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Evaluating strategic leadership factors contributing to middle management employee retention in a South African mining company

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in the field of Digital Business, Johannesburg.

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ABSTRACT

Background: The South African mining sector plays a pivotal role in the national economy but faces persistent challenges in retaining middle management employees. These professionals are critical for operational efficiency, regulatory compliance, and achieving strategic objectives. High turnover rates, driven by demanding work conditions, limited career growth, and insufficient leadership support, necessitate an investigation into the role of strategic leadership in employee retention.

Aim: This study examines the impact of strategic leadership—specifically transformational, servant, and supportive leadership styles—on middle management retention in one South African mining company. The research identifies key leadership practices, organizational support mechanisms, and talent management strategies that mitigate turnover and enhance workforce stability.

Methodology: A qualitative case study approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 15 middle managers and 3 top managers. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, and findings were triangulated with organizational records and existing literature to ensure credibility and depth.

Results: The findings indicate that transformational and servant leadership styles significantly enhance middle managers' job satisfaction and commitment. Middle managers emphasized the importance of transparent communication, participative decision-making, structured career development, and recognition programs. Conversely, top management prioritises long-term talent pipelines and strategic oversight. Significant barriers to retention include geographical isolation, limited local amenities, and career stagnation, while flexible work arrangements, leadership development programs, and an inclusive organizational culture emerge as effective retention strategies.

Conclusion: Strategic leadership practices rooted in empathy, vision, and professional development are crucial in reducing turnover and fostering organizational resilience. Mining companies can strengthen middle management retention by addressing immediate job satisfaction drivers and long-term succession planning, ensuring operational stability and sustainable leadership pipelines.

Keywords:

Job Satisfaction, Middle Management Retention, Organizational Commitment, Organisational Support, Strategic Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Servant Leadership, Talent Management, South African Mining Industry.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Table 1: List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Form
EE	Employment Equity
ER	Employee Retention
EVP	Employee Value Proposition
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
IDP	Individual Development Program
MM	Middle Manager
MME	Middle Management Employee
OST	Organisational Support Theory
POS	Perceived Organizational Support
SHRM	Strategic Human Resource Management
STL	Strategic Leadership
TL	Transformational Leadership
TLT	Transformational Leadership Theory

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of Purpose

This qualitative study explores the strategic leadership factors that contribute to middle management employee retention in a particular South African mining company.

1.2 Background of the Study

The mining sector in South Africa plays a vital role in the national economy, accounting for around 13% of GDP and 6% of employment in 2020 (Makgetla, 2021). Despite its crucial economic role, the industry struggles to retain skilled middle managers who are critical in work team management, strategy implementation, coordination, and translating top management vision into organisational success (Harding et al., 2014; Tawse et al., 2023; Ukil & Akkas, 2017). These managers are critical in meeting production goals, upholding safety standards, and ensuring regulatory compliance (Manyuchi et al., 2020). Nonetheless, high turnover rates among this group lead to instability, hinder knowledge retention, and elevate recruitment and training expenses (Massingham, 2018; Vasantham & Aithal, 2022).

a. Context of the Mining Industry in South Africa

South Africa has a well-established mining sector, with commodities such as platinum, gold, coal, and base metals dominating global supply chains (Baskaran, 2021; Signé & Johnson, 2021). Despite its strategic importance, the industry is marked by volatile commodity prices, regulatory uncertainties, labour disputes, and operational safety concerns (Lane et al., 2015; Leon, 2012). These challenges place immense pressure on middle managers, who must navigate corporate expectations and workforce engagement, managing their dual identity as controlled and controlling agents, bridging strategic goals with operational execution while reinforcing their critical role in strategic leadership (Harding et al., 2014; Van Rensburg et al., 2014). The demand for experienced middle managers remains high; however, retention rates are often low due to a high-pressure work environment, limited career progression opportunities, skills poaching by competitors, leadership challenges, and a lack of adequate leadership support (Belasen & Belasen, 2016; Manyuchi et al., 2020).

b. The Role of Middle Management in Organizations

Middle managers are the essential link between senior leadership and frontline employees (Hermkens & Romme, 2020). They often feel trapped between the expectations of senior leadership and the operational realities faced by frontline workers (Leavy, 2023). Furthermore, middle managers are influential strategists who promote and execute organisational strategies, contributing to innovation and adaptability (Engle et al., 2017; Sidhu, 2016; Van Rensburg et al., 2014). Retaining this talent pool is crucial for operational stability, knowledge retention, and overall business performance (Hermkens & Romme, 2020; Leavy, 2023).

c. Strategic Leadership and Its Impact on Retention

Strategic leadership involves the ability of senior executives to provide direction, inspiration, and support, ultimately shaping the organisation's culture and long-term success (Asif, 2020; Jaleha & Machuki, 2018). In the context of middle management retention, key strategic leadership factors include:

i. Leadership Style and Managerial Support

- Transformational leadership, characterised by vision, motivation, and individualised consideration, is linked to increased job satisfaction and lower turnover rates (Abolnasser et al., 2023; Cao & Le, 2024; Dias et al., 2020). This leadership theory emphasises how leaders inspire and motivate their employees through idealised influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation (Fayed & Fathy, 2022; Tian et al., 2020b; Udin, 2020). Transformational leadership builds long-term organisational commitment and enhances overall job satisfaction (Sandy et al., 2024).
- Transactional leadership, characterised by clear expectations and reward systems, can enhance organisational efficiency and performance (Dong, 2023). Transactional leadership primarily builds short-term relationships based on shared goals and rewards (Sandy et al., 2024).
- Servant Leadership emphasises employee well-being and empowerment and effectively retains employees in high-pressure environments (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). Research indicates that servant leadership positively influences employee retention and well-being in these demanding settings by increasing employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment (Alafeshat & Tanova, 2019; Canavesi & Minelli, 2022; Kaltiainen & Hakanen, 2022).

ii. *Career Development and Growth Opportunities*

Investment in leadership development programs, succession planning, and technical and managerial training significantly reduces attrition among middle managers (Hwang & Rauen, 2015).

iii. *Work-Life Balance and Employee Well-Being*

Flexible scheduling, mental health support, and rotational shifts can mitigate burnout and improve retention (Guoqiang & Bhaumik, 2024; Omondi, 2016; Pandey et al., 2021).

iv. *Recognition, Compensation, and Rewards Systems*

Competitive remuneration, performance-based incentives, opportunities for career development, and supportive work environments play a crucial role in attracting and retaining top talent (Suriati et al., 2024). While competitive compensation is vital for employee retention, other factors such as job satisfaction, work-life balance, and company culture are also significantly important (Sorn et al., 2023).

v. *Organizational Culture and Leadership Support*

A culture characterised by open communication, inclusivity, and trust fosters loyalty among middle managers and reduces turnover (Chaanine, 2025; Wong & Huang, 2021).

d. Research Significance

Understanding the strategic leadership factors that contribute to middle management retention will enable mining companies to:

i. Develop leadership frameworks that foster loyalty and engagement.
ii. Reduce operational disruptions caused by high turnover.
iii. Enhance talent management and succession planning strategies.
iv. Strengthen the competitive positioning of South African mining companies.

e. Background Overview

Middle management retention is a critical challenge in the South African mining sector. Strategic leadership creates an environment where middle managers feel valued, supported, and motivated to stay. This research evaluates the leadership factors influencing retention to provide actionable insights that mining companies can implement to achieve long-term organisational success.

1.3 Research Problem

The mining industry, marked by labour-intensive operations and systemic inequalities (Benya, 2017; Bezuidenhout & Buhlungu, 2015), operates in an environment where high job demands and limited career progression contribute to elevated turnover rates (Tlaiss et al., 2017). Although prior studies have linked factors such as training, work environment, and job satisfaction to employee retention (Xuecheng et al., 2022), few have examined the specific mechanisms by which strategic leadership practices influence middle management retention. In particular, the application of transformational leadership, which fosters trust, professional development, and innovation (Fayed & Fathy, 2022; Udin, 2020), remains underexplored within the unique context of South African mining companies. This research addresses this gap by evaluating how strategic leadership practices influence middle management retention and identifying context-specific pathways to improve workforce stability and organisational resilience. Given the centrality of middle managers to operational and strategic success, this research can enhance organisational performance and sustainability in the mining sector.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

I. What are the critical strategic leadership factors contributing to middle management employee retention in the organisation?
II. How do middle managers perceive the leadership styles of top management concerning their retention?
III. What specific leadership practices and behaviours do middle managers identify as crucial for enhancing job satisfaction and organisational commitment?
IV. How does transformational leadership influence middle management retention within the organisational context?
V. What are this organisation's key challenges and opportunities in talent management and employee retention?

1.5 Rationale

The rationale for this study is rooted in the critical role that middle managers play in an organisation's operational and strategic dimensions. Effective strategic leadership has emerged as a key determinant of employee retention, influencing job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and

overall workplace culture (Gu, 2023; Ukil & Akkas, 2017). South Africa's mining industry faces significant challenges, including operational complexities, socioeconomic issues, and health and safety risks, which lead to high operational pressures and challenges in retaining middle management (Lane et al., 2015; Pelders & Nelson, 2019). Retaining middle managers is vital to maintaining business continuity and fostering innovation (Benya, 2017; Thomas et al., 2018).

This research makes a significant contribution by:

i. Bridging existing research gaps by addressing the paucity of research on how strategic leadership practices affect middle management retention in resource-intensive and high-pressure sectors.
ii. Enhancing organisational performance by providing actionable insights to reduce turnover, minimise recruitment costs, and maintain a stable and experienced leadership pipeline.

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

To maintain a focused investigation, the study was delimited by the following parameters:

i. The research focused on a single mining enterprise in South Africa (i.e. Geographical and Organizational Scope). While this case study enables an in-depth analysis of specific challenges in the South African mining context, the findings may not be generalisable to other organisations or regions.
ii. The study targeted the selected organisation's middle managers and senior leadership (i.e. Participant Scope). While perspectives from frontline employees are valuable, the primary focus was on the leadership practices that directly influence middle management retention.
iii. The investigation focused on strategic leadership behaviours like transformational leadership and leadership support's impact on middle management retention (i.e. Conceptual Focus). While external factors such as macroeconomic trends and industry labour market conditions were acknowledged, they were not examined in detail.
iv. A qualitative research design employing semi-structured interviews was used to gather in-depth insights (i.e. Methodological Approach). This approach facilitates rich, contextual data collection; however, it may limit the broader generalizability of the results.

1.7 Definition of terms

a. Talent Management

The systematic process of attracting, developing, and retaining talented individuals within an organisation. This includes recruitment, performance management, training and development, and succession planning (Stuss, 2020).

1.8 Assumptions

This research was based on several key assumptions;

i. The studies anticipated that all participants would provide honest and accurate responses during interviews, thereby offering reliable insights into the impact of strategic leadership on retention.
ii. The study assumed that the organisational environment and strategic leadership practices would remain relatively stable during the data collection, allowing for a consistent evaluation of their impact on retention.
iii. Established constructs of strategic leadership (e.g., transformational, transactional, and servant leadership) were expected to apply to the South African mining industry.
iv. The research anticipated that participants would be willing to engage openly in the research process.

1.9 Chapter 1 Summary

This introductory chapter has outlined the purpose, background, research problem, research questions, rationale, delimitations, and assumptions underlying this study. In the subsequent chapter, the literature review will critically examine relevant theories and empirical studies related to strategic leadership and employee retention. This will be followed by a detailed description of the research methodology, presentation and analysis of findings, and a discussion of the implications for theory and practice.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the literature on strategic leadership and its impact on middle management retention. It synthesises theoretical and empirical research on leadership styles, organisational support, job satisfaction, and employee retention in high-pressure industries. The review also explores the role of transformational and servant leadership in fostering commitment alongside talent management strategies that promote workforce stability. Finally, it presents an integrated theoretical framework that combines Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) and Organizational Support Theory (OST) to underpin this study.

2.2 Strategic Leadership: Definitions and Organizational Impact

2.2.1 *Defining Strategic Leadership*

Strategic leadership is a multifaceted concept widely discussed in management literature. It refers to leaders' ability to set direction, mobilise resources, and inspire employees to achieve long-term organisational objectives (Rowe, 2001). Effective strategic leadership encompasses essential skills such as communication, problem-solving, negotiation, and decision-making (Suwanratchapoo et al., 2013). Additionally, strategic leaders act as visionaries, analysts, and motivators, navigating complex business environments to drive sustainable success (Mjaku, 2020; O'Shannassy, 2021).

2.2.2 *Organizational Impact of Strategic Leadership*

Research highlights the positive influence of strategic leadership on employee satisfaction, motivation, and retention (Jaleha & Machuki, 2018; Mubarak & Yusoff, 2019). Strategic leaders cultivate flexibility, collaboration, and resilience, ensuring organisations remain competitive in dynamic markets (Erenturk, 2020). Although external factors such as market volatility and regulatory constraints can impact leadership effectiveness, scholars agree that strong strategic leadership enhances organisational viability and workforce stability (Bhardwaj et al., 2021; Tian et al., 2020).

2.2.3 *Relevance of Strategic Leadership in Middle Management Retention*

Strategic leadership is particularly crucial in industries like mining, where operational complexity and employee retention challenges persist. Leaders must balance strategic foresight with practical talent management strategies to reduce turnover and enhance workforce commitment (Năstase, 2010; Pazireh et al., 2014). Strategic leadership can significantly improve retention rates by aligning organisational resources, leadership behaviour, and employee engagement initiatives (Adoli & Kilika, 2020).

2.3 Strategic Leadership Factors Influencing Employee Retention

2.3.1 *Leadership Styles and their Influence on Retention*

Leadership style shapes workplace culture, employee engagement, and long-term retention (Dias et al., 2020). Studies suggest transformational and servant leadership foster job satisfaction, loyalty, and reduced turnover intentions (Gu, 2023; Kaltiainen & Hakanen, 2022; Yamin, 2020).

i. *Transformational Leadership (TL)*

TL is characterised by visionary guidance, individual support, and intellectual stimulation, enhancing employee motivation and commitment (Dias et al., 2020; Gu, 2023). Leaders practising TL align employees' goals with organisational values, fostering a sense of purpose and engagement (McManus, 2019; Xuecheng et al., 2022). Mittal (2023) demonstrated that transformational leadership significantly influences employee performance and retention by promoting engagement and shared vision.

ii. *Transactional Leadership (TR)*

TR emphasises performance-based incentives and structured oversight, which can improve short-term efficiency but may not foster long-term retention (Dong, 2023). Employees may feel disengaged if leadership lacks inspiration and individualised support (Sandy et al., 2024).

iii. *Servant Leadership (SL):*

SL focuses on employee well-being, empowerment, and ethical leadership, creating an inclusive and psychologically safe work environment (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). Studies indicate that SL positively impacts retention by fostering trust, engagement, and long-term loyalty (Alafeshat & Tanova, 2019; Kaltiainen & Hakanen, 2022).

2.3.2 *Organizational Factors Affecting Retention*

Beyond leadership style, various organisational factors influence retention, including:

i. *Career Development & Growth*

Organisations that invest in leadership development programs, structured succession planning, and mentorship initiatives experience lower turnover rates among middle managers (Hwang & Rauen, 2015; Thibault Landry et al., 2017).

ii. *Work-Life Balance & Well-being*

Flexible scheduling, mental health support, and employee wellness programs significantly impact retention, particularly in high-stress environments (Guoqiang & Bhaumik, 2024; Pandey et al., 2021).

iii. *Recognition, Compensation and Rewards*

Competitive salaries, performance-based incentives, and non-monetary recognition foster job satisfaction and employee commitment (Sorn et al., 2023; Suriati et al., 2024).

iv. *Organizational Culture & Leadership Support*

Open communication, inclusivity, and trust-driven workplace cultures contribute to employee engagement and retention (Chaanine, 2025; Praneeth & Pradeep, 2024).

2.3.3 *Proposition 1*

Based on the reviewed literature, the following proposition is advanced:

- Effective strategic leadership improves employee retention by fostering supportive work environments, implementing transformational leadership practices, and adopting robust talent management strategies.

2.4 Middle Management and Its Relationship with Strategic Leadership

2.4.1 *Role of Middle Managers in Organizations*

Middle managers are critical in translating strategic vision into operational success (Ping, 2019; Tawse et al., 2023). Their interaction with both top management and frontline employees positions them uniquely to influence organisational performance and employee satisfaction (Tawse et al.,

2023). They are tasked with operational oversight and serve as key communicators and implementers of strategic change (Ukil & Akkas, 2017). Middle managers are, therefore, a critical link between senior leadership and frontline employees, ensuring strategic vision execution and operational efficiency (Hermkens & Romme, 2020). However, they often face pressure from senior management and workforce expectations, impacting job satisfaction and retention (Leavy, 2023).

2.4.2 *Leadership Behaviors that Foster Middle Manager Retention*

Leadership behaviours that enhance middle manager retention include:

i. *Transparent Communication*

Open dialogue between senior leadership and middle managers builds trust and engagement (Mey et al., 2021).

ii. *Professional Development & Career Pathways*

Providing structured training, mentorship, and internal mobility opportunities enhances commitment (Jakhar, 2015; Mandhanya & Agrawal, 2017; Noor, 2015).

iii. *Recognition and empowerment*

Employees who feel valued through consistent feedback and appreciation exhibit higher retention rates (Kothari, 2023; Thomas et al., 2018). Leaders who demonstrate emotional intelligence by showing empathy and understanding enhance job satisfaction and loyalty (Alzyoud et al., 2019). Research by (Kothari, 2023; Thomas et al., 2018) reinforces that supportive leadership behaviours, including feedback and mentoring, are key drivers of middle manager retention. Leadership practices and the support they receive from senior management greatly influence the effectiveness of middle managers (Tawse et al., 2023).

2.4.3 *Proposition 2*

Based on the above findings, the following proposition is advanced:

- Top management commitment, learning-oriented leadership, effective communication, and regular recognition significantly enhance middle management job satisfaction, leading to improved employee retention.

2.5 Theoretical Framework and Analytical Model

This section outlines an integrated overview of the theoretical and analytical concepts of the study.

2.5.1 *Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT)*

TLT posits that leaders who articulate a compelling vision, foster intellectual stimulation, and provide individual support can significantly enhance job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Abolnasser et al., 2023; Bose et al., 2020; Jain et al., 2019; Toufaili, 2017). Research indicates that transformational leaders:

i. Create supportive work environments that bolster trust and motivation (Abolnasser et al., 2023; Mohd Zin et al., 2022).
ii. Enhance job satisfaction and organisational commitment by aligning employee goals with the organisational vision (McManus, 2019; Xuecheng et al., 2022).
iii. Mitigate turnover intentions by providing opportunities for professional growth and intrinsic motivation (Krishna et al., 2022).

2.5.2 *Organizational Support Theory (OST)*

OST suggests that perceived organisational support (POS)—the extent to which employees believe their organisation values their contributions and well-being—positively impacts retention (Kurtessis et al., 2017). A supportive work environment with high POS fosters trust, motivation, and engagement. Key elements of POS include:

i. Employee recognition and feedback (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019).
ii. Opportunities for career advancement and leadership training (Mey et al., 2021)

2.5.3 *Integration of TLT and OST*

By integrating TLT and OST, this study suggests that effective strategic leadership motivates and inspires through transformational leadership practices, fostering an environment where employees feel supported and valued. This dual mechanism enhances job satisfaction and organisational commitment, improving retention rates among middle managers.

2.5.4 *Justification of the Selected Theoretical Framework*

The combined framework of TLT and OST offers a comprehensive perspective on how leadership influences middle management retention, particularly in high-pressure, resource-intensive sectors like mining. By integrating TLT and OST, this study demonstrates that:

i. Transformational leadership fosters inspiration and engagement.
ii. Organizational support strengthens commitment and job satisfaction.
iii. Both elements collectively enhance middle management retention.

2.5.5 *Conceptual Framework*

The visual schematic (Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Study) illustrates the two foundational pillars of the study—Transformational Leadership (TL) and Perceived Organisational Support (POS)—as independent variables (IVs) that converge to enhance job satisfaction and organisational commitment, which function as mediating variables (MVs). These mediators, in turn, influence middle management employee retention, identified as the dependent variable (DV). These variables collectively form an integrated pathway linking strategic leadership and organisational support mechanisms to improved retention outcomes.

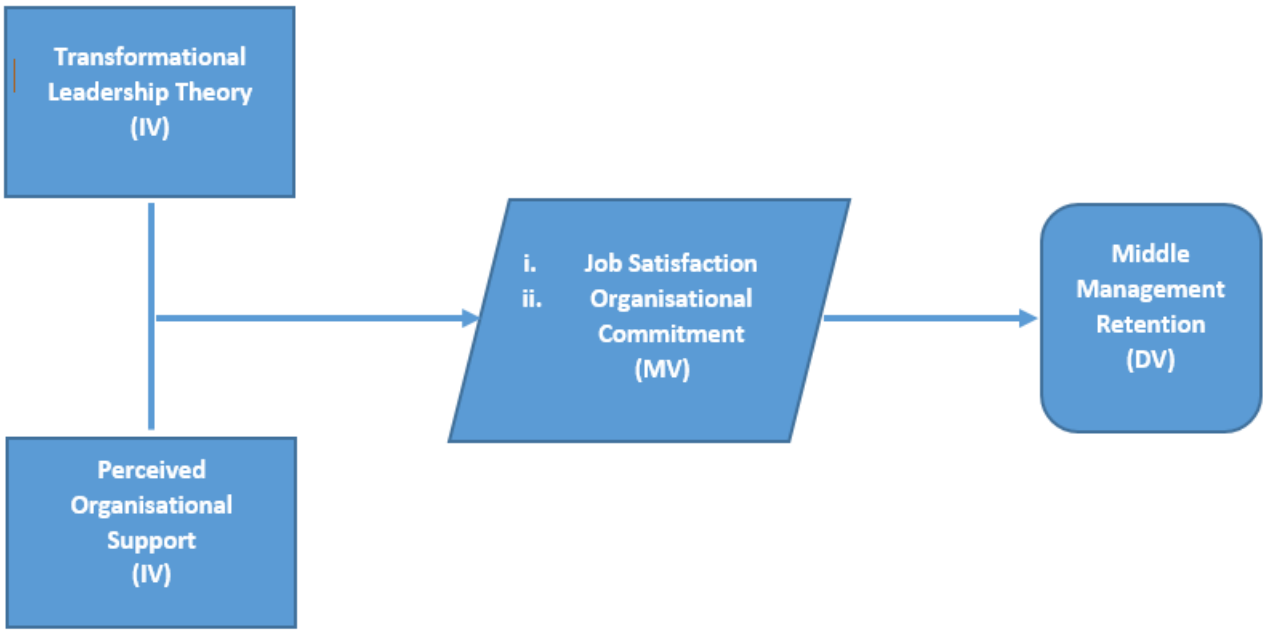


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Study

2.6 Chapter 2 Summary

This chapter reviewed theories and empirical studies on strategic leadership and employee retention. It explored the impact of leadership styles, organisational support mechanisms, and talent management practices on middle managers' job satisfaction and retention. The theoretical framework integrates TLT and OST, offering a comprehensive model for understanding leadership's role in retention. The conceptual framework posits that TLT and OST do not operate in isolation but rather synergistically. These insights will guide the subsequent empirical analysis. Two propositions were advanced: (1) effective strategic leadership enhances retention through supportive environments and robust talent management, and (2) specific leadership behaviours positively impact middle manager job satisfaction.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in the study, detailing the research approach, design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. A qualitative case study was chosen to explore the role of strategic leadership in middle management retention, enabling an in-depth examination of participants' experiences and perceptions.

3.1 Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was adopted to capture middle and top managers' complex and nuanced perspectives regarding leadership practices and employee retention. Qualitative methods allow rich, descriptive data to understand leadership behaviours and organisational dynamics (Awasthy, 2019). Given the exploratory nature of this study, interviews were selected as the primary data collection method, ensuring participants had the opportunity to express their views in detail.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a case study design, focusing on a single South African mining company. Case studies are well-suited for investigating contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts (Turhan, 2019). This design allowed for a holistic exploration of leadership styles, organisational culture, and talent management practices that influence middle management retention. A case study approach was deemed appropriate due to:

i. In-depth insights into the specific leadership challenges in the mining industry are needed.
ii. The ability to compare perceptions between middle and top management.
iii. The feasibility of triangulating findings with organisational records and secondary data sources.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

3.3.1 *Primary Data: Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 middle managers and 3 top managers, allowing for flexibility in responses while maintaining consistency in key thematic areas (Hossain et al., 2024). The interview guide (see APPENDIX C: Research Instrument) focused on:

i. Leadership styles (transformational, servant, and transactional leadership).
ii. Organizational support and communication practices.
iii. Perceived barriers and enablers of retention.
iv. Employee value proposition and talent management strategies.

Interviews were conducted in private office settings, ensuring confidentiality and encouraging open dialogue. Each session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, and all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis to preserve authenticity.

3.3.2 *Secondary Data: Organizational Reports and Surveys*

To enhance the credibility and depth of findings, secondary data sources were reviewed, including:

i. The company's 5-year Employment Equity (EE) plan (2023).
ii. The 2024 HR retention survey provided insights into employee satisfaction and turnover trends.

Triangulating interview responses with secondary data strengthened the study's validity, ensuring alignment between participant experiences and documented organisational reports.

3.4 Population and Sample

3.4.1 *Population*

This study's population comprised middle- and top-level managers involved in strategic planning, operational oversight, or talent management. These participants reflect a larger group of employees whose experiences, challenges in leadership, and retention-related factors were pertinent to the study's objectives.

3.4.2 *Sample and Sampling Method*

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants, ensuring the inclusion of managers with direct experience in leadership and retention-related challenges. This approach was chosen for:

i. Its ability to capture information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives (Obilor, 2023).
ii. The need to ensure diversity in perspectives across middle and top management levels.

Despite the limitations of purposive sampling, such as potential selection bias, the study mitigated these risks by:

i. Ensuring a balanced representation of departments within the organisation.
ii. Data saturation checks were conducted, and interviews were continued until no new themes emerged (Guest et al., 2020).

3.5 The Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide (APPENDIX C: Research Instrument) was developed to ensure interview consistency while allowing for exploratory discussions (Georgescu & Anastasiu, 2021). The guide was pilot-tested with two participants to refine question clarity and relevance (Abdul Majid et al., 2017). Feedback from the pilot study led to minor modifications, enhancing the guide's effectiveness. Key sections of the interview guide included:

i. Leadership Perceptions – Views on strategic leadership styles.
ii. Retention Challenges – Factors influencing job satisfaction and turnover.
iii. Organizational Support and Talent Management – Perceived career growth opportunities.

3.6 Procedure for Data Collection

Participants were contacted via email and phone, and formal interview invitations were sent to eligible managers. Interviews occurred in a private office at agreed times, offering a neutral and confidential setting. Before each session, participants reviewed and signed consent forms, confirming voluntary participation and fulfilling the research ethical requirements (Refer to APPENDIX A: The Participant Information Sheet and APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form). A semi-structured interview guide aligned with research objectives was used to gather the qualitative data (See APPENDIX C: Research Instrument). Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim, ensuring that the authenticity of participants' perspectives was preserved.

3.7 Data Analysis Strategies and Interpretation

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and relationships within interview responses (see APPENDIX D: Analysis Tables and Charts). This approach was chosen due to its flexibility and effectiveness in qualitative research (Esmaeilzadeh et al., 2022; Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

The subsequent Step-by-Step Analysis Processing was followed:

1. **Transcription and Familiarization**

- All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Initial readings of transcripts identified recurring concepts.

2. **Coding and Theme Development**

- Data were coded using NVivo software, categorising responses into thematic clusters. Themes were validated against existing literature and organisational reports.

3. **Triangulation with Secondary Data**

- To ensure data reliability, the findings were compared with the company's 5-year EE plan for 2023 and the 2024 HR retention survey.

4. **Comparative Analysis (Middle vs. Top Management)**

- Differences in leadership perspectives between middle and senior management were examined.

Through this structured approach, key themes related to leadership styles, career progression, and organisational culture emerged, providing robust insights into strategic leadership's role in retention.

3.8 Possible Limitations and Challenges of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study faced several limitations:

1. **Sample Size and Generalizability:**

The study focused on a single mining company, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other industries or regions. However, rich contextual insights from this case study provide valuable benchmarks for similar organisations.

2. **Potential Response Bias:**

Participants may have withheld negative opinions due to professional concerns. To mitigate this risk, confidentiality assurances and anonymous data reporting were employed.

3. **Reliance on Qualitative Data:**

While qualitative methods provide in-depth understanding, they lack quantifiable metrics. Future research could incorporate surveys or mixed-method approaches for enhanced empirical validation.

To address these constraints, the researcher used reflexivity, data triangulation, and member checking for cross-verification and participant validation of findings (Busso & Leonardsen, 2019). These measures improved the study's credibility and reduced the impact of bias on results.

3.9 Quality Assurance

Quality assurance in qualitative research is essential for ensuring the trustworthiness and dependability of study findings.

3.9.1 *External Validity and Transferability*

While findings are based on a single South African mining company, they offer transferable insights applicable to other resource-intensive industries. To enhance external validity, the study:

i. Provided a detailed contextual background, allowing comparisons with similar organisational settings.
ii. Referenced existing literature and industry reports, ensuring alignment with broader research trends.

By detailing the study's context, including setting, sampling, and data collection methods, the researcher allowed scholars and practitioners to assess the applicability of these findings to their studies (Woolcock, 2013).

3.9.2 *Internal Credibility*

To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed:

i. Member Checking: Participants reviewed summaries of their responses for accuracy.
ii. Data Triangulation: Cross-referencing findings with HR reports and existing literature.
iii. Audit Trail Maintenance: Documenting all research decisions to ensure transparency.

Member checking enabled participants to verify findings while maintaining an audit trail for each analytic decision and data process (Thomas, 2017).

3.9.3 *Reliability*

To enhance reliability, the study employed systematic data collection, standardised protocols, and data triangulation per qualitative study guidelines (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010; Coleman, 2022).

Secondary data from annual organisational labour reports and HR retention surveys added contextual information, enriching the primary data. This triangulation boosted credibility and depth, offering a robust understanding of STL's impact on middle management retention. Peer debriefing evaluated the research process, reducing potential bias (Adler, 2022).

3.10 Ethical Considerations

This study received the institution's ethics approval before data collection, and confidentiality was ensured by granting data access only to the researcher (Refer to APPENDIX E: Ethics Clearance Certificate). Interviews were held privately, with participants providing informed consent to participate voluntarily and withdraw at any time without negative consequences (see APPENDIX A: The Participant Information Sheet and APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form). Data were anonymised to protect identities by removing personally identifiable information. All records were stored in password-protected digital files in compliance with South Africa's Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act, which governs data processing for individual privacy. These measures collectively upheld transparency, accuracy, and respect throughout the research process.

3.11 Chapter 3 Summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology, data collection methods, sampling strategy, and analysis techniques to investigate strategic leadership's impact on middle management retention. Thematic analysis was applied to identify leadership practices influencing retention, while triangulation with HR data and organisational reports enhanced validity. Ethical considerations ensured participant confidentiality and research integrity. The next chapter presents the findings and data analysis.

CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and interprets the qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews with middle and top managers. The analysis employed thematic techniques and content clustering to discern key strategic leadership, retention, and job satisfaction patterns (Refer to APPENDIX D: Analysis Tables and Charts). The findings align with the research questions and are mapped to the two propositions introduced in Chapter 2. Direct quotes from respondents are included where relevant to substantiate the emerging themes.

4.2 Strategic Leadership Factors Influencing Retention

4.2.1 *Leadership Styles and Employee Commitment*

Interviews revealed that transformational and servant leadership styles significantly enhance middle managers' job satisfaction and commitment. The following leadership attributes were consistently highlighted:

i. <u>Visionary and Inspirational Leadership</u>

Participants emphasised the importance of leaders articulating a clear vision. Respondent 6: "When our executive team shares a clear direction, it becomes easier to see my future here." Transformational leadership fosters a sense of purpose and motivation. The following leadership attributes were consistently highlighted: Respondent 1 noted, "Leaders who inspire and empower us make us feel valued and motivated to stay." Similarly, Respondent 8 emphasised a human-centred approach: "Leadership styles must incorporate empathy and genuine care to build trust."

However, some participants acknowledged that certain transactional elements could also reinforce retention. Respondent 9 remarked, "I appreciate knowing the targets and being rewarded, but if there is no bigger purpose, it starts to feel like a mere job." This observation suggests that balanced leadership—combining clear performance incentives with a sense of purpose—can effectively sustain middle managers' commitment.

ii. Individualized Consideration and Support

Middle managers stressed the need for mentorship and personal development. Respondent 2: “My supervisor helps me map out a career path that aligns with my strengths; that personal investment is a major factor in why I stay.” Respondent 4 explained, “Our open-door policy bridges the gap between us and senior management, creating an environment of trust and learning.” Likewise, Respondent 12 added, “Feeling safe to share ideas without fear of backlash is critical for fostering innovation and commitment.”

Participants also pointed to top management’s investment in middle managers—through clear strategic guidance and continuous communication—as a crucial factor in retention. Respondent 1 commented, “When I see our senior leaders engage with us regularly, I feel more secure in my role and more inclined to stay.” Furthermore, continuous development surfaced as a recurring priority. Respondent 5 emphasised, “I am motivated to stay because I know that each year brings new development opportunities, and our leadership invests in us.”

iii. Participative Decision-Making

Employees value being included in strategic discussions. Respondent 7 noted: “I appreciate when top management actively seeks our input; it makes us feel like partners in the process.”

iv. Communication

While middle managers highlighted the importance of inclusive leadership, some felt that decision-making structures remained hierarchical, limiting engagement opportunities.

4.3 Perceptions of Top Management Leadership

4.3.1 *Supportive Leadership Practices*

Middle managers identified trust and recognition as key retention drivers. Supportive leadership behaviours include:

i. Open Communication

Transparent dialogue between middle and top management enhances trust and engagement. Respondent 8 noted: “When leaders communicate openly, it informs us and makes us feel involved in strategic decisions.” However, some participants noted inconsistencies in communication strategies. Respondent 3 noted, “While management is generally inclusive, there are times when

we are not adequately involved in decision-making." This feedback points to a need for greater consistency in communication strategies to maintain high levels of trust and engagement among middle managers. Participants emphasised that creating a safe space for open dialogue is an essential leadership practice. Respondent 12 remarked, "When we feel safe to express our ideas without judgment, it fosters a culture of innovation and commitment." Such psychological safety promotes creative thinking and strengthens trust between middle managers and supervisors, ultimately contributing to a more engaged and loyal workforce.

ii. Recognition and Valuation

Public acknowledgement and personal appreciation significantly boost morale and job satisfaction. Respondent 3 stated: "A simple thank-you or a personal note from my supervisor can make my day; it is a morale booster." Respondents 5 and 10 echoed this sentiment, emphasising how recognition programs—such as star performer awards and performance bonuses—reinforce motivation. Respondent 13 added, "Public recognition not only boosts morale but also strengthens trust within the team."

iii. Structured Professional Development

Respondents stressed the need for formal career advancement frameworks. Respondent 8: "Without structured training programs, many of us feel stagnant." Respondents emphasised the need for structured leadership development programs, mentorship opportunities, and clearly defined career pathways. Respondent 1 highlighted the importance of continuous learning, asserting that an organisation's investment in professional development strengthens employees' loyalty. In contrast, Respondent 8 noted that unaddressed performance management issues can stifle career progression, reducing the perceived value of leadership. This critique underlines the necessity for formal training programs and performance management systems that are both transparent and equitable. Respondent 7 highlighted the importance of mentorship: "Mentorship programs help us envision a clear future in the organisation, which is essential for long-term commitment." These insights suggest that robust and well-communicated development opportunities can enhance job satisfaction and retention.

4.3.2 *Challenges in Leadership Perceptions*

Some middle managers perceived a disconnect between leadership rhetoric and action. Respondent 14 stated: "There is a gap between what is preached and what is practised, particularly

in inclusive decision-making." This highlights the need for leadership consistency in engagement strategies.

4.4 Role of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership emerged as a critical retention driver, with middle managers highlighting the inspirational, motivational, and individualised support they receive from top leadership. Findings support the study's proposition that transformational leadership fosters job satisfaction and retention. Key themes include:

i. Vision, Inspiration and Motivation

Leaders who set a clear vision and inspire employees create a more engaged workforce. Respondent 6 stated, "When our executive team shares a clear vision of where we are heading, it is easier to see my future here." Similarly, Respondent 3 highlighted, "Transformational practices ensure that we feel valued and inspired, which keeps us committed." Respondent 1 further reinforced this view by emphasising the importance of vision and individual support, stating, "A leader who sets a clear vision and supports us individually makes all the difference."

ii. Employee Empowerment and Autonomy

Beyond visionary leadership, middle managers also stressed the importance of autonomy in decision-making and the freedom to innovate within their respective domains. Respondent 11 explained, "When I am trusted to run my projects with minimal micromanagement, I feel I am truly part of the company's success." This sense of empowerment fosters intrinsic motivation, reinforcing employees' sense of ownership and accountability for their contributions.

iii. Career Growth and Leadership Development

A lack of defined career pathways limits employee motivation. Respondent 5 highlighted: "Without structured professional development, it is hard to see a path for growth, leading to disengagement.". Respondents indicated that such personalised development plans significantly influence their decision to remain with the organisation. This insight underscores the importance of leaders recognising and nurturing the individual potential of middle managers, ensuring that their career trajectories align with personal aspirations and organisational objectives."

These findings suggest integrating structured career development programs with inspirational leadership approaches can enhance retention outcomes.

4.4.1 *Challenges and Opportunities in Talent Management*

This section addresses the key retention challenges and emerging opportunities in talent management as identified by middle and top management. The data reveal a combination of internal barriers related to career progression, external constraints linked to geographic and financial factors, and strategic opportunities for strengthening development programs, implementing flexible work arrangements, and cultivating an inclusive workplace culture.

i. Retention Challenges: Internal Barriers

Middle managers identified career stagnation and promotion bottlenecks as primary concerns. According to Respondent 3, internal candidates are often overlooked for promotions and instead remain in acting roles until external hires are brought in, fostering frustration among those seeking advancement. Similarly, Respondent 11 described the promotion process as “sporadic” and lacking a structured framework to support career growth. This perceived stagnation can lead to disengagement and reduced commitment over time. As Respondent 5 explained, “Without structured professional development, it is hard to see a path for growth, leading to disengagement.” These insights suggest that a lack of transparent and consistent career pathways diminishes employees’ long-term retention prospects.

ii. Retention Challenges: External Constraints

The remote location of mining operations presents additional retention barriers. Respondent 2 stated, “The remote location of our operations significantly complicates workforce sustainability,” highlighting the persistent struggle to attract and retain qualified personnel. Respondent 3 expanded on these concerns by noting that remote location contributes to high attrition rates in the organisation, which “destabilise performance” and pose ongoing obstacles to productivity. Furthermore, Respondent 6 pointed out that employees in such regions often face lower remuneration relative to elevated living costs, exacerbating dissatisfaction and prompting them to seek opportunities elsewhere. Beyond financial concerns, Respondent 3 underscored the limited family amenities and poor educational facilities, which deter potential recruits from relocating or committing to long-term employment. To mitigate these challenges, Respondent 1 recommended location-specific strategies such as flexible work arrangements and additional incentives that could bolster employee retention in geographically isolated sites.

iii. Opportunities: Enhanced Development Programs

Despite these obstacles, participants identified avenues for improving retention through professional development. Respondent 10 remarked, "Structured mentorship and training programs are essential for nurturing internal talent and improving retention," highlighting how clear pathways for progression can bolster employee engagement. Respondent 7 further stressed the importance of leadership development—particularly in emotional intelligence and conflict resolution, for cultivating effective leaders who can motivate teams and reduce turnover. These insights suggest that comprehensive, well-defined development initiatives can address employees' aspirations, enhancing satisfaction and organisational commitment.

iv. Opportunities: Flexible Work Arrangements

Another strategy to combat retention challenges involves flexible work models. Respondent 9 highlighted the role of work-life balance, stating, "Flexible scheduling and remote work options can greatly improve job satisfaction." Similarly, Respondent 15 emphasised that inclusive workplace policies, including flexible scheduling, are key to overall well-being and can significantly lower turnover rates. By accommodating diverse employee needs ranging from family responsibilities to commuting constraints, the organisation can foster a more supportive environment that incentivises employees to remain long-term.

v. Opportunities: Inclusive Workplace Culture

Participants underscored the value of creating a positive, inclusive culture. Respondent 11 explained, "A culture rooted in respect and inclusivity improves morale and builds long-term loyalty." This perspective aligns with broader findings that organisational culture is pivotal in talent management and employee retention. Respondent 14 reinforced this viewpoint, linking workplace culture to job satisfaction and emphasising that recognition and respect are essential for maintaining high morale. An inclusive culture that fosters collaboration, mutual respect, and employee recognition can thus mitigate retention challenges by ensuring that employees at all levels feel valued and engaged.

4.5 Comparative Management Perceptions

The analysis reveals several critical patterns that emphasise the significance of strategic leadership in employee retention and illustrate the nuanced differences between middle and top management perspectives. Both groups recognise the crucial role of supportive leadership, strong professional development, and effective communication.

4.5.1 *Convergence in Leadership Practices*

Both middle and top management agree that supportive leadership is essential for fostering engagement and retaining talent. Middle managers prioritise an inclusive approach, emphasising open, two-way communication and participative decision-making. They advocate for direct engagement that empowers employees and fosters a sense of ownership. In contrast, top managers tend to focus on delegation and the practice of VFL, concentrating on high-level strategic decision-making and structured engagement sessions. While both tiers highlight the importance of trust-building and participative leadership, the operational focus differs: middle managers aim for immediate, hands-on involvement, whereas top managers emphasise broad visibility and strategic direction oversight.

4.5.2 *Professional Development and Career Advancement*

There is strong consensus across management levels on the critical role of structured career development in enhancing employee retention. Middle managers emphasise the value of immediate growth opportunities through mentorship, skills training, and leadership coaching. These initiatives are vital for boosting job satisfaction and fostering rapid career progression. Conversely, top managers advocate for IDPs and comprehensive leadership development programs. Their focus is more long-term, aiming to cultivate future leaders and ensure the organisation's sustainability through deliberate succession planning. This divergence illustrates a shared commitment to professional development, albeit with different temporal orientations.

4.5.3 *Transformational Leadership as a Retention Driver*

Transformational leadership emerges as a central retention driver, with inspirational leadership practices consistently linked to enhanced trust, motivation, and reduced turnover. Despite persistent challenges such as internal career stagnation and external geographical constraints, middle and top management see substantial opportunities to bolster talent management practices. Enhanced development programs and flexible work arrangements are recognised as potential remedies to these challenges, further reinforcing the critical role of leadership in navigating and mitigating retention issues.

4.5.4 *Recognition, Employee Value Proposition, and Retention Strategies*

Recognition is identified as a key driver of employee engagement, yet its implementation diverges notably between management tiers. Middle managers favour tangible recognition initiatives—such

as performance awards, direct acknowledgements, and incentive programs—which provide immediate motivational benefits. Conversely, top managers prioritise broader EVP elements, including retention bonuses, long-term incentives, and career-aligned benefits. This strategic approach is designed to align recognition with long-term organisational goals, highlighting a clear contrast between immediacy and the strategic framing of rewards.

4.5.5 *Alignment of Themes to the Study*

These convergent themes answered the research questions by demonstrating how effective strategic leadership and well-integrated talent management increase employee retention. The findings validated the study's propositions, indicating that transformational leadership practices, supportive work environments, and structured development frameworks were crucial to middle management satisfaction and reduced turnover.

4.6 Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the thematic analysis of interview data, addressing each research question. The findings offer a nuanced understanding of strategic leadership and its impact on middle management retention and job satisfaction. They also illustrate the breadth of leadership styles, supportive practices, and organisational strategies that can either enhance or diminish employee commitment. These findings validate the study's propositions and provide a nuanced understanding of how strategic leadership influences middle management retention in the context of the selected mining company. The next chapter will discuss these findings in relation to the literature and theoretical framework and outline their implications for theory and practice.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter interprets and evaluates the results presented in Chapter 4 against existing literature on strategic leadership and employee retention. It also explores how these findings support or challenge the conceptual frameworks introduced in the literature review, providing deeper insight into the transformational and servant leadership paradigms, perceived organisational support, and talent management theories. This chapter demonstrates how each theme answers the research questions and aligns with (or refutes) the study's propositions. The findings are also contextualised within secondary data sources, offering a comprehensive understanding of the strategic leadership factors influencing middle management retention in the mining company.

5.2 Key Themes and Strategic Leadership Alignment

5.2.1 *Transformational and Servant Leadership Practices*

Managers at both middle and senior levels emphasised that leadership characterised by inclusivity, transparency, and empowerment fostered a work environment where employees felt valued and aligned with organisational objectives. Interview narratives indicated that middle managers underscored the significance of reciprocal communication and systematic engagement. They maintained that this strategy lessened hierarchical barriers and fostered a sense of ownership among their teams. This preference aligns with transformational leadership, wherein leaders inspire followers through clear vision and personalised support (Quiros, 2020; Tian et al., 2020). These findings strongly supported Proposition 1, which posited that transformational leadership increased retention through supportive work environments and robust leadership practices (Kariuki et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2022). Nonetheless, certain transactional practices (e.g., performance-based rewards) also emerged, indicating that a blended approach might be more practical than relying solely on transformational methods.

Servant leadership themes centred on empathy, genuine care, and psychological safety, reinforcing the principle that leaders primarily serve the needs of their teams and, in doing so, enhance trust and commitment (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). Some middle managers perceived inconsistencies between expressed servant ideals and actual practice, where top-down directives and limited resources occasionally overshadowed servant leadership principles.

Aligned with Proposition 2, the practice of servant leadership demonstrated a strong commitment from top management. It emphasised regular recognition, improving job satisfaction and reinforcing the connection between supportive leadership and employee retention. In contrast, top managers emphasised delegation and leadership visibility, concentrating on strategic decision-making and long-term vision-setting. Scholars have similarly highlighted the servant leadership ethos grounded in empathy and genuine care (Agusta & Azmy, 2023; Kaltiainen & Hakanen, 2022). This underscores the leaders' responsibility to address their followers' needs, a method that promotes psychological safety and cultivates more profound commitment and performance. Findings reinforce the study's propositions that transformational and servant leadership styles positively impact retention. Consequently, a blended approach integrating transformational and servant leadership is ideal for employee retention.

5.2.2 *Perceived Organizational Support*

Employees reciprocate organisational investment with loyalty and engagement. The qualitative data revealed that POS, evident through structured career development, mentoring, training opportunities, and open-door policies, strongly predicted middle management retention. Middle managers conveyed frustration over inadequate career pathways and ambiguous promotion criteria, which contributed to stagnation and diminished job satisfaction. These findings corroborated the view of (Eisenberger et al., 2020), who posited that employees reciprocated organisational support—notably when leaders invested in their professional growth—with loyalty and commitment. However, inconsistencies in leadership support and training programs can weaken retention efforts. Aligned with Proposition 2, learning-oriented leadership, effective communication, and regular recognition (all integral to POS) bolstered job satisfaction, affirming the proposition's assertion that such factors led to improved retention.

5.2.3 *Talent Management and Leadership Development*

Structured career pathways and internal succession planning are critical for retention. These observations aligned with (Ferdiana et al., 2023), who argued that robust talent management—including leadership development and transparent succession planning—was crucial for retaining a skilled workforce. Middle and top managers alike underscored mentoring, structured training, and leadership pipelines as fundamental components for sustaining motivation, in agreement with (Mey et al., 2021; Stuss, 2020; Urme, 2023). These studies highlighted how comprehensive talent management frameworks significantly enhanced organisational performance and long-term employee satisfaction. Nonetheless, geographic and market constraints necessitated tailored

solutions since generic frameworks might be less effective in remote or specialised settings. In support of Proposition 1, well-executed talent management strategies—ranging from flexible work to focused employee development—proved highly impactful for staff retention, reaffirming that effective strategic leadership served as a key driver of organisational stability.

5.2.4 *The Role of Communication and Organizational Culture*

Transparent communication enhances workplace cohesion and commitment. Research by (Tian et al., 2020) supported this perspective, asserting that inclusive communication fosters team cohesion and commitment, creating an environment where employees feel heard and valued. Additionally, an inclusive workplace culture, characterised by mutual respect, recognition, and psychological safety, has enhanced job satisfaction and reduced turnover rates (Unsworth & Seivwright, 2023). A supportive work environment prioritising open dialogue, transparent leadership, and employee inclusivity significantly contributes to workforce stability (Vincent, 2024).

The 2024 retention survey underscored a growing need for improved communication and engagement processes, aligning with findings from the company's 5-year EE plan, which advocated for a structured communication strategy. The study's findings further corroborated that enhancing leadership accessibility and fostering a culture of openness was essential for reducing turnover. A structured internal communication framework would ensure greater alignment between leadership and employees, strengthening organisational commitment and long-term retention.

5.3 Interpreting the Findings within the Organizational Context

5.3.1 *Internal Career Stagnation & Leadership Support*

A key tension emerged between employees' aspirations for immediate career progression—such as promotions, mentorship, and skill-building—and organisational structures that often delayed or overlooked internal candidates. The company's 5-year EE plan highlighted significant gaps in training and development, underscoring the necessity for robust career development programs and IDPs to facilitate employee advancement and succession planning. The study findings align with the company's 5-year EE plan, highlighting training gaps and the need for internal career growth. The 2024 HR retention survey also reveals high turnover linked to perceived career stagnation.

While top management emphasised delegation and broader strategic responsibilities, middle managers stressed the need for direct, day-to-day leadership support. This dichotomy indicated that

bridging the gap between strategic vision and operational leadership was crucial to mitigating career stagnation. This perspective is aligned with (Mey et al., 2021), who argued that integrated leadership pathways could optimise talent retention by fostering a structured approach to career progression.

Empirical findings showed that strong leadership development created environments where employees felt supported and motivated (Agusta & Azmy, 2023). These scholars noted that effective leadership influenced career advancement by promoting supportive climates and enhancing job satisfaction. Similarly, (Watson & Tomovic, 2019) argued for formal leadership programs to equip mid-level managers with critical communication and decision-making skills. Such programs enabled middle managers to navigate complexities and foster trust. Additionally, (Heyden et al., 2018) evidenced that empowered middle managers drove transformational change and improved organisational adaptability.

Establishing structured leadership development programmes and reinforcing succession planning are vital strategies for addressing existing leadership gaps and improving middle management retention.

5.3.2 *The Geographical Remoteness Challenge*

Geographical remoteness significantly exacerbated employee retention challenges due to limited amenities and relocation barriers. Research on remote workforce management by (Onnis, 2019) suggested that location-specific barriers necessitated the adoption of flexible work arrangements and competitive incentive packages to counteract high attrition rates. The 2024 HR report revealed that 30% of terminations resulted from employees resigning due to family-related relocation issues, as their families were reluctant to move to the area due to insufficient amenities. Similarly, the company's 5-year EE plan identified the lack of schools, medical facilities, and essential infrastructure as a key obstacle to recruitment and long-term retention.

The findings highlighted the urgent need for strategic interventions to address the challenges of remoteness, mainly through infrastructure development and family-supportive policies. Interview respondents suggested that targeted solutions such as housing allowances, improved educational facilities, enhanced medical services, and better town infrastructure could ease relocation concerns and improve workforce sustainability. These insights are aligned with (Buykx et al., 2010), who demonstrated that strategic resource allocation in remote or rural settings could significantly mitigate workforce retention challenges. Consequently, a comprehensive retention strategy, incorporating financial incentives, relocation support, and infrastructure development initiatives, is essential for ensuring long-term workforce stability in geographically remote operations.

5.3.3 *Recognition and the Employee Value Proposition*

A strong EVP incorporating structured compensation, recognition programs, and career development enhances retention. An effectively structured EVP incorporates essential elements such as career advancement opportunities, organisational support, and tangible rewards, ensuring employees feel valued and committed (Pawar et al., 2023; Zaware, 2019). The study's findings revealed a notable divergence in EVP expectations, with middle managers placing a greater emphasis on immediate, tangible recognition, such as spot bonuses and public acknowledgements. Conversely, top managers prioritised long-term strategic incentives, including retention bonuses and career development programs. Research conducted by (Tarneja & Deshpande, 2023; Vincent, 2024) corroborates the necessity of a dual-approach EVP, wherein short-term rewards and long-term incentives coexist to address the diverse motivational drivers of employees while aligning with organisational retention strategies. Organisations must benchmark remuneration and benefits to remain competitive.

The organisation’s 5-year EE plan has underscored the issue of elevated resignation rates and identified key barriers to employee retention. The findings indicated that external mining organisations frequently poach employees by offering higher salaries and superior benefits, thus highlighting the urgent need for a comprehensive retention strategy. Additionally, the 2024 employee retention survey revealed that employees perceived a lack of recognition and considered their remuneration and benefits inadequate, prompting many to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Consequently, the organisation has recognised the imperative of fortifying its EVP by augmenting financial and non-financial rewards, promoting a culture of recognition, and establishing clear pathways for career advancement to retain high-calibre talent.

5.4 Combined TLT + OST Pathways to Job Satisfaction and Commitment

The conceptual framework posits that TLT and OST do not operate in isolation but rather synergistically. The empirical data illustrate two key combined pathways:

5.4.1 *TLT Catalyzing OST*

Transformational leaders often act as conduits for OST. When a manager exhibits individualized consideration—such as negotiating a customized training plan—the behavior both instantiates TLT and signals high POS. Middle managers interpreted these actions as “the company genuinely cares about my development,” thereby simultaneously elevating job satisfaction (intrinsic motivator) and nurturing organizational commitment (reciprocal loyalty).

In practice, a transformational leader's decision to sponsor an emerging leader to a cross-functional assignment functioned as both TLT (stretch assignment, personal coaching) and OST (investment in the individual's career).

5.4.2 *OST Reinforcing TLT Investments*

Likewise, when HR rolled out a clear, well-communicated succession plan or formal mentorship cohorts, employees' POS became more salient, amplifying the motivational power of TLT behaviours. Managers who already felt inspired by leadership were even more committed when they saw structural supports backing up those inspirational messages.

In other words, leaders' verbal vision ("We want you to lead our next transformation") gained credibility only when OST structures (e.g., funded leadership programs) validated that message. This alignment strengthened both Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment, ensuring TLT's inspirational and OST's supportive elements reinforced each other.

These combined effects explain why employees expressed stronger retention intentions when both theories' conditions were present (i.e., when leaders were inspirational and the organization backed up that rhetoric with material support).

5.5 Mediators Driving the Retention Outcome

Within the conceptual framework, job satisfaction and organizational commitment serve as proximal mediators. The empirical findings showed:

i. Job satisfaction rose when managers felt their intrinsic needs (autonomy, purpose, professional growth) were met via transformational leadership actions—clear vision, intellectual stimulation, and personalized coaching.
ii. Organizational commitment strengthened when managers believed the organization was genuinely invested in their long-term success—demonstrated through formal recognition programs, career pathways, and consistent mentoring.

Once satisfied and committed, middle managers were considerably less likely to entertain external offers, even in the face of geographic and operational challenges. In practice:

i. A manager who reported "high trust in leadership's vision" also noted they were willing to endure remote location hardships because they felt their career would progress.

ii. Another respondent said, “Even though I get calls from headhunters, I stay because I know the company will invest in my next leadership role.”

These statements illustrate how positive scores on the mediators directly correlated with stronger retention intentions—validating the final arrow in the conceptual model (→ Middle Management Retention).

5.6 Implications for Propositions and Overall Retention Picture

Proposition 1 (TLT and OST combined → supportive environment → improved retention) is fully supported:

- Transformational behaviours (vision, individualised support) elevated job satisfaction.
- Organisational support mechanisms (career paths, recognition) reinforced organisational commitment.
- The synergy between TLT and OST created a holistic retention environment.

Proposition 2 (Top management commitment, communication, recognition → job satisfaction → retention) is also confirmed:

- Transparent two-way communication (a TLT trait) emerged as critical for trust building.
- Consistent recognition programs (an OST practice) were vital for reinforcing loyalty.
- Middle managers explicitly linked these behaviours to higher satisfaction and stronger intent to stay.

5.7 Chapter 5 Summary

This chapter has connected the key empirical findings from Chapter 4 to prevailing leadership theories and broader organisational behaviour research. The emergent themes highlight the importance of transformational and servant leadership practices, robust POS, and targeted talent management strategies, providing actionable insights for addressing middle management retention challenges. The findings reveal a compelling interplay between Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) and Organizational Support Theory (OST) in enhancing job satisfaction and organizational commitment—two key mediators driving middle management retention. Transformational leaders inspire through vision and intellectual stimulation, empowering managers with a sense of strategic purpose and intrinsic motivation. Individualized consideration, expressed through mentorship and career coaching, fosters psychological empowerment and deepens commitment. Simultaneously,

perceived organizational support—manifested in transparent career pathways, recognition, and investment in development—cultivates trust and loyalty. When leaders act as conduits of support, TLT and OST synergize: leadership behaviors signal organizational care, while institutional mechanisms validate inspirational rhetoric. This alignment creates a psychologically enriched environment in which job satisfaction and organizational commitment flourish. Managers who feel valued, supported, and aligned with the organization's vision report a significantly stronger intent to stay, even amidst geographic and operational challenges. These findings affirm that retention is not driven by isolated leadership acts or HR interventions, but by the convergence of visionary leadership and credible organizational support, as posited in the conceptual model's propositions.

CHAPTER 6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the study's insights, offering key conclusions and actionable recommendations for theoretical advancement and organisational intervention. The chapter then identifies study limitations and proposes future research directions, ensuring a comprehensive conclusion to this investigation into strategic leadership factors contributing to middle management retention. The insights from this study are significant, providing a deeper understanding of the factors influencing middle management retention.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

i. This study contributes to leadership and retention literature by reinforcing the role of strategic leadership in middle management retention. Key theoretical implications include:
ii. Findings confirm that transformational leadership fosters motivation, professional development, and engagement, while servant leadership promotes psychological safety and trust. A blended leadership model—incorporating visionary inspiration, participative decision-making, and supportive mentorship—is ideal for long-term retention.
iii. Employees who perceive strong leadership support, structured career development, and transparent communication exhibit higher organisational commitment. The study confirms that POS is a mediating factor in leadership's influence on retention.
iv. The study highlights how geographical isolation and industry-specific challenges impact middle management retention. Leadership frameworks must be adapted to industry demands, incorporating location-based incentives, work-life balance policies, and succession planning.

6.3 Practical Implications

Findings offer actionable insights for mining companies to enhance employee retention, engagement, and leadership effectiveness:

i. Companies should invest in structured training on emotional intelligence, communication, and strategic decision-making. Mentorship programs can enhance leadership succession and bridge career stagnation gaps.

ii. Integrated recognition systems (e.g., spot bonuses, career progression incentives, and personalised appreciation) boost employee morale. Benchmarking salaries and benefits against competitors can reduce turnover and increase retention.

iii. Flexible work arrangements, such as hybrid schedules and extended leave policies, can enhance work-life balance. Wellness initiatives addressing burnout, mental health, and workplace engagement should be prioritised.

6.4 Recommendations

Below are the recommendations which are explicitly tied back to the elements of the study's problem statement, with each action directly addressing a specific root cause that was identified—namely, high turnover caused by (a) limited career progression, (b) insufficient leadership support/recognition, (c) demanding work conditions exacerbated by geographic isolation, and (d) an underdeveloped organisational culture.

6.4.1 *Develop a Comprehensive Talent Management Framework*

To address the limited career progression and succession gaps, the organisation should:

- Establish structured career pathways outlining promotion criteria and leadership competencies.
- Introduce formal succession planning programs to support internal leadership development.
- Expand leadership training programs to equip middle managers with decision-making, conflict resolution, and people-management skills.

6.4.2 *Implement an Integrated Recognition and Employee Value Proposition (EVP) Strategy*

To counteract insufficient leadership support and recognition, the organisation should:

- Incorporate financial and non-financial rewards (e.g., performance-based bonuses, additional leave, and professional development sponsorships).
- Regularly review and adjust compensation packages to remain competitive within the industry.
- Recognize achievements publicly to reinforce a culture of appreciation and commitment.

6.4.3 *Address Workplace Challenges Related to Remote Locations*

The mining company should adopt targeted retention strategies to counteract its geographical isolation of operations:

- Offer location-based incentives, such as housing allowances and relocation support.
- Enhance local infrastructure and family amenities (e.g., schools, healthcare, and community services) to attract and retain skilled employees.
- Implement flexible work policies (e.g., hybrid working models for administrative roles).

6.4.4 *Strengthen Leadership Practices and Organisational Culture*

To remediate the Organizational Culture and Leadership Practices, the organisation should:

- Enhance leadership accessibility through regular town hall meetings, site visits, and structured engagement forums.
- Encourage two-way communication, such as anonymous feedback platforms and structured performance discussions.
- Promote an inclusive workplace culture where employees feel respected, empowered, and supported.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

i. Findings are based on one South African mining company, which may limit generalizability to other sectors or locations. Future research should compare multiple organisations or industries for broader applicability.
ii. While interviews provided rich, contextual insights, the lack of quantitative metrics limits statistical validation. Future studies could integrate mixed-method approaches (e.g., employee surveys and retention analytics) to enhance empirical robustness.
iii. Participants may have withheld negative opinions due to professional concerns. Future research should incorporate anonymous survey methods for more candid insights to mitigate this.

6.6 Suggestions for Future Research

i. Investigating how leadership styles, retention strategies, and perceptions of POS evolve over time can provide causal insights into workforce stability (Longitudinal Studies).

ii. Employing survey instruments or structural equation modelling (SEM) can statistically evaluate leadership's influence on retention (Quantitative Research).
iii. Research across industries (e.g., manufacturing, oil and gas, and financial services) can identify sector-specific leadership best practices (Comparative Industry Analysis).

6.7 Conclusion

This study explored the strategic leadership factors influencing middle management retention in a selected South African mining company. Chapter 1 introduced the research context, objectives, and rationale, outlining the problem of middle management turnover and framing the study's significance. Chapter 2 reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature, critically engaging with Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) and Organisational Support Theory (OST). It highlighted the interdependence of leadership practices, organisational support mechanisms, and talent management in shaping retention outcomes. It advanced two propositions regarding the influence of strategic leadership on job satisfaction and commitment.

Chapter 3 detailed the research design and methodology, including the qualitative approach, purposive sampling, data collection via semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis. Ethical considerations and triangulation strategies were employed to ensure the credibility and validity of the research study. Chapter 4 presented the empirical findings, categorising the themes that emerged from participant narratives and aligning them with the study's propositions. These findings revealed how leadership vision, personalised support, fair recognition, and career development opportunities directly impact middle managers' satisfaction and commitment.

Chapter 5 integrated these findings with the conceptual framework and existing literature. It demonstrated that retention is best achieved through the synergistic application of TLT and OST. Transformational leaders enhance intrinsic motivation through vision and inspiration, while organisational support fosters loyalty through tangible career investment and recognition. When these elements align, they strengthen the mediating effects of job satisfaction and organisational commitment—thereby reinforcing middle management retention.

The study concludes that effective retention strategies do not result from isolated leadership behaviours or policy interventions but arise from an integrated leadership-support ecosystem that empowers, recognises, and invests in middle management talent. Key takeaways include:

i. Strategic leadership plays a crucial role in employee satisfaction and commitment.

ii. Middle managers require transparent career pathways, mentorship, and leadership development programs.
iii. Flexible work arrangements and recognition programs are critical for long-term retention.

By implementing targeted leadership and talent management interventions, mining companies can mitigate employee turnover, foster stability within the workforce, and enhance operational success. This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of strategic leadership and employee retention while offering practical recommendations to improve employee engagement within high-demand industries. Future research endeavours should consider exploring quantitative methodologies and cross-industry perspectives to expand upon these findings.

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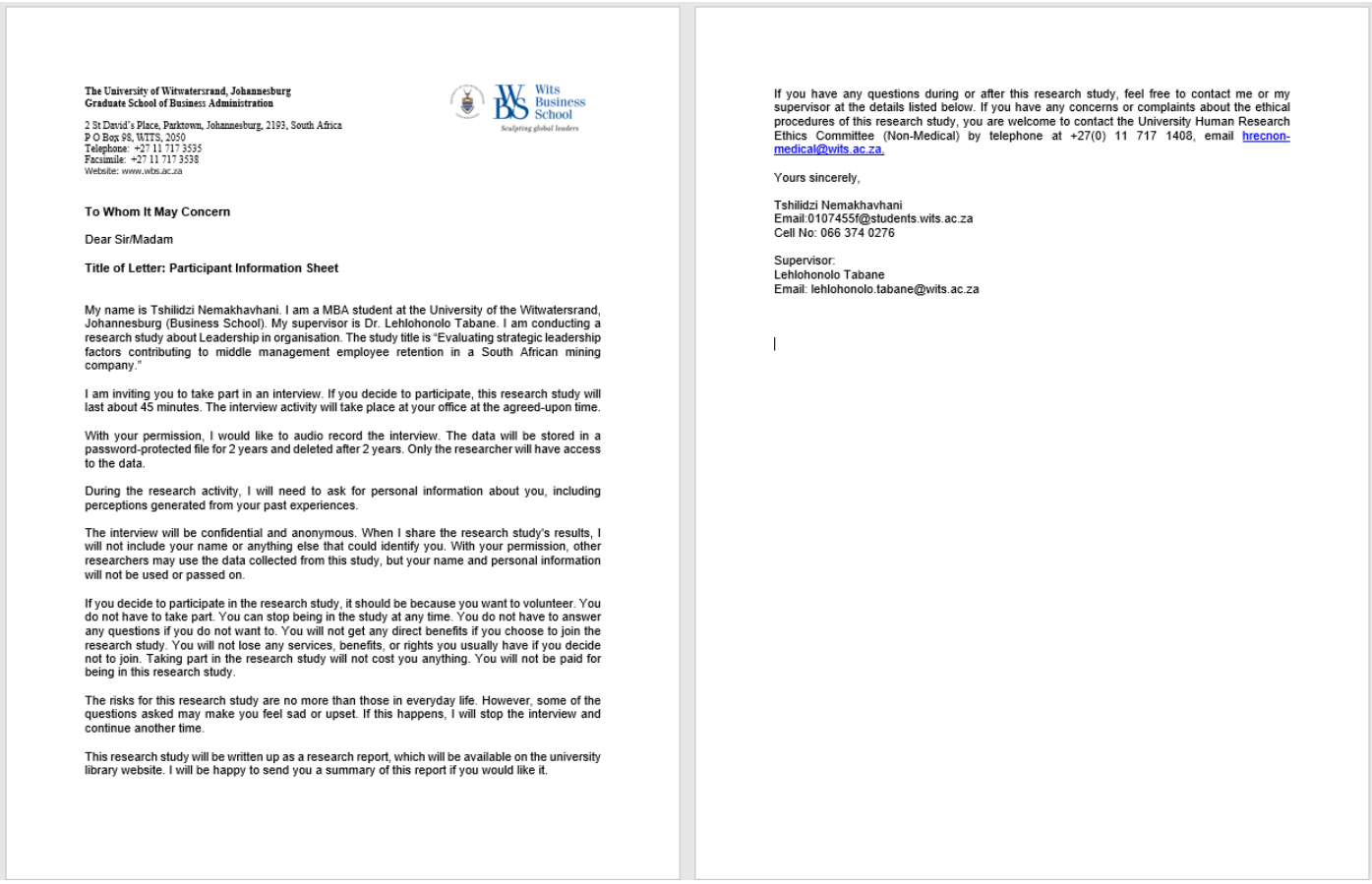
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APPENDIX A: The Participant Information Sheet



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Wits Business School
Sculpting global leaders

To Whom It May Concern

Dear Sir/Madam

Title of Letter: Participant Information Sheet

My name is Tshilidzi Nemakhavhani. I am a MBA student at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (Business School). My supervisor is Dr. Lehlohonolo Tabane. I am conducting a research study about Leadership in organisation. The study title is "Evaluating strategic leadership factors contributing to middle management employee retention in a South African mining company."

I am inviting you to take part in an interview. If you decide to participate, this research study will last about 45 minutes. The interview activity will take place at your office at the agreed-upon time.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. The data will be stored in a password-protected file for 2 years and deleted after 2 years. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

During the research activity, I will need to ask for personal information about you, including perceptions generated from your past experiences.

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the research study's results, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this study, but your name and personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to participate in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you usually have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than those in everyday life. However, some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time.

This research study will be written up as a research report, which will be available on the university library website. I will be happy to send you a summary of this report if you would like it.

If you have any questions during or after this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor at the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) by telephone at +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

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Figure 2: Participant Information Sheet

APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form

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Sculpting global leaders

Title of project: Evaluating strategic leadership factors contributing to middle management employee retention in a South African mining company

Name of researcher: Tshilidzi Nemakhavhani

I, ..., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview/focus group may be audio-recorded	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use direct quotations from my interview in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report)	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES	NO

..... (Signature)

..... (Name of participant)

..... (Date)

Figure 3: Participant Consent Form Template

APPENDIX C: Research Instrument

Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Middle Management
Introduction: Thank the participant for their time and explain the purpose of the interview. Ensure confidentiality and provide an overview of the interview process.
1. Perception of Strategic Leadership Factors (RQ1, Hypothesis 1): *Research Question:* What critical STL factors contribute to middle management employee retention? *Hypothesis 1:* Effective strategic leadership improves employee retention through supportive work environments, TL, and TM. - How would you describe the organization's strategic leadership approach and its impact on middle management retention? - Can you share any examples of how strategic leadership has influenced your job satisfaction and commitment to the organization? - From your perspective, what specific aspects of strategic leadership contribute most to middle management retention?
2. Perception of Top Management Leadership Styles (RQ2): *Research Question:* How does MM perceive the leadership styles of top management in terms of their retention within the organization? - How would you characterize the leadership style of top management and its influence on middle management retention? - Can you provide examples of how the leadership style of top management has affected your job satisfaction and commitment to the organization? - From your experience, which leadership practices or behaviours from top management contribute most to middle management retention?
3. Impact of Leadership Practices and Behaviours (RQ3): *Research Question:* What specific leadership practices and behaviours are perceived by MM as crucial for job satisfaction and organizational commitment? - What leadership practices do you believe have the most significant impact on your job satisfaction and commitment to the organization? - Can you share any specific leadership behaviours or initiatives that have positively influenced your retention within the organization? - How do you think leadership practices can be improved to better address the needs and expectations of middle management?
4. Role of Transformational Leadership (RQ4, Hypothesis 1): *Research Question:* What role does TL play in influencing middle management employee retention? *Hypothesis 1:* Effective STL improves employee retention through supportive work environments, TL, and TM. - How does the organization foster transformational leadership among top-level management and influence middle-management retention? - Can you provide examples of how transformational leadership has impacted your job satisfaction and organizational commitment? - In your opinion, which aspects of transformational leadership are most effective in retaining middle management talent?
5. Perception of Top Management Commitment (RQ2, Hypothesis 2): *Research Question:* How do MM perceive the commitment of top management to their retention within the organization? *Hypothesis 2:* Factors such as top management commitment, learning-oriented leadership, effective communication, and recognition of employee contributions enhance middle manager job satisfaction. - How do you perceive the commitment of top management to retaining middle management employees? - Can you provide examples of how top management's commitment has influenced your job satisfaction and commitment to the organization? - From your perspective, what specific actions or initiatives from top management demonstrate a commitment to retaining middle management talent?
6. Challenges and Opportunities in Talent Management (RQ5): *Research Question:* What are the challenges and opportunities in TM and employee retention? - What do you perceive as the main challenges in retaining middle management employees? - Are there any opportunities for improvement in talent management practices and employee retention strategies? - How do you think these challenges can be overcome, and opportunities leveraged to enhance middle management retention?
Conclusion: Thank the participant for their insights and inquire if they have any additional comments or observations. Reiterate confidentiality and express appreciation for their participation.

Figure 4: Interview guide for middle managers

Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Top-Level Management
Introduction: Thank the participant for their time, introduce the purpose of the interview, ensure confidentiality, and explain the process.
1. Strategic Leadership Factors (RQ1, Hypothesis 1): *Research Question:* What critical STL factors contribute to middle management employee retention? Hypothesis 1: Effective strategic leadership improves employee retention through supportive work environments, TL, and TM. - Can you discuss the strategic leadership approach employed within the organisation and its impact on middle management retention? - How do you believe strategic leadership influences middle management retention, particularly in creating supportive work environments? - Can you provide examples of strategic initiatives that have positively impacted middle management retention?
2. Perception of Top Management Leadership Styles (RQ2): *Research Question:* How does MM perceive the leadership styles of top management in terms of their retention within the organization? - How would you describe your leadership style and its influence on middle management retention? - From your perspective, how do you think the leadership style of top management affects middle management retention? - Can you share any instances where your leadership approach has contributed to middle management retention?
3. Leadership Practices and Behaviours (RQ3): *Research Question:* What specific leadership practices and behaviours are perceived by MM as crucial for job satisfaction and organizational commitment? - What leadership practices contribute most to middle management job satisfaction? - Can you discuss specific organisational behaviours or initiatives enhancing middle management retention? - How do you ensure that leadership practices align with the needs and expectations of middle management?
4. Influence of Transformational Leadership (RQ4, Hypothesis 1): Research Question: What role does TL have in influencing middle management employee retention? Hypothesis 1: Effective STL improves employee retention through supportive work environments, TL, and TM. - How does the organization foster transformational leadership among top-level management? - Can you explain how transformational leadership has impacted middle management retention? - In your experience, what aspects of transformational leadership most effectively retain middle management talent?
5. Challenges and Opportunities in Talent Management (RQ5): *Research Question:* What are the challenges and opportunities in TM and employee retention? - What are the main challenges in retaining middle management employees? - Are there any opportunities for improvement in talent management practices and employee retention strategies? - How will you address challenges and leverage opportunities to enhance middle management retention?
6. Factors Influencing Middle Management Job Satisfaction (Hypothesis 2): *Hypothesis 2:* Factors such as top management commitment, learning-oriented leadership, effective communication, and recognition of employee contributions enhance middle manager job satisfaction. - How does the top-level management ensure commitment to retaining middle managers? - Can you discuss leadership practices that foster a learning-oriented environment for middle managers? - How does top-level management ensure effective communication with middle managers, and how is this linked to their job satisfaction? - In what ways does top-level management recognise and appreciate the contributions of middle managers to enhance their job satisfaction?
Conclusion: Thank the participant for their insights and inquire if they have any additional comments or observations. Reiterate confidentiality and express appreciation for their participation.

Figure 5: Interview guide for top-level managers

Secondary Data Research Instrument (Triangulation)
1. Academic journals and articles on leadership, employee retention, and the mining industry in South Africa.
2. Reports and publications from mining industry associations and regulatory bodies.
3. Company documents such as HR reports, EE Labour Plans, HR policies, and internal talent management and retention memos.
4. Company Employee Retention Surveys and Exit Interviews

Figure 6: Secondary Data Sources for Triangulation

APPENDIX D: Analysis Tables and Charts



Figure 7: Word Cloud for Middle Management Responses



Figure 8: Word Cloud for Top Management Responses

Table 2: Key Themes and Sub-Themes Identified via Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-Theme	Key Points / Observations	Illustrative Quotes
Leadership Style	- Transformational	- Transformational leadership fosters trust and motivation	"Leaders who inspire and empower us make us feel valued and motivated to stay." (P1)
	- Servant	- Servant leadership promotes empathy and care	
	- Transactional		
Managerial Support	- Open-door Policy	- Emphasis on two-way communication	"Feeling safe to share ideas without fear of backlash is critical..." (P12)
	- Regular Feedback	- Psychological safety enhances innovation	
Professional Development	- Mentorship	- Absence of formal training → stagnation	"The absence of formal training programs leaves many of us feeling stagnant." (P8)
	- Career Pathways	- Mentorship fosters a sense of future	
Recognition & EVP	- Tangible Rewards	- Middle managers value immediate acknowledgement	"Star performer awards and performance bonuses reinforce our motivation." (P5)
	- Long-term Incentives	- Top managers focus on strategic retention bonuses	
Talent Management Challenges	- Internal Barriers	- Overlooked internal candidates for promotions	"High attrition in remote areas destabilizes our performance." (P3)
	- External Constraints	- Remote site challenges (amenities, cost of living)	
Opportunities	- Enhanced Development	- Flexible scheduling and remote options improve job satisfaction	"Flexible scheduling can greatly improve job satisfaction." (P9)
	- Flexible Work		

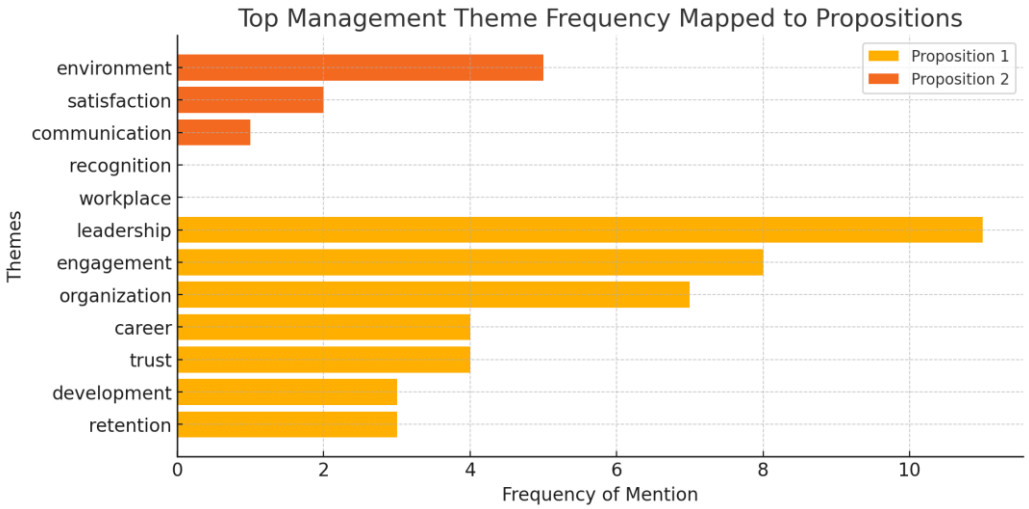


Figure 9: Top Management Theme Frequency Mapped to Propositions

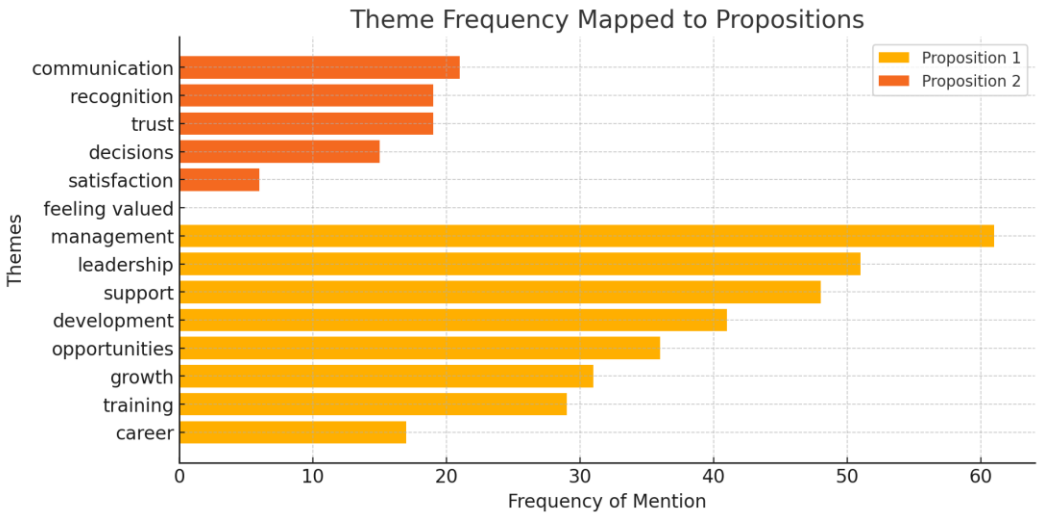


Figure 10: Middle Management Theme Frequency Mapped to Propositions

APPENDIX E: Ethics Clearance Certificate

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits Business School

Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number: WBS/BA0107455F/250

This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below).

This certificate is only valid if accompanied by formal permission from the relevant stakeholder(s).

Project title	Evaluating strategic leadership factors contributing to middle management employee retention in a South African mining company
Investigator / Researcher	Mr Tshilidzi Nemakhavhani
Nature of Project	MBA (Research Article)
Decision of the Committee	Approved, provided stakeholders and participants are guaranteed confidentialty.
Issue Date of Certificate	10/07/2024
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project / research report
Chairperson	Dr Ayanda Magida ☎ +27 11 717 3953 ✉ ayanda.magida@wits.ac.za

Declaration by Researcher

One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature	Date:
	16.09.2024

Figure 11: WBS Approval: Ethics Clearance Certificate

APPENDIX F: Consistency Table for the Research

Table 3: Consistency table representing research questions, propositions, data collection and data analysis

RQ #	State Research Question or Objective	Proposition #/hypothesis #	State Proposition or Hypothesis	Data collection detail	Data analysis method
1	What are the critical STL factors contributing to MM employee retention in the organisation?	1	Effective STL improves employee retention by creating supportive work environments, employing TL practices, and implementing robust talent management strategies	Semi-structured interviews with middle management and organisational leaders	Content analysis, thematic analysis
2	How do MM perceive the leadership styles of top management concerning their retention?	-	-	Semi-structured interviews with middle management	Qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis
3	What specific leadership practices and behaviours do MM identify as crucial for enhancing job satisfaction and organisational commitment?	2	Factors such as top management commitment, learning-oriented leadership, effective communication, and regular recognition significantly enhance MM job satisfaction, contributing to improved employee retention	Semi-structured interviews with middle management	Thematic analysis, content analysis
4	How does TL influence MM retention within the organisational context?	-	-	Semi-structured interviews with middle management and organisational leaders	Qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis
5	What are this organisation's key challenges and opportunities in talent management and employee retention?	-	-	Semi-structured interviews with middle management and organisational leaders	Content analysis, thematic analysis



Figure 12: Overview of the implementation timeline for the recommended solutions