where participants highlighted the constraints due to policies and procedures.

Autonomy emerged in multiple layers in the study. For some participants, autonomy was limited to their day-to-day tasks, as seen with RP015, who expressed frustration at having to constantly get approval before making decisions even though her role allowed her to make such decisions, to employees such as RP010, who experienced freedom with regards to how he performed his duties. Nie et al. (2019) highlighted that autonomy was a vital empowerment

element that fostered agility. Autonomy allows individuals to make adjustments that align with organisational goals.

Bhatti et al. (2021) indicate that agility requires flexibility and the authority to influence organisational structures and processes. This is difficult to achieve in the public sector, especially as evidenced in the study where policy changes rely on external bodies such as other spheres of government. Teece et al. (2020) argued for decentralising decision-making power to transform to meet the needs of the changing environment. The findings suggest that this task is not easy for public sector organisations.

Proactivity

The study found that employees' ability to be proactive is hampered in the organisation. This is even true for employees who are considered to be empowered. The period of uncertainty made it difficult to plan for possible changes as employees did not know what to expect because of the instability caused by the political shifts. RP007, who experienced most of the dimensions of both structural and psychological empowerment, indicated that he sometimes has plans set out on what he needs to work on, only for these to be changed on the day or hours before. Ludvig & Kalvina (2023) defined proactivity as the ability to anticipate changes and prepare in advance and described it as one of the dimensions of employee agility. The type of instability caused by political shifts made it difficult for participants to be proactive; however, the empowered participants responded better to this instability and uncertainty.

Responsiveness is one of the capabilities identified by Walter (2021) of agility. It not only refers to the ability to be proactive but also speaks to being able to react to changes. The engagement levels and positive attitude that empowered participants allowed them to respond more positively when drastic changes required them to readjust their plans, unlike other participants who expressed frustration. This supports the assertion that Naqach & Chaouki (2023) make that employees who are empowered are better able to deal with changes in a positive way.

The study also found that disempowered participants would observe potential environmental changes and identify how these would affect their respective units. Still, due to their perceived inability to contribute and make an input, they would keep quiet, affecting the unit's ability to be proactive in planning and preparing for the potential impact of the changes. This also shows disengagement on the part of employees. Disengagement affects an employee's ability to perform fully. This finding supports Monje-Amor (2019), who discussed the impact of empowerment on employee engagement and organisational performance. The study's

findings underscore how limited empowerment is a barrier to proactivity. When employees lack empowerment, such as the ability to influence the organisation and contribute to organisational responses during periods of change, they adopt a passive stance, which limits the organisation's ability to harness insights by employees on anticipated threats and opportunities.

Swiftness

Walter (2021) identified the ability to respond swiftly to changes as one of the essential aspects of organisational agility. The study found that employees' ability to act speedily is significantly constrained by factors such as lack of communication, lack of direction, and structural delays, to name a few. RP014 described how, following the COVID-19 pandemic, it took the team over six months to transition to remote work and become familiar with online tools such as Microsoft Teams. Similarly, RP011 highlighted delays in the procurement process following procedural changes that are not communicated, leading to mistakes and taking time to rectify. RP002 is also an example of the constraints in responding swiftly due to the need to consult with external stakeholders such as COGTA and SALGA. The current administration has been in effect for over two years, and the identified issues have not been resolved. Bureaucracy is found to be a barrier to the ability to respond swiftly.

Ludvig & Kalvina (2023) emphasise communication's critical role in enabling agility. The study has revealed lack of information is one of the biggest challenges that employees face, with most of the participants expressing frustration and even disconnecting from the organisation due to the lack of information. Lack of information has been identified as one factor contributing to disempowerment among participants. Ludviga & Kalvina (2023) argue that it is difficult for organisations to respond quickly when no clear direction is provided. This is evidenced by experiences such as those of RP004 and RP006, who have resorted to passively waiting for direction on what to do.

Learning

The ability to learn is one of the components that Walter (2021) identified as crucial for ensuring agility. As much as it is the ability to respond to changing learning swiftly, it is essential in fostering agility. Although from the study, there are systems in place for employees to be trained and focus on developing themselves regarding education, there was a lack identified in providing internal learning that enabled participants to respond to changes in the

environment, whether it is changes in policies or work requirements. This was identified as a barrier to employees responding to change effectively.

This is supported by Pulakos et al. (2019), who advocated for an environment that promotes learning and experimentation during periods of uncertainty. Some participants identified the political shifts as opportunities to learn what works, what could be done better, etc, but this is not reflected in the organisation. Part of what Pulakos et al. (2019) identify as contributing to agility is the platform created for employees to share ideas and try new approaches to foster agility.

Resilience

The research study found that most participants possessed qualities that made them resilient in responding to changes resulting from political shifts. Despite the challenges and experiences that most of the participants have encountered, they remained positive and hopeful and looked for ways to cope with the changes experienced.

Participants' experiences, such as RP013, are stories of resilience, showing people who have gone through tough times and were able to bring themselves out of this. Resilience is one of the elements that foster employee agility, as described by Ludviga & Kalvina (2023), who describe resilience as the ability to handle challenging situations effectively.

Resilience was found in most of the employees, even those with low to moderate levels of empowerment. Therefore, resilience was not a result of the organisation's empowerment structures, as some participants did not experience these, such as in the case of RP013.

This finding suggests that other factors contribute to resilience outside of external structures. An explanation for this could be in Baek-Kyoo et al. (2019), who highlighted other factors, such as individual characteristics and personal values, contributing to how employees feel and act towards their work. From the findings, the organisation comprises employees who possess the elements of employee agility, not necessarily due to the empowerment structures.

6.2.6. Conclusion on discussion for Research Question 3

The findings from Research Question 3 reveal the connection between employee empowerment and organisational agility. The study found that employee agility, which contributes to organisational agility, is influenced by empowerment structures. When empowered, employees are more adaptable and proactive and act swiftly in response to changes.

The study found several barriers that hampered employee agility, such as lack of communication, bureaucratic structures and insufficient autonomy. The ability of participants to be adaptable was limited by bureaucratic constraints such as policies and processes in the organisation. Even with empowered participants, proactivity was difficult due to the unstable nature of the changes and where the organisation finds itself. What was found necessary was how different participants viewed this instability, with those with levels of empowerment displaying a more positive and flexible attitude towards the instability.

As the study found, one of the critical elements to agility is swiftness in response, and the bureaucratic nature of the organisation makes it difficult to respond speedily to changes. Despite constraints, most participants were found to display qualities of resilience, which showed an internal drive to manage changes positively. This resilience was seen in employees who were empowered and those who were considered to have low empowerment. The findings by Baek-Kyoo et al. (2019) suggest that individual traits play a critical role in how employees act and feel towards their work, and this is not exclusive to empowerment.

6.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter 6 discusses the findings presented in Chapter 5 about existing literature. The findings reveal that empowerment is not merely a supportive function but a critical driver of employee engagement, motivation, and commitment towards the organisation.

The study found that structural empowerment is foundational in fostering an empowered workforce. Still, it is the consistency, accessibility, and quality of these empowerment structures that determine their effectiveness. For instance, participants with reliable access to information, autonomy, and supportive management reported feeling more engaged, motivated, and capable of adapting to change. These empowered employees demonstrated higher levels of proactivity and adaptability, which are essential traits for organisational agility.

In contrast, the findings also highlight the adverse impact of disempowerment on employee on employees and how they experienced uncertainty in the organisation. Participants who experienced gaps in communication, support, and autonomy frequently expressed frustration, disengagement, and a sense of helplessness in the face of organisational shifts. The study found that limited access to critical information and decision-making authority prevented these employees from contributing proactively, relegating them to a reactive stance that hindered the organisation's overall agility. These findings align with the literature and some of the conclusions from scholars such as Rasheed et al. (2019), who note that employees who feel

unsupported or excluded are more likely to disengage and adopt a passive approach, which ultimately undermines the organisation's ability to adapt swiftly to external pressures.

Moreover, the findings emphasise that empowerment extends beyond structural support to encompass psychological empowerment of employees' perceptions of their competence, impact, and self-worth within the organisation. Employees who felt their contributions were valued and had a clear sense of purpose displayed greater resilience and a positive outlook, even amidst uncertainty. Nie et al. (2023) support this observation, arguing that psychological empowerment fosters an intrinsic motivation that sustains employee engagement and well-being during periods of instability. The study found that participants who perceived their roles as meaningful and impactful were better equipped to withstand the stresses of change, highlighting the importance of aligning employee roles with personal and organisational purposes.

What emerged from the findings is the critical role of the support dimension of structural empowerment and the ability to be the driver for the rest of the dimensions. This identifies the manager's role in performing the support function. However, literature looks at the existence of all dimensions in ensuring empowerment; the support dimension can influence how much information employees have access to, the extent of access to opportunities that they have, and access to resources. From the study, the organisation has systems in place for opportunities such as subsidised education schemes and training aimed at training employees; what was missing, though that affected some of the participants' ability to navigate the shifts in the organisation, was specialised learning that identified individual needs of employees to be equipped with the tools to navigate these changes. Simple actions such as those expressed by RP004 and RP010, to name a few, have expressed the lack of workshops to equip employees with the changes and implications of these changes on them. These are areas that require the support dimension of empowerment.

Employees equipped with the skills and know-how to navigate organisational shifts would also have an increased sense of competence. The manager's role is to provide opportunities for employees to contribute towards the objectives of the respective units that participants are in. For most participants, there is a feeling of their contribution not being valued and an inability to contribute ideas on how to do things better—these influence dimensions such as meaning, self-determination and impact.

At the heart of all these dimensions is management's crucial role in ensuring that employees are given the tools required to do their work, fostering empowerment and equipping them with the necessary tools to navigate periods of uncertainty. In answering Research Question 2, it was evident that the lack of support hampered most participants' ability to navigate the periods

of turbulence in the organisation. Most of them highlighted the need for guidance, clarity and information to ease the feelings of uncertainty that resulted.

From the findings, the lack of support and the fear of the threats to participants' levels of stability resulted in them focusing on their survival and utilising some of the empowerment structures, such as opportunities and resources to develop themselves and move from the unit they were in as opposed to more empowered participants who because of management support during periods of uncertainty focused on helping the unit to navigate the periods of turbulence. This highlights the difference between individual agility resulting from participants sensing threats and deploying their dynamic capabilities to survive the threats instead of deploying capabilities towards organisational or unit goals, thereby influencing the ability of the unit to navigate the environmental shifts.

Another key finding is the role of individual traits in determining how employees respond to empowerment structures. While structural and psychological empowerment significantly influenced employee engagement and adaptability, individual factors such as personal resilience, internal motivation, and values also played a role. Participants with a strong sense of purpose and personal drive exhibited proactive coping strategies, viewing uncertainty as an opportunity for self-growth rather than merely a source of stress. This observation aligns with Baek-Kyoo et al. (2019), who argue that individual characteristics can shape how employees experience and respond to empowerment, underscoring that a one-size-fits-all approach to empowerment may not be sufficient. Organisations may benefit from tailoring empowerment strategies to accommodate their workforce's different personality traits and motivational drivers.

The chapter also highlights the barriers to empowerment and agility within public sector organisations, particularly the impact of bureaucratic structures and rigid policies. Bureaucracy was identified as a significant hindrance to adaptability and swift decision-making, with participants reporting that restrictive policies limited their autonomy and ability to respond effectively to change. Baran and Woznyj (2019) note that bureaucratic constraints are incredibly challenging in public sector organisations, where standardised processes often take precedence over flexibility. The study found that these structural barriers compromised employees' ability to be agile, as they usually lacked the authority to modify workflows or make quick decisions. This suggests that for public sector organisations to achieve true agility, it is necessary to reduce procedural bottlenecks and foster an environment where employees have the freedom and support to act swiftly and adaptively.

In summary, the discussions in Chapter 6 affirm findings from existing literature and emphasise that employee empowerment is a multidimensional construct that influences organisational

agility. Organisations must provide comprehensive empowerment structures to foster an agile workforce, including access to information, autonomy, supportive leadership, and growth opportunities. Additionally, fostering psychological empowerment by promoting a sense of competence, impact, and purpose among employees can further enhance their engagement and resilience. The findings underscore empowerment should not be viewed as a single intervention but as an integrated approach that aligns structural support with individual motivation and purpose; for public sector organisations, reducing bureaucratic barriers and enhancing communication channels are crucial to enabling a workforce that can respond proactively and swiftly to ever-evolving demands.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1. Introduction

The study aimed to explore the relationship between employee empowerment and organisational agility through the experiences of public sector employees. After an in-depth literature review on the two constructs identified, a research question was developed with three sub-questions. The main research question was: **How do employees' perceived level of empowerment impact their experiences during periods of uncertainty in a public sector organisation, and how does this influence organisational agility?**

The sub-questions were formulated as follows:

1. How do employees perceive their level of empowerment within the organisation, and how does this affect their attitude towards the organisation?
2. How do employees experience periods of uncertainty, instability, and volatility?
3. How does the sense of employee empowerment contribute to organisational agility?

These questions proved pertinent in understanding organisational agility in the public sector context. A phenomenological study was done, which focused on gaining deep insight into how employees in a public sector organisation experienced periods of uncertainty. Focusing on front-line employees and middle management allowed for insight into the experiences of employees responsible for service delivery. Today's organisations face the reality of operating in constantly changing environments that require agility to perform in these conditions (Ludviga & Kalvina, 2023). Dynamic capability served as a theoretical foundation for this study. Described as the ability of the organisation's capabilities to build, integrate, and reconfigure its resources to navigate turbulent environments (Teece et al., 1997), these were identified by El Idrissi et al. (2022) as critical in ensuring that organisations survive and thrive even in volatile environments.

The public sector is not exempted from these changing environments, with scholars such as Trivellato et al. (2021) arguing that the public sector is even more affected by unpredictable environments than the private sector. Despite that, limited work focuses on dynamic capabilities in the public sector context (Mazzucato et al., 2021). Choosing to conduct the study in a public sector organisation was intentional in understanding how public sector organisations deal with periods of uncertainty.

Mazzucato et al. (2021) highlighted the challenges the public sector faces affecting its ability to provide services to its citizens as mandated. Turbulent environments such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of a public sector that can navigate these environments (Mazuccato & Katel, 2020).

One of the ways that organisations navigate these environments is through being agile. Organisational agility was identified as a dynamic capability that allows the organisation to respond and adapt to environmental changes (Walter, 2021). Walter (2021) identified three categories contributing to organisational agility: agility enablers, capabilities, and dimensions. In all three categories, the importance of the workforce as an enabler, capability, and a dimension of agility emerged. With this in mind, the research focused on the workforce and how they can contribute to agility. Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) highlighted the importance of employees as a critical resource that organisations possess to help them achieve agility. Employee empowerment was identified in the literature as a contributor to organisational agility.

Previous studies such as those conducted by Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020), who have cited scholars such as Azizi Asl et al. (2015), Alzoubi et al. (2011) and Horabadi-e-Farahani and Salimi (2015) identified a positive correlation between employee empowerment and organisational agility. Studies conducted were quantitative, seeking to prove the existence of the relationship between the two constructs. With this background, this study sought to gather more profound insight into employees' experiences, what they consider to be the factors contributing to empowerment, and how this affects their experiences in turbulent times.

The study sought to understand this relationship by exploring how employees in a public sector organisation perceive their level of empowerment, how the empowerment affects how they navigate periods of uncertainty and how this affects organisational agility. Fifteen participants were identified through a purposive non-probability sampling method with a set criterion for selecting participants who would add value to the study. Through a snowball method, where research participants recommended other potential participants, the research was able to include a mix that was deemed satisfactory for providing insight and depth to the study. The research focused on understanding the lived experiences of employees and capturing their experiences and perceptions regarding employee empowerment and how it has impacted how they experienced periods of uncertainty within the organisation and how this affected their attitude towards the organisation and their ability to navigate these turbulent times and how these impacted on the organisation's agility. This was done with the principles of

phenomenological studies, centring on capturing participants' lived experiences (Bartholomew, 2021).

7.2. Research findings

The study confirmed a positive relationship between employee empowerment and agility, as Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) suggested. The study found that most participants exercise low to moderate levels of empowerment, with only a few considered fully empowered. As Monje-Amor et al. (2021) indicated, structural empowerment sets the foundation for psychological empowerment.

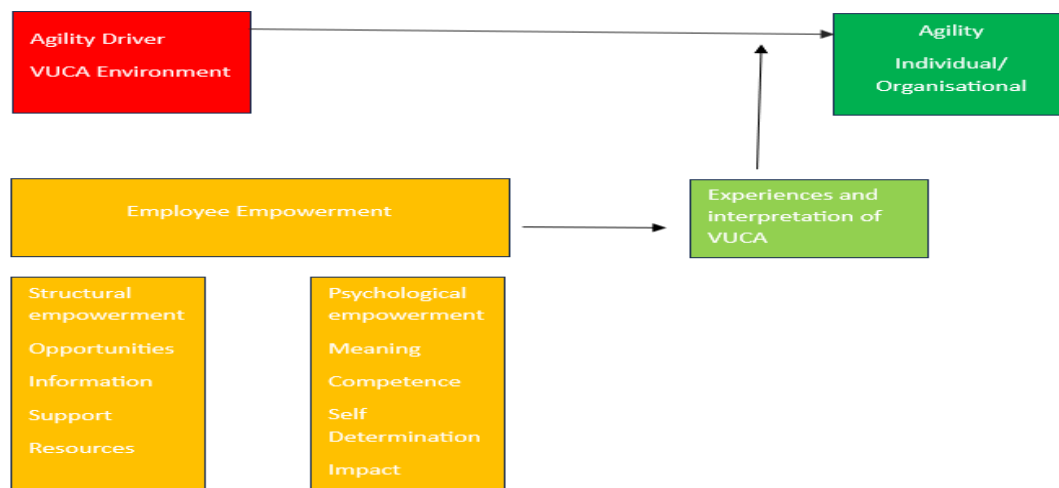
The study also found that empowerment levels impacted how employees experienced periods of uncertainty. Structural dimensions such as information and support were crucial and alleviated some of the feelings of uncertainty that emerged from experiencing these periods. The findings supported work by Scheepers & Swart (2020), who provided an understanding of the neurological impact of change and management's being aware of this as they help employees navigate change. Participants considered to have high empowerment levels were able to navigate these periods than those who were not empowered. This sense of empowerment impacted my ability to be proactive, respond swiftly to changes, learn, and be resilient.

The availability of structural (access to opportunities, access to information, resources and support) and psychological (meaning, competence, self-determination and impact) provided employees with the tools needed to navigate these turbulent periods. For employees to be agile and contribute to an agile organisation, they must be resilient, proactive and adaptable (Naqack and Chaouki (2023). These employees need to be engaged, motivated and committed to the organisation. Although literature such as Monje-Amor et al. (2019) identify the role of empowerment structures in factors such as employee engagement, motivation and commitment, the study found that other traits, such as personality and values, contribute to these. They further suggest that empowerment alone is not the only contributor to these.

Although this is so, the study found even if employees still maintain a positive attitude and are committed to the organisational goals without true empowerment, these do not necessarily contribute to organisational agility but instead result in employees turning inwards and developing their dynamic capabilities to deal with periods of uncertainty that presents a threat to themselves.

However, empowered employees can contribute to the organisation and focus not only on their survival but also on how the organisation can respond and adapt to the requirements of

the new environment. Although literature, i.e. Echebiri et al. (2020), highlight the existence of all structural dimensions in fostering empowerment, findings suggest that the support dimension of empowerment can be the gear that drives the other dimensions of empowerment and, therefore, be considered the foundation of empowerment. From the research findings, the following framework is suggested:



SUPPORT DIMENSION

Figure 8: Proposed Framework - The support dimension of employee empowerment as a driver for agility

In this framework, support is a foundational unifying gear that can power structural and psychological empowerment.

7.3. Theoretical contributions of the study

The study was interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of employees' experience during periods of uncertainty, how their level of empowerment influenced how they experienced these periods, and how this, in turn, impacted organisational agility. Previous studies such as those conducted by Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020), who have cited scholars such as Azizi Asl et al. (2015), Alzoubi et al. (2011) and Horabadi-e-Farahani and Salimi (2015) identified a positive correlation between employee empowerment and organisational agility. While these studies conducted quantitative studies to determine the relationship between employee empowerment and organisational agility, the study sought to discuss more than just the relationship but to gain insight into the lived experiences of

employees during periods of uncertainty and how empowerment contributes to not just agility but how employees navigate these periods of uncertainty.

Agility is a concept that organisations focus on due to the dynamic environments that they are faced with. An agile workforce emerges consistently in Walter's (2021) model of organisational agility. Defined as the 'ability of employees to respond and adapt to changing circumstances quickly' (Naqack & Chaouki, 2023, p. 2), an agile workforce is critical in organisations successfully responding to environmental changes. As a result, there is growing interest in enhancing the scope of knowledge regarding contributors to workforce agility and, subsequently, organisational agility (Naqack & Chaouki, 2023). Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) have also highlighted the need to further explore the relationship between employee empowerment and organisational agility.

This study sought to address the existing gap by contributing to the current knowledge regarding the impact of empowerment on agility. The study found that VUCA environments affect the organisation and employees, who are essential resources for navigating these changes. Employee empowerment was found to be first and foremost critical in employees being able to navigate VUCA environments, and the absence of empowerment structures hampers this effort to navigate periods of uncertainty and instability. Monje-Amor et al. (2021) cited the founding scholars of empowerment, Kanter (1977), who described the power in empowerment as 'the ability to get things done' (p.781). This is done through empowerment structures that provide employees access to opportunities, information, support and resources (Monje-Amor et al., 2021). Psychological empowerment structures give employees autonomy over their work, creating a sense of competence and meaning (Naqack & Chaouki, 2023).

Although the literature suggests ways that the presence of all dimensions contributes to employee empowerment, the study found that crucial empowerment structures need to be in place. When absent, the presence of other structures still results in employees experiencing moderate levels of empowerment. Access to support and information was crucial in providing employees with the power to navigate VUCA environments. In periods of uncertainty and instability, these two play an important role. This is specifically attributed to the presence of the support dimension. The study found that a strong support dimension has a cascading effect on the other dimensions. Therefore, the study makes the following assertion: The support dimension is the gear that drives the rest of the different dimensions of structural empowerment, thereby contributing towards workforce agility and organisational agility.

The study also contributes to understanding agility in the context of the public sector. Public sector institutions are big institutions riddled with bureaucracy, and factors hamper agility. The dynamic capabilities framework is suitable for this setting due to its scalability. Teece et al. (2020) pointed out the model's uniqueness in its ability to be applied at various levels. While it can be challenging to look at a huge organisation as the one in the study focusing on units, teams allow for the understanding of agility on this scale and how implementing change in small units can eventually make a difference in the entire organisation.

7.4. Recommendations for management and the organisation

While the researcher recognises the context that participants find themselves in as an environment that is highly regulated and legislated, from the study, there are actionable items that are within management control to foster an environment that promotes employee empowerment and subsequently contributes to the organisation and employees being better suited to respond to periods of uncertainty and instability.

7.4.1. Strengthen structural empowerment

From the findings, participants are aware of their environment and some of their control limitations. With this said, management could strengthen structural empowerment, especially concerning access to information and support. These are vital areas identified as missing and could contribute significantly to how employees experience periods of uncertainty and their level of empowerment.

The organisations already have foundational structural empowerment structures in place, such as access to opportunities through their various subsidised education programs and access to resources where most participants had access to tools of trade to perform their duties. What was consistently missing was access to information and support. Providing a clear and accessible platform for information empowers employees to know what is happening in the organisation. It can ease anxiety and fears associated with navigating periods of uncertainty and instability. Regular and consistent communication can help employees not lose touch with what is happening in the organisation.

The findings reveal that the support element is crucial in ensuring employees feel supported by their managers. Some participants mentioned that coaching is a box-ticking exercise that does not necessarily focus on employees' development and keeping in touch with how they are doing. This is a missed opportunity as coaching sessions can be used to check in with employees, show concern for their well-being, and guide employees' challenges. A

recommendation would be for management to include frequent check-ins and a discussion platform that enables employee engagement.

7.4.2. Create an environment that fosters psychological empowerment.

The study revealed that employees want more than a transactional relationship between them and the employer, where they get paid at the end of the month to provide a service. Employees are motivated by being part of the organisation and being able to contribute to the success of the organisation. Nie et al. (2023) have highlighted the critical role that job autonomy and meaning play in employees showing passion about their work and being able to contribute positively towards organisational goals. Management can create this environment by acknowledging achievement and contribution and seeing how their role contributes to achieving organisational goals. Although there is an acknowledgement of the bureaucratic nature of the public sector, management should encourage employees to assume autonomy in their work. Specific bottlenecks were created as experienced by RP006, where the manager centralised all decisions as unnecessary, resulting in erosion of trust and the employee detaching from what was happening in the unit.

There are areas identified where employees can make confident decisions independently and take ownership and responsibility for their work. This also contributes to building trust with employees where employees feel trusted to perform their functions, thereby increasing their competency levels and confidence.

7.4.3. Managers to tailor-make empowerment strategies.

From the study, the different personality traits were evident in how these influence things such as engagement, motivation, resilience, and adaptability. The findings suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to empowerment doesn't necessarily work, and managers need to be proactive in understanding members of their team and adjusting empowerment strategies to fit these. Although this seems like an added responsibility and a difficult task, the reality is that leading and managing a team requires understanding and insight into the people being led. Monje-Amor et al. (2019) referenced a seminal study by (Bass, 1990, 1999), who indicated that 'Supportive leadership occurs when the leader expresses concern for subordinates, takes into account followers' individual needs regarding their personal and professional development, provides individualised support and acts as mentors' (p. 2). Understanding these needs can ensure that the leader knows the level of autonomy required by each employee and approach them accordingly.

7.4.4. Invest in training and development for managers.

Jin and McDonald (2017) emphasise that managers are critical in ensuring the workforce is engaged. This is supported by other scholars like Monje-Amor et al. (2019), who highlight how crucial managers are for the organisation's success. From the study's findings, management in the organisation needs training and focused development on providing support and guidance for employees, especially during periods of uncertainty and instability. Responding to the VUCA environment requires possession and activation of dynamic capabilities. The business-as-usual approach would not work in an environment that requires the ability to transform to respond to these changes. From the findings, this ability is lacking, leading to delays in making decisions and adapting to the changes. Even with the limitations on control, unavoidable delays, such as those expressed by participants, such as RP014, where to put a notice to communities informing them of changes in office address can be avoided. Training programs focused on developing an agile mindset and leading in times of uncertainty and instability will improve the organisation's capacity to respond to dynamic environments.

7.5. Delimitations and limitations of the research

Akanle et al. (2020) describe research study limitations as 'characteristics inherent in the research methodology or design that change the meaning and interpretation of the research results' (p. 109). The researcher consciously attempted to ensure the study was conducted, considering the quality control measures identified in Chapter 4. Although this is so, certain limitations are associated with this research study. Akanle et al. (2020) argue that a study's limitations do not indicate a lack of planning or weakness in how the researcher conducted the study. Still, limitations are present in all studies conducted.

The researcher's inexperience in conducting research could have affected the depth and accuracy of the data collected and how it was analysed and interpreted. Even after following the processes outlined in the literature on conducting phenomenological research and getting guidance from the supervisor, the quality of the study could still be compromised. Two pilot interviews were conducted to reduce the impact, which enabled the researcher to amend the interview guide to address the issues that arose from the pilot interview.

Although the researcher strove to be impartial and objective in conducting the study, the dual role of both an employee in the department and a researcher, as some of the participants

engaged with the researcher with the understanding of prior knowledge of what was happening within the department, possibly influenced participants' responses. The researcher is aware of the management position held in the department, which may also affect how some of the participants respond. The researcher made a great effort to be mindful of such restrictions, to make participants comfortable and assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and to remain objective during the data collection and analysis process.

The timing of the study is another limitation, as the survey was conducted during a time when there was uncertainty regarding possible political changes, which eventually happened when key political positions changed following the mayor's resignation, which had a cascading effect. This uncertainty could have also skewed participants' responses as this was an issue on their minds during the study.

Although confidentiality was assured and assurance that there was approval from the Head of Department to conduct the interview, there was insufficient time to establish rapport with most of the participants, with some hesitant to share honest views and experiences. This was seen in participants such as RP008, who were initially reluctant to share openly. The researcher was able to pick this up due to the face-to-face nature of the interview. The nonverbal cues allowed the researcher to pick up on discomfort. They could take steps to provide further reassurance, even referring to the interview as a conversation instead of the interview in instances where participants seemed uncomfortable.

The study was conducted on a single department within a specific public sector organisation. The department that was the focus of the study was the Legislature Department. The changes described by most participants could generally only be found in that department as it deals with the political aspects of the organisation. Even though critical events occurred in the past five years, such as COVID-19, these were hardly mentioned as the political instability affected most participants. Within the same organisation but focusing on a different department, the events considered to cause uncertainty and instability would have possibly been described differently.

The limitations suggest that while valuable insight can be gained from the data on organisational agility and employee empowerment in a public sector organisation, this insight

should be interpreted while considering the above limitations. The researcher made a great effort to manage these limitations to ensure the quality of the study.

7.6. Suggestions for future research

A suggestion for future research is to conduct a mixed-method approach to assess empowerment levels and the agility of the public sector organisation under study. While the phenomenological approach provided deep insight into the participants' experiences, a mixed method approach would add rigour by establishing empowerment using validated measurement scales. This would allow for a clearer and more consistent assessment of empowerment and validation of what scientifically is considered low, moderate or high levels of empowerment across all participants. Quantitative studies by Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) have shown a positive correlation between employee empowerment and organisational agility. A mixed-method approach, however, would build on these findings by offering quantitative measurements and the rich insight necessary to understand employees' unique experiences.

Scholars such as Echebiri et al. (2020) argued that structural empowerment is achieved when employees have access to all four dimensions: opportunities, information, support and resources. These empowerment structures contribute to employees' engagement, motivation and commitment. The research findings found that some empowerment structures, even though some are absent, still contribute to engagement, motivation and commitment. Future research can, therefore, look at comparative studies between the various empowerment structures, further clarifying which aspects of empowerment have the most influence of the three factors on organisational agility.

Lastly, management and leadership emerged as major contributing factors to how employees perceived their levels of empowerment and experienced periods of uncertainty. Monje-Amor et al. (2019) explored the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement with employee empowerment as a mediator. Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020) explored corporative management as a mediator for empowerment. In the study context, it would be insightful to learn what management styles contributed to the participant's high levels of empowerment compared to others. Exploration of leadership styles and practices that foster a culture of empowerment, thereby fostering agility, will be insightful to existing knowledge on the phenomenon being studied.

7.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has found employee empowerment impacts how employees navigate periods of uncertainty and instability. Structural and psychological empowerment dimensions contribute to how employees process the uncertain periods and what they mean. They can make sense of the changes occurring when they are provided with information, guidance, determination, and clarity on their questions. Their sense of competence and self-determination increases when equipped with the tools to navigate these. Employees considered more empowered were more secure in their roles and contributed to finding solutions for their respective units to respond to the changes brought on. The study added to findings by scholars such as Asgarnezhad Nouri & Mir Mousavi (2020), who found that employee empowerment contributed to organisational agility. Besides confirming the relationship between these two constructs, it has added to the knowledge of employee empowerment and its critical role in promoting organisational agility, especially in the public sector. The interviews with participants show that environments comprising volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), as discussed by Baran & Wonzyi (2020), are experienced in the public sector. Although the VUCA environment shared by the participants was a result of internal shifts, this did not mean that the organisation did not need to adjust and adapt to these environments.

Through a phenomenological approach, the study gained insight into employees' experiences, how these environmental shifts affected them, and their sense of safety and security. Through this insight, it was able to highlight the role of empowerment as a support structure for navigating these shifts and how the absence of these structures impacts on creating an agile workforce that is key as an agility enabler, agility capability and agility dimension (Walter, 2021), all three categories that contribute towards organisational agility.

Although the study does not seek to generalise the findings to all public sector organisations, it does offer valuable insight into the empowerment-agility conversation. The support dimension emerged from the research as a foundational gear that can drive the other empowerment dimensions. By ensuring a solid support dimension, organisations can improve efforts to foster empowerment, which scholars such as Monje-Amor et al. (2019) emphasise contributes to having an engaged, motivated workforce with a positive attitude towards their work. These are important as employees deal with periods of uncertainty. Future research could explore the support dimension as pivotal to empowerment and ensuring organisational agility.

REFERENCE LIST

- Akanle, O., Ademuson, A. O., & Shittu, O. S. (2020). Scope and Limitation of the Study in Social Research. *Contemporary Issues in Social Research*, 105–114.
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Olamide-Shittu-2/publication/345136333_Scope_and_Limitation_of_Study_in_Social_Research/links/5fb7a610458515b79755f6b4/Scope-and-Limitation-of-Study-in-Social-Research.pdf
- Ali Salahat, M. (2021). Employee Empowerment, Knowledge Management and Decision-making Agility; Mediating Role of Extra-role Performance. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(7).
<https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v11-i7/10327>
- Asgarnezhad Nouri, B., & Mir Mousavi, M. (2020). Effect of Cooperative Management on Organizational agility with the Mediating Role of employee empowerment in the public transportation sector. *Cuadernos de Gestión*, 20(2), 15–46.
<https://doi.org/10.5295/cdg.170873ba>
- Baird, K., Tung, A., & Su, S. (2020). Employee empowerment, performance appraisal quality and performance. *Journal of Management Control*, 31, 451–474.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00187-020-00307-y>
- Baran, B. E., & Woznyj, H. M. (2020). Managing VUCA. *Organizational Dynamics*, 50(2), 100787. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2020.100787>
- Barrutia, J. M., Echebarria, C., Aguado-Moralejo, I., Apaolaza-Ibáñez, V., & Hartmann, P. (2022). Leading smart city projects: Government dynamic capabilities and public value creation. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 179, 121679.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2022.121679>
- Bartholomew, T. T., Joy, E. E., Kang, E., & Brown, J. (2021). A choir or cacophony? Sample sizes and quality of conveying participants' voices in phenomenological research. *Methodological Innovations*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20597991211040063>

- Bell, E., Bryman, A., & Harley, B. (2019).). *Business Research Methods. (2nd Int. Ed.)*. Oxford University Press.
- BHATTI, Q. A., AHMAD, M. J., AKRAM, M., & AHMAD, R. (2021). Investigating the role of transformation leadership on Public sector employee's job satisfaction during Covid-19: The mediating role of employee Empowerment. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government*, 27(4). <https://doi.org/10.47750/cibg.2021.27.04.012>
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches (2nd ed)*. Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Drechsler, W., & Kattel, R. (2020). Debate: The developed civil servant—providing agility and stability at the same time. *Public Money & Management*, 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2020.1729522>
- Echebiri, C., Amundsen, S., & Engen, M. (2020). Linking Structural Empowerment to Employee-Driven Innovation: The Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment. *Administrative Sciences*, 10(3), 42. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci10030042>
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Martin, J. A. (2000). Dynamic capabilities: what are they? *Strategic Management Journal*, 21(10-11), 1105–1121.
- El Idrissi, M., El Manzani, Y., Ahi Maatalah, W., & Lissaneddine, Z. (2022). Organizational crisis preparedness during the COVID-19 pandemic: an investigation of dynamic capabilities and organizational agility roles. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis, ahead-of-print*(ahead-of-print). <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoa-09-2021-2973>
- Fernani, A., Hines, A., Lanteri, A., & Esposito, M. (2020, September 25). *Corporate Foresight In An Ever-Turbulent Era*. The European Business Review; Business Review. file:///C:/Users/30070128/OneDrive%20-%20City%20of%20Joburg/Desktop/Research/Used%20literature/Corporate%20Foresight%20In%20An%20Ever-Turbulent%20Era%20-%20The%20European%20Business%20Review.html

- Furnival, J., Boaden, R., & Walshe, K. (2019). A dynamic capabilities view of improvement capability. *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, 33(7/8), 821–834.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/jhom-11-2018-0342>
- Fusch, P., & Ness, L. (2015). Are We There Yet? Data Saturation in Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408–1416. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2281>
- Gong, Y., Wu, Y., Huang, P., Yan, X., & Luo, Z. (2020). Psychological Empowerment and Work Engagement as Mediating Roles Between Trait Emotional Intelligence and Job Satisfaction. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00232>
- Gravetter, F. J., & Forzano, L.-A. B. (2009). *Research Methods for the Behavioral Sciences* (3rd ed.). Cengage.
- Groenewald, T. (2004). A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(31).
http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf
- Ilmudeen, A., Bao, Y., Alharbi, I. M., & Zubair, N. (2021). *Revisiting dynamic capability for organizations' innovation types Does it matter for organizational performance in China?* Emerald Publishing Limited. DOI 10.1108/EJIM-06-2019-0144
- Ivanova, M., & von Scheve, C. (2019). Power through empowerment? The managerial discourse on employee empowerment. *Organization*, 27(6), 135050841985570.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508419855709>
- Jabri, M. A. A., Shaloh, S., Shakhoor, N., Haddoud, M., & Obeidat, B. Y. (2024). The Impact of Dynamic Capability on Enterprise Agility: The Intervening Roles of Digital Transformation and IT Alignment. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 100266. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joitmc.2024.100266>
- Jin, M. H., & McDonald, B. (2016). Understanding Employee Engagement in the Public Sector: The Role of Immediate Supervisor, Perceived Organizational Support, and Learning Opportunities. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 47(8), 881–897. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074016643817>

- Joo, B.-K. (Brian), Bozer, G., & Ready, K. J. (2019). A dimensional analysis of psychological empowerment on engagement. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 6(3), 186–203. <https://doi.org/10.1108/joepp-09-2018-0069>
- Kanjanakan, P., Wang, P. Q., & Kim, P. B. (2023). The empowering, the empowered, and the empowerment disparity: A multilevel analysis of the integrated model of employee empowerment. *Tourism Management*, 94, 104635. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104635>
- Khaliq, A. (2020). Relationship of employee training, employee empowerment, team work with job satisfaction. *Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, 7(2), 185–198. [https://doi.org/10.46662/jass-vol7-iss2-2020\(185-198\)](https://doi.org/10.46662/jass-vol7-iss2-2020(185-198))
- Lee, O.-K. (Daniel), Sambamurthy, V., Lim, K. H., & Wei, K. K. (2015). How Does IT Ambidexterity Impact Organizational Agility? *Information Systems Research*, 26(2), 398–417. <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.2015.0577>
- Legislature Department Business Plan*. (2020).
- Lin, Y., & Wu, L.-Y. (2014). Exploring the role of dynamic capabilities in firm performance under the resource-based view framework. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(3), 407–413. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.12.019>
- Ludviga, I., & Kalvina, A. (2023). Organizational Agility During Crisis: Do Employees' Perceptions of Public Sector Organizations' Strategic Agility Foster Employees' Work Engagement and Well-being? *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10672-023-09442-9>
- Mazzucato, M., & Kattel, R. (2020). COVID-19 and public-sector capacity. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 36(1). <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/graa031>
- Mbhele, S., & De Beer, E. (2022). Achieving employee engagement through effective internal communication. *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa*, 40(2), 153–182. <https://doi.org/10.36615/jcssa.v40i2.1315>
- Mohammad Faraz Naim, Sahai, S., & Varun Elembilassery. (2023). Does empowering leadership enhance employee agility? A serial mediation model. *Evidence-Based*

HRM, 12(3). <https://doi.org/10.1108/ebhrm-08-2022-0197>

Monje Amor, A., Abeal Vázquez, J. P., & Faíña, J. A. (2020). Transformational leadership and work engagement: Exploring the mediating role of structural empowerment.

European Management Journal, 38(1), 169–178.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2019.06.007>

Monje Amor, A., Xanthopoulou, D., Calvo, N., & Abeal Vázquez, J. P. (2021). Structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, and work engagement: A cross-country study. *European Management Journal*, 39(6).

Naqach, T., & Chaouki, F. (2023). Exploring the power of psychological empowerment in boosting workforce agility in SMEs. *Zenodo (CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research)*, 4(5-2).

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8388142>

Nie, T., Tian, M., Cai, M., & Qiao, Y. (2023). Job Autonomy and Work Meaning: Drivers of Employee Job-Crafting Behaviors in the VUCA Times. *Behavioural Sciences*, 13(6), 493–493.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13060493>

Nilsen, P., Schildmeijer, K., Ericsson, C., Seing, I., & Birken, S. (2019). Implementation of change in health care in Sweden: a qualitative study of professionals' change responses. *Implementation Science*, 14(1). [https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-019-0902-](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-019-0902-6)

6

Nowacka, A., & Rzemieniak, M. (2021). The Impact of the VUCA Environment on the Digital Competences of Managers in the Power Industry. *Energies*, 15(1), 185.

Panda, A., & Sahoo, C. K. (2021). Work–life balance, retention of professionals and psychological empowerment: an empirical validation. *European Journal of Management Studies*, 26(2/3), 103–123.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/ejms-12-2020-0003>

Phillips-Pula, L., Strunk, J., & Pickler, R. H. (2011). Understanding Phenomenological Approaches to Data Analysis. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, 25(1), 67–71.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2010.09.004>

Pulakos, E. D., Kantrowitz, T., & Schneider, B. (2019). What leads to organizational agility:

It's not what you think. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 71(4),

305–320. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000150>

- Rasheed, A. T., Atta, N., & Sohali, T. (2024). Employees' behaviours as compliance, resistance, and their relationship with the professional quality of life while facing organisational change. *International Journal of Studies in Psychology*, 4(2), 16–21. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijspys.v4i2.1162>
- Saeed, I., Khan, J., Zada, M., Ullah, R., Vega-Muñoz, A., & Contreras-Barraza, N. (2022). Towards Examining the Link Between Workplace Spirituality and Workforce Agility: Exploring Higher Educational Institutions. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, Volume 15, 31–49. <https://doi.org/10.2147/prbm.s344651>
- Saunders, M. N. K., & Townsend, K. (2016). Reporting and Justifying the Number of Interview Participants in Organization and Workplace Research. *British Journal of Management*, 27(4), 836–852. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12182>
- Saunders, M., & Lewis, P. (2018). *Doing research in business and management an essential guide to planning your project* (2nd ed.). Harlow Pearson.
- Scheepers, C. B., & Swart, S. (2020). *Change Leadership in Emerging Markets*. Springer International Publishing.
- Teece, D., Brown, K., Alves, P., Mthombeni, M., & Mondliwa, P. (2020). *Firm-Level Capabilities: The Missing Link in South African Industrial Growth Strategy*.
- Teece, D. J. (2018a). Business models and dynamic capabilities. *Long Range Planning*, 51(1), 40–49. Sciencedirect. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2017.06.007>
- Teece, D. J. (2018b). Dynamic capabilities as (workable) management systems theory. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 24(3), 359–368. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2017.75>
- Teece, D. J. (2022). The Evolution of the Dynamic Capabilities Framework. *FGF Studies in Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, 113–129. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-11371-0_6
- Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). Dynamic Capabilities and Strategic Management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(7), 509–533.

[https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0266\(199708\)18:7%3C509::AID-SMJ882%3E3.0.CO;2-Z](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199708)18:7%3C509::AID-SMJ882%3E3.0.CO;2-Z)

The complexity of government in the GCR | State of Gauteng City Region. (2024).

Unomena.net. <http://2013.legacy.gcro.unomena.net/governance/complexity-government-gcr>

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. (1996).

Tripathi, P. M., Srivastava, S., Singh, L. B., Kapoor, V., & Solanki, U. (2021). A JD-R perspective for enhancing engagement through empowerment: A study on Indian hotel industry. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 46, 12–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.11.007>

Trivellato, B., Martini, M., & Cavenago, D. (2020). How Do Organizational Capabilities Sustain Continuous Innovation in a Public Setting? *The American Review of Public Administration*, 51(1), 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074020939263>

Walter, A.-T. (2020). Organizational agility: ill-defined and Somewhat confusing? a Systematic Literature Review and Conceptualization. *Management Review Quarterly*, 71, 343–391. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-020-00186-6>

Weir, A. (2017, December 7). *The biggest danger is to act with yesterday's logic*. Business News. <https://www.businessnews.com.au/article/The-biggest-danger-is-to-act-with-yesterday-s-logic>

Zahra, S. A., Petricevic, O., & Luo, Y. (2022). Toward an action-based view of dynamic capabilities for international business. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 53(53), 583–600. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-021-00487-2>

Zitkiene, R., & Deksnys, M. (2018). Organizational Agility Conceptual Model. *Montenegrin Journal of Economics*, 14(2), 115–129. <https://doi.org/10.14254/1800-5845/2018.14-2.7>

Zollo, M., & Winter, S. G. (2002). Deliberate Learning and the Evolution of Dynamic Capabilities. *Organization Science*, 13(3), 339–351. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.13.3.339.2780>

Research Instrument – Interview guide

Biographical Information

Gender:

Age:

Position:

Number of years' experience:

Qualification level

Introduction:

1. Could you describe any notable unexpected changes in your work environment and their impact on your department and your role specifically?
2. What factors or events do you think have played a part in initiating or driving these changes?

Body:

3. How have these changes affected your work, and how have you dealt with them?
4. Have there been any efforts to manage these changes effectively and encourage your input?
5. To what extent do you feel your contributions have had an influence on the outcomes of these changes?
6. How have these changes shaped your overall work experience within the organization?
7. In your experience and knowledge, how effectively has management handled the changes that have taken place?

Conclusion:

8. Considering these changes, how do you currently feel about your work?
9. If given the opportunity, what would you suggest be done differently to better manage these changes?

10. In your view, how has the change management process affected your perceptions and attitudes toward your work?

Research Instrument – Interview guide

Identifying Information

Region:

Gender:

Position:

Number of years' experience:

Introduction:

1. Can you describe any unforeseen/unpredictable changes in the environment that have affected your organization over the past 5-10 years?
2. What factors or events do you believe have contributed to or driven these changes?
3. How have these changes impacted your department and your specific role?
4. How have these changes influenced your current feelings about your work?

Body:

5. How has management or your line manager handled these changes to encourage your input?
6. Do you feel that your contributions are valued and influence how the department navigates these changes?

Conclusion:

7. If you had the chance, what suggestions would you offer to improve the management of these changes?

INFORMED CONSENT TO CONDUCT INTERVIEW

I am conducting research on '**Employee experience during organisational change in the public sector: The impact of employee empowerment on organisational agility**'. Our interview is expected to last 45-60 minutes and aims to explore your perspectives on employee empowerment and its role in shaping organisational agility during times of change. By sharing your insights, you will provide invaluable contributions to our research, which seeks to enhance our understanding of these crucial factors in the context of public sector organisations. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have given permission for:

- The interview is to be recorded and transcribed.
- Verbatim quotations from the interview are to be used in the report, provided they are not identified with your name or that of your organisation.
- The data to be used as part of a report that will be publicly available once the examination process has been completed; and
- All data to be reported and stored without identifiers.

Should you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name :

Email :

Phone :

Research Supervisor :

Email :

Phone :

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

ANNEXURE D

Grouping codes

Sub-research Question 1

Topics	Categories	Sub-Categories	Codes
Empowerment	Structural Empowerment	Opportunities	Lack of clarity in new policy implementation Left to figure it out Lack of workshops to align with new priorities
		Information	Lack of communication and feedback channels. Reliance on rumours due to lack of official communication. Importance of communication during periods of uncertainty.
		Support	Lack of trust between employees and management. Supportive leadership providing clarity and stability. Employees' perspective on management support.
		Resources	Employees feeling unsupported due to insufficient resources. Lack of tools of trade. Emotional disengagement caused by insufficient support from management.
	Psychological Empowerment	Meaning	Employees driven by belief in truth and integrity Desire for meaningful contribution. Employee's attitude towards work as an opportunity to grow and learn.
		Competence	Recognition of the need for self-improvement and skill acquisition. Employees' perspective on their level of adaptability in work flow.

ANNEXURE D

			Employees leveraging their skills and adaptability to cope with challenges.
		Self-Determination	Employee autonomy in decision-making. Managerial trust in employees. Employee perception of their own ability to navigate uncertainty.
		Impact	Innovation and process improvement as a result of employee contribution. Employees' suggestions being acknowledged and utilized. Lack of empowerment leading to perceived ineffectiveness in contributing meaningfully.
Impact of Empowerment Levels	Attitude	Engagement	Emotional disengagement from work. Employees feeling unappreciated due to their suggestions not being acknowledged. Platforms for employee engagement boosting morale and connectivity.
		Motivation	Employees driven by a larger purpose and alignment with organizational goals. Demotivation caused by exclusion from decision-making processes. Employees' self-motivation as a coping mechanism during instability.
		Commitment	Employees' positive attitude towards work despite challenges. Emotional disengagement from the organization due to lack of trust.

ANNEXURE D

			Employees' desire for inclusion in decision-making to foster loyalty.
--	--	--	---

Sub-research Question No. 2

Theme	Category	Subcategories	Codes
Feelings of Uncertainty	Factors contributing to feelings of uncertainty	Uncertainty about job security	Stress stemming from job insecurity. Anxiety triggered by job insecurity. Fear about job security. Prolonged uncertainty leads to distress. The uncertainty caused by rumours.
		Uncertainty about the direction of the organisation	Political leadership changes leading to instability and uncertainty. High turnover leading to lack of continuity. Lack of organizational direction. Lack of clarity in new policy implementation.
		Changing roles and responsibilities	Role ambiguity due to frequent changes in leadership. Employee facing uncertainty due to responsibilities being taken away. Loss of continuity in projects and shifting priorities. Unexpected changes in work focus.
		Management & Communication	Ineffective communication during periods of change. Lack of feedback mechanisms in the unit. Division between management and employees. Lack of trust between employees and management.
	Impact of experiencing uncertainty	Emotional distress & mental health	Emotional disengagement from the organisation. Demotivation from lack of inclusion in decision-making.

ANNEXURE D

			Anxiety and stress due to job insecurity and instability. Emotional strain caused by leadership changes.
		Uncertainty as a driver for personal growth	Resilience is built through adversity. Recognition of the need for self-improvement and skill acquisition. Employees' adaptability to uncertainty fosters growth.
	Coping strategies used by employees to manage uncertainty	Reliance on existing systems and policies	Coping through reliance on informal processes and personal networks. Employees leverage previous experiences to navigate instability. Use of existing frameworks to handle ambiguity.
		Adaptability & flexibility	Employees adapting to uncertainty through self-motivation. Flexibility in work approach amidst changes. Employees developing new competencies in response to uncertainty.
		Detachment from organisation	Employees coping through compartmentalisation. Emotional detachment as a response to instability. Employees experiencing disconnection from organisational goals and vision.

Sub Research Question 3

Topic	Theme	Categories	Codes
Empowerment and Organisational Agility	Adaptability	Ability to adjust to changes	Employees responding effectively to unexpected organisational changes. Capacity for employees to adapt quickly to new work environments. Teams showing resilience in overcoming changes in priorities.

ANNEXURE D

			Demonstrating flexibility in work patterns during periods of transition.
		Adaptive decisions making	Decision-making driven by data and situational awareness. Employees adjusting decisions based on new insights or changing circumstances. Proactive engagement in reshaping workflows to align with new organizational needs.
	Proactivity	Sensing ability	Employees recognizing and acting on emerging trends in their roles. Awareness of environmental shifts influencing work processes. Anticipating challenges and addressing them before they escalate.
		Ability to take initiative	Employees proposing solutions for process improvements. Taking ownership of tasks beyond immediate responsibilities. Voluntary leadership within collaborative teams.
		Innovation and creative problem-solving	Employees developing novel approaches to address organizational challenges. Brainstorming sessions resulting in out-of-the-box ideas. Leveraging technology or alternative tools for operational efficiency.
	Engagement & commitment	Engagement with organisational objectives	Alignment between personal goals and organizational mission. Consistent participation in organizational strategy meetings and planning.

ANNEXURE D

			Employees actively contributing to long-term organizational objectives.
		Attitude towards work	High levels of morale leading to better productivity. Positive employee perception of their role in achieving organizational success. Sustained enthusiasm in challenging projects, showcasing dedication.



CITY OF JOHANNESBURG
METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

COUNCIL LEGISLATURE

4th Floor, Council Chamber Wing
158 Civic Boulevard, Braamfontein
South Africa, 2000
www.joburg.org.za

PO Box 1049
Johannesburg
2017

kgomotsomot@joburg.org.za
andileg@joburg.org.za

Tel +27 (0) 11 407 7480
Cell +27 (0) 83 993 0106

TO : WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**FROM : MR ANDILE GOBINCA
ACTING SECRETARY TO COUNCIL**

DATE : 27 JUNE 2024

**SUBJECT : AUTHORISATION FOR RESEARCH IN MASTERS OF
PHILOSOPHY IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

Dear Research Participant,

Kindly note that **Mpho Thelma Masipa** is conducting research as part of her **Master of Philosophy in Business Management**, specializing in Corporate Strategy. I hereby grant permission for Ms. Masipa to conduct research on the topic, "Employee Experience During Organizational Change in the Public Sector: The Impact of Employee Empowerment on Organizational Agility." This research will involve collecting data through interviews with approximately 15-20 employees in the Legislature Department, over a period not exceeding three months following acquiring ethical clearance.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and the principle of informed consent must be applied to each participant involved in the data collection process. The researcher must protect the identities of the organization and the individuals involved by keeping this information confidential in any stored data, reports, or publications resulting from this research.

As the duly authorized person I grant permission granted by an authorized individual.

Kind regards,

Andile Gobinca
Acting Secretary to Council
City of Johannesburg

GIBS ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION FORM 2024/25

G. APPROVALS FOR/OF THIS APPLICATION

When the applicant is a student of GIBS, the applicant must please ensure that the supervisor and co-supervisor (where relevant) has signed the form before submission

STUDENT RESEARCHER/APPLICANT:

29. I affirm that all relevant information has been provided in this form and its attachments and that all statements made are correct.

Student Researcher’s Name in capital letters: [REDACTED]

Date: 06 Jul 2024

Supervisor Name in capital letters: PROF. JOHAN OLIVIER

Date: 07 Jul 2024

Co-supervisor Name in capital letters:

Date: 06 Jul 2024

Note: GIBS shall do everything in its power to protect the personal information supplied herein, in accordance to its company privacy policies as well the Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013. Access to all of the above provided personal information is restricted, only employees who need the information to perform a specific job are granted access to this information.

Decision:

Approved

REC comments:

Approved

Date: 08 Jul 2024