

**Intended and unintended outcomes from strategy implementation activities by  
middle managers in State-Owned Entities.**

26418241

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 (Corporate Strategy).

24 November 2025

## **ABSTRACT**

South Africa (SA) faces significant challenges, including rising unemployment, high inequalities, widespread poverty, and stagnant economic growth. To address these challenges, the government has established State Owned Entities (SOEs), which are wholly owned and operated by the government. SOEs in South Africa drive the implementation of the large-scale national priorities that the private sector cannot deliver at the required scale. These include energy security, efficient logistics, industrial growth, and economic competitiveness. For each SOE to deliver on these priorities, they develop a set of strategic priorities to be achieved. The implementation of these strategies is monitored through the National Development Plan (NDP). A decade since its launch, the NDP has not yielded the desired outcomes, with entities such as Eskom and Transnet far from achieving their strategic goals.

These failures in achieving the NDP goals suggest that the problem lies not in strategy formulation but in strategy execution. The study aimed to explore the strategic outcomes of strategy implementation activities through the lens of middle managers in SOEs. This is because middle managers in these SOEs are central to implementing these strategies, as the Top Management Team (TMT) delegates to them to operationalise within their teams and translate them into day-to-day activities.

Given the SOEs' important role, understanding how middle managers influence strategy implementation within them is critical. Based on 15 semi-structured interviews with SOE middle managers, the study investigated how their strategy implementation activities relate to intended and unintended strategic outcomes. The research found that middle managers experience challenges during implementation, including resource constraints, frequent leadership changes, and competing mandates, which lead to unintended strategies. These challenges are further compounded by the SOE context of having to achieve financial goals and public service objectives simultaneously. It identified their strategy implementation activities and how they relate to intended and unintended outcomes of the strategies, providing insights into how SA SOE can improve the delivery of their strategies.

## **KEYWORDS**

Strategy implementation, intended outcomes, unintended outcomes, antecedents, strategy implementation activities

## **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.

26418241

24 November 2025

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Overview of interview sample (Source: Authors own) .....	47
Table 2: Summary of the coding process (Source: Author's own) .....	54
Table 3: Summary key findings (Source: Author's own) .....	80

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Literature roadmap (Source: Author's own).....	19
Figure 2: Model of middle manager activities in strategy implementation.....	30
Figure 3: Saturation chart (Source: Author's own) .....	47
Figure 4: Adapted model of middle manager activities in strategy implementation .....	104

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>DMRE</b>	Department of Mineral Resources and Energy
<b>GIBS</b>	Gordon Institute of Business Science
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IPPPP</b>	Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme
<b>KPI</b>	Key Performance Indicators
<b>NDP</b>	National Development Plan
<b>NPC</b>	National Planning Commission
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>SOE</b>	State Owned Entities
<b>SA</b>	South Africa
<b>TMT</b>	Top Management Team
<b>TNPA</b>	Transnet National Ports Authority
<b>TPT</b>	Transnet Port Terminals
<b>WEF</b>	World Economic Forum

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	i
<b>DECLARATION</b> .....	iii
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	iv
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	v
<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	vi
<b>1 Chapter 1 – Introduction to the research problem</b> .....	11
<b>1.1 Background to the research problem - business relevance</b> .....	11
<b>1.2 Problem statement and theoretical significance</b> .....	13
<b>1.3 Research contribution</b> .....	15
<b>1.4 Purpose statement</b> .....	15
<b>1.5 The research questions</b> .....	15
<b>1.6 Research Scope</b> .....	16
<b>1.7 Overview of the research report</b> .....	16
<b>1.8 Conclusion</b> .....	17
<b>2 Chapter 2 - Literature review</b> .....	18
<b>2.1 Introduction</b> .....	18
<b>2.2 Theoretical foundations</b> .....	19
<b>2.2.1 Strategy implementation: definitions and core process</b> .....	19
<b>2.2.2 Middle managers in strategy implementation</b> .....	21
<b>2.2.2.1 Definition of middle managers</b> .....	21
<b>2.2.2.2 Middle manager’s roles and activities in strategy implementation</b> .....	22
<b>2.2.3 Antecedents to strategy implementation</b> .....	24
<b>2.2.4 Challenges in strategy implementation</b> .....	27
<b>2.2.5 Intended and unintended outcomes of strategy implementation</b> .....	28
<b>2.3 Empirical evidence and the South African SOE context</b> .....	30
<b>2.3.1 Strategy implementation in SOEs (Global and SA Evidence)</b> .....	30
<b>2.3.2 Middle managers in SOEs</b> .....	33
<b>2.3.3 Antecedents of strategy implementation in SOEs</b> .....	33
<b>2.3.4 Challenges of strategy implementation in SOEs</b> .....	36
<b>2.3.5 Intended and unintended outcomes of strategy implementation in SOEs</b>	
37	
<b>2.4 Gaps in literature and implications for this study</b> .....	39

2.5	Conclusion .....	40
3	Chapter 3 - Research questions .....	42
3.1	Introduction .....	42
3.2	Primary research question .....	42
3.3	Research sub-questions that feed into the main question are: .....	42
3.3.1	Research sub-question one.....	42
3.3.2	Research sub-question two.....	42
3.3.3	Research sub-question three.....	42
3.3.4	Research sub-question four.....	43
4	Chapter 4 - Research methodology and design .....	44
4.1	Introduction .....	44
4.2	Research approach .....	44
4.3	Research philosophy.....	44
4.5	Research setting .....	45
4.6	Sampling method.....	45
4.7	Sampling Criteria .....	46
4.8	Sample size .....	46
4.9	Level and Unit of Analysis.....	48
4.10	Data gathering process .....	48
4.11	Data analysis approach.....	48
4.12	Research quality and rigour .....	49
4.12.1	Validity and reliability.....	49
4.13	Data Storage.....	50
4.14	Ethical considerations.....	50
4.15	Limitations of the research design and methods. ....	51
5	Chapter 5 – Findings and Results .....	52
5.1	Introduction .....	52
5.2	Sample description .....	52
5.3	The coding process.....	52
5.4	Findings for Research Sub-question one .....	54
5.4.1	RQ1: Theme 1: Strategy implementation activities of middle managers in the public sector.....	54
5.5	Findings for Research Sub-question two.....	59

5.5.1	RQ2: Theme 2: Processes preceding implementation.....	60
5.5.2	RQ2: Theme 3: Barriers and Enablers to Strategy Implementation.....	62
5.6	Findings for Research Sub-question three.....	70
5.6.1	RQ3: Theme four: intended outcomes of strategy implementation activities.....	70
5.6.2	RQ3: Theme five: Use of project management/problem-solving tools....	71
5.6.3	RQ3: Theme six: Internal alignment between departments and teams ...	72
5.6.4	RQ3: Theme seven: Build external relationships .....	73
5.7	Findings for Research Sub-question four.....	74
5.7.1	RQ4: Theme eight: Negative and positive unintended outcomes.....	74
5.7.2	RQ4: Theme nine: Middle managers' use of experience .....	76
5.7.3	RQ4: Theme ten: Poor coordination.....	77
5.7.4	RQ4: Theme eleven: Misalignment between leadership and middle managers.....	77
5.8	Conclusion .....	79
6.	Chapter 6: Discussion of the research findings .....	81
6.1.	Introduction .....	81
6.2.	Discussion of findings for research sub-question one.....	81
6.2.1.	RQ1: Theme 1: Strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs	81
6.2.2.	Conclusion for research sub-question one .....	85
6.3.	Discussion of findings for research sub-question two .....	86
6.3.1.	RQ2: Theme 2: Processes preceding strategy implementation .....	86
6.3.2.	RQ2: Theme 3: Antecedents to strategy implementation .....	88
6.3.3.	Conclusion for research sub-question two.....	93
6.4.	Discussion of findings for research sub-question three .....	93
6.4.1.	RQ3: Theme four: intended outcomes of strategy implementation activities	93
6.4.2.	RQ3: Theme Five: Use of project management and problem-solving tools	94
6.4.3.	RQ3: Theme Six: Internal alignment between departments and teams	95
6.4.4.	RQ3: Theme seven: Build external relationships.....	96
6.4.5.	Conclusion for research sub-question three.....	98
6.5.	Discussion of findings for research sub-question four .....	98

6.5.1.	<b>RQ4: Theme eight: Positive and negative unintended outcomes</b> .....	98
6.5.2.	<b>RQ4: Theme nine: Middle managers’ use of experience</b> .....	100
6.5.3.	<b>RQ4: Theme ten: Poor coordination between departments</b> .....	100
6.5.4.	<b>RQ4: Theme eleven: Alignment between leadership and middle managers</b> .....	100
6.5.5.	<b>RQ4: Theme twelve: use of flexibility</b> .....	101
6.5.6.	<b>Conclusion for research sub-question four</b> .....	102
6.6.	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	103
7.	<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations</b> .....	106
7.1.	<b>Introduction</b> .....	106
7.2.	<b>Principal theoretical conclusions</b> .....	106
7.2.1.	<b>Research Sub-question one: Strategy implementation activities</b> .....	107
7.2.2.	<b>Research Sub-question two: Strategy Implementation antecedents</b> .	108
7.2.3.	<b>Research Sub-question three: Intended outcomes</b> .....	109
7.2.4.	<b>Research Sub-question four: Unintended outcomes</b> .....	110
7.3.	<b>Research contribution</b> .....	111
7.4.	<b>Recommendations for management and/or other stakeholders</b> .....	112
7.5.	<b>Limitations of the research</b> .....	112
7.6.	<b>Suggestions for future research</b> .....	112
8.	<b>References</b> .....	113
9.	<b>Appendices</b> .....	121
9.1.	<b>Appendix 1: Interview Protocol</b> .....	121
9.2.	<b>Appendix 2: Consistency Matrix</b> .....	122
9.3.	<b>Appendix 3 – Ethical Clearance Approval</b> .....	123
9.4.	<b>Appendix 4 – Codebook from Atlas.ti</b> .....	124

## **1 Chapter 1 – Introduction to the research problem**

This chapter defines the research problem and outlines the purpose of the study. It accomplishes this by outlining the business relevance of the study, the problem statement and the theoretical significance of the study, its objectives, and the anticipated contributions to academic research

### **1.1 Background to the research problem - business relevance**

The public sector exists to provide public goods, correct market failures, and enable inclusive development through services and infrastructure that the private sector cannot deliver at the required scale (OECD, 2024; Wang, 2021). Consequently, its priorities include fostering economic growth and infrastructure investment, responsible management of resources, facilitating the provision of healthcare, education, housing, and social program delivery (McKinsey & Company, 2025). In South Africa (SA), this mandate is formalised through the National Development Plan (NDP), which positions the state as an enabler of economic transformation, long-term planning, and improved public value (NPC, 2012). To fulfil these responsibilities, the government operates through both government departments and State-Owned Entities (SOEs), which are expected to drive national priorities such as energy security, efficient logistics, industrial growth, and economic competitiveness (National Treasury, 2024).

The NPC (2020b) highlights that entities such as Eskom, Transnet, PRASA, and Denel were established to support the NDP's developmental goals by delivering essential network infrastructure, supporting industrialisation and providing essential services to reduce unemployment and inequality, and eliminating poverty by 2030 (NPC, 2023). Although implementation is a central theme in the NDP, it has not yielded notably positive outcomes, and the failure to effectively implement the strategy persists, leading to unintended outcomes (NPC, 2020a). For instance, the poverty rate has increased from 39% in 2011 to 55% in 2024; the unemployment rate increased from 27% in 2011 to 32% in 2024 (Stats SA, 2025); and inequality remains high with a Gini coefficient of 0.6, positioning SA among the most unequal countries globally (International Monetary Fund, 2025). The NDP sought to address these structural challenges through a capable state, improved governance, and better service delivery (NPC, 2011). More than a decade after its adoption, many of the

NDP's core objectives remain unmet. Persistent load shedding, transport inefficiencies, political interference, and weak institutional capacity continue to undermine national competitiveness, economic performance, and investor confidence (OECD, 2022; The Presidency, 2024).

While SOEs are intended to play an instrumental role in the NDP's developmental objectives, persistent governance failures, weak financial controls, leadership instability, and weak operational controls across major SOEs have undermined their effectiveness (Auditor General South Africa, 2023). National Treasury (2024) similarly highlights escalating bailouts, rising contingent liabilities, and insufficient progress in achieving the infrastructure and service delivery targets outlined in the NDP. The NDP 10-Year Review confirms that several priority outcomes, particularly reliable electricity, efficient freight rail, and effective public transport, have not been met (NPC, 2020a). For example, Eskom remains significantly behind on its grid expansion plan, and Transnet is behind on initiatives aimed at improving operational efficiencies and capacity expansion.

These failures in achieving the NDP goals suggest that the problem is not always in strategy formulation but in how strategy is executed. Sull et al. (2015) note that poor execution, rather than flawed strategy, is often the primary source of organisational underperformance. Poor implementation is identified as a significant driver of strategy failure, with up to 90% of strategies reportedly failing during implementation (Edinger, 2024). Cote (2020) writes that 48% of organisations fail to achieve at least 50% of their strategic targets, and 93% of business leaders struggle with strategy implementation.

In the context of SOEs, strategy implementation is particularly challenging. The risk of misalignment and unintended outcomes is high because managers often operate under multiple, sometimes competing mandates, face limited capacity, political pressures, and resource constraints (International Monetary Fund, 2022; OECD, 2022). Within this environment, middle managers play a pivotal role in translating high-level strategies into operational activities (Sull et al., 2015). They coordinate resources, manage personnel and budgets, interpret directives, and influence employee behaviour, directly shaping whether strategic objectives are achieved or whether unintended consequences, such as workarounds, superficial compliance, or misaligned priorities, emerge (Sull et al., 2015). The

(NPC, 2020a) emphasises that bridging the gap between strategic intent and day-to-day practice is essential for improving SOE performance and achieving intended outcomes.

Given South Africa's high inequality, persistent unemployment, and the fiscal burden of underperforming SOEs, understanding how middle managers influence strategy implementation in SOEs is critical. Effective execution at this level can reduce the economic drag of SOEs, improve service delivery, and advance the NDP's developmental objectives (NPC, 2023). In addition to meeting these national objectives, effective implementation will also contribute towards international commitments such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and help mitigate broader economic risks such as unemployment and economic downturns (World Economic Forum, 2024).

## **1.2 Problem statement and theoretical significance**

Effective strategy implementation is critical to organisational success, as strategies only create value when executed properly (Lee, 2024). In the public sector, successful implementation can lead to improved service delivery, increased public value, and more efficient processes (Vandersmissen et al., 2024). Despite its importance, research on strategy implementation in the public sector and in SOEs is scant (George, 2021; Vigfússon et al., 2021). This study seeks to address this gap by examining the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs in South Africa and how these activities produce intended and unintended outcomes (Christie & Tippmann, 2023).

SOEs operate under a dual mandate, balancing the delivery of public services with financial objectives (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020). Unlike private organisations, SOEs are responsible for strategic infrastructure and crucial services, such as electricity, water, public transport, and hospitals, and often function as monopolies, making their performance strategically and socially important (Andrews et al., 2019; Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020). This complexity creates goal ambiguity, which presents an opportunity to explore the processes and challenges of strategy implementation in the context of SOEs in South Africa.

This study focuses on SOEs because of their dual mandate and in response to Papenfuß and Keppeler's (2020, p. 18) invitation to public administration and (public) management researchers to "test and develop their theories/concepts/constructs in SOE settings" for

different insights than those from administrative and private-sector entities. The variation in governance structures, high external scrutiny, limited discretionary control over resources, and sometimes inconsistent owner behaviour make SOEs a unique setting for examining how middle managers' activities influence intended and unintended outcomes (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Klier et al., 2025).

Strategy implementation involves translating formulated strategies into actionable activities (Friesl et al., 2020; Köseoglu et al., 2020). Top Management Teams (TMTs) typically develop strategic plans (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Samimi et al., 2022), while middle managers operationalise these strategies, coordinating resources, aligning teams, and ensuring the strategy is executed effectively (Ateş et al., 2020; Vera et al., 2022). However, numerous strategies fail during implementation, even when carefully designed, due to misalignment, poor coordination, leadership gaps, or ineffective execution (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Vera et al., 2022; Vigfússon et al., 2021). Understanding middle managers' activities is therefore essential to explaining why intended outcomes are realised, or why unintended outcomes emerge (Christie & Tippmann, 2023).

Middle managers are central to the implementation process because they connect TMTs to operational teams, translate strategic objectives into day-to-day activities, and shape employee behaviour (Ateş et al., 2020; Christie & Tippmann, 2023). Research shows that organisations with strong middle management improve performance significantly compared to those with weaker middle management (Fitzgerald, 2024; Mason, 2024). Yet, middle managers are often excluded from strategy formulation, limiting their ability to execute strategies effectively (The Strategy Institute, 2024). Empowering middle managers and actively involving them in the implementation process improves outcomes and overall organisational performance (Krell et al., 2025; The Strategy Institute, 2024).

The public sector context adds further complexity. Unlike private sector organisations, SOEs face constant political shifts, high regulatory oversight, budgetary constraints, and stakeholder pressures (Gullmark et al., 2025; Klier et al., 2025a; Wirtz et al., 2021). Middle managers in SOEs must navigate these complexities while simultaneously achieving financial and public service objectives (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020). This duality, combined with unique governance structures and scrutiny, makes SOEs an important setting for

advancing theoretical understanding of strategy implementation in public sector contexts. In addition, rising public expectations, increasingly aligned with private-sector service standards, further emphasise the importance of middle managers' strategic role in achieving effective service delivery (Chadwick et al., 2023).

### **1.3 Research contribution**

By focusing on middle managers in SOEs, this study contributes to theory by:

1. Clarifying the role of middle managers in bridging strategy formulation and execution in complex organisational settings (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Friesl et al., 2020).
2. Examining intended and unintended outcomes of strategy implementation, extending knowledge beyond the private sector (Christie & Tippmann, 2023).
3. Expanding strategy implementation theory to dual-mandated organisations with high external pressures, offering insights into how context shapes strategy outcomes (Klier et al., 2025; Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020).

Understanding these dynamics is theoretically significant because it addresses a gap in strategy implementation research, particularly regarding how middle managers influence outcomes in SOEs, and provides a basis for refining models of implementation in complex, dual-mandated environments.

### **1.4 Purpose statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore the intended and unintended outcomes of strategy implementation activities by middle managers in SOEs.

### **1.5 The research questions**

The primary research question is: "Which [SOE] middle manager activities result in strategy implementation in its intended or unintended form?" (Christie & Tippmann, 2023, p. 4).

Sub-questions:

- What are the activities of middle managers in SOEs during strategy implementation?
- What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?

- What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to intended outcomes?
- What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to unintended outcomes (positive or negative)?

## 1.6 Research Scope

The current study drew from the experience of middle managers in the South African public sector working within State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and sought to understand how the propositions suggested by Christie and Tippmann (2023) may yield similarities or differences. For example, the extent of autonomy can vary as public middle managers are often considered to have limited discretion when implementing objectives and goals outlined by their principals (Grøn et al., 2024), meanwhile Friesl et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of flexibility for a successful implementation of a strategy, citing its adaptive nature. The use of coalition activities may also vary since public sector strategies require extensive partnerships and collaborations to create public value (Hansen et al., 2022). This was accomplished by conducting in-depth interviews with middle managers in SOEs. The findings presented a variation in the use of autonomy and coalition activities in SOEs, which is discussed in chapters five, six and seven. The criteria for middle managers that were adopted were “middle managers positioned between top managers and first-line supervisors” (Christie & Tippmann, 2023, p. 5).

## 1.7 Overview of the research report

**Chapter 1** outlines the research problem from the business and theoretical perspective.

**Chapter 2** presents the literature review of the theoretical constructs within strategy implementation, middle management activities and intended and unintended strategic outcomes.

**Chapter 3** is the discussion of the main research question and sub questions.

**Chapter 4** outlines the research methodology that has been followed to conduct the study.

**Chapter 5** presents the research findings.

**Chapter 6** is the discussion on the findings of the research.

**Chapter 7** is the conclusion of the research, which outlines the outcomes and recommendations.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

Successful strategy implementation enables organisations to gain a competitive advantage and create public value. However, ineffective strategy implementation is one of the primary reasons strategies fail, resulting in unintended outcomes. Challenges during implementation include a lack of buy-in by employees, poor communication, poor risk management and ineffective execution. Middle managers play a crucial role in the implementation of strategies in SOEs, making their actions important. Studying middle managers' activities will clarify their role in bridging strategy formulation and execution in complex organisational settings. Given South Africa's high inequality, persistent unemployment, and the fiscal burden of underperforming SOEs, understanding how middle managers influence strategy implementation in SOEs is critical

## 2 Chapter 2 - Literature review

### 2.1 Introduction

The study seeks to examine the activities of SOE middle managers that lead to unintended and intended consequences during strategy implementation. The three key constructs of this study are: (i) middle managers, (ii) strategy implementation activities, and (iii) intended and unintended outcomes of strategy implementation. The study is conducted in the context of SOEs. Considering the three constructs and the context, the literature used in this literature review was sourced from highly rated, peer-reviewed academic journals in the fields of strategic management, organisational studies, public administration, public sector management, management and leadership studies, human resource management, corporate governance, and performance management studies.

It will discuss the definition and process of strategy implementation, the antecedents of strategy implementation, the middle managers' role and activities, the challenges experienced during implementation, and the SOE context.

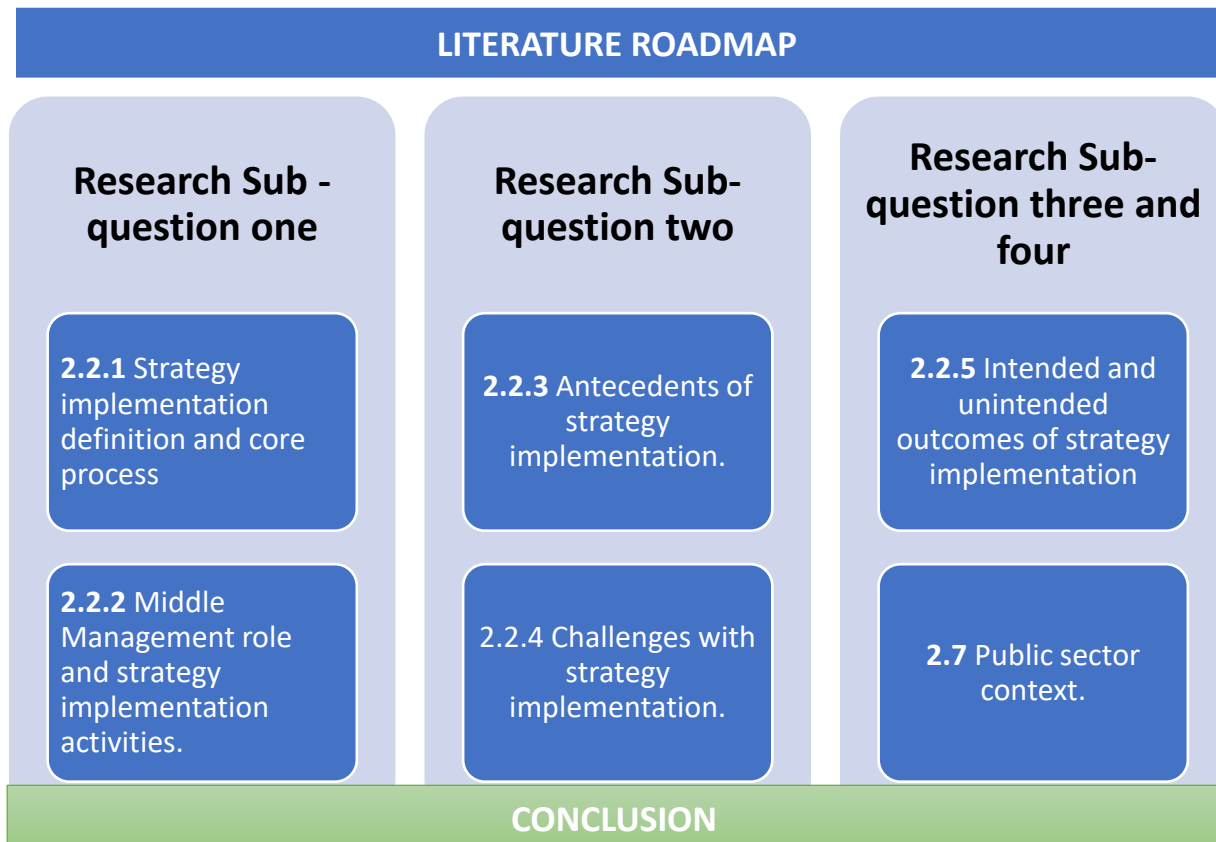


Figure 1: Literature roadmap (Source: Author's own)

## **2.2 Theoretical foundations**

### **2.2.1 Strategy implementation: definitions and core process**

Multiple definitions of strategy implementation exist (Weiser et al., 2020). Various scholars regard strategy implementation as a process through which an organisation translates its strategic intent into actions and initiatives that result in intended organisational outcomes (Schuler et al., 2023; Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Weiser et al., 2020). Strategy implementation involves putting into practice strategic initiatives, targeted at enhancing organisational capabilities and performance, and often reflects the top priorities of the organisation (Mitchell, 2019; Friesl et al., 2020). According to Ergene et al. (2023), these strategic initiatives can take on many forms, such as projects related to new products and business development, capital investment, revenue growth, and operational improvement. The main aim of strategy implementation is to integrate a new practice into the existing processes of the organisation effectively, to ensure that the strategic intent is realised in practice (Mitchell, 2019; MacLennan & Markides, 2021).

There is no universally agreed-upon process for strategy implementation (Mitchell, 2022). Strategy implementation is a complex, context-dependent, and dynamic process (Friesl et al., 2020; MacLennan & Markides, 2021; Weiser et al., 2020). Its effectiveness relies on the interplay between structural processes and interpersonal processes (Mistry et al., 2023). Structural processes include formal coordination mechanisms, reporting hierarchies, monitoring systems, and evolving control tools (Ergene et al., 2023; MacLennan & Markides, 2021; Mitchell, 2019; Schuler et al., 2023). Interpersonal processes include management behaviours, communication, collaboration, joint problem-solving, and strategic consensus among organisational actors (Friesl et al., 2020; Köseoglu et al., 2020; MacLennan & Markides, 2021; Mistry et al., 2023). Evidence suggests that structural mechanisms alone are insufficient, effective strategy implementation is also influenced by social dynamics such as the intensity of top-management team collaboration and the degree of interdependence among members (Mistry et al., 2023). The interplay between structural processes and interpersonal processes is captured by the concept known as strategic control, which refers to processes and mechanisms through which organisations monitor, guide, and adjust the

execution of strategy to ensure that the objectives are achieved (Mistry et al., 2023; Schuler et al., 2023; Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025).

Strategic control integrates structural and interpersonal processes by combining formal tools for measurement, feedback, and coordination with social interactions that allow actors to interpret, adapt, and enact strategy in practice. In addition, research suggests that technological innovations, such as AI-enabled algorithmic “itemisation,” can further support strategy implementation by improving attentional control, broadening participation, and providing real-time feedback, complementing human coordination and adaptive execution (Laamanen et al., 2025; Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025). While traditional frameworks such as top-down models, the McKinsey 7S, and the Balanced Scorecard, provide guidance for aligning structures and measuring performance (Ergene et al., 2023; Friesl et al., 2020; Schuler et al., 2023), they often overlook the relational, adaptive, and socially mediated aspects of implementation (Köseoglu et al., 2020; Mistry et al., 2023; Weiser et al., 2020). Contemporary perspectives argue that strategy implementation is an integrative and iterative approach, in which structural tools, technological supports, and interpersonal alignment interact continuously to embed initiatives into routines, coordinate action across levels, and ensure that strategic objectives are realised (Friesl et al., 2020; Laamanen et al., 2025; MacLennan & Markides, 2021; Mitchell, 2022; Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025; Weiser et al., 2020).

The literature review in this section shows that strategy implementation is a complex, context-dependent, and dynamic process influenced by structural systems, interpersonal interactions, and strategic control mechanisms. This complexity raises the research sub-question: RQ1 - What are the activities of middle managers in SOEs during strategy implementation?, as understanding these activities shows how middle managers coordinate, exercise strategic control, and leverage tools such as AI-enabled attentional control to prioritise and adapt strategic initiatives in practice. Building on this, the next section reviews literature on middle managers and examines their roles and activities in strategy implementation.

## **2.2.2 Middle managers in strategy implementation**

### **2.2.2.1 Definition of middle managers**

Numerous definitions exist for middle managers, but they are generally understood to be organisational actors positioned between senior leadership and operational staff, responsible for translating strategic objectives into actionable initiatives while supervising subordinates (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Hassard & Morris, 2022). Their dual position allows them to operate both as superiors, with authority over subordinates, and as subordinates to senior management, managing expectations from both directions. This intermediary positioning, often described as their “middle-levelness,” gives them a unique role in shaping organisational functioning and performance (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Tarakci et al., 2023).

Middle managers are also a key source of information, generating, integrating, and disseminating knowledge both upwards and downwards in the hierarchy, and are increasingly relying on digital information tools, such as dashboards, collaborative platforms, and AI-enabled systems, to support decision-making, attentional control, and strategic prioritisation (Laamanen et al., 2025; Sundström & Svärdesten, 2025; Tarakci et al., 2023). Through these roles, middle managers thus contribute to both structural processes, such as monitoring performance, allocating resources, and coordinating work, and interpersonal processes, such as collaboration, communication, and trust-building, which are critical for effective strategy implementation (Köseoglu et al., 2020; Mistry et al., 2023). In addition, middle managers also contribute to strategic control, ensuring that strategic initiatives are prioritised, adapted, and embedded into organisational routines.

This leads to the conclusion that the role of middle managers remains integral for strategy implementation and organisational performance. Understanding how they coordinate structural processes, manage interpersonal interactions, and exercise strategic control highlights the importance of examining their activities in more detail. The following section is a synthesis of literature on the specific roles and activities of middle managers during strategy implementation.

### **2.2.2.2 Middle manager's roles and activities in strategy implementation**

Strategy implementation involves multiple actors that perform various activities to translate the intended strategy into outcomes (Christie and Tippmann, 2023). Middle managers play a central role in strategy implementation, bridging strategy and operations (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Vera et al., 2022). Middle managers carry out strategy implementation activities internally by co-ordinating activities across departments and hierarchical levels, and inter-organisationally by engaging with external stakeholders such as consultants, regulators, and partners to ensure alignment and support for implementation efforts (Friesl et al., 2020). This dual domain highlights that strategy implementation is not a contained organisational process, but is a multi-level social process that is influenced by relationships, expectations, and contextual constraints.

Several middle management strategy implementation activities emerge from literature based on their pivotal role. While scholars describe these activities using different labels, a synthesis of literature shows that these roles and activities can be largely categorised into the following domains. This subsection, therefore, directly addresses RQ1, which seeks to understand the activities undertaken by middle managers during strategy implementation.

- **Interpreting and translating strategy:** Middle managers are responsible for interpreting the strategy from senior leadership by translating strategic ideas into actionable operational activities (Tarakci et al., 2023) and motivating employees to commit and work toward its implementation (Ateş et al., 2020). They do this by making sense of the strategy, based on their interpretation of how to advance change wisely (Tarakci et al., 2023) and framing strategy in ways that make sense within the organisational context (Friesl et al., 2020). When top management prescribes what must be communicated, middle managers have discretion in how they interpret and communicate the strategy, highlighting the importance of strategic alignment between senior management and middle managers (Ateş et al., 2020). Middle managers possess the ability to influence activities and the strategy process because of their proximity to top management's internal views, relative to other employees or external stakeholders (Splitter et al., 2023). This position grants them a certain level of flexibility in how they interpret and implement strategic initiatives (Azambuja et al., 2023). Interpretation and translation, therefore, serve as the initial bridge between strategic intent and practical action.

- **Sensemaking and sense giving:** Through sensemaking, middle managers construct meaning from ambiguous or evolving strategic information, and through sensegiving, they actively shape the interpretations of employees, peers, and partners (Schuler et al., 2023). This activity enables alignment of understanding across the organisation and supports collective engagement with the strategy.
- **Co-ordinating and enacting strategic activities:** Middle managers manage structural processes by co-ordinating resources, work, and operational processes to ensure that the strategy is implemented effectively (Mistry et al., 2023; Porck & van Knippenberg, 2022; Weiser et al., 2020). The ability of middle managers to coordinate actors for collective action is central to strategy implementation (Weiser et al., 2020). This collective action extends to coordinating key role players in strategy implementation, which includes top management, frontline employees, strategic planning staff (Weiser et al., 2020), external stakeholders and consultants (Friesl et al., 2020). They take on a bridging role and implement these strategies at lower organisational levels (Ateş et al., 2020; Friesl et al., 2020). Middle managers communicate strategic objectives to employees through channels such as newsletters, Emails, and town-hall meetings, and set key performance indicators to drive and monitor performance (Friesl et al., 2020). They also engage in issue-selling activities, which enable them to identify and prioritise issues they deem necessary and worth bringing to the attention of top management (Splitter et al., 2023).
- **Influencing, networking, and enlisting commitment to the strategy:** Strategy implementation requires securing the cooperation of numerous actors, and middle managers perform this role by leveraging internal and external networks (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Tyskbo & Styhre, 2022). They negotiate resources, build coalitions, foster relationships, and mobilise support across organisational boundaries (Ateş et al., 2020; Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Tyskbo & Styhre, 2022). These interpersonal activities are crucial for managing the political and relational complexities inherent in implementation processes.

- **Contribute to conceptualising and shaping strategic outcomes:** Although the top management drives the conceptualisation of strategies, their activities have an impact on the implementation outcomes (Weiser et al., 2020). Loudon (2024) advocates for opening up the strategy process to employees as implementers of the strategy to ensure that it is practical and encourage accountability. Köseoglu et al.'s (2020) study found that extending participation to employees during conceptualising the strategy improves the success rate at implementation. In some instances, middle managers' involvement in strategy development is part of their job description and they have little control (Feldermann & Hiebl, 2025).

In conclusion, these activities of middle managers in strategy implementation illustrate that middle managers are not passive recipients of strategic plans but active agents who interpret, communicate, coordinate, influence, and shape strategy as it is implemented. The success of these ongoing strategic activities and projects is essential for the success of the organisation's strategic objectives (MacLennan & Markides, 2021). However, middle managers face multiple challenges during implementation that may lead to strategies failing to succeed. According to Vigfússon et al. (2021) and Vera et al. (2022), many strategies fail not because they are poorly formulated, but because of poor or ineffective implementation. Understanding why some middle managers succeed in these roles while others struggle thus requires examining the factors that precede and enable their implementation work. Accordingly, the next section examines the antecedents of strategy implementation.

### **2.2.3 Antecedents to strategy implementation**

Strategy implementation does not occur in isolation. Its success depends on various organisational, managerial, and contextual conditions, known as antecedents, that set the stage for middle managers to interpret, coordinate, and enact strategic initiatives effectively. Antecedents of strategy implementation are of relevance to those implementing strategies, such as managers and other implementers (Vigfússon et al., 2021). A synthesis of literature shows that antecedents to strategy implementation, include leadership support, availability of resources, organisational culture, communication p. Examining these antecedents highlights the environment that affects middle managers' capacity to interpret, coordinate, and enact strategic initiatives. This subsection therefore addresses RQ2: What are the

antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs? The discussion below explores these key antecedents and their influence on effective strategy implementation.

**Clearly defined strategy, goals, and objectives:** Having an actionable and well-formulated strategy is the first antecedent to strategy implementation (Chamorro-Premuzic and Lovric, 2022). Clear goals and objectives, aligned with the strategy, provide employees and middle managers with reference points for decision-making and enable the translation of strategic intent into measurable outcomes (Friesl et al., 2020; Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025; Vigfússon et al., 2021). Without clearly articulated goals and performance indicators, middle managers may struggle to coordinate, monitor, and guide strategic activities effectively, increasing the risk of poor outcomes (Friesl et al., 2020).

**Leadership styles and motivation:** Leadership support, motivation, and style have an impact on implementation and was one of the highly referenced factors in the review by Vigfússon et al. (2021). This is because the CEO and TMT play a critical role in the successful implementation of a strategy (Köseoglu et al., 2020; Vera et al., 2022). This role entails providing support and commitment to the chosen strategy (Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025). Their actions, which include coordinating activities, specifying goals, tracking progress, putting controls and their ability to adapt to changing conditions as necessary, may influence the strategy implementation process (Vera et al., 2022). Their actions also extend to acquiring and shaping the resources needed for strategy implementation (Mistry et al., 2023), making their role crucial to successful implementation.

**Organisational culture, communication, and shared understanding:** An enabling culture, characterised by shared values and openness to change, facilitates middle managers' implementation activities (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2008; Harrison & Rogers, 2024). Frequent, clear, and transparent communication ensures that employees understand the strategy, perceive its relevance, and commit to its execution (Ateş et al., 2020; Friesl et al., 2020). A shared understanding of strategic priorities promotes alignment across organisational levels, enhancing the middle managers' ability to sensemake, sensegive, and coordinate collective action (Köseoglu et al., 2020; Vigfússon et al., 2021). Approaches such as open strategy, which involve middle managers and employees in formulation and sharing of strategic information, can increase ownership and support for implementation

(Feldermann & Hiebl, 2025; Hansen et al., 2022; Splitter et al., 2023). However, the inclusivity of open strategy can also shift power dynamics, potentially constraining middle managers' influence and affecting how they perform their strategic activities (Splitter et al., 2023).

**Alignment of structure, resources and capabilities:** Successful implementation depends on the availability and allocation of organisational resources, including human, financial, and technological capital, as well as the capabilities of middle managers and their teams (Lee, 2024; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021; Vera et al., 2022a). Ashkenas (2024) argues that if the implementers of the strategy do not have the skills, motivation, and resources to put it into action, it will fail. In addition, alignment between organisational structure, processes, and strategy ensures that middle managers can coordinate, facilitate, and monitor initiatives effectively (Friesl et al., 2020; Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025). Furthermore, realistic timeframes and clear prioritisation further support middle managers in planning and sequencing activities, mitigating the risk of overburdening teams and failing to achieve intended outcomes (Friesl et al., 2020; Vigfússon et al., 2021).

**Change management led by executives:** The ability to manage change is a critical antecedent, as strategy implementation often involves altering processes, behaviours, or organisational structures (Vigfússon et al., 2021). Executives must possess the capability to drive and support change, which enables middle managers to enact strategic initiatives and guide employees through transitions effectively.

While the antecedents above provide general conditions that support strategy implementation, their impact is context dependent. The effectiveness of leadership support, resource allocation, communication practices, and organisational culture can vary across different organisational settings, sectors, and environmental conditions (MacLennan & Markides, 2021; Tarakci et al., 2023). In particular, middle managers' ability to interpret, coordinate, and enact strategic initiatives is shaped not only by these antecedents but also by the unique constraints, expectations, and opportunities present in their specific organisational and operational context. Future studies should include the opinions of mid-level managers in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the success factors for strategy [formulation] and implementation (Köseoglu et al., 2020). The next section,

therefore, examines the key challenges faced by middle managers during strategy implementation.

#### **2.2.4 Challenges in strategy implementation**

Although the strategy implementation literature extensively identifies challenges experienced by middle managers during implementation (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Vigfússon et al., 2021), achieving successful implementation continues to present a persistent challenge (Olson et al., 2024). According to Chamorro-Premuzic and Lovric (2022, p. 2), these challenges are often misunderstood, and managers tend to conjure explanations based on commonly used explanations such as “poor leadership,” “inadequate talent,” “lack of process excellence,” or “culture eats strategy for breakfast”. These commonly used explanations were also identified in a recent literature review study by Vigfússon et al. (2021), on the obstacles to strategy implementation, and also in the seminal work of Beer and Eisenstat (2000), of the six silent killers of strategy implementation.

There are other unexpected factors from within the organisation which can also influence the outcome of the planned strategies (Köseoglu et al., 2020). Through the participation of various implementers, strategies can also arise from the bottom-up and not only top-down (Weiser et al., 2020). This introduces challenges in navigating emergent features and fostering coordinated collective action across the organisation, which complicates the strategy implementation process and may lead to unrealised strategies (Friesl et al., 2020). The unrealised strategies can result in waste of the organisation’s time, resources, and capital (Vigfússon et al., 2021).

The strategy implementation literature also puts forward suggestions on how managers may overcome these barriers. Vigfússon et al. (2021) suggest that these implementation challenges can also be viewed as success factors necessary for implementation. For instance, poor leadership necessitate leadership styles and motivation, and ‘culture eats strategy for breakfast’ calls for shaping the corporate culture (Vigfússon et al., 2021). Köseoglu et al. (2020) study identified achieving strategic consensus and effective communication as crucial to strategy implementation and achieving intended strategic outcomes. Ateş et al. (2020) suggest that the answer to some of these challenges rests with middle and lower-level managers, who are critical in enlisting team commitment.

Feldermann and Hiebl (2025) advocate for the inclusion of middle managers during the formulation process for successful strategy implementation.

Despite extensive literature on barriers and success factors to strategy implementation aimed at increasing strategy success rates, strategies continue to fail. Vera et al. (2022) attribute this low success rate in strategy implementation to ineffective implementation and without effective implementation, the strategy is unlikely to deliver on its intended outcomes (Köseoglu et al., 2020). This raises many unanswered questions that warrant an investigation into middle management activities that result in strategy implementation in its intended or unintended form (Christie & Tippmann, 2023) in the South African public sector context. Examining the activities of middle managers and their related outcomes will provide valuable insights into their role within the strategy implementation process and how their activities impact the outcomes (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Splitter et al., 2023). This may improve the likelihood of success during the strategy implementation.

### **2.2.5 Intended and unintended outcomes of strategy implementation**

According to Schuler et al. (2023), middle managers can champion the strategy and implement it as intended, or they may be opposed to the company's strategy (Ateş et al., 2020), which may cause them to deviate during strategy implementation (Schuler et al., 2023). Another reason which may cause middle managers to deviate from intended strategies is access to resources, which influences how likely they are to take initiative (Glaser et al., 2021).

Christie and Tippmann (2023) describe the intended strategy as a set of objectives outlining the means to achieve them, through detailed plans that include specific targets, deadlines, and assigned responsibilities. These include high-level corporate strategies as well as strategies developed at the business unit, functional, and program levels. Intended outcomes according to Christie and Tippmann (2023) arise when strategic plans are executed consistently with how they were formulated or articulated. In the public sector, these outcomes can manifest as enhanced service delivery, increased public value, and more efficient processes (Vandersmissen et al., 2024).

Conversely, when implementers largely diverge from strategies envisioned by top management, fail to execute them, or delay them significantly, unintended outcomes may emerge as a result (Christie & Tippmann, 2023). During implementation, middle managers sometimes encounter challenges that may cause them to adapt the strategies. These challenges include unrealistic implementation plans, unforeseen changes or power and politics within the organisation (Weiser et al., 2020). Leading to middle management (un)intentionally deviating from the intended strategy during implementation (Meyfroot & Desmidt, 2024).

Other deviations from the intended strategy may emanate from the middle manager's interpretation of the strategic priorities. This interpretation may sometimes be aligned with the intended objective, but at other times depart from its original formulation (Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025). Unintended outcomes may also be the result of linking strategies to control mechanisms with no flexibility (Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025). Christie & Tippmann (2023) highlight that while unintended, certain outcomes may still yield favourable results.

Christie and Tippmann (2023) studied the activities that middle managers engage in that relate to both intended and unintended outcomes as outlined in figure 2 below. They grouped their activities into four areas: using accrued characteristics, using personal autonomy, using coalitions, and using cooperation. Their findings are summarised as follows: Middle managers engage in activities relating to **personal autonomy and coalitions** when they deviate from the intended strategies, leading to unintended outcomes. **Cooperating** with their teams and leadership results in both outcomes; however, when they cooperate less with their leadership, it leads to unintended outcomes. When middle managers deviate from the intended strategy, they engage in activities related to coalitions and cooperation. The use of **accrued characteristics** by middle managers relates to both intended and unintended outcomes (Christie & Tippmann, 2023). These middle management activities and related outcomes are reflected in the model below.

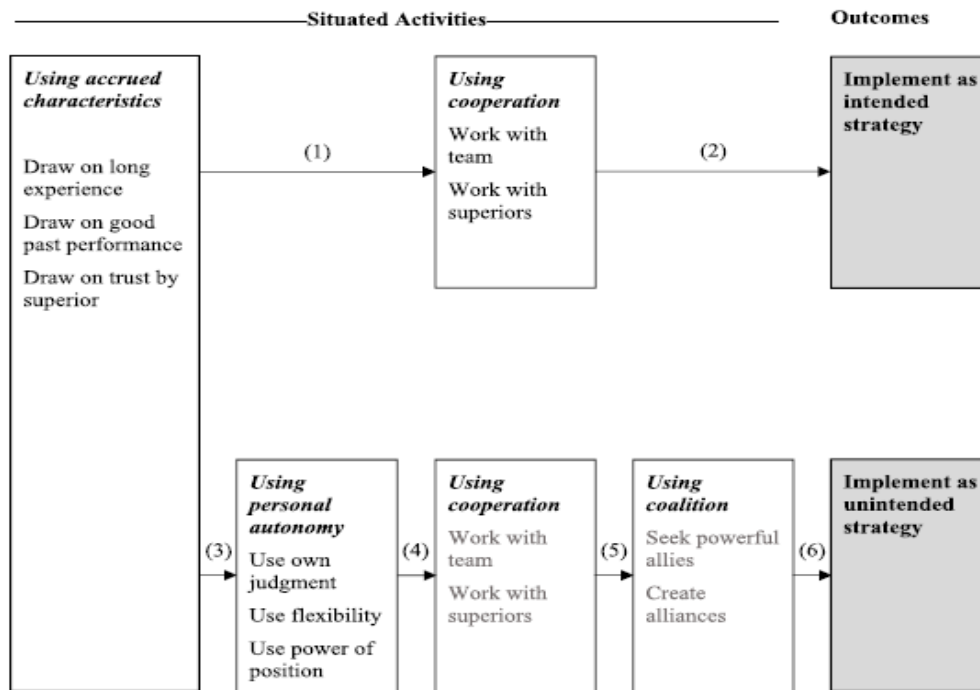


Figure 2: Model of middle manager activities in strategy implementation

Christie and Tippmann (2023) acknowledge the limitations of these findings, noting that they can only be applied to large private-sector organisations due to the sample of middle managers interviewed. They argue that organisations in the public sector may derive different findings due to the presence of more bureaucratic governance structures and invite scholars to extend the study. Considering the gap outlined, a focused investigation into how strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs relate to intended or unintended outcomes is warranted. This study aims to respond Christie and Tippmann's (2023) invitation and address "Which [SOE] middle manager activities result in strategy implementation in its intended or unintended form?".

## 2.3 Empirical evidence and the South African SOE context

### 2.3.1 Strategy implementation in SOEs (Global and SA Evidence)

Although strategy implementation is widely acknowledged as a critical determinant of government performance and service delivery (Mitchell, 2019), most strategy

implementation literature is drawn from the private sector and developed countries. As a result, there are limitations when these frameworks are applied directly to South African SOEs, where institutional, political, and governance contexts differ substantially. Although the study setting is SOEs, a subset of the public sector, this section mainly leverages literature from strategy implementation in the broader public sector due to limited academic research on strategy implementation in SOEs. Key contextual differences in strategy implementation in the public sector compared to the private sector are discussed below.

Public organisations operate under conditions that are structurally different from the private sector. They are subject to additional layers of approvals, budgetary constraints, and demanding regulatory oversight, often exerted by politically empowered actors (Gullmark et al., 2025; Wirtz et al., 2021). Leadership turnover in the public sector, particularly in SOEs, is more frequent than in private firms, creating inconsistency, discontinuity, and complexity that middle managers must navigate (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020).

Stakeholder engagement also differs substantially. While private firms have identifiable customer groups, public organisations must engage a much broader set of stakeholders, as every individual may be affected and is therefore a stakeholder (Mitchell, 2022). Public organisations also face pressure from politically powerful stakeholders who may exert direct influence over strategic priorities (Wirtz et al., 2021). Because public organisations serve multiple end-users with varying and sometimes conflicting expectations, definitions of value are more complex (Osborne et al., 2021), and these expectations influence intended outcomes (Hansen et al., 2022).

In addition, public-sector business models rely heavily on collaboration with partners such as private firms, politicians, taxpayers, citizens, and the media (Hansen et al., 2022). Engagement with the media may be strategically used by managers to elevate issues or shape agenda-setting, though media bias can produce unintended consequences (Vaara & Fritsch, 2022). These dynamics complicate the measurement of public-sector performance because stakeholders hold diverse and competing views about what constitutes success (Osborne et al., 2021; Vandersmissen et al., 2024). As Gong & Yang (2024) noted, citizens judge public sector performance based on the value they personally receive, emphasising the need to distinguish between organisational performance indicators and subjective citizen experiences.

Although SOEs are similar in some respects with other public organisations, one of their key distinguishing feature is that they operate under a dual system where they must deliver constitutionally mandated public services while simultaneously meeting financial goals (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020). This duality makes performance measurement, goal prioritisation, and implementation more complex. Middle managers in SOEs must therefore mediate between public-value obligations and commercially oriented expectations, often in contexts of bureaucratic constraint, political influence, and resource volatility.

Developed-country SOEs generally benefit from clearer performance contracts, higher managerial autonomy, professionalised governance systems, and stable funding environments (Gullmark et al., 2025; Wirtz et al., 2021). These structural supports enhance the likelihood of implementing intended strategies effectively (Gullmark et al., 2025). In contrast, SOEs in developing countries operate in environments characterised by political volatility, budget instability, capacity constraints, and procedural rigidity (Glaser et al., 2021; Vigfússon et al., 2021). These conditions exacerbate the risks of divergence and improvisation during strategy implementation, and thus increase the likelihood of unintended outcomes.

South Africa represents a hybrid case. While governance frameworks and public-value mandates are formally established, many SOEs have experienced leadership instability, politicized oversight, funding constraints, and procurement challenges (Manyathi & Jarbandhan, 2024; Mitchell, 2022; Osborne et al., 2021). These conditions amplify implementation complexity and highlight the relevance of studying middle-manager activities in South African SOEs. The contextual differences discussed in this section set the foundation for understanding SOE strategy implementation and directly support the following research sub-questions by revealing the unique institutional landscape of South African SOEs that influence how middle managers interpret and execute strategy.

- RQ2: What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?
- RQ3: What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to intended outcomes?
- RQ4: What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to unintended outcomes (positive or negative)?

### **2.3.2 Middle managers in SOEs**

Middle managers are central to translating organisational strategy into everyday practice. Their responsibilities typically include coordinating activities, mobilising commitment, cascading information, resolving operational tensions, and exercising strategic control (Schuler et al., 2023; Weiser et al., 2020). However, in SOEs their role is shaped by a distinct set of contextual pressures. Middle managers in SOEs face greater bureaucratic, political, and stakeholder-related complexity than their private-sector counterparts (Gullmark et al., 2025). They must manage dual goals of serving individual citizen needs while advancing broader public interests (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020), and help staff navigate these competing expectations. These pressures increase stress, especially as middle managers are responsible for capacitating junior staff and maintaining operational effectiveness (Tyskbo & Styhre, 2022).

Middle managers in SOEs also respond to policy changes and shifting political agendas, which often result in changing priorities and require continuous adaptation (Tyskbo & Styhre, 2022). Their role is therefore inherently persuasive. They must build coalitions, manage resistance, secure cooperation, and align diverse stakeholders toward strategic objectives (Mitchell, 2022; Tyskbo & Styhre, 2022).

In addition, strategic initiatives in the public sector are broad in nature and implementation in SOEs often requires multi-disciplinary coordination, making middle managers critical for orchestrating complex teams (Lee, 2024). Studies show that involving them early in strategy conceptualisation improves implementation success and increases ownership (Hansen et al., 2022). Transparency, through systematic sharing of strategy information, further enhances engagement and alignment (Hansen et al., 2022).

These differences in role and activities of middle managers in SOEs provide an opportunity for insights into the strategy implementation activities of middle management from the public sector and SOE lens.

### **2.3.3 Antecedents of strategy implementation in SOEs**

Antecedents are the organisational, managerial, and contextual conditions essential for an effective strategy implementation. In public-sector and SOE contexts, these conditions are

multi-level and involve multiple actors, including top management, middle managers, frontline employees, and external stakeholders (Mitchell, 2022; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). Understanding these antecedents is essential because they create the enabling environment in which middle managers interpret, coordinate, and enact strategic initiatives, directly influencing implementation success (Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025; Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025). This discussion addresses RQ 2: What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?. Key antecedents in SOEs are discussed below and include internal alignment, resource allocation, and technology adoption.

Internal alignment remains a central antecedent in SOEs. The strategy must be compatible with external environmental conditions, organisational design, processes, and leadership structures (Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025). Middle managers are pivotal in achieving such alignment, as they interpret strategic objectives, prioritise initiatives, and coordinate cross-departmental activities (Mitchell, 2022; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). Essential organisational antecedents include competence, commitment, and effective coordination, which provide the foundation for middle managers to execute their strategic roles effectively (Mitchell, 2022). In SOEs, the dual mandate of achieving public service objectives while maintaining financial sustainability creates unique pressures that shape these antecedents (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020). Unlike private firms, SOEs operate under bureaucratic structures, political oversight, and high regulatory scrutiny, which influence resource allocation, decision-making, and prioritisation (Gullmark et al., 2025; Wirtz et al., 2021). Middle managers must navigate these complexities while ensuring alignment between strategic goals and operational capabilities, a task that is less pronounced in private-sector contexts (Tyskbo & Styhre, 2022).

Resource allocation in SOEs frequently involves external actors, including elected representatives, regulators, and other government bodies (Mitchell, 2022). Budgetary decisions may even incorporate public participation, highlighting the multi-level and political nature of antecedents in these contexts (Mitchell, 2022). Similarly, stakeholder engagement extends beyond organisational boundaries to include politicians, citizens, media, and private-sector collaborators, all of whom may exert influence on strategic outcomes (Hansen et al., 2024; Vandersmissen et al., 2024). These complexities create unique conditions in which middle managers must operate, requiring negotiation skills, coalition-building, and the

ability to balance competing expectations while maintaining focus on organisational objectives.

Digital technologies introduce a further layer of complexity and opportunity in SOEs, distinguishing them from private-sector organisations. Digitally enabled control tools allow middle managers to access real-time management information, facilitating rapid adjustments to changing operational conditions (Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025). Such tools can enhance coordination across multiple levels and teams and empower employees with actionable information. However, in SOEs, technology adoption is shaped by political oversight, regulatory frameworks, and bureaucratic processes, implying that digital systems are not only efficiency tools but also instruments of compliance and accountability (Agostino et al., 2021; Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025). This dual purpose can reshape authority and discretion, as algorithmic decision-making and performance dashboards may constrain middle managers' interpretive space or, conversely, elevate their influence as interpreters of digital data.

Moreover, digital tools in SOEs interact with the dual mandate of public and financial goals. While private firms primarily use technology to optimise efficiency and profitability, SOEs must balance operational improvements with transparency, equity, and public value creation (Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025). In addition, rigid procurement rules and legacy IT systems can slow adoption, further shaping how technological antecedents influence strategy implementation (Mitchell, 2022).

In conclusion, the antecedents outlined above are context-dependent, varying across organisational environments, levels of bureaucracy, stakeholder influence, and technological maturity. Middle managers' ability to enact strategic initiatives successfully is contingent not only on the presence of these antecedents but also on the organisational and political conditions that mediate their effect (Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025; Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025). By recognising these antecedents as multi-level, socially constructed, and contingent, the study positions middle managers as active agents navigating both enablers and constraints in SOE strategy implementation.

#### **2.3.4 Challenges of strategy implementation in SOEs**

Strategy implementation in SOEs presents a distinct set of challenges that differentiate it from private sector contexts. While general strategy implementation literature identifies barriers such as poor leadership, inadequate resources, cultural misalignment, and ineffective communication (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Vigfússon et al., 2021), SOEs operate within unique organisational, institutional, and political conditions that intensify these challenges. Middle managers in SOEs face frequent leadership turnover, political interference, and dual objectives (balancing constitutional or public service mandates with financial performance requirements) that are rarely experienced in private enterprises (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020; Tyskbo & Styhre, 2022). These conditions require middle managers to navigate both bureaucratic constraints and politically charged stakeholder expectations while simultaneously ensuring operational continuity and aligning their teams to strategic objectives (Gullmark et al., 2025; Mitchell, 2022).

Resource allocation in SOEs often involves multi-level decision-making, including elected representatives, regulators, and external partners, making funding unpredictable and contingent on competing political priorities (Mitchell, 2022; Vandersmissen et al., 2024). Middle managers must weigh the costs and benefits of deploying scarce resources, building capabilities, and delivering on strategic initiatives under these constraints (Bryson et al., 2022). This dynamic is further complicated by multi-stakeholder pressures. In the public sector, every citizen may be a stakeholder, and conflicting definitions of value can intensify expectations for service delivery (Gong & Yang, 2024; Osborne et al., 2021). Middle managers are therefore tasked with mediating between external demands, internal capacity, and strategic priorities, a challenge amplified by the dual mandate of delivering public services while meeting financial targets (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020; Vandersmissen et al., 2024).

Digital technology introduces additional complexity. Digitally enabled control tools provide flexibility by linking employees with relevant management information in real time, supporting quick adjustments to operational changes and enhancing coordination across hierarchical levels (Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025). While these technologies can improve situational responsiveness, they may also shift authority from pre-defined strategic plans to algorithmically generated insights, introducing new governance challenges and potential

misalignment between intended strategic priorities and emergent operational actions (Agostino et al., 2021; Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025).

Political dynamics, bureaucratic structures, and the involvement of multiple external stakeholders mean that strategies in SOEs are rarely implemented as initially intended. Middle managers often must adapt, reprioritise, or negotiate strategic actions in response to emergent constraints or opportunities, increasing the likelihood of unintended outcomes (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Weiser et al., 2020). Challenges such as resource availability constraints, inconsistent leadership, and complex stakeholder demands not only impede intended strategy execution but also create opportunities for middle managers to exercise discretion, autonomy, and coalition-building in navigating these constraints (Ateş et al., 2020; Feldermann & Hiebl, 2025).

Understanding how middle managers manage these SOE-specific challenges is critical for examining the outcomes of strategy implementation. These contextual nuances directly influence both the achievement of intended outcomes, such as enhanced service delivery, public value creation, and operational efficiency, and the emergence of unintended outcomes, which may be either positive or negative (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Vandersmissen et al., 2024). By analysing these dynamics, this section addresses the following research sub-questions:

- RQ2: What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?
- RQ4: What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to unintended outcomes?

### **2.3.5 Intended and unintended outcomes of strategy implementation in SOEs**

The distinction between proximate and distal outcomes offers a useful way to understand why strategy implementation in SOEs often produces mixed results. Proximate outcomes refer to internal improvements that occur as a direct result of implementation efforts, such as clearer goals, better coordination, stronger internal decision-making, and improved managerial processes (Poister & Streib, 2005; Wolf & Floyd, 2017). These outcomes are relatively easier for SOEs to achieve because they rely mainly on internal alignment and the actions of middle managers, who interpret and coordinate implementation activities. In

contrast, distal outcomes reflect the broader performance effects expected from successful implementation, such as improved service quality, greater citizen satisfaction, and more efficient public services (Vandersmissen et al., 2024). In SOEs, distal outcomes are more difficult to realise because they depend on factors beyond managerial control, such as political stability, funding decisions, regulatory constraints, and the cooperation of external stakeholders (Bryson et al., 2022). As a result, proximate successes often fail to translate into the distal improvements that governments and citizens expect.

A key implication is that unintended outcomes may be more prevalent in SOEs than intended outcomes. Frequent policy shifts, leadership turnover, resource constraints, and political influence create conditions where middle managers must make continuous adjustments to keep operations functioning (Meyfroot & Desmidt, 2024; Mitchell, 2022). These adaptations can lead to negative unintended outcomes, such as delays, inconsistent implementation across units, or diluted strategic priorities. Yet, they can also result in positive unintended outcomes such as innovative workarounds or context-specific solutions that were not envisioned in the original strategy (Christie & Tippmann, 2023).

Digitalisation adds another layer of complexity. While digital tools are intended to improve responsiveness, they may inadvertently shift authority from strategic plans to algorithmic outputs, creating new governance and accountability challenges (Agostino et al., 2021; Sundström & Svärdesten, 2025). This risk is particularly pronounced in SOEs with legacy systems or capability gaps, where digitalisation may expose coordination weaknesses or create conflicting interpretations of performance information.

In conclusion, the literature suggests that although SOEs often achieve proximate, internal intended outcomes, the realisation of distal, external intended outcomes is more difficult to achieve. This gap creates space for a wide range of unintended outcomes, both negative and positive, that are influenced by SOEs' unique institutional and political constraints. These dynamics highlight the need to examine how the strategy implementation activities of middle managers contribute to both intended and unintended outcomes in SOEs, directly informing research sub-questions RQ3 and RQ4.

## **2.4 Gaps in literature and implications for this study**

Although there is an extensive body of research on strategy implementation in general, there are significant gaps in strategy implementation in the context of SOEs, and more so in developing countries. Existing strategy implementation literature focuses on private-sector organisations in developed countries, where strategy implementation processes are often streamlined and less constrained by political or public accountability requirements (Mitchell, 2022; Wirtz et al., 2021). While insights from private-sector studies provide useful guidance, they are limited in their applicability to SOEs, where managers operate within a dual mandate of achieving financial objectives while simultaneously delivering public value. This duality, coupled with the bureaucratic and multi-stakeholder nature of SOEs, introduces complexities not typically observed in private firms (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020; Vandersmissen et al., 2024).

Middle managers are widely recognised as pivotal actors in strategy implementation, yet research has predominantly emphasised top management roles, leaving the day-to-day activities and influence of middle managers underexplored (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Vera et al., 2022). In SOEs, middle managers face unique pressures, including political interference, high turnover in leadership, and competing stakeholder expectations, which shape their capacity to interpret, coordinate, and enact strategy (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020; Tyskbo & Styhre, 2022). The specific mechanisms through which middle managers navigate these pressures to influence intended and unintended outcomes remain an understudied area, particularly within the South African context.

Another gap relates to the antecedents of strategy implementation. While private-sector studies highlight the importance of leadership support, resources, organisational culture, and communication practices, these conditions are multi-level and politically mediated in SOEs (Hansen et al., 2022; Mitchell, 2022). Resource allocation decisions, for example, may involve elected representatives and other external stakeholders, and digital infrastructures can simultaneously enable responsiveness while introducing governance challenges (Agostino et al., 2021; Sundström & Svärdsten, 2025). The ways in which these antecedents collectively influence the activities of middle managers, and the resulting outcomes remain a largely understudied area.

Existing academic literature also provides limited insight into the **intended and unintended outcomes** of strategy implementation in SOEs. While intended outcomes such as improved service delivery and public value creation are often emphasised (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Vandersmissen et al., 2024), unintended outcomes arising from adaptive managerial responses to structural, political, and technological constraints are underexplored ((Meyfroot & Desmidt, 2024; Weiser et al., 2020). Understanding both types of outcomes is particularly important in SOEs, where public-sector accountability, multi-stakeholder engagement, and institutional complexity significantly influence the effects of strategic initiatives.

Considering the gaps outlined above, a focused investigation into how middle managers in SOEs navigate complex organisational and institutional contexts, the antecedents that enable or constrain their activities, and the resulting strategic intended and unintended outcomes is warranted. This study thus seeks to address these gaps by examining the interplay between antecedents, strategy implementation activities, challenges, and outcomes in South African SOEs, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of strategy implementation in SOEs.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a synthesis of strategy implementation literature, with a particular focus on the activities and role of middle managers, the antecedents and challenges of implementation, and the intended and unintended outcomes of strategic activities.

The literature review highlighted the centrality of middle managers in bridging strategy and operations, emphasising their interpretive, coordinative, and influential roles, as well as their capacity to shape both intended and emergent outcomes (Ateş et al., 2020; Christie & Tippmann, 2023). The literature review also demonstrated that antecedents such as leadership support, resource availability, organisational culture, communication practices, and alignment of structure and processes are critical enablers of successful implementation (Mitchell, 2022; Sundström & Svärdesten, 2025; Vigfússon et al., 2021). However, these antecedents are highly context-dependent. In the South African SOE environment, additional complexities, including politicised oversight, frequent leadership turnover,

regulatory constraints, and multi-level stakeholder pressures, affect how strategies are implemented and outcomes realised (Manyathi & Jarbandhan, 2024; Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020).

Empirical evidence indicates that strategy implementation in SOEs is characterised by a combination of intended outcomes, such as improved service delivery, increased public value, and organisational efficiency, and unintended outcomes arising from structural constraints, emergent managerial adaptations, or institutional pressures (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Vandersmissen et al., 2024). This duality highlights the nuanced and institutionally mediated nature of strategy implementation in the public sector, contrasting with the more predictable outcomes often observed in private-sector contexts (Bryson et al., 2022; Wolf & Floyd, 2017).

In conclusion, the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies reviewed provide a foundation for understanding how middle managers in South African SOEs navigate complex organisational and environmental conditions to implement strategy. The chapter also identifies gaps in the literature, particularly regarding the specific activities of middle managers, the interplay between antecedents and challenges, and the mechanisms through which intended and unintended outcomes emerge in the South African context. These insights directly inform the conceptual framework for this study which is presented below.

### **3 Chapter 3 - Research questions**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The research questions arose from the reviewing of the current academic literature in chapter two on middle management, strategy implementation activities and intended and unintended outcomes, and public sector context. The primary research question originated from an invitation by Christie and Tippmann (2023) to explore the strategy implementation activities by middle managers in the public sector that result in intended or unintended outcomes.

#### **3.2 Primary research question**

“Which middle manager’s activities result in strategy implementation in its intended or unintended form in SOEs?”.

#### **3.3 Research sub-questions that feed into the main question are:**

##### **3.3.1 Research sub-question one**

###### **What are the activities of SOEs middle managers during strategy implementation?**

The answer to this question gave the researcher insights into the activities of middle managers in SOEs during strategy implementation. It also highlighted the similarities and differences between the activities performed by middle managers in the public and private sectors.

##### **3.3.2 Research sub-question two**

###### **What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?**

This question aimed to understand what conditions middle managers in SOEs believe should be in place to increase the likelihood of successfully implementing a strategy. It sought to understand why some middle managers succeed in strategy implementation by examining the factors that precede and enable implementation work

##### **3.3.3 Research sub-question three**

**What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to intended outcomes?**

Research sub-question three sought to understand strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs and how they relate to intended outcomes. This was achieved by asking participants about the strategic initiatives or projects they have implemented, the activities they engaged in, and the outcomes they led to.

**3.3.4 Research sub-question four**

**What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to unintended outcomes (positive or negative)?**

This question sought to understand what the unintended outcomes of strategy implementation in the SOEs are and what activities of middle managers result in those. It further gave the researcher the insights into positive and negative unintended outcomes of strategy implementation in SOEs.

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

### **4.1 Introduction**

This section discusses the research design and methodology used to answer the research questions outlined in chapter three. The study used semi structured interviews who are middle managers in SOEs responsible for strategy implementation.

### **4.2 Research approach**

Although there is an extensive body of research on strategy implementation in general, there is a lack of studies in the context of SOEs, particularly in South Africa. Therefore, the researcher opted for a qualitative research approach to conduct the study on strategy implementation activities of SOE middle managers that result in intended and unintended outcomes in South Africa. The qualitative research approach is suitable for exploratory studies where the researcher seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the participants' view (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2023) and answering the "how" and "why" questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The decision to use qualitative methods was informed by a need to delve deep into the middle managers' experiences of strategy implementation within the SOEs. In addition, it can be useful in drawing attention to aspects of a social phenomenon that quantitative data does not capture (Hendren et al., 2023). Making the qualitative research approach suitable to explore this novel phenomenon (Köhler et al., 2022).

### **4.3 Research philosophy**

The researcher holds a constructionism worldview and relied on the participants' personal views (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2023). The researcher investigated middle managers' activities in strategy implementation in SOEs. The researcher achieved this by asking open-ended questions during interviews and carefully listening to participants' responses. The researcher analysed the data to identify themes and patterns and sought meaning from the participants' experiences and articulation of events. Constructionism was the most appropriate worldview because the researcher analysed the data to understand meanings as she engaged with the participants during the interviews (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2023).

#### **4.4 Research Strategy**

This study adopted a qualitative approach aimed at exploring how middle managers make sense of their lives and experiences, in relation to their roles in the SOEs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This strategy was appropriate because the researcher was interested in understanding the strategy implementation activities and outcomes based on the experience of middle managers during the implementation of an identifiable intended strategy. The use of qualitative in-depth interviews enabled the researcher to generate meaning from the participants' understanding of strategy implementation.

#### **4.5 Research setting**

Strategy implementation has been largely studied in the private sector and there is limited research undertaken in the public sector addressing effective strategy implementation (George, 2021). The research was therefore conducted in South Africa's public sector. Furthermore, within the public sector only State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) were considered, these are entities characterised by a dual system, they deliver on their constitutional mandate of providing public services while also being compelled to achieve financial goals (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020). The research focused on middle managers working within these SOEs who have implemented a strategic initiative or led a project that is of strategic importance (Christie & Tippmann, 2023). A strategic initiative is a targeted effort aimed at enhancing organisational capabilities and performance. These initiatives include, but are not limited to, projects focused on developing new products and increasing revenue, capital investment, and operational improvements (Ergene et al., 2023).

#### **4.6 Sampling method**

The researcher employed purposive sampling when selecting participants for the study. Purposive sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to choose the best individuals to assist with the understanding of the phenomenon (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2023). The researcher is employed in the public sector working for a state-owned organisation and has access to individuals suitable for the study. To guard against bias, she spread her sample across four SOEs to avoid only interviewing individuals for the SOE she works for. This was also done to ensure internal validity and triangulation. The researcher sent invitations to potential participants outlining the criteria in section 4.7

and only scheduled meetings on confirmation that the criteria is met. She leveraged her professional network for referrals, which extends to stakeholders including, regulatory bodies and other state-owned entities she frequently interacts with in her role. She also leveraged her network to connect with organisations where her friends work, seeking introductions to the relevant individuals suitable for the study. The researcher also made use of LinkedIn, a social media platform for professionals, to approach individuals from SOEs that may fit the criteria or possible connect her with willing participants. She also approached the organisations directly through their research or knowledge management departments.

#### 4.7 Sampling Criteria

- Middle managers working within SOEs in South Africa, positioned between top managers and direct supervisors, who have direct reports and report to somebody else.
- Responsible for implementing an identifiable strategic initiative formulated by the top management team, although they may have been involved as well.
- A middle manager who is willing to share their strategy implementation experience.

#### 4.8 Sample size

The researcher conducted 15 interviews with middle managers from four SOEs as tabled below. The different colour indicates the number participants from a particular SOE.

No	Participant	Pseudo name	Group
1	Participant 1	MM10	SOE 1
2	Participant 2	MM14	SOE 1
3	Participant 3	MM15	SOE 1
4	Participant 4	MM8	SOE 1
5	Participant 5	MM2	SOE 1
6	Participant 6	MM12	SOE 2
7	Participant 7	MM3	SOE 2
8	Participant 8	MM7	SOE 2
9	Participant 9	MM1	SOE 2
10	Participant 10	MM9	SOE 2
11	Participant 11	MM11	SOE3
12	Participant 12	MM5	SOE3

13	Participant 13	MM6	SOE3
14	Participant 14	MM13	SOE 4
15	Participant 15	MM4	SOE 4

Table 1: Overview of interview sample (Source: Authors own)

There are no explicit guidelines on the number of participants a study must have (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2023), as it depends on the study itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). However, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) found that in qualitative research, empirical studies reach data saturation between 9-17 interviews. They describe data saturation as a point whereby data becomes repetitive and introduces no additional insights or issues (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The researcher conducted 15 interviews, although saturation was not reached, by the 13th interview, the researcher began to see similar themes and patterns consistently emerging, and no new information surfaced during the coding of the transcripts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This is illustrated in the saturation chart figure three below.

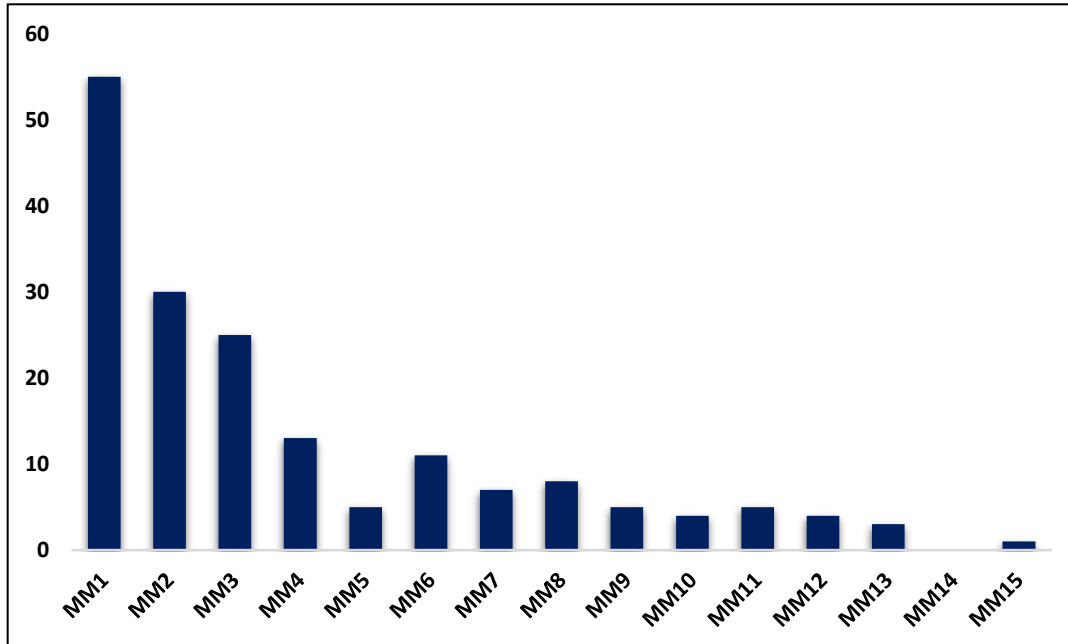


Figure 3: Saturation chart (Source: Author's own)

#### **4.9 Level and Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis was middle managers in SOEs leading the implementation of an intended strategy. The level of analysis was the strategy implementation activities that result in intended or unintended outcomes. The unit of observation was middle managers in SOEs.

#### **4.10 Data gathering process**

A key characteristic of qualitative research is its use of various data types to help understand the research problem (Gehman et al., 2018). Data-gathering techniques include observation, interviews, archival surveys, and social media (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2023; Gehman et al., 2018). The researcher used qualitative semi-structured interviews to allow for probing and exploration (Christie & Tippmann, 2023). The researcher conducted one-on-one, face-to-face interviews and where distance made this impractical, they made use of online platforms for video calls. The interview times averaged between 29 to 52 minutes. The participants were offered confidentiality and anonymised with a number based on the order in which they were coded (MM1-MM15). Certain position titles were also anonymised to prevent identification, as their specialised nature could have made individuals easily identifiable. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher using Microsoft Teams. The researcher undertook two pilot studies to test the interview protocol (appendix 1) before proceeding with data gathering and adjusted the interview questions based on the outcome of those interviews.

#### **4.11 Data analysis approach**

O'Kane et al. (2021) recommend that the researchers use computer-aided/assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to aid their understanding of the data and strengthen the credibility of qualitative work. The researcher made use of Atlas.ti software to code and identify themes for analysis. The researcher adopted the phases as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a guide to performing the qualitative thematic analysis. The phases are as follows:

- **Phase one:** The data was organised and prepared for analysis. The researcher listened to the recordings to ensure that the transcripts were accurately captured

and then reviewed the transcripts to identify meanings and patterns before proceeding with coding.

- **Phase two:** The transcripts were imported into Atlas.ti and coded individually. Preliminary codes were generated and organised into meaningful categories referred to as code groups on Atlas.ti. The codes were chosen based on how closely they answer the research questions.
- **Phase three:** Themes and sub-themes were identified using the coding process.
- **Phase four:** The researcher refined and reviewed the themes. This was done by further grouping the themes that were closely related manually on Excel.
- **Phase five:** The themes that were analysed were further defined and refined. Each theme was then analysed against the research questions and other themes.
- **Step six:** A final analysis was conducted and the findings are presented in a clear, coherent and non-repetitive manner in chapter five of the research report.

## **4.12 Research quality and rigour**

### **4.12.1 Validity and reliability**

The validity and reliability of data is important in research and entails conducting the study in an ethical manner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Therefore, the researcher exercised caution and employed validity and reliability strategies as recommended by Cresswell and Cresswell (2023). The following strategies were followed:

#### **4.12.1.1 Validity**

**Research bias:** The researcher is aware of possible bias as the qualitative research method considers the researcher a key instrument (Creswell & Creswel, 2018). Since the researcher is employed within the public sector and wishes to also interview individuals from the organisation she is employed in, the researcher recognised the potential for personal biases she needed to guard against. She managed the bias by interviewing only individuals she does not know personally from the organisation. She also interviewed individuals from other SOEs. The researcher pilot tested the interview questions with two interviews and made adjustments before proceeding with the data collection and avoided asking leading questions during the interviews.

**Present negative or discrepant information** that runs counter to the theme (Creswell & Creswel, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Should there be evidence that is contrary to the themes the researcher will present such information to add credibility to the study.

#### **4.12.1.2 Reliability**

In qualitative research, the key concern regarding reliability is whether the findings accurately reflect the data that was collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. The researcher was meticulous in ensuring the transcripts were correct and took care during the coding of the data that the codes didn't change, as they can obscure the findings should they change. The researcher documented an audit trail that "describes in detail how data was collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.252). The coding process is outlined in chapter five, and a consistency matrix is outlined in Appendix 2.

#### **4.13 Data Storage**

The collected data is securely stored in Microsoft Onedrive and is password protected and only accessible to the researcher.

#### **4.14 Ethical considerations**

The researcher adhered to GIBS' ethical principles. The researcher only proceeded with data collection after receiving ethical clearance (appendix 4). The information of the participants was protected and they were treated with respect. The researcher obtained informed consent from the participants for the study prior to the interviews and presented them with the option to withdraw consent at any time should they wish to. Each participant signed a consent form (appendix 3), which is stored with all the collected data. Confidentiality was assured by not requesting names of the participants, just their positions which some were further anonymised to avoid being identifiable. While anonymity could not be fully guaranteed to participants due to the nature of face-to-face interviews, participants were anonymised and given pseudonyms during coding and all their data is stored under those names.

#### **4.15 Limitations of the research design and methods.**

The limitation of the research design is that it relies on people's recollection of events, which may be subject to inaccuracies. The study focused only on middle managers' perspectives, without considering those of employees and top management, thereby limiting its scope for in-depth analysis.

The emphasis of the methodology on the researcher as a tool introduces limitations associated with the researcher being a novice. Time constraints also affected the data collection process as the research had to stop collecting data to allow enough time for data analysis. The SOE context also posed limitations due to restrictions on obtaining participants, therefore impacting the sample size. Some SOEs still require that the researcher obtains organisational approval even though the unit of analysis is an individual. Certain individuals were hesitant to participate without organisational approval.

## **5 Chapter 5 – Findings and Results**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with middle managers in the SOEs. The chapter begins with the description of the sample and the coding process. This is followed by the presentation of the evidence from the interviews, an in-case analysis, and a conclusion for each theme. Themes are discussed as per the research sub-questions previously discussed in Chapter 3 and briefly mentioned below:

**Main research question:** “Which middle managers’ activities result in strategy implementation in its intended or unintended form in SOEs?”

- Research sub-question one: What are the activities of middle managers in SOEs during strategy implementation?
- Research sub-question two: What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?
- Research sub-question three: What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to intended outcomes?
- Research sub-question four: What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to unintended outcomes (positive or negative)?

### **5.2 Sample description**

The sample comprised 15 SOE middle managers (referred to as middle managers in this chapter) responsible for implementing strategic initiatives or projects in their organisations. They had to be reporting to someone else and have supervisors as direct reports. To broaden the range of perspectives and experiences, the participants were selected from four SOEs for more in-depth in-case analysis. The inclusion criteria ensured that each middle manager has experience implementing a strategy, whether at the business-unit or functional level, and is responsible for cascading it to subordinates.

### **5.3 The coding process**

The analysis of the 15 interviews was done on Atlas.ti—a computer-aided/assisted qualitative data analysis software to assist with qualitative analysis. The first iteration

generated 301 codes, which were selected based on the researcher’s judgment of their relevance to the research questions. These were further refined, and similar codes were grouped and reduced to a final total of 180 codes. The 180 codes were extracted from Atlas.ti and manually grouped into categories in Excel (see Appendix 4). The next phase of the coding process generated 32 code groups in Atlas.ti, these are referred to as the categories below. The categories were further narrowed to 12 final themes as outlined in Table 2 below and discussed in this chapter. Below is the summary of the coding process.

RESEARCH SUB-QUESTIONS	CODES	CATEGORY	THEME
RSQ1 - What are the activities of middle managers in SOEs during strategy implementation?	Codes as per appendix 4	Interpreting and cascading the strategy Obtain buy-in from employees Collaborate with other departments Facilitate resource availability Set KPIs and monitoring Go between employees and TMT Navigating the strategy within regulatory constraints	Strategy implementation activities by middle managers
		Review of previous strategies Strategy formulation process Strategy implementation process	Process proceeding implementation
RSQ2 - What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?		Involvement of middle managers Support from the leadership Availability of resources Buy-in from employees Coordination amongst departments Lack of autonomy/flexibility Public sector regulations Change management Lack of an emerging strategy Understanding the Strategy Organisational culture	Barriers and enablers of strategy implementation
RSQ3 - What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to intended outcomes?		Expected outcomes by organisation Individual outcomes Team outcomes Internal alignment Build external relationships Project management techniques	Intended outcomes Internal alignment Build external relationships Use of project management and problem-solving tools

<b>RSQ4</b> - What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to unintended outcomes (positive or negative)?		Unintended outcomes Alignment with leadership Systematic issues Activities from negative to positive outcomes Negative unintended outcomes  Positive unintended outcomes	Unintended outcomes MM' use of experience Lack of coordination  Alignment with leadership Flexibility
---	--	--	--

Table 2: Summary of the coding process (Source: Author's own)

### 5.4 Findings for Research Sub-question one

The aim of research sub-question one was to understand what SOE middle managers do when implementing the strategy. This was achieved by asking the participants about their role and the activities that they engage in during strategy implementation.

#### 5.4.1 RQ1: Theme 1: Strategy implementation activities of middle managers in the public sector

##### 5.4.1.1 Interpreting and cascading the strategy

When asked what they do during strategy implementation, middle managers cited that they are responsible for interpreting and cascading the strategy presented to them to their teams or business units. What emerged from this activity is that the strategy is open to interpretation at the middle-management level. As mentioned by MM9: *“it's open for interpretation once it gets to you”*. They do this by ensuring their teams understand their role within the strategy as a department and what is required of them. This activity also involves identifying inputs and processes and setting up standards and guidelines to aid the outputs. Below are illustrative quotes.

**MM1:** *“cascading of information down to the relevant levels, that would basically be your foot soldiers or the implementers”*

**MM3:** *“So my role is to take the strategic objective from the corporate and then try to break it down for my team to say for this objective **what are the inputs** that go into it. What are **the processes that we need to follow** or need to engage in to get out that output.”*

MM4: “So taking the team literally through what the strategy is, what it means for the organisation. **Where do they fit in into the strategies** and what are the activities or initiatives or projects that will come out of the various strategic outputs.”

MM11: “obviously look at **the finer details** now from a business management perspective, you need to start interpreting it and start to **see your own unit within that strategy**”

MM12: “So my role is basically in the interpreting the strategy and also **initiate the standards or the guidelines around that strategy** and also implement the roll out of the guidelines and standards.”

#### 5.4.1.2 Obtain buy-in from employees

Closely associated with cascading the strategy, obtaining employee buy-in also emerged as an activity undertaken by middle managers. Evidence suggests that this activity is crucial for effective strategy implementation, as employee buy-in was highlighted in theme two as an enabler. Some participants indicated that this is done through workshops, roadshows and employee engagements, and the aim is to embed the strategy and create a sense of ownership to increase the likelihood of successful implementation. Words such as “coerce” (MM1), “institutionalising” (MM2) and “convincing” (MM12) suggested the different approaches that middle managers use in obtaining buy-in and commitment. Illustrative quotes from middle managers are seen below.

MM1: “I think you almost have to empathise in a weird way to **coerce** them to be on your side”

MM4: “**institutionalising and embedding** you know something like making it like the bible, which all of us sing from.”

MM6: “people must feel **it's theirs** as well.”

MM8: “it involved a lot of **roadshows**”

MM12: “Obviously those you need to address them through **workshops** and employee engagement”

MM15: “So you really need data for you to be able to **convince** people”

#### 5.4.1.3 Collaborate with other departments

In addition to engaging employees, another strategy implementation activity middle managers are also responsible for is engaging other departments, as expressed by MM11: “...there's a lot of engagement with supporting managers” who are crucial to effectively implementing the strategy. Strategy implementation requires coordination among departments because some strategic initiatives in SOEs involve interdependent components. Therefore, middle managers identify which departments need to be involved and lead those engagements. They emphasise the importance of a multidisciplinary team, or of different managers from different departments, specialists, or stakeholders, to improve the likelihood of success during implementation. Illustrative quotes from middle managers below.

MM1: “Then we also need to **engage all the other elements** that might feed into it; engineering, technical services...”

MM3: “so the collaboration in terms of **engaging those key stakeholders**, I've seen that it's not clear...”

MM10: “So one of the key things that we do is to ensure that we have **multidisciplinary streams that are led by our department**”

MM12: “**engage with the various role players** in the business or people that you'll consider specialist in that area”

#### 5.4.1.4 Facilitate resource availability

Another activity middle managers engage in is identifying the resources required to implement the strategy effectively. This involves requesting funding, deciding on a sourcing strategy and ensuring that the people implementing the strategy are adequately resourced. The data suggests that middle managers facilitate resource availability with their leadership, as explained by MM1: “...Then sign that off with all our senior management that will **unlock resources**...”. They are responsible for identifying the required resources and submitting requests—for example, funding—to their seniors to make those resources available, as evidenced in the quotes below. In addition, as indicated by MM6, middle managers do not have decision-making power over how these resources are allocated within their departments.

**MM4:** *“obviously **putting in place the resources** you know, in terms of, if it is a budget requests to the CFO, if it is outsourcing of certain functions”*

**MM6:** *“So you enjoy an element of autonomy by **having a budget allocated to you**, but at the same time, how you utilise that budget is not something you are fully in control of”*

**MM5:** *“we need to be able to ensure that those **people are properly resourced**”*

**MM12:** *“Then in terms of implementation you will then **identify resources that are required** for implementation”*

#### **5.4.1.5 Set KPIs and monitoring**

Middle managers also set key performance indicators (KPIs) specific to their business units that are linked to the strategy. These serve as a guide to their teams on what needs to be achieved. These KPIs facilitate strategy monitoring and enable middle managers to provide feedback to the leadership team and to evaluate whether to adjust the strategy. KPIs also help align expectations between leadership and employees. As explained by MM11: *“...so that there is alignment around what expectations are and also what deliverables look like on the ground”*. Illustrative quotes from middle managers below.

**MM1:** *“So we will **then design indices, dashboards, KPI's** that will feed or guide the foot soldiers to execute and implement and then be the pulse or the centre, the heartbeats of were all that information is gathered, managed, tracked, measured and then reports it up upstream”*

**MM8:** *“We need to **put measures in place**. Are we checking in every six months annually, quarterly and so on and so forth and we need to make room to pivot.”*

**MM13:** *“We will then take that annual performance plan [strategy] and use it to **craft our own personal contracts with KPIs and deliverables**”*

#### **5.4.1.6 Go between employees and TMT**

Middle managers view themselves as the bridge between the TMT and employees. Three themes of engagement between TMT and middle managers emerged from the data. By virtue of their position, Middle managers serve as a link between the employees and the leadership:

**MM4:** “So that becomes my role as a middle manager and also as a **bridge between the executive team and them**”

**MM10:** “So I am the **buffer between leadership and the bottom part**”

**MM11:** “...while you also try to **bridge the gap between the corporation and those staff members. So that there is alignment around what expectations are**”

Middle managers pitch to their seniors:

**MM1:** “I think like I said, if you can pitch at the right level because **you're pitching up** ...When we see the bottlenecks, we'll develop a case study and then the case study we will send it to senior management.”

**MM12:** “You will then develop a strategy at your level, at a middle manager level, and then that strategy is **communicated back to the top levels for approval** so that they check everything if it's aligned correctly.”

**MM6:** “my role is really to say to the organisation look, **let me show you the importance of our department**”

In addition to pitching strategies to their seniors, they provide feedback to leadership on the strategies based on the KPIs they have set. This is to communicate feedback on how they are experiencing the strategy and to enable leadership to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies being implemented, as indicated by MM6 and MM9 below.

**MM6:** “We'd feed back up again and **say hey, this one is not working** for us because this is the feeling people have...”

**MM9:** “So **we can feed up again** until it gets to executive so that you can measure if it assists the condition to achieve what needs to be achieved.”

#### **5.4.1.7 Navigating the strategy within regulatory constraints**

Another activity middle managers believe they have to engage in is balancing the implementation of the strategy with regulations. SOEs are regulated entities as expressed by MM12: “we in the public sector, it is more like a regulated environment, there have to be regulations around whatever that you do”. Furthermore, middle managers must fulfil the

organisation's mandate and achieve financial goals while competing with purely profit-driven organisations. MM11 refers to the expectations of the organisation competing with what they feel are more pressing factors.

**MM3:** *"So with every requested demand, it's not part of the strategy, but it needs to be attended to."*

**MM6:** *"Our commercial competitors\* have got a commercial imperative. Of course they are about the bottom line, make money, make profit. Ours is mandate heavy..."*

**MM11:** *"you have to balance quite a number of things around what the corporation expects from that particular unit and also what you feel are much more the pressing issues."*

#### **5.4.1.8 Conclusion of theme one**

Middle managers in SOEs engage in various activities during strategy implementation. They are responsible for interpreting and cascading the strategy to the employees. This entails tailoring the strategy to their business units and ensuring that the employees understand what is required of them and how they fit into the strategy. They also engage in activities to obtain buy-in from employees, which include workshops, roadshows and employee engagements, with the aim of embedding the strategy and creating a sense of ownership, to increase the likelihood of successful implementation. Middle managers also lead the engagements of the departments that are involved in their respective strategic initiatives to enable cooperation and focus on the initiatives.

Middle managers are also responsible for facilitating the availability of resources through engagements with leadership to ensure that people are fully resourced and that resources, such as funding, human capital, and technology, are made available. They also set and track KPIs, provide feedback to leadership, and serve as the bridge between employees and leadership. Middle managers also have to navigate the implementation of the strategy within regulatory constraints. These activities of middle managers in strategy implementation illustrate the critical role of middle managers in implementing strategies in SOEs.

#### **5.5 Findings for Research Sub-question two**

Research sub-question two sought to understand the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs. This was achieved by exploring what middle

managers believe should be in place to implement strategy effectively. To add depth to the study, the researcher first sought to understand the process of formulating and implementing the strategy, as well as the key role players in these processes within the SOEs. This was to gain insights into the process that precedes strategy implementation, as it may impact its execution and outcomes. Two themes emerged from this sub-question: the processes preceding implementation and the barriers and enablers of strategy implementation.

### 5.5.1 RQ2: Theme 2: Processes preceding implementation

#### 5.5.1.1 Strategy formulation process

The findings show that, in most cases, the strategy is formulated by the board of directors, the Chief Executives, and the executive committees, without the involvement of middle managers. Participants consistently described strategy as a top-down directive from executives that arrives as a complete document from leadership that they are tasked with implementing. As mentioned by MM2: “...*It's a directive and we follow suit.*”. There are however, exceptions where some middle managers reported being consulted in the strategy formulation process, albeit that it was not meaningful participation for most of the participants that were consulted (for example, MM6). Others noted that involvement only occurs when their work is highly specialised and executives require technical guidance as mentioned by MM10: “*we also have to be part of the formulation of the strategy so that we can guide certain key areas that need to be included in the strategy for us to be able to implement.*” Evidence of the strategy formulation process, as quoted by middle managers, is outlined below.

MM4: “*It's the board, it's **the management teams**, the senior management teams. As well as you know, **I would reluctantly say middle management** because like I said, when it comes to us, it's already been finalised”*

MM6: “*So, from when it comes to formulation, **we don't really take much part** in it, but **we do get consulted.**”*

MM9: “*In most cases, what the executives do, **they tend to do the strategy alone**”*

MM10: “*we also **have to be part of the formulation** of the strategy so that we can guide certain key areas that need to be included in the strategy for us to be able to implement.”*

### 5.5.1.2 Strategy implementation process

Most middle managers displayed an understanding of the formulation process and the key role players involved; however, very few could clearly outline the implementation process within their organisations. According to MM4, their implementation process is not very streamlined and is heavily dependent on their line managers' willingness to guide them through the strategy. Phrases in relation to the strategy implementation process included "there is a bit of a discord" (MM3) and "it is slightly more challenging than the formulation" (MM5), with no clear outline of how it is done in the organisation. Similarities were observed in the use of roadshows as part of the implementation process, which some middle managers highlighted they believed were sometimes not very effective. MM9 shared a recent example of a launch of the strategy and indicated that employees still do not know what needs to be done. Illustrative quotes from middle managers below.

**MM1:** "Implementation; then the outcome of those strategic planning sessions, **developing the strategic objectives, is now that roadshow, that buy-in, that cascading of information down to the relevant levels, that would basically be your foot soldiers or the implementers.**"

**MM3:** "The implementation of the strategy, that's where **there's a bit of a discord** in terms of implementation at the functional level."

**MM4:** "strategy is normally formulated at the highest level....comes in form of a document and also **the process is not very streamlined**, because for instance, in some business units you find that there are very clear communication lines between the executives or the heads of Departments"

**MM9:** "so people are on the ground, they've seen the launch, but **they don't know what it is that they're supposed to be doing**"

### 5.5.1.3 Conclusion of theme two

SOE strategies are formulated at a very high level of the organisation, with role players including the board of directors, the C-suite executives, senior managers and the strategy office for those SOEs that have such offices. Middle managers have limited involvement in the formulation process; these strategies come as a directive or a finalised document to them. There is no straightforward process for how they are cascaded to middle managers.

Some middle managers are consulted once the strategy has been formulated to provide feedback to leadership, and others are involved due to the complexity of the work they do.

The implementation process is not clearly laid out. The participants expressed confusion and frustration with the process, and they found it challenging. The implementation process involves developing strategy objectives and conducting roadshows to introduce the strategy and gain employee buy-in. The process also relies on their line managers' willingness to take them through the strategy.

## 5.5.2 RQ2: Theme 3: Barriers and Enablers to Strategy Implementation

### 5.5.2.1 Understanding the Strategy

Understanding the strategy emerged as a success factor for middle managers. MM1 mentioned that to gain such understanding, they consult the individuals responsible for formulating the strategy. The reason middle managers feel it is important to understand the strategy is that they cannot cascade it to obtain buy-in from employees if they do not fully understand it. As mentioned by MM4: *“if you as a middle manager are also not 100% sure of how that happens, then you stand a chance of having a team that is just doing this as a compliance tick box”*. Illustrative quotes from middle managers below.

MM1: *“First point would always be to go to the people who have developed the strategy and engage with them...**To understand where does this come from, why do we have this policy? Why do we have these strategic objectives?**”*

MM3: *“Also, this thing of saying managers should understand it at high level, when they understand it at high level, **it becomes difficult for them to trickle it down** to the bottom level.”*

MM9: *“I think the first thing that actually comes to my mind is the fact that **does the line manager understand** what is expected of them?”*

### 5.5.2.2 Support from leadership

Most participants regard leadership support as a key enabler for effective implementation of the strategy. The nature of the support varied. MM6 mentioned support in terms of accessibility to the leadership team for consultations and gaining their buy-in for projects and ideas. Additionally, it involves line managers explaining the strategy to middle managers and being accessible to address any concerns regarding the strategy. Other reasons mentioned are that leadership support carries weight, and employees are most likely to buy in if they see the leadership visible at the beginning of the implementation. MM14 cited support in terms of quick turnaround when decisions need to be made by the leadership, as it puts them on a fair competitive footing with their private-sector counterparts. Illustrative quotes from middle managers below.

MM5: *"I've been in the situation where my line manager would actually sit with me with a strategy took me through it, **even though it has been finalised but took me through it**, you know, but I know that's a privilege that not many middle managers enjoy, to be honest"*

MM6: *"**Accessibility to the brains** [leadership] fast, as it were, makes it easier for us to be able then do the work we need to do"*

MM13: *"Is the **buy in from the leadership**. Sometimes we could have nice, brilliant project that could make an impact, but if ever it's not supported by the leadership even if you want to collaborate with other business, you won't get far because the instruction should come from the top"*

MM14: *"So support in that things will not always be as we claim them to be, **when there need to be changes, when there needs to be flexibility**, we need to have the support. When you have the support from the top, support from the bottom, it makes it easier."*

### 5.5.2.3 Organisational culture

Middle managers referenced organisational culture as an enabler and barrier to strategy implementation. MM2 referenced the inability of people to speak out against management, citing that people do not speak when they are unable to deliver on certain projects that have been put in place without consulting middle managers. Similarly, MM3 referenced culture in terms of how different managers drive performance in their respective departments, whose performance is linked to other deliverables. MM6 emphasised that maintaining the culture

during strategy implementation is an enabler. When employees have a balanced life, it has a positive impact on their performance.

**MM2:** *"People just don't speak out. That's a cultural thing...I ask myself, is the issue that as people are we comfortable enough or secure enough that management can be challenged in the very things that they want us to deliver on"*

**MM3:** *"It's the culture within the organisation itself...culture in terms of different managers in the departments, in the culture that they drive, the inconsistency in terms of the same culture in driving objectives"*

**MM6:** *"And then also just making sure still in terms of the culture, that nothing happens to culture, the culture too remains...culture of the organisation where it's a place. you can grow, learn, come and have fun...yes, we want the revenue, but take some leave, get some rest"*

#### **5.5.2.4 Coordination amongst departments**

Lack of coordination among departments emerged as a barrier to the implementation of the strategy. Aligned with theme one, this is because strategic initiatives or projects require coordination across departments; therefore, it is important that departments align on deliverables. Coordination among departments enables the teams to have a view of the activities and their involvement. As illustrated in the quotes below, working in silos indicates a lack of coordination, which impacts effective strategy implementation.

**MM2:** *"It's a lack of coordination. Our coordination is not across the business unit lines because there's so many interdependent things for the momentum to take place."*

**MM3:** *"So yeah, it's the streamlining and breaking down those silo effects so we can have a clear view and do one streamlined activity to resolve everything."*

**MM5:** *"so that is where sometimes implementation can become challenging because one thing is dependent on the other"*

#### **5.5.2.5 Buy-in from employees**

Middle managers identified employees as central to the successful implementation of the strategy, emphasising that their buy-in and active support are critical. They highlighted the importance of employees understanding the strategy and how it relates to their day-to-day

activities. As the executors of the strategy, they must also buy into the strategy because their day-to-day activities have an impact on the success of the strategy, and they provide feedback middle managers. Illustrative quotes from middle managers below.

MM1: *"You need that **buy-in from your foot soldiers**. Your foot soldiers will execute, comment, implement and give you that feedback."*

MM4: *"another thing that I'm thinking of very much linked to the resources and capacity, which I've covered is the **employee buy-in**"*

MM8: *"**support of your subordinates** as well is very important."*

MM14: *"**Everyone needs to buy into it** because every day it will inform each and everyone's direction, so as much as it may be worked on or finalised at the top, but everyone will have to take from that and formulate their own departmental strategy that should be aligned to that"*

#### **5.5.2.6 Availability of resources**

The availability of resources also emerged as a strong enabler of strategy implementation. As explained by MM15: *"Resources definitely, that could come in the form of human resources, technology in whatever form, resources that may be required to make sure that the strategy becomes reality."* Additionally, funding also emerged a resource that is critical for strategy implementation success. Some mention that it is important to equip employees with training and tools, such as laptops, to carry out the strategy. When organisations put moratoriums in place to cut down on costs, they constrain the implementation of the strategy while still expecting middle managers to achieve the results intended by the strategy. Illustrative quotes from middle managers below.

MM2: *"You put **constraints on the implementation** part by things like moratoriums or **budget cuts**"*

MM10: *"And then the other one that I think I have seen it's resources, where we get a strategy to implement, but the resources are not sufficient to implement, such as **people resources** to get the work done, to implement and also tools that are required to get the correct results"*

MM13: *“there's a number of critical success factors that I can think of. One is the availability of resources, you know, government entities or organisation **they're usually understaffed.**”*

MM14: *“one of the biggest things is not given the resource. It could be the resource in terms of **funding** being made available.”*

### 5.5.2.7 Change management

Few middle managers listed change management as the antecedent to strategy implementation, as indicated in the quotes below. MM1 mentioned that change management makes it easier to implement a strategy. Similarly, MM10 made reference to their change management department, which engages with employees on the ground through roadshows during strategy implementation. According to MM13 when instructions come from the top it improves the likelihood of success indicating that change management must be driven by the leadership.

MM1: *“Easier I think, **change management**, consultation, buy-in from the foot soldiers”*

MM10: *“There are departments for that we call **change management** whereby they would facilitate roadshows on getting the message across to the men on the ground”.*

MM13: *“Sometimes we could have nice, brilliant project that could make an impact, but if ever it's not supported by the leadership even if you want to collaborate with other business you need to you won't get far because the **instruction should come from the top to say**”*

### 5.5.2.8 Involvement of middle managers in the strategy formulation process

Most middle managers indicated that involving them in the formulation of the strategy is an enabler to implementing it effectively. The findings indicated that the lack of involvement in strategy formulation prevents middle managers from interrogating the strategy, decreases their sense of ownership, and makes it difficult for them when they are expected to implement something they had no input in. MM4 raised the point that, because the strategy comes to them already finalised, they do not have a complete understanding of it, which, in turn, makes it challenging to cascade it to employees when they do not fully understand it themselves. MM6 indicated that consultations encourage ownership of the strategy. MM7 expressed frustration at being consulted but their input being ignored, as the strategy's

success is linked to their performance. The lack of involvement impacts their performance, compromises the cascading of the strategy and limits ownership. Supporting evidence from middle managers is presented below.

**MM4:** *“the fact that sometimes it comes, most of the time actually it comes as a finalised document, and **you have no understanding of what your team's role is** because you're not part of the whole process.”*

**MM6:** *“#2 people must feel it's theirs as well. Look **why the consultation is important** then to feed into that as well.”*

**MM7:** *“I think one I've experienced greatly is whereby input, **local input is requested and required, however ignored**. That's the most challenging that I've experienced, because then the success or lack thereof is aligned to one's performance”*

**MM8:** *“I'm being expected to now implement something that I was **not part of in the beginning**”.*

#### **5.5.2.9 Public sector regulations**

Middle managers highlighted the negative impact of regulations on strategy implementation within the SOEs. The data shows that strict compliance requirements often limit flexibility and slow down processes. MM10 referenced the bureaucracy in government procurement processes, which delays implementation. Similarly, MM14 referenced slow processes which lead to the organisation's competitiveness being compromised and cause significant frustration for middle management. Regulations emerged as a barrier to strategy implementation as referenced below by middle management quotes.

**MM6:** *“we are **quite a regulated business** so. So we need to make sure that everything we do we're colouring within the lines.”*

**MM10:** *“So working for **government has these bureaucracies** when it comes to procuring goods and services, so that also hinders the efficiency of implementing the strategy”*

**MM14:** *“And another thing is the **time factor in terms of our processes**... Yet the people that we compete with they're able to make decisions faster than us. So. We may come up with ideas, but our processes, they have so many hoops to jump before we can implement something... but the back and forth is frustrating...”*

### 5.5.2.10 Lack of autonomy/flexibility

The lack of autonomy emerged as a barrier to strategy implementation. MM11 expanded on the point that *“you enjoy an element of autonomy by having a budget allocated to you, but at the same time, how you utilise that budget is not something you are fully in control of”*. Being unable to decide where to allocate the budget, for instance, according to what the middle managers deem a priority, constrains implementation. This is echoed by MM12 that *“it becomes difficult, especially if you are a middle manager because it's not in your power to change whatever that you think needs to be changed.”*. MM15 emphasised that the strategy should not be rigid; it should be adaptable and tweakable to fit the business units. This supports a similar view from MM6 that they enjoy this flexibility as long as it drives revenue. Inability to make such changes hinders implementation. Illustrative quotes from middle managers below.

**MM6:** *“So what we found as well is that, **we'll be allowed to in terms of implementation to tweak it** here and there to suit the actual unit itself. because at the end of the day its all about generating that revenue”*

**MM14:** *“when **there needs to be flexibility**, we need to have the support.”*

**MM15:** *“as much as the strategy should be solid, but **there should be room for flexibility** in terms of modifying or tweaking”*

### 5.5.2.11 Lack of an emerging strategy

Lack of an emerging strategy emerged as a barrier to strategy implementations. As explained by MM4, this is the ability of an organisation to plan for different scenarios to enable middle managers to pivot when there are changes, be it political or otherwise. Having an emergent strategy will improve the likelihood of strategy implementation success.

**MM4:** *“another thing that hampers or that makes it difficult for middle managers to implement strategy is a lack of an **emerging strategy** because more often than not, these strategies come cast in stone...emerging strategy would give us a chance to, if there's critical changes. Say politically or otherwise we'll be able to switch to that to respond to whatever is happening in the environment.”*

### **5.5.2.12 Conclusion of theme three**

Theme three provided insights into the barriers and enablers that middle managers in SOEs consider when implementing a strategy. Middle managers identified eleven factors they believe should be in place to improve the likelihood of successful strategy implementation. They cite understanding the strategy as an antecedent to its implementation, as it enables them to clearly articulate it to employees to obtain buy-in. Employee buy-in is another factor they believe is key to the strategy's success. This is because employees are the implementers of the strategy; without their support and commitment, the strategy will not succeed.

Leadership support, availability of resources and coordination amongst departments also emerged as enablers for strategy implementation. Leadership support in terms of supporting the strategy, being easily accessible, making the resources available, quick turnaround in decision making and buying into the ideas from middle management. For strategic initiatives to be implemented successfully, coordination among various departments is crucial.

Change management is also another success factor for the effective implementation of the strategy. They see their lack of involvement in the strategy formulation process as a barrier to strategy implementation. They are of the view that being involved will allow them to contribute to the strategy and aid their understanding, making it easier to cascade to employees. They are of the view that the lack of involvement prevents them from interrogating the strategy, decreases their sense of ownership, and makes it challenging to implement something they had no input in.

Flexibility would make it easier for middle managers to make adjustments as needed, to improve the strategy's success rate. Middle managers cited public-sector regulations as a barrier to strategy implementation, due to lengthy processes that delay its implementation. Organisational culture was mentioned as both a barrier and an enabler of strategy implementation. Lastly, the lack of an emergent strategy limits public sector organisations' ability to pivot to other strategies when encountering challenges.

## 5.6 Findings for Research Sub-question three

Research sub-question three sought to understand strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs and how they relate to intended outcomes. This was achieved by asking participants about the strategic initiatives or projects they have implemented, the activities they engaged in, and the outcomes they led to.

### 5.6.1 RQ3: Theme four: intended outcomes of strategy implementation activities

When asked about the intended outcomes of implementing strategies in their organisations, participants' responses varied. MM4 and MM5 similarly mentioned business growth and revenue generation as intended outcomes when a strategy is implemented. MM4 further acknowledged that the business growth metric is relevant even for SOEs, as some government entities have the profit component. A customer-focused theme emerged from MM10 and MM13, with specific intended outcomes of customer retention, public service delivery, and the ultimate social impact of creating employment. MM15 spoke about fulfilling the mandate as an intended outcome during strategy implementation, which they linked to reduced customer complaints, indicating customer satisfaction. Other outcomes included *“improved confidence and recognition as pioneers”* MM1. Illustrative quotes from middle managers below.

**MM4:** *“With every strategy, you’re aiming to move or shift the needle in terms of business growth. And I’m saying **business growth** loosely because some of the SOEs or government agencies, there is a profit component to it.”*

**MM5:** *“An expectation from that would be #1 to see from those clients that we have invited to that workshop **a growth in revenue**”*

**MM10:** *“improved **customer** interactions, improved relations with customers and more retained customers in the long run... and there’s also a bigger benefit which is **increase employment** for the country.”*

**MM13:** *“obviously, is **service delivery**, when strategies are implemented then we are able to serve our **customers**. And meet their needs...all what we do we do to serve the general public. Citizens.”*

**MM15:** *"I would say that the organisation would be happy or excited or content provided that you know, **we fulfil the mandate**...if we fulfil this mandate, no more complaints from our **customers**."*

#### **Conclusion of theme four**

Intended outcomes of strategies, as articulated by SOE middle managers, include revenue generation, customer growth, and fulfilling the organisation's mandate. They also include a profit component, as the organisations the middle managers work for are both mandate-driven and also engage in profit-making activities.

To deliver on these intended outcomes, middle managers engage in strategy implementation activities through strategic projects and initiatives. The following section highlights the situated activities participants identified as leading to the intended outcomes. Three themes emerged from the data: internal alignment amongst departments and teams, building external partnerships, and the use of project management and problem-solving tools.

#### **5.6.2 RQ3: Theme five: Use of project management/problem-solving tools**

As illustrated in the quotations below, middle managers use problem-solving and project management tools to achieve intended outcomes. MM1 and MM15 highlight the importance of contextualising the problem to gain leadership support and improve the likelihood of success by using problem-solving tools. Similarly, MM3's use of project management encourages tracking and feedback, and MM10's inclusion of employees in the planning process encourages accountability from the team. This supports the findings from theme three of the importance of employees' buy-in, leadership support and tracking of KPIs as enablers to strategy implementation. Below examples of supporting quotes.

**MM1:** *"But when you give them [leadership] a case study and you show them, we've rolled this pilot out in these many provinces, this is what happened...Now they can **contextualise the problem** as opposed to us saying, it's not possible."*

**MM15:** *"You need **to properly identify the problem**, scope it so that it is based on facts...We use a principle called DMAIC, (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, Control)."*

**MM3:** “Then we kind of **project manage** it in a way to say, okay, **on a weekly basis**, we need to get our feedback.”

**MM10:** “To plot in our dates and our **project timelines**, we had a project schedule that we had to draft as the department and now this is where now we really could get a **buy in from the employees** in the department because now they are part and parcel of plotting dates to each action item that will see us at the end of the project.”

### **Conclusion of theme five**

To kick-start implementation, middle managers use problem-solving and project management tools. Contextualising the problem is important to aid leadership support and ensure the right problem is being addressed. They use project management tools for inclusive planning with their teams and for tracking the objectives of strategic initiatives.

### **5.6.3 RQ3: Theme six: Internal alignment between departments and teams**

Middle managers facilitate internal alignment between other **departments** and their teams when pursuing intended strategies. Middle managers frequently mentioned working closely with other departments when talking about their strategy implementation activities that led to intended outcomes. This aligns with the findings in theme two, which show that coordination among departments and employee buy-in enable successful strategy implementation. MM3 referred to breaking down silos to streamline department activities. MM6 and MM15 outlined that they engage in a process to break down the project/initiative and understand how each department fits into it, to improve alignment.

Middle managers frequently emphasised the importance of **subordinate/team** support and understanding when discussing activities that led to intended outcomes. MM4 emphasised that it is important for people to know why they are doing what they are doing, while MM12 and MM14 mentioned the engagement of all role players for a positive impact—illustrative examples of quotations below.

#### alignment amongst departments

**MM3:** “it’s the streamlining and **breaking down those silo effects** so we can have a clear view and do one streamlined activity to resolve everything.”

**MM6:** *"We'll get that and then we'll have to filter it through and break it down in terms of the various sections and then how all **verticals within the departments** as well. So marketing, programming and such."*

**MM15:** *"**Understand their processes** because to make this thing a success, all these departments processes must be intertwined and optimised"*

alignment within the team

**MM4:** *"But the work that led to that was sort of like any form of a project, change management needs to happen. **People need to know why** they do this and so forth"*

**MM12:** *"engage with the various **role players in the business** or people that you'll consider specialist in that area."*

**MM14:** *"So when there's **full alignment and engagement** that always has a positive impact."*

### **Conclusion of theme six**

When middle managers are engaged in activities that lead to intended outcomes, alignment with other departments and their teams is important. This involves the middle managers collaborating with other departments during strategy implementation. Working with their teams involves ensuring they understand what needs to be done and buy into the department's vision to achieve a positive impact.

#### **5.6.4 RQ3: Theme seven: Build external relationships**

The use of external partnerships was highlighted by several participants when talking about their activities that led to intended outcomes. These external partners included partnering with other government entities and the private sector (MM11), competitors (MM5, MM13), and the municipality (MM15). These partnerships are intended to pool resources, such as funding and expertise, and to build relationships to improve the likelihood that the strategies would be implemented successfully. This is evident in the quotes below from the participants.

**MM5:** *"And then one of the things we had to look at was maybe we should look at **outside partners** who can supply us and we can share revenue"*

MM11: “We entered into a **partnership with the government**, we entered into what we call a trade exchange.”

MM11: “So what we did was that we **partnered with a private partner**”

MM13: “the business **partnered with the competitor** something that was never done before.”

MM15: “And then there's an **element of the city** as well where their processes must complement ours”

### **Conclusion of theme seven**

Middle managers use partnerships outside the organisation during implementation to achieve intended outcomes. They partner with stakeholders from both the public and private sectors to pool in resources and build relationships.

### **5.7 Findings for Research Sub-question four**

Research sub-question four sought to understand the unintended outcomes of strategy implementation in the public sector and what activities of middle managers lead to these outcomes. Middle managers were asked about strategic initiatives or projects that they implemented and the outcomes they led to.

#### **5.7.1 RQ4: Theme eight: Negative and positive unintended outcomes**

Contrary to intended outcomes, unintended outcomes emerged as strategies that middle managers deemed unsuccessful or not fully implemented. MM6 had to adjust their project due to financial constraints, resulting in an outcome that did not fully align with the initial plan. MM4 highlighted that during implementation, things may take longer, citing the human factor, which may also lead to unintended consequences. Occasionally, some projects do not achieve their goals due to misalignment between leadership and employees' expectations (MM15) or unanticipated challenges leading to loss of market share and customers (MM11).

##### **5.7.1.1 Negative unintended outcomes.**

MM3: “It felt like we **missed critical and crucial steps** in terms of closing the loop on what we were trying to achieve because as much as that campaign was executed and

some customers transitioned smoothly, we still left people behind and the key objective of that drive, **I don't feel like it was completely successful** because we are still trying to rectify that same problem.”

MM4: “the negative ones where, you know, things take longer when you deal with human beings. They take longer...**It took longer**, so obviously it moves the timelines.”

MM6: “because of the financial challenges that we are experiencing, **we have had to cut down** because we released two per week. So now we are releasing two or three in a month. Which is still okay, not ideal”

MM11: “So all those elements, were essentially discarded and disregarded when the business restructured, so the negative effects of that was that the business started **losing a lot of market, a lot of clients** on the ground because servicing clients using personal touch became a bit difficult”

MM15: “leadership was expecting this thing would really make employees happy, but the ground is saying your methodology of this is not working. It has actually taken the levels of **morale lower than ever before.**”

#### 5.7.1.2 Positive unintended outcomes.

To deepen the insights from the study, a further analysis of unintended outcomes was done and labelled as positive unintended outcomes. These are the outcomes achieved after making some adjustments to the initial plans, or were unexpected by middle managers. MM9 mentioned becoming the flagship of the organisation, indicating an unexpected outcome for the team. MM3 cited that a quick turnaround in terms of iteration has led to one of the greatest initiatives in the organisation.

MM1: “Then the **turnaround** is happening now, slowly, but it's definitely happening now.”

MM3: “When it's fully in its completion form, I think that will be one of the **great strategic initiatives we perform as an organisation** in terms of the iteration 'cause we slow in terms of the iteration when we're trying to implement something, so that has been good in terms of that.”

MM9: “We were a **flagship of the entire organisation** because of the clear strategies that we had and the processes that were aligned to those strategies, they were sound”

### Conclusion of theme eight

Unintended outcomes refer to strategies that middle managers deem unsuccessful or that were implemented differently than initially planned. The experience of middle managers with these strategies includes the need to make adjustments due to limited resources or adjusting the timelines due to delays. The negative unintended outcomes include a loss of market share and lower employee morale. Not all unintended outcomes are negative. The positive unintended outcomes include observed turnaround within the organisation and initiatives that are even better than initially planned, and a boost in team morale.

#### 5.7.2 RQ4: Theme nine: Middle managers' use of experience

When discussing unintended outcomes, middle managers spoke about using lessons learned by asking what they can do better when strategies do not go as anticipated (MM1). When faced with new challenges, MM6 displayed resilience, and once they gained experience, they recognised the importance of the tool. Similarly, MM10 also acknowledged challenges when faced with an unprecedented situation, and they had to improvise to succeed.

MM1: *"That's now where it didn't end up the way we wanted. And we had to double down and say, guys, **what can we do to be better?**"*

MM5: *"Since we are currently cash strapped, **we had to look at ways of how else we get a certain product without having to spend our own money.**"*

MM6: *"it gave us a bit of a challenge, but eventually **I think when we caught on** and was like, oh, actually this is a great tool because it will help us."*

MM10: *"We haven't had any case like that before, but **we took it with a chin** and it was difficult to even present it to our leadership to allow us to proceed... but however we managed to wing it and yeah, got the buy in to proceed..."*

### Conclusion of theme nine

This theme highlights the experience of middle managers when confronted with challenges during implementation. It emphasises the importance of resilience, the ability to learn and adapt when faced with such challenges during implementation.

### 5.7.3 RQ4: Theme ten: Poor coordination

Poor coordination of other departments emerged as the activity middle managers engage in when deviating from intended strategies, leading to unintended outcomes. Lack of communication and aligned readiness amongst departments were highlighted by the quotes below from middle managers.

MM2: *“You do it, you implement it but **you’re not isolated for your deliverables**. Other business units need to do it, but if they weren’t ready like you were, that means to move to the next level they’re still stuck, so they still have another year, so you’re almost moving at a snail pace.”*

MM8: *“So the people that did strategy A and the people that did strategy B, I felt like **they were not talking to each other**”*

### Conclusion of theme ten

When middle managers do not collaborate with other departments, it leads to unintended outcomes. This is because deliverables are not isolated to the middle managers’ departments. They must ensure that the other departments that are linked to their objectives are also ready for implementation and keep the communication lines open.

### 5.7.4 RQ4: Theme eleven: Misalignment between leadership and middle managers

Middle managers cited several issues relating to leadership when discussing the unintended outcomes. The reasons cited align with the findings for theme three about the importance of leadership support and resources during implementation. A new challenge that emerged is the frequent leadership changes, which MM3 suggests disrupts the full implementation of the strategy. This statement is supported by MM6, who points out that new leadership tends to make abrupt changes when they take over. This data suggests that misalignment between leadership and middle managers may lead to insufficient resourcing of strategic initiatives.

MM2: *“So you’ve got the staff, **but they can’t go for training** and then you’ve got to go kind of beg to get the sign off for the training to take place”*

**MM3:** *“But it felt like the **people who should be on the forefront**, who should be driving it, who should have supported it in the correct way in terms of adequate resources and so forth, they just didn't come to the party,”*

**MM5:** *“We recognise that we **have not been able to give you what was required** for you to get to 25%, but we still expect the 25% of you.”*

**MM3:** *“There hasn't been a time where a leader comes into the organisation and **we are given enough time with the leader to fully execute the strategy in its full entirety.**”*

**MM6:** *“**somebody new from outside coming in** “I see the organisation and I just want to change it” and that's some of the challenges that a lot of organisations have with getting people from outside”*

#### **Conclusion of theme eleven:**

When there is less cooperation between middle managers and their superiors, it leads to unintended outcomes. Misalignment between leadership and middle managers regarding required support and resources, and the organisation's vision, compromises implementation.

#### **RQ4: Theme twelve: Flexibility**

Flexibility allows middle managers to adjust the strategies to achieve positive unintended outcomes. MM8 mentioned that they had to quickly pivot and do what they could to achieve better results than initially planned. MM2 had to find other ways to achieve the same goal. MM6 indicates that while they achieved the results, they were not ideal.

**MM2:** *“**we found a completely different unit to piggyback** on their contract. So that the budget amount would be reduced”*

**MM6:** *“which is still okay, not ideal with what we wanted to do and achieve”*

**MM8:** *“we were able to **quickly pivot** and just try to implement whatever we could and change whatever we could... So the 1st result was not as positive ... but then when we changed it, something even better came about and I'm very proud to put that on my portfolio.”*

### Conclusion theme twelve

The use of flexibility by middle managers leads to unintended outcomes. These outcomes can be negative or positive. When middle managers can pivot during strategy implementation, it may sometimes lead to unintended positive outcomes.

### 5.8 Conclusion

Key findings emerged from the themes are outlined below table three below.

<b>Research sub-question 1:</b>
<b>What are the activities of middle managers in SOEs during strategy implementation?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interpreting and cascading the strategy</li><li>• Obtain buy-in from employees</li><li>• Collaborate with other departments</li><li>• Facilitate resource availability</li><li>• Set KPIs and monitoring</li><li>• Go between employees and TMT</li><li>• Navigating the strategy within regulatory constraints</li></ul>
<b>Research sub-question 2:</b>
<b>What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understanding the strategy</li><li>• Employee buy-in</li><li>• Leadership support</li><li>• Availability of resources</li><li>• Coordination amongst departments</li><li>• Change management</li><li>• Organisation's internal culture</li><li>• Exclusion from the strategy formulation process (barrier)</li><li>• Public-sector regulations (barrier)</li><li>• Lack of Flexibility (barrier)</li><li>• Lack of an emergent strategy (barrier)</li></ul>
<b>Research sub-question 3:</b>

<b>What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to intended outcomes?</b>
<b>Intended strategic outcomes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business and revenue growth</li> <li>• Customer growth and customer retention</li> <li>• Improved service delivery</li> <li>• Improved employee confidence</li> <li>• Recognition as pioneers</li> </ul>
<b>Middle managers' strategy implementation situated activities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of project management and problem-solving tools to contextualise the problem</li> <li>• Coordinate with departments and teams to align on activities and obtain buy in</li> <li>• Build external relationships to pool in resources and build relationships</li> </ul>
<b>Research sub-question 4:</b>
<b>What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to unintended outcomes (positive or negative)?</b>
<b>Unintended strategic outcomes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of employee morale (negative)</li> <li>• Loss of market share (negative)</li> <li>• Department recognition as flagship of the organisation (positive)</li> <li>• Turnaround in the organisation (positive)</li> </ul>
<b>Middle managers strategy implementation situated activities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle managers' use of experience relates to unintended outcomes</li> <li>• Poor coordination between departments leads to unintended outcomes</li> <li>• Misalignment between leadership and middle managers relates to unintended outcomes.</li> <li>• use of flexibility relates to unintended outcomes</li> </ul>

Table 3: Summary key findings (Source: Author's own)

## **6. Chapter 6: Discussion of the research findings**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the discussion of the findings in relation to the literature. This is achieved by synthesising chapter two and chapter five. Chapter five presents the findings from interviews of middle managers in SOEs. This chapter seeks to discuss those findings in the context of the literature. The chapter's layout follows the research sub-questions and discusses the themes which emerged.

#### In-case analysis of the research findings and literature

### **6.2. Discussion of findings for research sub-question one**

Research sub-question one: What are the activities of middle managers during strategy implementation in SOEs?

#### **6.2.1. RQ1: Theme 1: Strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs**

In summary, the research findings revealed the following as activities of middle managers in the SOEs during strategy implementation.

- Interpreting and cascading the strategy
- Obtain buy-in from employees
- Collaborate with other departments
- Facilitate resource availability
- Set KPIs and monitoring
- Go between employees and TMT
- Navigating the strategy within regulatory constraints

Examining the activities of middle managers provided valuable insights into their pivotal role within the strategy process, as suggested by Splitter et al. (2023). Several middle management strategy implementation activities emerge from the literature based on their pivotal role. While scholars and research findings describe these activities using different

labels, a synthesis of the literature in chapter two shows that these activities can be categorised into distinct domains. The discussion of the research findings on SOE middle managers' strategy implementation activities will be structured using the same categories identified in the literature.

Findings from this study illustrate that SOE middle managers engage in various activities during strategy implementation. The research findings are aligned with the literature, which states that SOE middle managers **interpret and translate the strategy** for employees. The literature reflects that this is possible by translating strategic ideas into actionable plans (Tarakci et al., 2023) and motivating employees to commit and work toward its implementation (Ateş et al., 2020). This is consistent with the research findings, which show that SOE middle managers tailor the strategy to their business units and ensure employees understand what is required of them and how they fit into the strategy. When top management prescribes what must be communicated, middle managers have discretion in how they interpret and communicate the strategy, highlighting the importance of strategic alignment between senior management and middle managers (Ateş et al., 2020).

The literature further reflects that middle managers possess the ability to influence activities and the strategy process because of their proximity to top management's internal views, relative to other employees or external stakeholders (Splitter et al., 2023). This position grants them a certain level of flexibility in how they interpret and implement strategic initiatives (Azambuja et al., 2023). Although the research findings align with the literature on strategy interpretation, a slight variation in terms of flexibility is noted. Once SOE middle managers have interpreted the strategy, they must present it to their leadership for approval and to unlock resources. This highlights the lack of flexibility and the dependence on superiors, further emphasising the importance of alignment between middle managers and leadership for effective strategy implementation.

In comparing the research findings to the literature, the researcher notes that middle managers also play a key role in **coordinating and enacting strategic activities during** strategy implementation. The literature identifies these activities as those aimed at achieving collective action (Weiser et al., 2020). This collective action extends to coordinating key role players in strategy implementation, which includes top management, frontline employees, strategic planning staff (Weiser et al., 2020), external stakeholders and consultants (Friesl

et al., 2020). The literature highlights that middle managers facilitate these interactions through informational and social exchanges, acting as a link for vertical and horizontal strategic activities across the organisation (Tarakci et al., 2023). The research findings confirm the literature that SOE middle managers engage in these activities to obtain buy-in from employees, through workshops, roadshows and employee engagement, aiming to embed the strategy and create a sense of ownership to increase the likelihood of successful implementation. This is also similar to Friesl et al. (2020), that middle managers communicate strategic objectives to employees through channels such as newsletters, emails, and town-hall meetings.

Middle managers take on a bridging role and implement these strategies at lower organisational levels (Ateş et al., 2020; Friesl et al., 2020). Through **sensemaking**, middle managers construct meaning from ambiguous or evolving strategic information, and through **sensegiving**, they actively shape the interpretations of employees, peers, and partners (Schuler et al., 2023). This activity enables alignment of understanding across the organisation and supports collective engagement with the strategy. They achieve this by setting objectives and key performance indicators (KPI) to drive and monitor performance, as these are necessary for successful strategy implementation (Friesl et al., 2020; Vigfússon et al., 2021). This is another activity consistent with the research findings, that SOE middle managers also set and track KPIs and create objectives linked to the strategy for employees. Strategic objectives must be translated into measurable performance indicators for employees, because the lack of indicators can be a barrier to implementation (Friesl et al., 2020; Vigfússon et al., 2021).

In addition to setting KPIs and objectives, the research findings suggest that SOE middle managers provide consistent feedback to the leadership on the progress of the strategic initiatives. According to Christie and Tippmann (2023), middle managers connect the TMT and employees, driving the operationalisation of strategies across teams and ensuring commitment to the strategy from the teams (Ateş et al., 2020). The research findings further suggest that middle managers are also responsible for pitching ideas to leadership and serving as a bridge between employees and leadership. The literature refers to this activity as issue-selling, citing that it gives middle managers the discretion to identify and prioritise

issues they deem necessary and worth bringing to the attention of top management (Splitter et al., 2023).

Middle managers negotiate resources, build coalitions, foster relationships, and mobilise support across organisational boundaries (Ateş et al., 2020; Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Tyskbo & Styhre, 2022). SOE middle managers negotiate resources by engaging leadership to ensure that human resources are fully resourced and equipped with tools, and that resources, such as funding and technology, are also available. This is because the responsibility of acquiring and shaping the resources needed for strategy implementation lies with the TMT (Mistry et al., 2023) and compared to other sectors, SOE leaders are substantially restricted in terms of their ability to influence and direct resources (Klier et al., 2025b).

Consistent with the literature, SOE middle managers also build coalitions, foster relationships, and **enlist commitment to the strategy**. Strategy implementation requires securing the cooperation of numerous actors, and middle managers perform this role by leveraging internal and external networks (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Tyskbo & Styhre, 2022). The research findings show that middle managers lead engagements with other departments involved in their respective strategic initiatives. This is because departments are not isolated in their deliverables. SOE projects involve multiple disciplinary teams, departments, and sometimes divisions, and middle managers must coordinate to ensure the projects succeed. Middle managers achieve this coordination through sense-giving and communicating to develop a shared understanding (Friesl et al., 2020). This shared understanding among employees and other departments is a success factor in strategy implementation. According to Weiser et al. (2020) these interactions for shared understanding take the hierarchical approach, and across multiple departments. These interpersonal activities are crucial for managing the political and relational complexities inherent in implementation processes.

The literature and the research findings acknowledge that middle management contributes to **conceptualising and shaping strategic outcomes**. Although top management drives the conceptualisation of strategies, their activities also affect implementation outcomes (Weiser et al., 2020). Similar to the findings, this contribution may be because strategy

development is part of their job description (Feldermann & Hiebl, 2025), which is similar to the research findings that SOE middle managers in specialised roles are included in the formulation and that some are consulted to guide leadership. Furthermore, with the growing advocacy for opening up the strategy to middle managers and employees to make implementation easier and practical, to encourage accountability, and to improve the success rate at implementation (Hansen et al., 2022; Köseoglu et al., 2020; Loudon, 2024), one can conclude that conceptualisation is an important activity for middle managers.

The research findings show that another activity middle managers engage in, is navigating the implementation of the strategy within **regulatory constraints and the demands of senior management**. The research findings suggest that SOE middle managers must also manage expectations within the organisation, competing with what they perceive as more urgent factors. This activity is not unique to middle managers in SOEs, Gjerde & Alvesson (2020) refers to this as their middle-levelness because middle managers have to manage expectations from their seniors and subordinates, as well as contradictions that may occur. The research findings suggest that, in the SOE context, this balance concerns balancing the fulfilment of the mandate with the pursuit of profits. This is in line with the literature that profit-making is a fundamental aspect of most SOEs and is integral to their organisational identity (Andrews et al., 2019), together with their constitutional mandate of providing services to the public service (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020).

### **6.2.2. Conclusion for research sub-question one**

Research sub-question one sought to understand the activities of SOE middle managers during strategy implementation. The research findings are consistent with the literature on the activities of middle managers in SOEs during strategy implementation. The key activities are categorised under: (i) interpreting and translating the strategy for employees; (ii) coordinating and enacting strategic activities; (iii) sensemaking and sense giving; (iv) influencing, networking, and enlisting commitment to the strategy; and (v) contributing to conceptualising and shaping strategic outcomes. Middle managers also have to balance the strategy implementation activities with managing their day-to-day priorities. These findings are supported by the literature.

### 6.3. Discussion of findings for research sub-question two

Research sub-question two: What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?

#### 6.3.1. RQ2: Theme 2: Processes preceding strategy implementation

According to Chamorro-Premuzic and Lovric (2022), having an actionable strategy formulated is the first antecedent to strategy implementation. The research findings indicated that strategies in SOEs are formulated at a very high level of the organisation, with role players including the board of directors, C-suite executives, senior managers, and the strategy office within the SOEs where available. Predominantly, middle managers are not involved in the formulation process; these strategies come as a directive or a finalised document to them. This is consistent with the literature that the TMT is entrusted with formulating the strategy (Christie & Tippmann, 2023) and making decisions about strategic choices that influence firm performance (Samimi et al., 2020). They delegate the implementation of these strategies to middle managers (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Vera et al., 2022), who drive the implementation of the formulated strategies within their teams (Ateş et al., 2020).

The delegation process for these strategies to public middle managers remains unclear, and the findings suggest inconsistencies in how they reach middle managers. In many instances, it is in the form of a document or through their senior management. In certain cases, middle managers are consulted once the strategy has been formulated to provide input to the leadership, and in other instances, they are involved due to the complexity of the work that they do, suggesting it is part of their job, in line with Feldermann and Hiebl's (2025) assertion that in some instances, middle managers' involvement in strategy development is part of their job description. These inconsistencies suggest a gap in how the strategies are cascaded within the organisations, supporting the observations by Friesl et al. (2020) that strategies may be clearly planned or roughly outlined and formally or loosely shared with employees. One can conclude that strategies in SOEs are clearly planned, however loosely shared.

The research findings on the strategy implementation process align with the scholarly perspectives. The findings suggest that there is no well-defined implementation process in SOEs. This translates to confusion and frustration with the process, presenting a challenge for middle managers. This is not unique to middle managers; Köseoglu et al. (2020) and Lee (2024) acknowledge that the execution process is said to be less clearly defined and uncertain, which could impact the implementation and outcomes. The research findings reveal that the organisations' implementation process involves various activities, outlined in no particular order, including cascading the strategy from leadership to middle managers, developing strategy objectives, and conducting roadshows to introduce the strategy and secure buy-in from employees. This aligns with the work of Mitchell (2022) that there is no agreed-upon strategy implementation process for a strategy. Strategy implementation is a complex, context-dependent, and dynamic process (Friesl et al., 2020; MacLennan & Markides, 2021; Weiser et al., 2020) and its activities differ across time and varying contexts and it must be supported by the leadership (Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025).

Although the research findings did not present a clearly defined strategy implementation process, the middle management activities during implementation as discussed in theme three, did reveal elements of the strategy implementation process reflected in the work of Rowe and Nevmerzhytskyi (2025). They summarise the strategy implementation process adopted in the public sector as that of alignment of various areas. This entails aligning the formulated strategy with external environmental factors, resources and capabilities, organisational design elements such as structure, management processes and culture and ensuring leadership support for the proposed strategy (Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025). The findings on the antecedents and middle management activities during implementation, which are detailed below, reflect the factors discussed by Rowe and Nevmerzhytskyi (2025), suggesting that although the findings are not conclusive on the strategy implementation process, they do offer middle managers valuable insights on what needs to be in place before implementation and the activities they must engage in and reinforces the notion that strategy implementation is iterative and not a linear process (Mitchell, 2022).

In conclusion, the research findings and the literature on the processes that precede strategy implementation align. Strategy formulation is done at a high level, with middle managers involved only as subject-matter experts as part of their jobs; in some instances, they are

consulted or receive a document to implement. There is no clearly defined strategy implementation process in SOEs; there are various strategy implementation activities linked to the process, but they are not sequenced, aligning with the literature that the process is iterative. Strategies are clearly planned, however loosely shared with the middle managers and employees. There were consistent with the literature, and therefore add to the existing body of knowledge.

### **6.3.2. RQ2: Theme 3: Antecedents to strategy implementation**

Understanding the strategy emerged as a success factor for middle managers in the research findings. This aligns with the literature, that an unclear strategy is a barrier to strategy implementation (Vigfússon et al., 2021). **A clearly defined strategy, clear goals and objectives**, which align with the strategy, provide employees and middle managers with reference points for decision-making and enable the translation of strategic intent into measurable outcomes (Friesl et al., 2020; Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025; Vigfússon et al., 2021). The research findings indicate that middle managers achieve clarity about the strategy by consulting the individuals responsible for formulating it. They do this to understand the strategy so they can cascade it down and obtain employee buy-in for effective implementation. This is because without clearly articulated goals and performance indicators, middle managers may struggle to coordinate, monitor, and guide strategic activities effectively, increasing the risk of poor outcomes (Friesl et al., 2020).

The research findings confirmed the literature regarding **leadership support** as an antecedent to strategy implementation. In exploring leadership support, the research findings confirmed that for strategies to be successful, leadership must be easily accessible, support the strategy, make resources available, provide a quick turnaround in decision making and buy into the ideas from middle management. This confirms that the CEO and TMT play a critical role in the successful implementation of a strategy (Köseoglu et al. (2020; Vera et al., 2022). They provide support and commitment to the chosen strategy (Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025). Their actions also extend to acquiring and shaping the resources needed for strategy implementation (Mistry et al., 2023), making their role and support crucial to successful implementation. Similar to Vigfússon et al.'s (2021) review, leadership support in the research findings was highly referenced for its impact on implementation. Vigfússon et al. (2021) write that **leadership support, motivation, and style** have an

impact on implementation and was one of the highly referenced factors in their review. This is consistent with the research findings that there must be a willingness from the leadership to take middle managers through the strategy, that the leadership must buy into their ideas, and that leadership visibility plays a critical role during strategy implementation.

According to Crittenden and Crittenden (2008), the **organisation's internal culture** can be an enabler in successful implementation. They define it as the set of shared values that directs daily operations. The research findings confirm the dual role of organisational culture as both an enabler and a barrier to strategy implementation in line Vigfússon et al.'s (2021) findings. As a barrier, the research findings cited the culture of poor communication as a obstacle to strategy execution. Specifically, SOE employees often refrain from voicing concerns when they cannot deliver on projects, suggesting a lack of psychological safety. Furthermore, inconsistencies in the culture within various departments on how different managers drive performance in their respective departments hinder implementation. This is because collaboration among departments is crucial for strategy implementation and if departments have different performance cultures, it causes inconsistencies in how deliverables are carried out. Harrison and Rogers (2024), place the responsibility of actively fostering the organisational culture on middle managers. Conversely, middle managers emphasised that maintaining a positive culture during strategy implementation is an enabler, emphasising work-life balance as a critical cultural element that may positively impact performance.

**Coordination amongst departments** also emerged as an enabler for strategy implementation in the research findings. Middle managers are responsible for coordinating activities with other departments during strategy implementation. This is in line with the findings from (Köseoglu et al., 2020), that strategic consensus is one of the most important success factors during implementation. The research findings highlighted that for strategic initiatives to be successfully implemented, there must be consensus among departments. Middle managers are pivotal in achieving such alignment, as they interpret strategic objectives, prioritise initiatives, and coordinate cross-departmental activities (Mitchell, 2022; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). This is because most strategy initiatives require collaboration across departments to succeed, and those departments need to be aligned and have a complete understanding of what is required from them. This is referred to in literature as a

shared understanding and commitment, and it has an influence on the strategy and its successful implementation (Vigfússon et al., 2021). This is because, without a shared understanding of the strategic direction among the members of the organisation, both the implementation process and its outcomes may be impacted (Friesl et al., 2020).

Understanding the strategy is important for facilitating **employee buy-in**, which middle managers consider as an additional key success factor for strategy implementation in the findings. To obtain support and buy-in from subordinates, middle managers must be able to communicate the strategy clearly. Communicating the strategy to employees enhances their commitment and encourages them to contribute to its successful implementation (Ateş et al., 2020). The research findings suggest that, because employees are the implementers of the strategy, without their support and commitment, the strategy will not succeed. Furthermore, their day-to-day activities have an impact on the success of the strategy. This is consistent with the literature, that when employees are committed to the strategy, they understand the significance of their contribution and they have a view of how they contribute to the success of the organisation's strategic objectives (Ateş et al., 2020; MacLennan & Markides, 2021).

The leadership is also responsible for ensuring that the appropriate capabilities and resources are in place to implement the strategy (Vera et al., 2022). The research findings on the **availability of resources** as an antecedent to strategy implementation were also found in the literature. Both the findings and the literature highlight the importance of financial resources and dedicated staff (Lee, 2024). In addition to human resources and financial resources, the research findings also cited technology. Middle managers were also clear that their subordinates must also be capacitated with the tools that are required to implement the strategy. This is confirmed by literature that the development of middle and lower-level managers' capabilities for the effective implementation of the organisation's strategy is critical (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). Concluding that if the implementers of the strategy lack the skills, motivation, and resources to put it into action, it will fail (Ashkenas, 2024).

The findings show that **change management** is also another success factor for the effective implementation of the strategy. Although this aligns with the literature, it differs in the people identified as responsible for the function. The findings refer to change management as a

responsibility of a specific department and are not explicit about the level at which it occurs, while the literature notes explicitly, that change management led by executives, is essential for strategy implementation, and inadequate capabilities to implement change management may hinder strategy implementation (Vigfússon et al., 2021). Although not explicit, the visibility of leadership during strategy implementation and the requirement for certain directives to originate from leadership, discussed under leadership support, indicate alignment with the notion that change management driven by executives enables successful strategy implementation. Therefore, it can be concluded that change management driven by executives enhances the likelihood of strategy implementation success.

### **Barriers to strategy implementation**

The research findings provide insights into the barriers and enablers that SOE middle managers perceive as having an impact on strategy implementation. Middle managers perceive their **exclusion from the strategy formulation process** as a significant barrier to effective implementation. They believe that involvement will allow them to contribute to the strategy, increase their sense of ownership, and enhance their understanding, making it easier to cascade to employees. This perspective aligns with the concept of open strategy by Splitter et al. (2023), which advocates for inclusion and transparency. Feldermann and Hiebl (2025) advocate for the inclusion of middle managers in the formulation process. In the public sector, Hansen et al. (2024) advocate for transparency, which entails sharing information about the strategy with employees, clients, and other organisations. According to Feldermann and Hiebl (2025), this inclusive approach encourages ownership, while Hansen et al. (2024) suggest that in the public sector, it can help foster support for decisions, making strategy implementation easier. The research findings agree with the literature in that the involvement of middle managers in strategy formulation may increase the sense of ownership and accelerates decision-making from superiors. However, the research findings emphasised the strong desire for middle managers to have input into the strategy and that their involvement would primarily support their understanding of the strategy. This suggests that middle managers are aware of their limitations in relation to their understanding of the strategy and how it hinders them from implementing it effectively.

Middle managers perceive **public-sector regulations** as a barrier to implementing strategy. The literature confirms that public sector organisations are subject to additional layers of

approvals, budgetary constraints, and high regulatory pressures from politically empowered actors (Gullmark et al., 2025; Wirtz et al., 2021). Unique to public sector organisations, the findings revealed that lengthy processes driven by government bureaucracy and strict compliance requirements often limit flexibility and slow down processes in the SOEs. This results in implementation delays, may compromise the organisation's competitiveness, and can cause significant frustration for middle management.

The findings highlighted that **flexibility** makes it easier for middle managers to make adjustments as needed to strategies to improve the strategy's success rate, as it enables them to adapt in order to achieve intended outcomes. Although the findings highlighted flexibility as an enabler, they also indicated that SOE middle managers lack it. The findings referenced perceived autonomy, where middle managers have limited input in how things are done even within their own departments. This is in contrast to the literature, which purports that middle managers make sense of the strategy and based on their interpretation, decide on how to advance (Tarakci et al., 2023). The findings reflect that inasmuch as SOE middle management interprets the strategy, they still have to get approval from their leadership before proceeding. This departs from Ateş et al. (2020) that middle managers have autonomy in communicating their interpretation of the strategy.

Lastly, the findings reveal that the **absence of an emergent strategy** limits the organisation's ability to adapt to other strategies when encountering unexpected challenges. They defined this as being prepared for unexpected challenges. The literature suggests digitally enabled control tools that can provide flexibility by linking employees with relevant management information in real time, supporting quick adjustments to operational changes and enhancing coordination across hierarchical levels (Sundström & Svärdesten, 2025). This lack of flexibility was emphasised middle managers, indicated that an emergent strategy would make it easier to pivot to an emergent strategy when faced with challenges during implementation. This observation aligns with Köseoglu et al. (2018) who found unexpected changes from internally or externally to be a barrier to successful strategy implementation. Therefore, having an emergent strategy could enhance adaptability ultimately improving implementation outcomes.

### **6.3.3. Conclusion for research sub-question two**

The research findings on sub-question two are consistent with the literature in terms of the antecedents of strategy implementation. The research findings suggest that inclusion of middle managers in the strategy formulation process, understanding the strategy, employee buy-in, leadership support, availability of resources, Coordination amongst departments, change management, and organisation's internal culture are antecedents in strategy implementation.

They further highlight public-sector regulations, a lack of flexibility, and the absence of an emergent strategy as barriers to effective strategy implementation. Challenges such as resource availability constraints, inconsistent leadership, and complex stakeholder demands not only impede intended strategy execution but also create opportunities for middle managers to exercise discretion, autonomy, and coalition-building in navigating these constraints (Ateş et al., 2020; Feldermann & Hiebl, 2025).

While acknowledging the similarity between the research findings and the literature, the research findings further expand the current body of knowledge on strategy implementation, more so within the context of SOEs.

## **6.4. Discussion of findings for research sub-question three**

Research sub-question three: What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to intended outcomes?

### **6.4.1. RQ3: Theme four: intended outcomes of strategy implementation activities**

When defining intended outcomes of strategies, the research findings indicate that within SOEs, these include revenue generation, improved service delivery, customer growth, and fulfilling the organisation's mandate. This is in line with Vandersmissen et al. (2024), that in the public sector, these outcomes can manifest as enhanced service delivery, increased public value, and more efficient processes. Moreover, the findings highlight that SOEs, are both mandate-driven and also engage in profit-making activities as intended outcomes. This came out strongly in the findings as this dual mandate also impacts their ability to deliver on the strategies as they constantly must balance between the two as discussed under theme one. This is supported by Papenfuß and Keppeler (2020), who write that SOEs have a dual

system, they must deliver on their constitutional mandate of providing public services while also being compelled to achieve financial goals.

The study examined strategy implementation activities of middle managers that relate to these intended outcomes and found that SOE middle managers engage in the use of project management and problem-solving tools, coordinate departments and teams and build external relationships when implementing strategies as intended. These situated activities are discussed below and populated into a model of middle manager activities in strategy implementation by Christie and Tippmann (2023) to highlight the similarities or differences based on the SOE context as outlined in chapter one. The same process is followed for research sub-question four. The adapted conceptual model and propositions are discussed in the conclusion.

#### **6.4.2. RQ3: Theme Five: Use of project management and problem-solving tools**

The research findings reflect that, when operationalising the strategy, SOE middle managers use problem-solving and project management tools to contextualise the problem and plan for implementation. Contextualising the problem is important for gaining leadership support and improving the likelihood of successful implementation. They use project management tools for inclusive planning with their teams, tracking the objectives of strategic initiatives, and gathering feedback. This is in line with the findings from theme two that employees' buy-in, leadership support, and the tracking of KPIs are enablers of strategy implementation.

The use of a project management tool closely resembles the implementation process by MacLennan and Markides (2021), in the literature of using strategy execution maps to encourage ownership from employees and help them see where their own activities connect to strategic objectives. Similarly, these offer a more practical implementation process focused on the implementers of the strategy, the employees and provide a visual representation of the activities. The summarised benefits of both the strategy execution maps and project management tools include, employees having a view of how they contribute to the objectives of the organisation. Furthermore, they can see the connection between their own activities and strategic objectives. This helps them make good choices when prioritising their day-to-day work, allocating resources, and deciding where to focus

their attention (MacLennan & Markides, 2021). Additionally, Mitchell (2019) concluded that project management concepts and practices are useful for strategy implementation.

This situated activity aligns with the use of accrued characteristics in the model by Christie and Tippmann (2023). They refer to these activities as those that middle management engage in as a starting point when implementing strategy. The model is silent about tools middle managers use under accrued characteristics activities and this is the only activity that emerged as new under accrued activities when compared to the literature. This suggests similarities in the use of accrued characteristic for operationalising the strategy in relation to intended outcomes but a difference in the situated activity of use of a project management tool between the model and the research findings.

In conclusion, the application of project management practices in SOEs relates to intended strategic outcomes. They are useful for facilitating ownership from employees, enabling tracking of KPIs and provide structured feedback to leadership, which are antecedents for strategy implementation. Although the application of project management practices is consistent with the literature, this is a new activity under accrued characteristics in the conceptual model.

#### **6.4.3. RQ3: Theme Six: Internal alignment between departments and teams**

The research findings indicate that when middle managers engage in strategy implementation activities that lead to intended outcomes, working with other departments and their teams is important. This is consistent with Weiser et al. (2020) who refer to these activities as hierarchical and across multiple departments. This involves SOE middle managers leading the collaboration with other departments during strategy implementation, as discussed in theme three. Moreover, working with their teams to ensure they understand what needs to be done and buy into the department's vision to drive positive outcomes as outlined in the research findings in theme four.

The ability of middle managers to coordinate other departments and employees for collective action is central to strategy implementation (Weiser et al., 2020). This is because multiple actors are involved during the implementation process, carrying out various activities to translate the intended strategy into outcomes, as argued by Christie and Tippmann (2023).

This view is also built on by Lee (2024), that strategic initiatives in the public sector are broad in nature and implementation often requires multi-disciplinary coordination, making middle managers critical for orchestrating complex teams for effective strategy implementation. Although Lee (2024), broadly references the public sector, the research findings support this view, as they elevate the need for multi-disciplinary teams and to break down silos in SOEs to enable effective strategy implementation. The motivation of employees to commit to and work toward strategy implementation is also the responsibility of middle managers (Ateş et al., 2020), which is consistent with the research findings, that obtaining employee buy-in is one of the key activities of middle managers in SOEs as discussed in theme three.

This theme confirms Christie and Tippmann's (2023) findings, that when middle managers are implementing strategies as intended, they work with their teams.

In contrast, Christie and Tippmann (2023) associate working with other departments, which they term creating alliances, with unintended outcomes while the research findings associate this activity with intended outcomes. While this finding is in contrast to Christie and Tippmann's (2023) model, it is consistent with other literature that middle managers in state-owned entities must collaborate across departments for the successful implementation of strategies (Lee, 2024), aligning with the findings in themes two and three.

In conclusion, middle managers from SOEs must coordinate with their teams and other departments to achieve intended strategic outcomes. However, a notable divergence lies in coordinating with other departments, which is associated with unintended outcomes in Christie and Tippmann's (2023) model but with intended outcomes in SOEs.

#### **6.4.4. RQ3: Theme seven: Build external relationships**

A new theme that emerged from the research findings, is the use of external relationships when implementing strategies as intended. In contrast with Christie and Tippmann's (2023, p. 13) proposition that "middle managers will make more use of coalition activities—seeking powerful allies and creating alliances—when deviating from intended strategies than when implementing strategies as intended". The research findings suggest that SOE middle

managers make use of coalition activities when implementing strategies as intended. Although this is in contrast to Christie & Tippmann (2023) it is consistent to the literature because resource allocation in SOEs frequently involves external actors, including elected representatives, regulators, and other government bodies (Mitchell, 2022). Budgetary decisions may even incorporate public participation, highlighting the multi-level and political nature of antecedents in these contexts. Similarly, stakeholder engagement extends beyond organisational boundaries to include politicians, citizens, media, and private-sector collaborators, all of whom may exert influence on strategic outcomes (Hansen et al., 2022; Vandersmissen et al., 2024). The research findings indicate that middle managers use partnerships outside the organisation during implementation to achieve intended outcomes. They partner with stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, as well as competitors, to pool resources and build relationships. This is further supported by Friesl et al. (2020), that middle managers carry out strategy implementation activities internally and inter-organisationally.

Interestingly, SOE middle managers made no mention of partnering with external parties when discussing their strategy implementation activities in theme one, and it did not come up as an antecedent to strategy implementation in theme three of the research findings. Christie and Tippmann (2023) also make no mentions of external partnerships under coalitions in their conceptual model for middle management activities. However, both the literature and the research findings on the situated activities confirm external partnerships as crucial to effective strategy implementation. This suggest that beyond cooperation with the teams, and coalitions allow middle managers access to resources and expertise they would not otherwise have.

In conclusion, the broader literature is consistent with the research findings on the need for external collaborations by SOEs to achieve intended strategic outcomes. The inconsistency that is noted in the use of coalition activities. Therefore, proposing the following:

**Proposition 1:** SOE middle managers will make more use of coalition activities—creating alliances (other departments and external partnerships)—when implementing strategies as intended than when deviating from intended strategies.

#### 6.4.5. Conclusion for research sub-question three

Three strategy implementation activities that SOE middle managers engage in when implementing the strategy as intended, namely the **use of accrued characteristics** - the application of project management practices, **use of cooperation activities** - work with their teams and **use of coalition activities**—creating alliances (other departments and external partnerships).

The use of these activities by middle managers in SOEs is consistent with the literature however it differs when compared to Christie & Tippmann (2023)'s model in the following;

- **Use of accrued characteristics** - Although the use of project management practices by SOE middle managers is consistent with the literature, it is a new sub-theme under accrued characteristics in the adapted conceptual model.
- **Use of coalition activities** - coordinating with other departments and external collaborations, which are associated with unintended outcomes in Christie and Tippmann's (2023) model but with intended outcomes in SOEs.

Therefore, proposing the following:

**Proposition 1:** SOE middle managers will make more use of coalition activities—creating alliances (other departments and external partnerships)—when implementing strategies as intended than when deviating from intended strategies.

#### 6.5. Discussion of findings for research sub-question four

Research sub-question four: What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to unintended outcomes (positive or negative)?

##### 6.5.1. RQ4: Theme eight: Positive and negative unintended outcomes

When defining unintended outcomes, the research findings show that these are strategies that middle managers deem unsuccessful or that are implemented differently than initially planned. This is in line with Christie and Tippmann's (2023) definition that unintended outcomes may emerge when implementers deviate significantly from strategies envisioned

by top management, fail to execute them, or delay their implementation. During implementation, middle managers sometimes encounter challenges that may cause them to adapt the strategies. These challenges include unrealistic implementation plans, unforeseen changes or power and politics within the organisation (Weiser et al., 2020). The research findings highlighted leadership changes, implementation delays and insufficient resources as key causes of strategy deviation leading to unintended outcomes. SOE middle managers adjust their strategies due to limited resources or adjust the timelines due to delays caused by long processes. Leadership changes disrupt strategy continuity due to shifting priorities and insufficient time to implement strategies and see them through. The research findings further suggest that the negative unintended outcomes include a loss of revenue and market share, as well as lower employee morale.

Linked to the findings and the literature in theme three, one of the activities of middle managers is to interpret the strategy. Sundström and Svärdsten (2025) suggest that other deviations from the intended strategy may emanate from the middle manager's interpretation of the strategic priorities, as their interpretation may sometimes be aligned with the intended objective, but at other times depart from its original formulation. This did not reflect in the research findings; this could be due to the finding that SOE middle managers lack the flexibility to make changes, as they must present their strategies to the leadership for approval before proceeding with implementation, limiting the deviation due to misinterpretation.

The findings also highlight positive unintended outcomes that may sometimes arise from deviations. Consistent with Christie and Tippmann (2023) that while unintended, certain outcomes may still yield favourable results. The positive unintended outcomes revealed by the research findings include observed turnaround within the organisation, initiatives that achieved better outcomes than initially planned, and a boost in team morale.

The themes discussed below reflect strategy implementation activities that middle managers in SOEs engage in when deviating from intended strategies.

### **6.5.2. RQ4: Theme nine: Middle managers' use of experience**

The research findings reflect that when deviating from intended strategies, middle managers draw on lessons learned by asking what they can do better when strategies do not go as anticipated. When faced with new challenges, they display resilience and improvise to succeed. The findings highlighted the importance of resilience and the ability to learn and adapt when facing challenges during implementation. The literature refers to this as drawing on long experience. A concept that Christie and Tippmann (2023) use to refer to the general experience that middle managers have that is relevant to the strategy being implemented. Middle managers often possess strong expertise in their field, based on extensive experience. Tapping into this experience is relevant to both intended and unintended outcomes (Christie & Tippmann, 2023).

In conclusion, SOE middle managers draw on their long experience when deviating from intended strategies. This suggests that to achieve positive intended outcomes, middle managers use their expertise.

### **6.5.3. RQ4: Theme ten: Poor coordination between departments**

The research findings suggest that when middle managers fail to collaborate with other departments, it leads to unintended outcomes. This is because deliverables are not isolated to the middle managers' departments. They must ensure that the other departments that are linked to their objectives are also ready for implementation and keep the communication lines open. This is aligned with Christie and Tippmann (2023) that, when coalitions are used less by middle managers, it results in strategies being implemented as unintended.

Therefore, proposing the following:

**Proposition 2:** SOE middle managers will make less use of coalition activities—creating alliances—when deviating from intended strategies than when implementing strategies as intended.

### **6.5.4. RQ4: Theme eleven: Alignment between leadership and middle managers**

The research findings suggest that middle managers in SOEs work more closely with their leadership when deviating from intended strategies. The role of leadership entails providing

support and commitment to the chosen strategy (Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025) and acquiring and shaping the resources needed for strategy implementation (Mistry et al., 2023). The research findings suggest that less cooperation between middle managers and their superiors may compromise strategy implementation. Leadership and middle managers must align on the required support and resources to increase the likelihood of successfully implementing a strategy. This aligns with the findings from theme two about the importance of leadership support and sufficient resources during implementation.

Leadership must ensure that there are appropriate capabilities and resources to implement the strategy (Vera et al., 2022). These resources include organisational and financial resources, as well as dedicated staff (Lee, 2024), as also indicated in theme two findings. In addition, the findings indicate that frequent leadership changes disrupt the full implementation of the strategy. This suggests that misalignment between leadership and middle managers may also stem from frequent leadership changes, which are common in SOE. This is consistent with Papenfuß and Keppeler (2020), who write about the frequent turnover in leadership in SOEs, which presents middle managers with inconsistencies, complexities, and complications that private-sector middle managers do not have to deal with.

This theme deviates from Christie and Tippmann's (2023) findings because SOE middle managers work more with their superiors when deviating from intended strategies. This could be because SOE middle managers lack the flexibility to change strategies and must be constantly aligned with leadership for approval of any deviations.

Therefore, proposing the following:

**Proposition 3:** SOE middle managers will make more use of co-operation activities—working with superiors (upwards)—when deviating from an intended strategy rather than implementing it”.

#### **6.5.5. RQ4: Theme twelve: use of flexibility**

As indicated in the research findings, SOE middle managers need to adjust strategies when faced with resource challenges, delays, and changing priorities; however, these adjustments must comply with regulations and be approved by leadership. The use of flexibility by middle

managers is associated with unintended outcomes. These outcomes are not always negative. When middle managers pivot during strategy implementation, it may sometimes lead to unintended positive outcomes. Friesl et al. (2020), emphasise the importance of flexibility for a successful strategy implementation, citing its adaptive nature. This is not the case in SOEs. Notably, the research findings in theme three suggest that flexibility in SOEs does not translate to autonomy. Middle managers lack autonomy in deciding how to allocate budget and resources within their departments. This is supported by literature that public middle managers are often considered to have limited discretion when implementing objectives and goals outlined by their principals (Grøn et al., 2024).

A noteworthy finding is that the use of personal autonomy activities in the adapted model is closely linked with working with superiors. This is the use of judgment, flexibility, and the position of power. Moreover, the use of judgment and the position of power did not emerge in the findings. This may be attributed to the critical role of leadership approval and support, which limits middle managers' autonomy in SOEs. Even when middle managers exercise judgment, implementation still depends on leadership support and resource allocation.

This is in line with Christie and Tippmann's (2023) proposition that middle managers will use personal autonomy activities—their judgment, **flexibility**, and position of power—more when deviating from an intended strategy than implementing it as intended. However, the difference noted is that flexibility is closely linked to working with superiors in SOEs, while in the literature, it is working less with superiors, indicating the differences in use of autonomy in the private sector compared to the SOE context as discussed in chapter one.

#### **6.5.6. Conclusion for research sub-question four**

Four strategy implementation activities that SOE middle managers engage in when deviating from the intended strategies emerged from the discussion, namely the **use of accrued characteristics** - draw on their long experience, **use of cooperation activities** – work with their superiors, **use of coalition activities**—creating alliances (other departments), and **using personal autonomy** – use flexibility.

The use of these activities by middle managers in SOEs is consistent with the literature however, it differs when compared to Christie and Tippmann (2023)'s model in the following;

- When coalitions are used less by SOE middle managers, it results in strategies being implemented as unintended.

Therefore, proposing the following:

**Proposition 2:** SOE middle managers will make less use of coalition activities—creating alliances—when deviating from intended strategies than when implementing strategies as intended.

- SOE middle managers work more with their superiors when deviating from intended strategies.

Therefore, proposing the following:

**Proposition 3:** SOE middle managers will make more use of co-operation activities—working with superiors (upwards)—when deviating from an intended strategy rather than implementing it”.

Use of flexibility is in line with Christie and Tippmann’s (2023) proposition that middle managers will use personal autonomy activities—their judgment, **flexibility**, and position of power—more when deviating from an intended strategy than implementing it as intended. However, the difference noted is that flexibility is closely linked to working with superiors in SOEs, while in the literature, it is working less with superiors, indicating the differences in use of autonomy in the private sector compared to the SOE context as discussed in chapter one.

## 6.6. Conclusion

This chapter provided a synthesis of the literature and the research findings. The research findings are consistent with the literature on the activities and the role of middle managers, the antecedents and challenges of implementation. There are slight differences observed on the situated activities that lead to intended and unintended outcomes in relation to Christie & Tippmann’s (2023) model of middle manager activities in strategy implementation.

The differences confirm the literature that the context of SOEs presents additional challenges and complexities for middle managers that require extensive internal and external alignment. Middle managers are tasked with mediating between external demands, internal capacity, and strategic priorities, a challenge amplified by the dual mandate of delivering public services while meeting financial targets (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020; Vandersmissen et al., 2024). The main differences highlighted by the findings is that SOE middle managers make use of coalition more when implementing strategies as intended, and work with their superiors more when deviating from intended strategies. These are highlighted in figure four presenting the adapted model for SOE middle managers below.

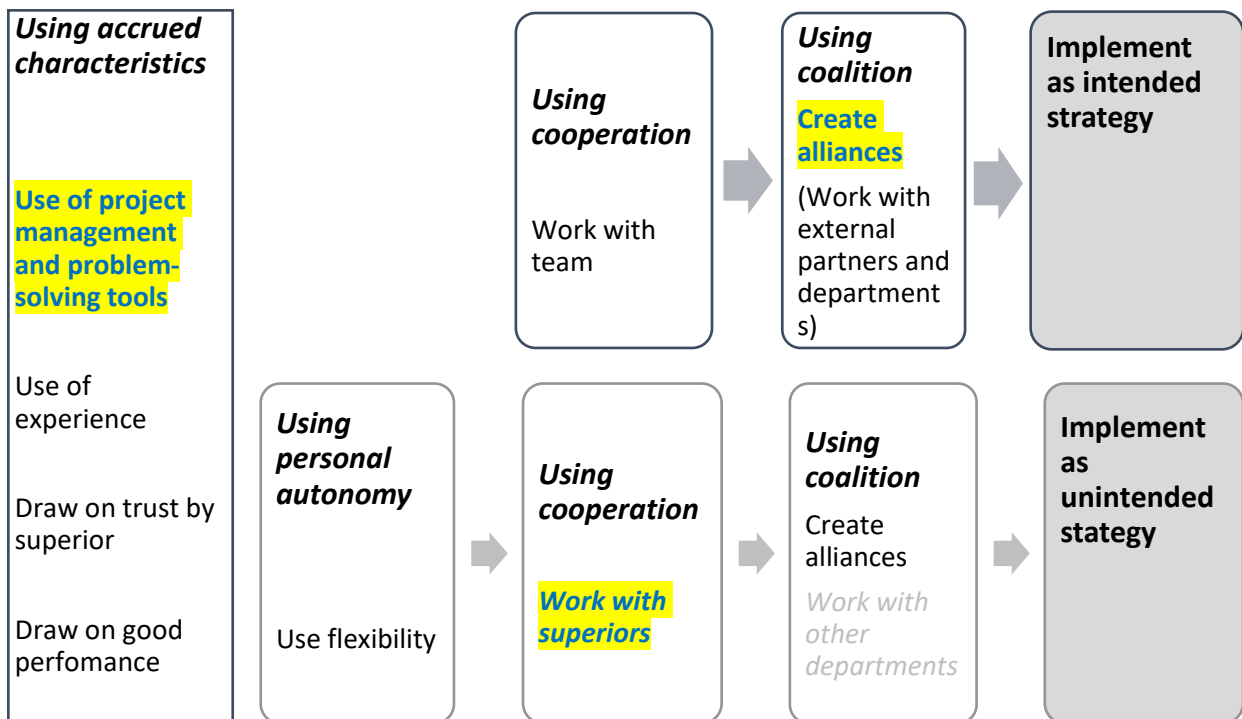


Figure 4: Adapted model of middle manager activities in strategy implementation

(Source: Author's own)

Figure 4 above illustrates the findings generated from the themes discussed in this chapter. The key findings summarised as follows. SOE Middle managers' use of project management and problem-solving techniques, their experience, and lessons learned lead to both intended and unintended outcomes. Middle managers engage with their teams, departments and external partners when implementing strategies to achieve intended outcomes. They make use of flexibility and work more with superiors when deviating from intended strategies. When middle managers engage less with other departments and external partners, it leads to unintended outcomes.

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

### **7.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the research outcomes that emerged from the discussion of the literature and research findings in Chapter 6.

The research set out to explore how strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs relate to intended and unintended strategic outcomes. The participants were middle managers working within SOEs in South Africa who had implemented a strategic initiative or led a strategic project.

To answer the main research question, the study aimed first to understand the activities of middle managers during strategy implementation. Secondly, the study sought to understand why some middle managers succeed in these activities while others struggle by examining the antecedents of strategy implementation. Thirdly, gain insights into how these strategy implementation activities relate to intended and unintended strategic outcomes. Lastly, propose an adapted conceptual model of middle manager activities in strategy implementation that captures these activities and their related outcomes in the context of SOEs.

The research outcomes are presented according to the research sub-questions as outlined in Chapter Three. The research outcomes are further discussed with reference to the research findings and the literature. The adapted conceptual model from Christie & Tippmann (2023), as presented in chapter two, is updated using the research outcomes, and the amended model is proposed in chapter 6. The research contributions are discussed, followed by recommendations for management and stakeholders. The chapter ends with highlights of the limitations and proposed future research opportunities.

### **7.2. Principal theoretical conclusions**

This section outlines the theoretical conclusions of the study in relation to the research question.

Several similarities were identified between the research findings and the literature. A few nuance differences were highlighted that could be potential refinements and extensions to the literature in the context of SOEs. Two new potential sub-themes were identified as potential extensions to the literature. The two sub-themes are the use of project management practices and working with external partners by SOE middle managers during strategy implementation. One new potential sub-theme that was identified, with a potential refinement to the literature, is the variation in how SOE middle managers work with superiors during strategy implementation.

### **7.2.1. Research Sub-question one: Strategy implementation activities**

Research sub-question one: What are the activities of SOE middle managers during strategy implementation?

The research outcomes on the activities of middle managers in SOEs were identified in the extant literature with nuance differences based on the SOE context. There is extensive literature on middle managers and strategy implementation activities; however, it is predominantly conducted in the private sector context (George, 2021; Vigfússon et al., 2021). To address this, the research identified strategy implementation activities by SOE middle managers.

The strategy implementation activities identified by SOE middle management are similar to the extant literature. The activities identified include, interpreting and translating the strategy for employees (Ateş et al., 2020; Friesl et al., 2020; Tarakci et al., 2023); coordinating and enacting strategic activities (Mistry et al., 2023; Porck & van Knippenberg, 2022; Weiser et al., 2020); sensemaking and sense giving (Schuler et al., 2023); influencing, networking, and enlisting commitment to the strategy (Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Tyskbo & Styhre, 2022); and contributing to conceptualising and shaping strategic outcomes (Köseoglu et al., 2018; Loudon, 2024; Weiser et al., 2020).

Building on these activities, SOE middle managers also have to navigate the strategy implementation within regulatory constraints linked to their dual mandate. This aligns with the literature, which holds that profit-making is a fundamental aspect of most SOEs and is

integral to their organisational identity (Andrews et al., 2019), alongside their constitutional mandate to provide public service (Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020).

Even though this theme is similar, the study extends the body of knowledge on the activities of middle managers in SOEs, thus extending the middle management and strategy implementation literature in the SOE context.

### **7.2.2. Research Sub-question two: Strategy Implementation antecedents**

Research sub-question two: What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?

Strategy implementation activities do not occur in isolation. Its success depends on various organisational, managerial, and contextual conditions, known as antecedents. Examining these antecedents highlights the environment that affects middle managers' capacity to interpret, coordinate, and enact strategic initiatives. While the antecedents identified provide general conditions that support strategy implementation, their impact is context dependent. The research outcomes on the antecedents of strategy implementation were identified in the extant literature with nuance differences based on the SOE context.

Consistent with the literature and the SOE middle managers' views, clearly defined strategy, goals, and objectives (Chamorro-Premuzic & Lovric, 2022; Friesl et al., 2020; Vigfússon et al., 2021); leadership styles and motivation (Mistry et al., 2023; Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025; Vigfússon et al., 2021); organisational culture; (Ateş et al., 2020; Crittenden & Crittenden, 2008; Harrison & Rogers, 2024), communication, and shared understanding action (Köseoglu et al., 2020; Vigfússon et al., 2021) alignment of structure, resources and capabilities (Lee, 2024; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021; Vera et al., 2022); and change management led by executives (Vigfússon et al., 2021) are antecedents to strategy implementation.

The research outcomes also identified barriers that impact effective strategy implementation, namely public sector regulations and limited flexibility in SOEs. Although these were identified in the research outcomes, the literature notes them as challenges faced by middle managers in SOEs, however, is not explicit on their impact on the

implementation of the strategy. According to Gullmark et al. (2025) and Wirtz et al. (2021) public sector organisations are subject to additional layers of approvals, budgetary constraints, and high regulatory pressures from politically empowered actors.

Furthermore, the research outcomes reflect that, inasmuch as SOE middle management interprets the strategy, they still have to get approval from their leadership before proceeding, departing from Ateş et al. (2020) that middle managers have autonomy in communicating their interpretation of the strategy.

This presents an area for future research on the barriers to strategy implementation in the context of SOEs and the impact of context-based challenges on effective strategy implementation.

### 7.2.3. Research Sub-question three: Intended outcomes

Research sub-question three: What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to **intended** outcomes?

The research outcomes identified situated activities by middle managers in SOEs that result in intended outcomes. It extends a study by Christie and Tippmann (2023) that was conducted in the private sector to the public sector context.

The research outcomes identified three strategy implementation activities that SOE middle managers engage in when implementing the strategy as intended, namely, the use of accrued characteristics - *the application of project management practices*, the use of cooperation activities - *work with their teams* and the use of coalition activities -*creating alliances*.

The use of these activities by middle managers in SOEs during strategy implementation is consistent with the literature, as also discussed in theme one. The literature confirmed the use of accrued characteristics - the application of project management practices (Mitchell, 2019), use of cooperation activities - work with their teams (Ateş et al., 2020; Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Lee, 2024) and use of coalition activities—creating alliances (Christie &

Tippmann, 2023; Friesl et al., 2020; Hansen et al., 2022) (other departments and external partnerships) as activities to strategy implementation.

This study builds on the existing literature by linking the above activities of SOE middle managers to intended outcomes derived from the research outcomes. When SOE middle managers use these activities, there are differences observed in the research outcomes when compared to Christie and Tippmann's (2023) study in the research outcomes. The research outcomes reveal the following in the context of SOEs:

- **Use of accrued characteristics** - Although the use of project management practices by SOE middle managers is consistent with the literature, it is a new sub-theme under accrued characteristics in the adapted conceptual model.
- **Use of coalition activities** - coordinating with other departments and external collaborations, which are associated with unintended outcomes in Christie and Tippmann's (2023) model but with intended outcomes in SOEs.

The use of coalitions is a significant difference from the conceptual model and is supported by the literature, which shows that SOE middle managers engage with other departments and external stakeholders to increase the likelihood of successful strategy implementation. This is in contrast to Christie and Tippmann (2023) who found no use of coalition activities by middle managers in their study. The study further reveals that these identified activities result in intended outcomes. These are updated in the adapted model in chapter 6.

#### **7.2.4. Research Sub-question four: Unintended outcomes**

Research sub-question four: What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to unintended outcomes (positive or negative)?

The research outcomes identified situated activities by middle managers in SOEs that result in unintended outcomes.

In addition to the activities outlined in section 7.4 the use of personal autonomy is a strategy implementation activity that results in unintended outcomes (Christie & Tippmann, 2023).

The research outcomes revealed that SOE middle managers, when deviating from the intended strategies engage in strategy the use of accrued characteristics - *draw on their long experience*, use of cooperation activities – *work with their superiors*, use of coalition activities—*creating alliances* (other departments), and using personal autonomy – *use flexibility*.

The use of these activities by middle managers in SOEs is consistent with the literature as indicated in section 7.4 however, it differs when compared to Christie and Tippmann (2023)'s model in the following;

- When coalitions are used less by SOE middle managers, it results in strategies being implemented as unintended.
- SOE middle managers work more with their superiors when deviating from intended strategies.

A significant difference noted is that the use of flexibility when delivering unintended outcomes is closely linked to working more with superiors in SOEs, while in the literature, it relates to working less with superiors (Christie & Tippmann, 2023). This indicates a difference in the use of personal autonomy between the private sector and the SOE context, as discussed in chapter one. It can also be concluded that SOE middle managers work more closely with their superiors when using flexibility, due to the limited autonomy they hold.

### **7.3. Research contribution**

The research contributes to the literature on strategy implementation and the role of middle management. It also contributes to the public sector literature, specifically to SOEs, responding to the invitation by Papenfuß & Keppeler (2020) for studies in the public sector to be conducted in the SOE context. The research further contributes to the field of strategic management. It also contributes to South African literature.

#### **7.4. Recommendations for management and/or other stakeholders**

The research provides lessons for both middle managers and TMT. Middle managers should be aware of strategy implementation activities to use during execution to increase the likelihood of success. The TMT plays a pivotal role in supporting strategy implementation; they should also be cognisant of this and be ready to support quick decision-making, provide resources for the strategy, and help drive change management within the SOEs. The lack of flexibility impedes implementation; the TMT should look into emergent strategies and control systems that encourage a certain level of autonomy for middle managers without disregarding regulations.

#### **7.5. Limitations of the research**

The primary limitation of this research was the use of a homogeneous sample, which focused exclusively on the experiences of middle managers and did not consider other views from their superiors or subordinates. The role of middle managers may differ in other contexts, while some insights may be useful, they are limited in applicability. The study further focused only on SOEs and is not generalisable to other industries, as there may be nuances that differ across contexts. For example, SOEs have to balance the fulfilment of the mandate and profit-making activities, a nuance that exists in SOEs. The researcher is a novice, and the data analysis was conducted at the researcher's discretion, with limited experience in data analysis approaches and research report writing.

#### **7.6. Suggestions for future research**

Future research could include the opinions of the TMT and employees to gain more insights into strategy implementation activities in SOEs. Another area that emerged from the findings but was outside the scope of the study was the inconsistencies in how strategies are cascaded in SOEs from the TMT to middle managers. This presents an opportunity for future research to investigate the process of strategy implementation that aids effective strategy implementation. The use of strategy control tools or lack thereof in SOE is another research avenue that can be explore. With the advocacy for open strategy, future research could investigate its impact on SOEs and the role and activities of middle managers.

Lastly future research can explore the barriers to strategy implementation in the context of SOEs and the impact of context-based challenges on effective strategy implementation.

## 8. References

- Agostino, D., Saliterer, I., & Steccolini, I. (2021). Digitalization, accounting and accountability: A literature review and reflections on future research in public services. *Financial Accountability and Management*, 38(2), 152–176. <https://doi.org/10.1111/faam.12301>
- Andrews, R., Ferry, L., Kelcher, C., & Wegorowski, P. (2019). Corporatization in the Public Sector: Explaining the Growth of Local Government Companies. *Public Administration Review*, 80(3), 482–493. <https://doi.org/DOI:10.1111/puar.13052>
- Ashkenas, R. (2024). Internal Buy-In Will Make or Break Your Growth Strategy. *Harvard Business Review*, 1–6. <https://research-ebSCO-com.uplib.idm.oclc.org/c/ei2kms/viewer/pdf/oiuctoz4mn>
- Ateş, N. Y., Tarakci, M., Porck, J. P., van Knippenberg, D., & Groenen, P. J. F. (2020). The Dark Side of Visionary Leadership in Strategy Implementation: Strategic Alignment, Strategic Consensus, and Commitment. *Journal of Management*, 46(5), 637–665. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318811567>
- Auditor General South Africa. (2023). *Consolidated general report on national and provincial audit outcomes*. <https://pfma-2023-24.agsareports.co.za/>
- Azambuja, R., Islam, G., & Ancelin-Bourguignon, A. (2023). Walling in and Walling out: Middle Managers' Boundary Work. *Journal of Management Studies*, 60(7), 1819–1854. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12844>
- Beer, M., & Eisenstat, R. A. (2000). the silent killers of strategy implementation. *Sloan Management Review*, 41(4), 29–40. <https://research-ebSCO-com.uplib.idm.oclc.org/c/ei2kms/viewer/pdf/pr3z5uxcxz?route=details>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bryson, J. M., George, B., & Seo, D. (2022). Understanding goal formation in strategic public management: a proposed theoretical framework. *Public Management Review*, 26(2), 539–564. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2103173>
- Chadwick, R., Walsh, P., Stern, N., Cooper, J., & Ferens, N. (2023). *Customer-centric transformation in government*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/customer-centric-transformation-in-government>
- Chamorro-Premuzic, T., & Lovric, D. (2022). How to Move from Strategy to Execution. *Harvard Business Review*, 1–7. <https://research-ebSCO-com.uplib.idm.oclc.org/c/ei2kms/viewer/pdf/sjdotmvddf>

- Christie, A., & Tippmann, E. (2023). Intended or unintended strategy? The activities of middle managers in strategy implementation. *Long Range Planning*, 57(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2023.102410>
- Cote, C. (2020, November). *5 Keys to Successful Strategy Execution*. Harvard Business School Online. <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/strategy-execution>
- Cresswell, John. W., & Cresswell, David. J. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Crittenden, V. L., & Crittenden, W. F. (2008). Building a capable organization: The eight levers of strategy implementation. *Business Horizons*, 51(4), 301–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2008.02.003>
- Edinger, S. K. (2024). Leading Strategy Execution. *Leader to Leader*, 2024(113), 75–79. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ltl.20824>
- Ergene, E., Floyd, S., & Ergene, S. (2023). Managing goal heterogeneity in strategic initiatives. *Long Range Planning*, 56(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2023.102344>
- Feldermann, S. K., & Hiebl, M. R. W. (2025). Strategies to evoke entrepreneurial behavior in middle managers: involvement in strategy development and the creation of psychological ownership. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, 31(11), 235–253. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEER-10-2024-1071>
- Fitzgerald, R. (2024, June 2). *The Dynamic Role of Middle Management in Modern Organizations*. C-Suite Strategy. <https://www.c-suite-strategy.com/blog/the-dynamic-role-of-middle-management-in-modern-organizations>
- Friesl, M., Stensaker, I., & Colman, H. L. (2020). Strategy implementation: Taking stock and moving forward. In *Long Range Planning* (Vol. 54, Issue 4). Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2020.102064>
- Gehman, J., Glaser, V. L., Eisenhardt, K. M., Gioia, D., Langley, A., & Corley, K. G. (2018). Finding Theory–Method Fit: A Comparison of Three Qualitative Approaches to Theory Building. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 27(3), 284–300. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492617706029>
- George, B. (2021). Successful Strategic Plan Implementation in Public Organizations: Connecting People, Process, and Plan (3Ps). *Public Administration Review*, 81(4), 793–798. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13187>
- Gjerde, S., & Alvesson, M. (2020). Sandwiched: Exploring role and identity of middle managers in the genuine middle. *Human Relations*, 73(1), 124–151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718823243>
- Glaser, L., Fourné, S. P. L., Brennecke, J., & Elfring, T. (2021). Leveraging middle managers' brokerage for corporate entrepreneurship: The role of multilevel social capital configurations. In *Long Range Planning* (Vol. 54, Issue 4). Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2020.102068>

- Gong, P., & Yang, Y. (2024). Organizational strategic stance and perceived public service performance: a public service logic perspective. *Public Management Review*, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2024.2427005>
- Grøn, C. H., Opstrup, N., Salomonsen, H. H., & Villadsen, A. R. (2024). Managing in all the right directions? The relationship between public managers' perceived autonomy and leading upwards, sideways, outwards and downwards. *Public Management Review*, 26(5), 1113–1135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2126882>
- Gullmark, P., Salvato, C., & Clausen, T. H. (2025). Middle managers matter! Unpacking the deployment and adaptation of organization-level dynamic capabilities. *Public Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2025.2469826>
- Hansen, J. R., Pop, M., Skov, M. B., & George, B. (2022). A review of open strategy: bridging strategy and public management research. *Public Management Review*, 26(3), 678–700. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2116091>
- Harrison, S., & Rogers, K. (2024). Building Culture From the Middle Out. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 65(3), 60–64. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/3183097463/769A5FF5F56B4161PQ/1?accountid=14717&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>
- Hassard, J., & Morris, J. (2022). The extensification of managerial work in the digital age: Middle managers, spatio-temporal boundaries and control. *Human Relations*, 75(9), 1647–1678. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267211003123>
- Hendren, K., Newcomer, K., Pandey, S. K., Smith, M., & Sumner, N. (2023). How qualitative research methods can be leveraged to strengthen mixed methods research in public policy and public administration? *Public Administration Review*, 83(3), 468–485. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13528>
- International Monetary Fund. (2022). *The role of SOEs in South Africa: issues and policy option*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400201318.002>
- International Monetary Fund. (2025). *South Africa: 2024 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for South Africa*. <https://www.imf.org/en/publications/cr/issues/2025/01/30/south-africa-2024-article-iv-consultation-press-release-staff-report-and-statement-by-the-561414>
- Klier, J., Dillon, R., Blackburn, S., & Mansour, T. (2025a). *Honing leadership excellence in the public sector*.
- Klier, J., Dillon, R., Blackburn, S., & Mansour, T. (2025b). *Honing leadership excellence in the public sector*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/honing-leadership-excellence-in-the-public-sector>
- Köhler, T., Smith, A., & Bhakoo, V. (2022). Templates in Qualitative Research Methods: Origins, Limitations, and New Directions. *Organizational Research Methods*, 25(2), 183–210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10944281211060710>

- Köseoglu, M. A., Altin, M., Chan, E., & Aladag, O. F. (2020). What are the key success factors for strategy formulation and implementation? Perspectives of managers in the hotel industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102574>
- Köseoglu, M. A., Yazici, S., & Okumus, F. (2018). Barriers to the Implementation of Strategic Decisions: Evidence from Hotels in a Developing Country. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, 27(5), 514–543. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2018.1402723>
- Krell, A., D'amico, A., West, A., Diedrich, D., Birshan, M., Montard, A., & Zimmerman, W. (2025). *How Strategy Champions win*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/how-strategy-champions-win#/>
- Laamanen, T., Weiser, A. K., von Krogh, G., & Ocasio, W. (2025). Artificial intelligence in adaptive strategy creation and implementation: Toward enhanced attentional control in strategy processes. *Long Range Planning*, 58(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2025.102561>
- Lee, H. (2024). Strategic types, implementation, and capabilities: Sustainability policies of local governments. *Public Administration*, 102(1), 264–284. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12917>
- Loudon, A. (2024). Would You Invite Employees to Vote on Strategic Direction? *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 1–4. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/3107504109/BA152AEEE975487CPQ/1?accountid=14717&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>
- MacLennan, A. F., & Markides, C. C. (2021). Causal Mapping for Strategy Execution: Pitfalls and Applications. *California Management Review*, 63(4), 89–122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00081256211019799>
- Manyathi, S., & Jarbandhan, V. (2024). Procurement Practices and Operation Efficiency in State-Owned Enterprises: A Case of Eskom Holdings Ltd and Airports Company South Africa Ltd. *The African Journal of Governance and Development (AJGD)*, 13(2), 93–112. <https://doi.org/10.36369/2616-9045/2024/v13i2a5>
- Mason, J. (2024, June 12). *The Crucial Role of Middle Manager in Modern Organizations*. C-Suite Strategy. <https://www.c-suite-strategy.com/blog/the-crucial-role-of-middle-manager-in-modern-organizations>
- McKinsey & Company. (2025). *Public Sector in South Africa*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/za/our-work/public-sector-in-south-africa>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research : A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Meyfroodt, K., & Desmidt, S. (2024). Does governing board involvement impact strategy implementation effectiveness? The role of information sharing in the politics-

- administration interface. *Public Management Review*, 26(3), 565–590. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2103174>
- Mistry, S., Kirkman, B. L., Hitt, M. A., & Barrick, M. R. (2023). Take it from the Top: How Intensity of TMT Joint Problem Solving and Levels of Interdependence Influence Quality of Strategy Implementation Coordination and Firm Performance. *Journal of Management Studies*, 60(2), 400–427. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12838>
- Mitchell, D. (2019). It All Depends, But on What? Testing Contingency in Public Strategic Implementation. *Public Performance and Management Review*, 42(4), 783–807. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2018.1523063>
- Mitchell, D. (2022). Bought in? The contingent effect of stakeholder support upon strategic implementation success in American municipalities. *Public Management Review*, 24(5), 764–789. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1862289>
- National Treasury. (2024). *Budget Review 2024*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/2024/review/FullBR.pdf>
- NPC. (2011). *National Planning Commission: Diagnostic Overview*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/[https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/npcdiagnosticoverview1.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/npcdiagnosticoverview1.pdf)
- NPC. (2012). *Our future : make it work : national development plan, 2030*. National Planning Commission. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/[https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/ndp-2030-our-future-make-it-workr.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/ndp-2030-our-future-make-it-workr.pdf)
- NPC. (2020a). *A Review of the Advancing Implementation towards a more Capable Nation 2*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/assets/Documents/NDP%20REVIEW.pdf>
- NPC. (2020b). *The National Development Plan 10 year review*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/[https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/assets/Documents/Ten%20Year%20Review%20of%20the%20National%20Development%20Plan\\_26%20September%202023.pdf](https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/assets/Documents/Ten%20Year%20Review%20of%20the%20National%20Development%20Plan_26%20September%202023.pdf)
- NPC. (2023). *NDP Pathways Implementation towards 2030 and Critical Actions*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/[https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/assets/Documents/NDP%20Implementation%20Pathways%20towards%202030%20and%20Critical%20Actions\\_Nov%202022.pdf](https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/assets/Documents/NDP%20Implementation%20Pathways%20towards%202030%20and%20Critical%20Actions_Nov%202022.pdf)
- OECD. (2022). *Economic Survey of South Africa*. <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/economic-surveys/south-africa-economic-snapshot.html>
- OECD. (2024). *Ownership and Governance of State-Owned Enterprises 2024*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/395c9956-en>

- O’Kane, P., Smith, A., & Lerman, M. P. (2021). Building Transparency and Trustworthiness in Inductive Research Through Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software. *Organizational Research Methods*, 24(1), 104–139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428119865016>
- Olson, A. B., Greuel, J., & Images, G. (2024). *Why Isn’t Your Strategy Sticking?* <https://research-ebSCO-com.uplib.idm.oclc.org/c/ei2kms/viewer/pdf/cxd4todf4v>
- Osborne, S. P., Nasi, G., & Powell, M. (2021). Beyond co-production: Value creation and public services. *Public Administration*, 99(4), 641–657. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12718>
- Papenfuß, U., & Keppeler, F. (2020). Does performance-related pay and public service motivation research treat state-owned enterprises like a neglected Cinderella? A systematic literature review and agenda for future research on performance effects. *Public Management Review*, 22(7), 1119–1145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1740300>
- Poister, T. H., & Streib, G. (2005). Elements of strategic planning and management in municipal government: Status after two decades. In *Public Administration Review* (Vol. 65, Issue 1, pp. 45–56). Blackwell Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2005.00429.x>
- Porck, J. P., & van Knippenberg, D. (2022). An Integrative Model of the Role of Structural, Behavioural, and Cognitive Coordination in Intergroup Effectiveness: How Middle Managers Play a Role. *Journal of Management Studies*, 60(7), 1752–1785. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12841>
- Rowe, W. G., & Nevmerzhytskyi, S. (2025). Demonstrating the importance of the strategy implementation process to an entire organization. *Organizational Dynamics*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2025.101153>
- Samimi, M., Cortes, A. F., Anderson, M. H., & Herrmann, P. (2020). What is strategic leadership? Developing a framework for future research. *Leadership Quarterly*, 33(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.101353>
- Samimi, M., Cortes, A. F., Anderson, M. H., & Herrmann, P. (2022). What is strategic leadership? Developing a framework for future research. *Leadership Quarterly*, 33(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.101353>
- Schuler, B. A., Orr, K., & Hughes, J. (2023). My colleagues (do not) think the same: Middle managers’ shared and separate realities in strategy implementation. *Journal of Business Research*, 160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113782>
- Splitter, V., Jarzabkowski, P., & Seidl, D. (2023). Middle Managers’ Struggle Over Their Subject Position in Open Strategy Processes. *Journal of Management Studies*, 60(7), 1884–1923. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12776>
- Stats SA. (2025). *Media Release - Quarterly Labour Force Survey*. [www.statssa.gov.za,info@statssa.gov.za,Tel+27123108911](http://www.statssa.gov.za,info@statssa.gov.za,Tel+27123108911)

- Sull, D., Homkes, R., & Sull, C. (2015). *Why Strategy Execution Unravels-and What to Do About It*. <https://hbr.org/2015/03/why-strategy-execution-unravels-and-what-to-do-about-it>
- Sundström, A., & Svärdsten, F. (2025). Modes of strategic control: shifting dynamics between planning and control tools in strategy implementation. *Public Management Review*, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2025.2492299>
- Tarakci, M., Heyden, M. L. M., Rouleau, L., Raes, A., & Floyd, S. W. (2023). Heroes or Villains? Recasting Middle Management Roles, Processes, and Behaviours. *Journal of Management Studies*, 60(7), 1663–1683. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12989>
- Tawse, A., & Tabesh, P. (2021). Strategy implementation: A review and an introductory framework. *European Management Journal*, 39(1), 22–33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2020.09.005>
- The Presidency. (2024). *State of the Nation Address 2024*. <https://www.gov.za/SONA2024>
- The Strategy Institute. (2024, December 20). *6 Steps To Achieving a Successful Business Strategy Execution*. The Strategy Institute. <https://www.thestrategyinstitute.org/insights/6-steps-to-achieving-a-successful-business-strategy-execution>
- Tyskbo, D., & Styhre, A. (2022). Karma chameleon: Exploring the leadership complexities of middle managers in the public sector. *International Public Management Journal*, 26(4), 548–569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2022.2106330>
- Vaara, E., & Fritsch, L. (2022). Strategy as language and communication: Theoretical and methodological advances and avenues for the future in strategy process and practice research. *Strategic Management Journal*, 43(6), 1170–1181. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3360>
- Vandersmissen, L., George, B., & Voets, J. (2024). Strategic planning and performance perceptions of managers and citizens: analysing multiple mediations. *Public Management Review*, 26(2), 514–538. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2103172>
- Vera, D., Bonardi, J. P., Hitt, M. A., & Withers, M. C. (2022a). Extending the boundaries of strategic leadership research. *Leadership Quarterly*, 33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2022.101617>
- Vera, D., Bonardi, J. P., Hitt, M. A., & Withers, M. C. (2022b). Extending the boundaries of strategic leadership research. In *Leadership Quarterly* (Vol. 33, Issue 3). Elsevier Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2022.101617>
- Vigfússon, K., Jóhannsdóttir, L., & Ólafsson, S. (2021). Obstacles to strategy implementation and success factors: A review of empirical literature. *Strategic Management*, 26(2), 12–30. <https://doi.org/10.5937/straman2102012v>

- Wang, K. (2021, November 1). *What's Different About Strategy in the Public Sector?* ICMA. <https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/whats-different-about-strategy-public-sector>
- Weiser, A. K., Jarzabkowski, P., & Laamanen, T. (2020). Completing the adaptive turn: An integrative view of strategy implementation. *Academy of Management Annals*, 14(2), 969–1031. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2018.0137>
- Wirtz, B. W., Kubin, P. R. M., & Weyerer, J. C. (2021). Business model innovation in the public sector: an integrative framework. *Public Management Review*, 25(2), 340–375. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.1972703>
- Wolf, C., & Floyd, S. W. (2017). Strategic Planning Research: Toward a Theory-Driven Agenda. *Journal of Management*, 43(6), 1754–1788. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313478185>
- World Economic Forum. (2024). *The Global Risks Report 2024* (19th ed.). <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2024/>

## 9. Appendices

### 9.1. Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

Research sub-questions	Interview questions: SOE middle managers
<p><b>Research sub-question 1:</b> What are the activities of middle managers in SOEs during strategy implementation?</p>	<p>Q1: Can you walk me through your role or responsibility (as a middle manager) when implementing a strategy?</p> <p>Q2: Can you share examples of strategic initiative or project and how you contributed to ensuring that it is carried out within your team or department?</p>
<p><b>Research sub-question 2:</b> What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?</p>	<p>Q3: How would you describe/define the strategy formulation and implementation process in your organisation, including key role players?</p> <p>Q4: What kind of factors or conditions, in your view, make it easier or harder for middle managers to implement strategy?</p>
<p><b>Research sub-question 3:</b> What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to intended outcomes?</p>	<p>Q5: When a new strategy is introduced, what kind of outcomes or results are usually expected from its implementation?</p> <p>Q6: From your experience, what positive or negative effects have you seen (or do you anticipate) when strategies are implemented?</p> <p>Q7: Can you share an example of a strategic initiative/s you helped implement and what outcomes it led to—for the organisation, your team, or yourself?</p>
<p><b>Research sub-question 4:</b> What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to unintended outcomes (positive or negative)?</p>	<p>Q8: When strategies are implemented in your organisation, have there been any results or effects that were different from what was initially expected?</p> <p>Q9: Can you share an example of a time when implementing a strategy led to outcomes (positive or negative) that surprised you or your team?</p>

## 9.2 Appendix 2: Consistency Matrix

Research Questions	Literature Review	Data gathering tool	Data analysis
What are the activities of middle managers in SOEs during strategy implementation?	(Christie & Tippmann, 2023; Köseoglu et al., 2020) (Tarakci et al., 2023), Section <b>2.2.1</b>	Semi-structured interviews	Identifying themes through coding in Atlas.ti for analysis.
What are the antecedents to strategy implementation by middle managers in SOEs?	(Köseoglu et al., 2020) (Vigfússon et al., 2021) Section <b>2.2.3, 2.3.4</b>	Semi-structured interviews	Identifying themes through coding in Atlas.ti for analysis.
What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to intended outcomes?	(Vera et al., 2022) (Christie & Tippmann, 2023) Section <b>2.2.5, 2.3.1</b>	Semi-structured interviews	Identifying themes through coding in Atlas.ti for analysis.
What are the strategy implementation activities of middle managers in SOEs that relate to unintended outcomes (positive or negative)?	(Christie & Tippmann, 2023) Section <b>2.2.5, 2.3.4</b>	Semi-structured interviews	Identifying themes through coding in Atlas.ti for analysis.

### 9.3 Appendix 3 – Ethical Clearance Approval

**Gordon Institute  
of Business Science**  
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance  
Approved**

Dear Cwayita Debe,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

## 9.4 Appendix 4 – Codebook from Atlas.ti

NAME	CODE GROUP 1
<b>(RQ1) Activities of SOE middle managers</b>	
(RQ1) Engage value chain	(RQ1) Collaboration with other departments
(RQ1) Champion and coordinate	(RQ1) Day to day involvement
(RQ1) Develop procedure	
(RQ1) Fighting for that structure	
(RQ1) I generally get in and get my hands dirty	
(RQ1) Navigate Constraints	
(RQ1) Oversight	
(RQ1) The culture too remains	
(RQ1) Putting in place the resources	(RQ1) Facilitate resource availability
(RQ1) Bridge between the executive team and them	(RQ1) Go between employee and TMT
(RQ1) Engage corporate strategy	
(RQ1) Engage TMT	
(RQ1) Feedback to leadership	
(RQ1) Pitching up and you're pitching down	
(RQ1) Cascading the strategy to departments	(RQ1) Interpret and translate the strategy
(RQ1) Each business unit will have its own strategy	
(RQ1) Interpret strategy for our department	
(RQ1) Put it into action	(RQ1) Obtain buy-in from employees
(RQ1) Engage foot soldiers	
(RQ1) Getting feedback from the team	
(RQ1) Leading, coaching and mentoring	
(RQ1) Obtain buy in	
(RQ1) We'll check with employees	
(RQ1) KPIs appropriate to operational activities	
(RQ1) Report progress	(RQ1) Set KPIs and monitoring
(RQ1) Setting KPIs for others	
(RQ1) Start tracking	
<b>(RQ2) Antecedents to strategy implementation</b>	
(RQ2) Align with corporate strategy	(RQ2) Alignment to the organisation mandate
(RQ2) Align with the vision	
(RQ2) Disjoint between what is expected	(RQ2) Availability of resources
(RQ2) Aligning to the capabilities	
(RQ2) Lack of resources	
(RQ2) Moratoriums, budget cuts, leadership change	
(RQ2) Adoption	(RQ2) Buy-in from employees
(RQ2) Cascaded down without a follow through	

(RQ2) Change management	
(RQ2) Limited engagement	
(RQ2) Need buy in	
(RQ2) No understanding of what your team's role is	
(RQ2) Support from individuals	
(RQ2) Use an external party	
(RQ2) When you get that engagement	
(RQ2) Competing priorities	(RQ2) Conflicting Priorities
(RQ2) Information and data	
(RQ2) Pilot projects	
(RQ2) Where the improvements should be focused at.	
(RQ2) A bit of a discord in terms of implementation	(RQ2) Coordination amongst departments
(RQ2) Everybody being on the same page	
(RQ2) Lack of clarity of the objective	
(RQ2) One thing is dependent on the other	
(RQ2) Resistance from other departments	
(RQ2) Silo effect	
(RQ2) Those dynamics differ from sub area to sub area	(RQ2) Involvement of middle managers in the formulation
(RQ2) Factors not taken into consideration	
(RQ2) Feels like a tick box exercise	
(RQ2) Inclusion of individuals	
(RQ2) Inclusion of middle managers	
(RQ2) Solicit information and ideas	(RQ2) Lack of autonomy/flexibility
(RQ2) Flexibility	
(RQ2) Having autonomy that is not necessarily autonomy.	
(RQ2) Lack of an emerging strategy	
(RQ2) Strategy is not static	(RQ2) Monitoring and rewards
(RQ2) Difficulty of putting together performance contracts	
(RQ2) Lack of recognition	
(RQ2) Room for monitoring and evaluation	(RQ2) Organisational Culture
(RQ2) No huge change in terms of structure	
(RQ2) Organisational cultural issue	
(RQ2) Public image and perception	
(RQ2) The actual type of organisation	
(RQ2) Formulation role players	(RQ2) Processes preceding implementation
(RQ2) High level	
(RQ2) Lack of continuity	
(RQ2) Process is not very streamlined	
(RQ2) Some business units have clear communication	
(RQ2) The focus is now something else	
(RQ2) National framework for strategic planning	(RQ2) Public sector regulations

(RQ2) Regulated environment		
(RQ2) Stringent procurement processes		
(RQ2) Can't tell leadership its impossible	(RQ2) Support from the leadership	
(RQ2) Depending on your line manager		
(RQ2) Empowered as well to really share thoughts		
(RQ2) Flat structure		
(RQ2) Hindrances by leadership		
(RQ2) Its from top down		
(RQ2) Lack the support		
(RQ2) Leadership support		
(RQ2) At times the strategy can be very, very large.		
(RQ2) High level understanding by managers		(RQ2) Understanding the Strategy
(RQ2)It's very, very interactive		
<b>(RQ3) Intended outcomes and related activities</b>		
(RQ3) Align external stakeholders	(RQ3) Build external relationships	
(RQ3) Build relationships		
(RQ3) Improvement of communication		
(RQ3) Look at partnerships		
(RQ3) Match the needs of the customer		
(RQ3) Acceptance	(RQ3) Expected outcomes by organisation	
(RQ3) Confusion		
(RQ3) Contributing to the economy of the country		
(RQ3) Culture shift		
(RQ3) Customer growth		
(RQ3) Embedded in the system and operations		
(RQ3) Increase employment		
(RQ3) Is always expected that it will work		
(RQ3) Is service delivery		
(RQ3) Reduce our carbon footprint		
(RQ3) Reducing accidents		
(RQ3) Resistance		
(RQ3) Revenue growth		
(RQ3) Technology is up to scratch		
(RQ3) Understanding team strengths		
(RQ3) It wanted to cut down on the on the salary bill		
(RQ3) Programme that was initiated in organisation* to develop local suppliers		
(RQ3) I learn a lot		(RQ3) Individual outcomes
(RQ3) I scored well performance		
(RQ3) I'm encouraged to come to work		
(RQ3) Improve confidence		

(RQ3) Pride myself	
(RQ3) Align as departments	(RQ3) Internal alignment
(RQ3) Came up with initiatives	
(RQ3) Have a clear view	
(RQ3) If we could have understood what we wanted to do	
(RQ3) Needed to reorientate our own	
(RQ3) Strategies aligned to organisations need	
(RQ3) Understand how legislatively we will not be compliant	
(RQ3) When that new opportunity comes, everything is aligned	
(RQ3) You need change management	
(RQ3) Contextualise the problem	
(RQ3) Developed case studies	
(RQ3) Project manage	
(RQ3) Show them, we've rolled this pilot out	
(RQ3) Small increments	
(RQ3) So having that discipline in terms of tracking	(RQ3) Team outcomes
(RQ3) First team achievement	
(RQ3) Recognition as pioneers	
(RQ3) Successful strategic implementation	
(RQ3) The failures dropped	
(RQ3) We do it so well	
<b>(RQ4) Unintended outcomes and related activities</b>	
(RQ4) It gave us a bit of a challenge	(RQ4) Activities from negative to positive outcome
(RQ4) That was quickly resolved	
(RQ4) We were able to quickly pivot	
(RQ4) We were completely blindsided	
(RQ4) What can we do better	
(RQ4) Who was it serving	(RQ4) Alignment with leadership
(RQ4) Lack of leadership support	
(RQ4) The consultation is important	
(RQ4) There was not enough consultation	
(RQ4) You don't give me the platform to be able to engage	(RQ4) Manage external stakeholders
(RQ4) Have to really reconfigure the whole system	
(RQ4) Prioritised public responses and emails	
(RQ4) Stakeholders involved are fully aware of what is happening	
(RQ4) We're not effectively communicating with our customers	(RQ4) Negative unintended outcomes
(RQ4) Additional layer of resistance by customers	
(RQ4) But it looks like our efforts were in vain.	
(RQ4) Could not commit to the capacity	
(RQ4) Impacting one huge customer negatively	
(RQ4) Performance going down	

(RQ4) Proud of myself		
(RQ4) That's not what it is that we wanted from the start		
(RQ4) The unintended consequence		
(RQ4) There's lack of trust now from the customer		
(RQ4) Which means you're losing utilisation of your billions		
(RQ4) Achieve better than expected	(RQ4) Positive unintended outcomes	
(RQ4) Commitment of the team to whatever		
(RQ4) Exposed us to the overall business		
(RQ4) Flagship of the entire organisation		
(RQ4) From a legislative point of view		
(RQ4) Positive outcome		
(RQ4) Reputational Risk		
(RQ4) That is not the nature of the projects in the space		
(RQ4) This is something good		
(RQ4) Turnaround is happening slowly but gradually		
(RQ4) And we don't have the resources to do it		(RQ4) Systematic issues
(RQ4) Is the bureaucracy of it		
(RQ4) It's a lack of coordination		
(RQ4) Leadership change		
(RQ4) Our overdependency was so high		
(RQ4) Responsibility not clearly outlined		
(RQ4) There's definitely a gap in that		
(RQ4) They don't have the passion		
(RQ4) Things take longer		
(RQ4) Those things are not being prioritised		